

Women in the Superintendency in New Hampshire:

A Grounded Theory Study of Resilience

by Sydney Donnelly Leggett

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ABSTRACT

Though women comprise the majority of the education workforce in the United States, relatively few serve in the role of school superintendent. This is problematic for two main reasons: first, whenever one gender is underrepresented in any field, there is an accompanying lack of voice and ideas; second, in a field that is reaching critical stages of leadership scarcity, the absence of women represents a loss of potential talent in the applicant pool. The purpose of this study is to focus on how women superintendents experience the process of building resilience as they attain and serve in the position of superintendent. This is accomplished by examining participant-identified obstacles, how they overcame those obstacles, and what drove them to continue doing so during their most difficult times. Using constructivist grounded theory methodology, 12 New Hampshire women superintendents were interviewed, using iterative coding throughout the analysis, and the resulting data analysis offers the emergence of a substantive and original theory and two models (*the capacitance model* and *the capacitance model in context*) to illustrate this phenomenon. By investigating the core of resilience, this study informs us about strategies and mindsets that potentially open the gates to other women considering this role, increasing gender equity in the superintendency and in the education professional overall.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the strong and resilient women in my life who have inspired me to complete this research and who continue to motivate me each day to do good work in the world.

To the women in my family, my mom, sisters, daughter, and nieces, you make the world a better place with your laughter, love, and that little bit of crazy that makes great things happen.

To all my siblings and their partners and children in our wildly extensive family, I learned about resilience from all of you, from what we go through together and how we go on.

To my friends and colleagues, your drive to change the world is potent and palpable; the faith I have in the best of the world lies in you.

To mom, thank you for modeling resilience as you raised seven somewhat wild children. To dad, thank you for helping me decide to do this. I wish more than anything you were both here to see it finished.

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Thank you to my sisters who took care of me, fed me, took me on walks, and then sat me down to write again during the final weeks of completing this work. You got me through, and I can't wait for future writing retreats.

Most importantly, thank you to my own beautiful and supportive family; I really could not have done this without you and your patience. My husband, Chris, who encouraged me and never seemed to doubt that I'd finish. To Chris and Connor, who built me a bookshelf one Christmas just for my dissertation books; this was an inspirational source for me every time I needed it. To Sophie, who at 18 is already one of the best thought-partners and editors I've ever encountered. To Sam, who reminds me to think outside the box. And to all of you, thank you for never getting upset that when other families were having pizza night or Chinese food night, we were having another "feed for yourselves" night. And finally, to Connor, I think finishing this means there's no more talk of the DNF, don't you?

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I had just completed my interview with Felicity, who had told me about years of struggles, gender bias, her own depression, taking on a difficult district, and coping with deaths of employees and students. I looked at her and asked, “After everything you’ve just told me, why did you keep doing it?”

Felicity: “Because it’s the best job in the world.”

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In 1909, Ella Flagg Young, the first woman superintendent of a major city school district as head of Chicago Public Schools, made the following statement about her role: “Women are destined to rule the schools of every city” (Keller, 1999, p. 53). Though the national trend during her tenure may have given legitimate reason for this prediction, it has turned out to be false prophecy. The role of superintendent is the top professional position in each school district, making the ratio between men and women superintendents a valid indicator of the overall state of gender in educational leadership. The current ratio and the slow rate of growth of women in the field are cause for concern. Currently, the rate of women superintendents in the United States is measured at 24% (Finnan, McCord, & AASA, 2017), and studies analyzing the rate of growth estimate that the nation would not reach a 50/50 ratio for another 80 years (Wallace, 2014, p. 48). History, demographics, and socio-cultural factors over the past century since Ella Flagg Young’s time in the superintendency help to shed light on this phenomenon.

The 20th Century was a time of significant change for women in the superintendency. The ratio of women to men was high at the beginning of the 20th century, during Young’s time,

primarily due to the organic progression from the woman teacher in the one-room schoolhouse to women leaders of larger, county systems that were rapidly developing as the national public education structure itself was born (Glass, Bjork, Brunner, & American Association of School Administrators, 2000). Post-World War II then spurred a rapid decline of women administrators across the United States when gender roles realigned in this as well as many other professions (Goldstein, 2014). During the latter half of the 20th Century, rapid change occurred in economics, public education systems, international relationships and war, gender equality movements, and other arenas, such that towards the end of the century, the year 1980 saw the lowest number of women in the superintendency recorded in history, registering at less than 1% (Grogan, 1999). An upsurge occurred after this low point, with the percentage rising up to 13% by 2000; however, the U.S. Census Bureau that same year characterized the position of superintendent of schools in the United States as “still the most male-dominated executive position of any profession” (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2000). While other demographics in the superintendency experienced growth in terms of diversity—specifically racial diversity—the rate of women in the superintendency has not significantly increased compared to other demographic factors since the previous decennial study, thus reinforcing the concern of stagnancy of gender equality in this top educational role (Finnan et al., 2017).

Two central issues arise when so few superintendents are women. First, there is well-researched and documented concern that the pool of superintendents is getting to a threateningly low level as older superintendents retire, leaving fewer people interested in and/or willing to enter this position (Glass, 2000; Harris, Lowery, Hopson, & Marshall, 2004; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Second, the lack of women entering and/or achieving this position correlates to the gender stratified nature of the education profession overall, wherein the profession itself

comprises a significant majority of women teachers, currently estimated at 77% (NCES, 2018). This gender stratification suggests the loss of potential talent in the field, wherein capable women leaders are not accessing and/or serving in the chief leadership position.

While a significant national problem is evident, the research presented in this study focuses on the state of New Hampshire in particular, which a 2016 study identified as having the third highest rate in the nation (with New York and California taking the other top two slots) (Superville, 2016). At the time of this research, New Hampshire has a rate of 30% women superintendents. This study focuses on New Hampshire superintendents for two main reasons: first, with a higher than average rate of women superintendents, it offers a ripe environment in which to study successful strategies for women; second, as a woman superintendent in New Hampshire, this researcher has advantageous proximity and access to participants.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop a substantive theory and accompanying model that suggest how women superintendents in New Hampshire develop the resilience to achieve and serve in the position of superintendent. The process of building resilience functions as the foundation of inquiry. Resilience, the ability to come out of difficult situations to continue leading with strength and commitment, has the potential to highlight the most essential skills and strategies for women in the superintendency since resilience is required at the most difficult times, when a leader will need her most useful skills. This phenomenon is researched under two central concepts: the external and internal factors contributing to and/or thwarting the development of resilience. Essentially, what internal and/or external factors arose as potential motivators and inhibitors for women in the superintendency and what strategies did these professionals need in order to overcome them and attain their success? The outcome of the study

is a substantive theory and model illustrating the process women go through to build resilience in order to achieve and serve in the role of superintendent. When positioned against the larger backdrop of the national shortage and gender-stratified demographics of the superintendency, this theory may ideally provide suggestions for fostering greater gender equity in the superintendent role, which in turn would widen the talent pool; help stave off the impending scarcity of superintendents overall; and potentially add diverse voices, perspectives, and practices to benefit public education.

Significance of the Study

This study bears significance for the disciplines of educational leadership, psychology, sociology, and feminism. The majority of research in the area of women in the superintendency has focused on the overall barrier and specific obstacles—real and perceived—to both achieving and operating in this position. The all-encompassing barrier is the pervasive and ingrained gender bias in the role of superintendent itself; the obstacles are the more specific roadblocks that require overcoming. There is also a wide body of research in both psychology and organizational leadership disciplines concerning the process of building resilience in leadership. While the identified barrier and obstacles to women in the superintendency are not to be overlooked and need to be an integral part of the data, this study focuses on the process of building resilience in order to study not just the identification of obstacles but more importantly the skills and strategies employed to prevail over them. Thus, research about the obstacles combined with research about the process of building resilience complement each other to initiate the inductive process of identifying where and how they converge to reveal components of positive, effective strategies. Researching with this design helps to more clearly define what is actually working.

This study first provides an overview of demographics, historical and current, of women in the superintendency in the United States. These demographics suggest an overarching issue with gender-stratification in the position of superintendent and in the education professional overall, indicative of the barrier of gender bias. The primary identified obstacles from current literature are both external and internal. External obstacles include public scrutiny and perception; school boards and the search process; pay inequality; differing career paths; and leadership development and mentoring, or lack thereof. Internal obstacles that have been shown to trigger struggle include family, marriage, children and mobility; isolation; and motivation or lack thereof. The process of building resilience is explored through an examination of resilience in general, followed by specific considerations of resilience in leadership and nuances of resilience for women in leadership. Several researchers have proposed solutions specific to women in the superintendency; however, it remains clear that more can be learned from studying women in the superintendency through the lens of appreciative inquiry, where participants are a part of identifying areas of their common success.

The superintendency is recognized as one of the most gender-stratified executive positions in the country (Bjork, 1999; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000), which indicates the biased nature of the education profession overall. This is represented through mirrored statistics, where approximately 75% of all teachers are women (25% male) and approximately 25% of superintendents are women (75% male) (Trewartha, 2012). The statistics on principals show a more equitable distribution, wherein approximately 50% of women are principals (Aritomi, Coopersmith, & Gruber, 2009); however, 89% of those women principals are in elementary schools (NCES, 2018). In short, the socially constructed gender lines in the education profession largely depict a system that supports the traditional and stereotypical perception that “[w]omen

teach, men manage” (Strober, 1980). These trends exemplify a hegemonic system favoring males in leadership positions, and along these lines, many believe, are androcentric policies, practices, and perceptions that make it difficult to break away from this pattern and deconstruct the social construction and culture of the superintendency itself (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Wallace, 2014). To cross gender lines, women who aspire to and attain the top leadership position in schools are often expected to fit and/or accommodate two perceived roles: the male in business and the female in personal, making it necessary to overcome some (if not all) commonly identified impediments and perceptions.

While it is evident that the majority of women in education are teachers, there is also a growing number of women in leadership positions—beyond that of principal—who are working in the central office. This trend, however, is still not shown to transfer into increases in the top role. Multiple studies suggest that women are entering leadership positions in education, yet the superintendency itself remains elusive (Bilken & Brannigan, 1980; Brunner & Björk, 2001; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Mertz, 2006; Shakeshaft, 1987). Though women at one time or another were placed in the position of superintendent at the end of the 19th into the early 20th centuries, mainly due to developing structure of the nation’s public school system, a steady decline ensued and continued until approximately 1980, where the percentage of women in this position was less than one (Brunner & Grogan 2007). Increases to this percentage showed slight improvement, with 6.6% in 1992 (Glass, 1992); 14% in 2010 (Glass, 2010); 18% in 2013 (NCES, 2013); and 24% in 2015 (Finnan et al., 2017). While this growth is indeed encouraging, it still represents a significant and concerning lack of gender equity, making it crucial that any initial satisfaction with signs of growth does not inhibit the need for continued efforts towards genuine equity. In fact, at the current rate of growth, it would take another 80

years before women would comprise 50% of superintendents (Wallace, 2014, p. 48). It is also critical to emphasize here that with 93% of women superintendents being White, it is equally important to maintain a focus on increasing the access and opportunity to this position for women of color, though that demographic trend is not covered in this current study.

The larger umbrella encompassing the barrier to the superintendency has been chiefly identified as the result of the gender-stratified nature of the profession; socio-cultural norms and public perception; and other externally- and internally-imposed obstacles rising from navigating the juncture of the professional and personal for women in leadership (DeFelice & Schroth, 2000; Robinson et al., 2017). As social, cultural, political, and psychological constructs and mindsets undergo changes with both explicit and implicit gender bias, gender norms are in a continual state of flux as both individuals and institutions simultaneously maneuver these vacillations with varied paces and approaches.

Public gender bias studies validate how even unconscious, systemic bias likely affects people's real-world behavior toward women as leaders (Gipson, Pfaff, & Mendelsohn, 2017), suggesting a vital need for awareness of how these predilections influence and likely contribute to the underrepresentation of women. As one example, public scrutiny and cultural perceptions of women in leadership become obstacles when working with the gatekeepers—namely school boards and search committees—in overcoming bias to foster a pipeline of leadership for highly qualified women applicants (Chase & Bell, 1994; Bernal, 2019). The role of the gatekeepers thus becomes increasingly critical as it is the first avenue for access to the position. Traditional perspectives of public perception suggest that women do not have political and business expertise (Brunner, 1998; Dedrick, Sherman, & Wells, 2016; Harris, Marshall, Lowery, & Buck, 2002), and/or that once women enter administration they are no longer the teacher they were

meant to be (Brunner & Schumacher, 1998; Ortiz, 2012); These biases imply both that women are not well suited to administration and that school administration is no longer instructional in nature; yet, norms have transformed in the 21st Century as women demonstrate successful leadership and the role of superintendent becomes a more balanced role between instruction and business; these two converging trends may provide opportunity for women.

Sociocultural perceptions of women in leadership generate additional obstacles as well. When pursuing more traditional male roles, women are more harshly criticized for their failures, as evidenced through inhibited access to the position, performance evaluation bias, and public criticism (Brescoll, Dawson, & Uhlmann, 2010; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Barsh et al., 2008; Robinson, 2014; Skrla et al., 2000). Young and McLeod (2001) suggest that the school system itself is structured to ensure that women are less likely than men to serve in leadership positions, and the Rand Education Research Brief (Gates, Guarino, Santibanez, Ghosh-Dastidar, Brown, & Chung, 2004) found a substantial difference between rates of promotion of men and women school administrators. Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that board members have a tendency to brand women candidates as unable to handle budget, finance, and management of others. In addition, search consultants and boards are more likely to hire a candidate that is most like themselves, creating a perpetual and pervasive bias (Kanter, 1993; Tellerico, 2000). These same gatekeepers are also the ones to offer the superintendent salary, which—though not high on the self-reported list of needs for women—is still consistently lower than that of their male counterparts. The most recent figures on superintendent salary indicate women still earn slightly less, an average of \$4,000 to \$18,000 less than their male counterparts depending on the size of their districts (Finnan et al., 2017).

Moving into the more internal conflicts, current research shows that women superintendents encounter obstacles pertaining to marriage, family, child rearing, mobility, and motivation, all relating to the “double bind” of gender at its core, highlighting the unfeasibility of being an assertive leader while also maintaining “feminine” qualities and a life at home. Hewlitt (2002) depicts this as the impossibility of having it all, causing many women leaders to live in a constant state of pretense of gender neutrality. Women leaders are less likely to be married (Brunner & Grogan, 2007), are less likely to move to take a position (Robinson et al, 2017), and if they have children are more likely to enter the superintendency at a later age (Robinson et al., 2017). Entering the superintendent profession at a later age is also attributed to women spending more time in the classroom and in building administration prior to becoming a superintendent. This statistic can be interpreted differently, as some believe this means women wait to enter the superintendency until their own children are older, while others believe that this fact makes women more qualified to be instructional leaders from their additional depth of experience (Kim and Brunner, 2009).

Given both the perceived and real barrier and obstacles facing women in leadership, questions arise as to why women continue to be motivated to pursue the role, how they are nurtured as leaders, and what internal resolves they have and/or cultivate to persevere. Leadership development, especially for women, is best taught as an iterative process, since identity work (including gender identity), is essential to finding strength and success (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). Mentoring—both formal and informal—has also been shown to help move women into the superintendency; however, these mentoring programs either do not have enough available women mentors or they are still not providing ample support (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010). This may be due to the fact that organizations may promote gender equity through women

leadership and mentoring programs, but do not simultaneously address policies and practices that promote gender equity in leadership.

Studies show that both women and men are motivated to pursue the superintendency for similar reasons, including making a difference, personal and professional challenge, and a desire to work with comprehensive and complex communities (Finnan et al., 2017). The existing roadblocks to the superintendency for women, however, suggest that an additional layer of motivation may be needed to overcome the culturally pervasive barrier of gender bias to achieve and maintain the role, thus requiring more personal and professional resilience. Resilience is often discussed as the capacity, strength, or ability to recover from adversity (Hollister-Wagner, Foshee, & Jackson, 2001; Miller, 2002; Wayman, 2002). Most, if not all, definitions of resilience directly address overcoming some type of adversity, confirming that resilience is required only because obstacles need to be overcome. More directly studied in terms of leadership, Fullan (2005) suggests that resilience is the combination of perseverance and flexibility, and Patterson and Kelleher (2005) argue that resilience can be learned, can be taught, and is developed over a period time through processual experience, reinforcing that resilience is an active, not static, phenomenon.

Narrowing in further from general leadership, studies also support the argument that resilience is critical in the superintendency. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) describe the current superintendency with the nautical metaphor of trying to ride out the torrent of relentless storms that come and go and come again. The “storm” that continually strikes superintendents comprises a multitude of challenges from all directions. Harris (2004), identified these challenges as the result of the superintendency being such a rapidly changing role. She specifically cited the following: changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices and

philosophies; annual legislation; shrinking fiscal resources; the need to build cultural leadership in a time when public schools are under attack; providing the final answer while being expected to know all aspects of the organization in detail; dealing with high pressure community groups; increased diversity; and higher levels of political involvement in the daily activities of the position (Harris, 2004). Simultaneously, a critical shortage of superintendents is well documented, making it even more crucial to widen the talent pool for qualified applicants, especially women and people of color (Glass, 2000). With all of these challenges, it is more important than ever to find and nurture highly qualified people. All of these factors combined illustrate a need for resilient superintendents; women aspiring to this position—given the additional obstacles—have a requisite need to build supplemental resilience in ways that meet their unique needs.

The resilience cycle referred to in this study depicts the process and potential outcomes of overcoming adverse situations. Summarizing the key components of this cycle, an individual experiences the five basic phases of resilience: normal conditions, deteriorating phase, adapting phase, recovering phase, and growing phase (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer, 2013). Presented through this model, it is inevitable that conflict will arise; it is more a matter of how one bounces back from that conflict with multiple possible outcomes, ranging from not recovering (deteriorating) to recovering (adapting), to recovering with even more strength than before (growing). As this study focuses on identifying successful mindsets and strategies, the primary goal for resilience in the superintendency is viewed through the “growing” option outcome alone. It is imperative to remember, however, that a “growing” outcome is not a single incident, but a series of continual incidents and opportunities. According to Cuotu (2002) and Reivich and Shatte (2002), resilience is an active continuum that can be increased through

intentional learning and cultivation, thereby reinforcing the need to view it as a process and not a static, final outcome.

While the resilience model offers foundational similarities in building resilience regardless of gender, several studies suggest there are aspects of this process unique to women. These differences primarily involve an increased need for building capacity through connection to others (Palladino, 2016), maintaining a myopic trajectory on mission and values (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Simmons, 2007), and the ways in which women leaders wrestle with the public perception and the dichotomy of professional gender identity (Brown, 2007; Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2013); Zheng, Kark, & Meister, 2018). Brown's research on shame resilience theory (SRT) corroborates these leadership studies, suggesting that women may benefit from strategies surrounding opportunities wherein they gain resilience through empathy, connection, and empowerment (Brown, 2007). The development of resilience in this study is framed around the concept of critical vulnerability, "an informed process of commitment whereby individuals strategically tackle complex issues with the expectation that repercussions will ensue" (Karumanchery & Portelli, 2005). Superintendents are not unwilling victims; they have consciously chosen to serve in a role where they are assured of conflict. While likely all superintendents need to accept critical vulnerability, women have an added layer of critical vulnerability for not just the superintendency but for the gender norms that present added challenges as they develop into competent leaders; they are not only assured of conflict but also recognize that their approaches to conflict may be increasingly problematic due to their gender.

Zheng et al. (2018) suggests that women leaders nurture resilience through a continual need to maintain a *paradox mindset*, where they constantly balance agency and communion as a means of navigating the traditional male and female stereotypes of leadership. Zheng also

suggests that this skill may be fluid to situational leadership overall, giving women an increased ability to navigate the social and political situations of leadership, as negotiating situational balance becomes part of their foundational makeup. This theory reinforces and emphasizes that women have additional needs when it comes to resilience, that this process is a continually active and evolving one, and opens the possibility that some of these requirements can be seen as advantageous in the development of women leaders.

Combining research on women in leadership with that of building resilience offers a fresh approach to the phenomenon of gender inequality in the superintendency. While the majority of research on women in the superintendency examines lack, barrier, and obstacles, to date there is little research focusing specifically on the process of building resilience for this group and the identification of successful tools and strategies employed to build that resilience. New Hampshire demographics indicate a current rate of women superintendents at 30% as of 2019, providing a ripe environment for a grounded theory study on women in the superintendency. Constructivist grounded theory methodology appropriately elicits the voices of the participants, allowing for the potential of new theories, as there are fewer boundaries present from not having to draw upon traditional male hegemonic norms of the superintendency. The combined factors of this specific phenomenon, the freedom provided by the methodology, and the study from the vantage point of a “good problem,” or appreciative inquiry, converge to create a study with the intended outcome of a theory and model that depict the strategies, mindsets, practices, and/or situations that create the process of building resilience for women in the superintendency in New Hampshire. When positioned against the larger backdrop of the national shortage and gender-stratified demographics of the superintendency, this theory may ideally provide suggestions for fostering greater gender equity in the superintendent role, which in turn would widen the talent

pool; help stave off the impending scarcity of superintendents overall; and potentially add diverse voices, perspectives, and practices to benefit public education.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to women who have served or are currently serving as a superintendent in New Hampshire. The number of total participants was determined by the ongoing coding and theoretical saturation as defined by Charmaz (2014).

Research Questions

The following primary research question and sub-questions have been designed to achieve the purpose of this study:

RQ: How do women superintendents in New Hampshire build resilience in order to achieve, act, and thrive in the role of superintendent?

SQ1: What obstacles are encountered by women superintendents that require the need for resilience?

SQ2: What strategies, mindsets, and tools are employed to overcome these obstacles?

Foundation for Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This grounded theory study follows constructivist methodology and begins with an initial literature review and a basic theoretical framework. The literature review was a living, changing dynamic document throughout research data collection and analysis as categories and properties emerge. The importance of an initial literature review in grounded theory is emphasized by Thornberg (2012), as he argues that the absence of a literature review defies the reality that the researcher knows anything at all about her topic; the literature review therefore serves as a

foundation for moving forward with data collection in an informed study where the extant literature provides more substance to the development of the theory. In similar fashion, the theoretical framework provides an initial look into the possibility of a theory with the understanding that the final theory and model emerge as a result of the study itself. These elements help the researcher to start in the position of being informed with a strong knowledge base as opposed to the more traditional positivist approach of grounded theory where the researcher is supposed to start with a blank slate, removed and objective.

Preliminary Theoretical Frameworks

Grounded theory methodology seeks to foster the emergence of a new theory; however, it does not rule out the more conventionally acceptable method of having a theoretical framework as an initial basis. This mirrors the work of both Thornberg and Charmaz in that a pretense of starting with nothing is nonsensical (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2012).

Resilience Theoretical Framework

Framing resilience as process, Richardson's 1990 model (see Figure 1) represents a foundational theoretical framework for this study (Richardson et al, 2013). In this framework, the resilience process is outlined through five major stages: normal conditions, deteriorating phase, adapting phase, recovering phase, and growing phase. In this sense, resilience is perceived not only as a process, but also as an avenue for growth if a positive outcome is reached; the resilience process, absent growth or even reaching homeostasis, can also result in maladaptation and dysfunction, as depicted in the model.

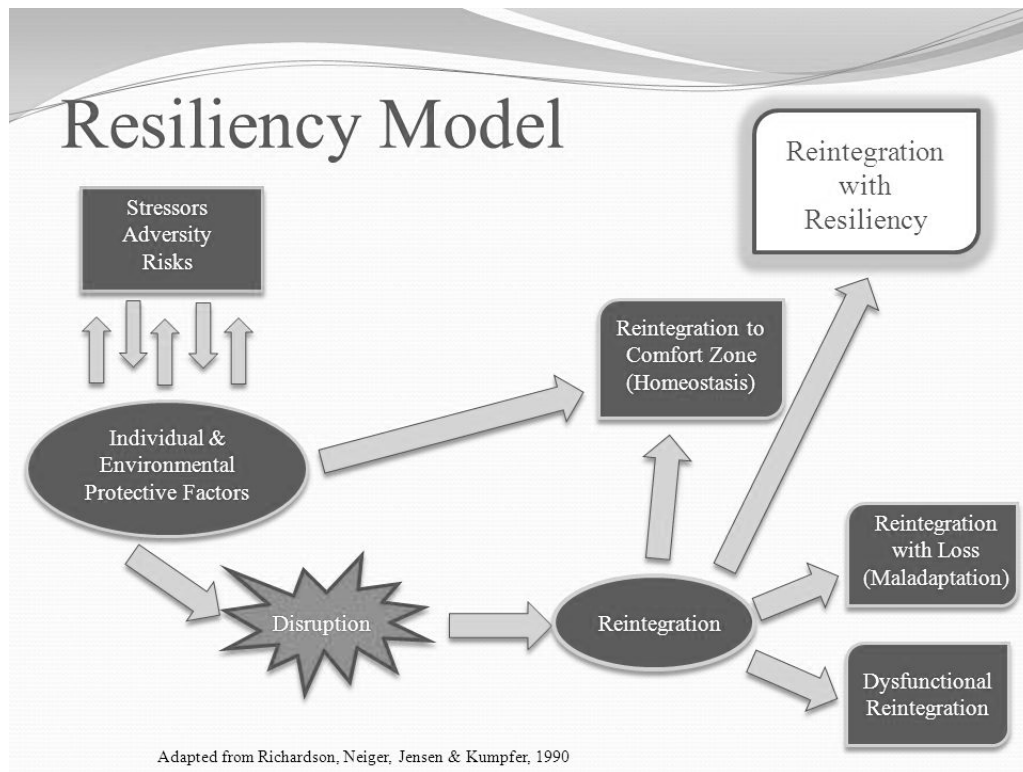


Figure 1. Resiliency model. This figure illustrates the general process of building resilience (Richardson et al., 2013)

Women in Leadership Theoretical Framework

In order to study a process of change for women superintendents, it is necessary to find a model that incorporates the characteristics of women leaders that have been shown to foster resilience and promote success in leadership, reinforcing the nature of appreciative inquiry, or “what works.” This study uses a model to help frame this work in a positive light, illustrated by the *Five Dimensions of Centered Leadership*, developed from research by Barsh, Craske, and Cranston (2008). According to this research, there are five key elements to successful women in leadership: meaning, managing energy, engaging, connecting, and positive framing. This model assumes that women going into leadership positions have the preconditions of intelligence, tolerance for change, a desire to lead, and communication skills; the impact of these preconditions plus the five dimensions are presence, resilience, and belonging:



Figure 2. Five dimensions of centered leadership (Barsh et al., 2008).

In more detail, this study of over 85 successful women leaders from around the world used grounded research to identify the five specific characteristics defined as:

- *Meaning*: finding your strengths and putting them to work in the service of an inspiring purpose; meaning makes it easier to take risks and accept the consequences when you're working for a greater good;
- *Managing energy*: knowing where your energy comes from, where it goes, and what you can do to manage it; flow, work-life balance myth, double bind of management and motherhood;
- *Positive framing*: adopting a more constructive way to view your world, expand your horizons, and gain the resilience to move ahead even when bad things happen; different than positive thinking (positive framing accepts that there are

problems and risks and one still moves forward), and is mainly accomplished through self-awareness;

- *Connecting*: identifying who can help you grow, building stronger relationships, and increasing your sense of belonging (women's networks tend to be narrower but deeper than men's); and
- *Engaging*: finding your voice, becoming self-reliant and confident by accepting opportunities and the inherent risks they bring, and collaborating with others. (Barsh, et al., 2008).

Specifically, this model is employed to help assess and identify the successful characteristics and mindsets of the women superintendents in New Hampshire as well as their successful resilience strategies.

Definition of Terms

Adversity: hardship, suffering, an extremely unfavorable experience or event (American Heritage Dictionary, 2010)

Belonging: note that belonging is not fitting in, or acclimating to the given situation; "True belonging is felt by those who have the courage to stand alone when called to do that.

They are willing to maintain their integrity and risk disconnection in order to stand up for what they believe in" (Brown, 2017).

Career path: the series of positions held by men and women as they aspire to the superintendency, taking into account the nuances between horizontal and vertical movement as well as the nature of the various roles along the way (Kim & Brunner, 2009)

Critical vulnerability: note that critical vulnerability is not defined in this

research as negative, denoting subjugation and/or weakness. It is more thoroughly defined as the ability “of individuals to willingly and consciously choose to place themselves at risk in order to counter, diffuse and transform detrimental conditions” (Simmonds, 2007).

Gender: either of the two sexes (men and women) in this study, members of a particular gender considered for this study as binary groups due to the fact that this study does not venture into masculine or feminine behaviors or leadership styles

Gender identity: “people's understanding of themselves in terms of cultural definitions of women and male” (Wood & Eagly, 2015, p. 461)

Glass ceiling: a discriminatory barrier that prevents women from rising to positions of power or responsibility, as within a corporation (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000)

Motivation: understood as career aspiration, which comprises a three-dimensional concept made up of a woman's career commitments (what she hopes to accomplish during her career in education); positional goals (the types of positions she is interested in pursuing); and leadership orientations (the leadership practices she believes necessary to realize her goals) (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 21)

Presence: “earned authority, rooted in fundamental competence and accompanies the success of anyone aspiring to lead” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 21).

Resilience: the elaborate process of developing skills over a lifetime, even in the face of adversity (Maulding, Peters, Roberts, Leonard, & Sparkman, 2012)

Risk: undertaking a task in which there is a lack of certainty or a fear of failure, applying to both internal risk and the risks superintendents take on behalf of their organizations (Tull,

2017).

Rural: any school district serving a population/community under 50,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

School district: any public education system in New Hampshire that is run through a School Administrative Unit (SAU), currently 101 SAUs in New Hampshire (NH Department of Education, 2019).

Superintendent: any professional, certified leader of an SAU, currently 100 Superintendents in the state of New Hampshire, 10 of whom are in the “interim” or “acting” superintendent capacity (NH Department of Education, 2019)

Threat: the possibility that something unwanted will happen, or a person or thing that is likely to cause something unwanted to happen (American Heritage Dictionary, 2010)

Urban: Any school district serving a population/community of 50,000 or more people; under this definition, there are only two cities in New Hampshire that qualify as urban: Manchester and Nashua (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Distinction of definition of Barrier vs. Obstacle: "When used as nouns, barrier means a structure that bars passage, whereas obstacle means something that impedes, stands in the way of, or holds up progress." In this research, the barrier is the larger "umbrella" of gender bias in the superintendency due to its socio-cultural underpinnings as a male-dominated profession. Underneath that umbrella lie the obstacles--the more focused, identified impediments that need to be overcome to foster the progress needed to surpass that larger barrier. (retrieved from <https://diffsense.com/diff/barrier/obstacle>)

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature Review Overview

The following literature review encompasses the main components of prior study of women, resilience, and the superintendency. As with most grounded theory studies, this literature review changed and deepened as the theory presents itself. In order to provide this overview, the literature review first takes a look at the history and demographics of women in the superintendency in the United States. The low percentage of women in the superintendency warrants questioning the position and profession being negatively influenced by gender bias, including identification of the common barrier and obstacles that have led to this lack of equity, both external and internal. External obstacles include public scrutiny and perception; school boards and the search process; pay inequality; career paths; and leadership and mentoring. Internal obstacles are those that cause struggle, including family, marriage, children and mobility; isolation; motivation; the multilayered need to build resilience as a women superintendent; and an acceptance of critical vulnerability to be able to aspire to and be successful in the position. Several researchers propose solutions; however, it is still clear that much can be learned from studying women from a situation where there is apparent positive change towards increased gender equity.

History and Demographics of Women in the Superintendency

Although women are increasingly obtaining leadership positions in the field, the position of superintendent remains elusive (Bilken & Brannigan, 1980; Brunner & Björk, 2001; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Mertz, 2006; Shakeshaft, 1987).

The history of the United States' public school educators can be traced back to the one-room schoolhouse. In the early days of United States history, the primary educator of the school

was a male, brought in and paid by the community to educate its children; if married, his wife and children would be given a place to live as well. Two key issues catalyzed the transference of this role to women educators. First, the Civil War, which took men away from their communities, spurred on the need for women to take over leadership of the school in order to continue educating the community's youth (Bonney, 1981). Second, a strong movement in public education around the time of Horace Mann and Catherine Beecher catalyzed a great philosophical revolution whereby education adopted a nurturing and mission-driven role, viewed at that time as functions best served by women (Goldstein, 2014). Thus, at this time in history, women more often became the principal educator. As the one-room schoolhouses grew into a vast array of school systems with America's development, women—still in the principal role—often seamlessly transitioned into the role of superintendent, at the time considered a natural progression of the school-turned-school systems' growth. If other events in history—in concert with social controversy over the role of women in society—had not occurred, the United States public schools may have fulfilled Ella Flagg Young's prediction for women leaders.

The key historical factors contributing to the changes in the gender of leaders in public education throughout the 20th century and into the first two decades of the 21st were wars, fluctuations in the economy, shifting laws pertaining to women, and a growing controversy over the ability and appropriateness of women in leadership. Reviewing the 20th century holistically, researchers confirm that the superintendency is one of the most static professional fields with a persistent absence of progress towards gender equity (Blount, 1998; Glass, 1992; Shakeshaft, 1987). World Wars I and II caused shifts in professional roles as more men left to fight overseas, some returning and some not. During this time, it became common again for women to become leaders of school systems, though only temporarily. Towards the end of World War II, however,

the post-war economy and national sentiments about family structures and values started to re-route men back into top professional positions and women back to the home. It was at this time that the main shift in the superintendency reverted back to being dominated by the male gender, with a steady decline in women school leaders, so much so that by 1980 fewer than 1% of superintendents in the United States as a whole were women (Brunner & Grogan 2007). As wars and the economy contributed to women leaving the top-level positions throughout the century, simultaneously an undercurrent of legal battles and their subsequent resulting laws and policies were developing that factored into paving the way to allow women to start regaining these positions.

Though women's suffrage in 1920 highlighted a landmark change in the role of women legally, there was slow and steady momentum regarding women's rights until another major resurgence beginning in the 1960s. Starting in 1963, the Equal Pay Act made disparity in compensation based on gender prohibited. Title IX followed in the Civil Rights Act of 1972 and crossed another legal hurdle for women whereby equal access to education and programs receiving Federal funding became a legal requirement. According to research by Tallerico and Blount (2004), this momentous decision in 1972 helped to pave the way for a resurrection of the women superintendent. Shortly thereafter in 1974, the Women's Educational Equity Act offered federal funding for research aimed at identifying and finding solutions for gender equity in education access and opportunity. In 1991, amendments to the Civil Rights Act included the establishment of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, which aimed to provide women with increased access to top-level management positions. At this time, the percentage of women superintendents was still very low at 6.6%, a figure virtually unchanged from 6.7% in 1952, 40 years earlier (Glass, 1992). Overall, even though laws, policies, and commissions have been

enacted and created, the progress of gender equity in the superintendency remains low even today.

Various research and reports over the past two decades illustrate an overall profile of the superintendency supported by more specific demographic and statistical data. Beginning with a seminal statistical analysis of the demographics of women in the superintendency by Blount (1998), the percentages remained just shy of 10%. A decade into the 21st Century, Glass (2000) completed a demographic analysis indicating that, of the nation's 13,728 superintendents, 1,984 were women, equating to 14%. Three years later, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that approximately 18% of superintendents in the United States were women (NCES, 2013). The most recent report, the *Study of the American Superintendent: 2015 Mid-Decade Update* noted that, although increases have been made throughout the years, women still only comprise 24% of the superintendency (Finnan et al., 2017).

While growth has occurred, from less than 1% in 1980 to 24% in 2015, many researchers are still skeptical of equity specifically due to the slow rate of change. Tallerico and Blount (2004), Brunner and Björk (2001), Mertz (2003), and Sherman and Grogan (2003), all caution against being overly optimistic since there is no evidence that women have attained or sustained this position over a long period of time. Two recent studies looking at the rate of increase echo this caution. With the rate “increasing by only 0.7% annually, it will take nearly 80 years for women to be proportionately represented in public schools” (Wallace, 2014, p. 48). The Center for American Progress made a similar prediction, stating that gender equity at the current rate would not occur until the year 2085 (Warner, 2015). Of course, it is important to note that all of these figures do not account for district consolidation and/or separation, which influences the

total number of superintendents required. As of the time of this research, this influence has not been studied.

In addition to the general rates of women in the superintendency, demographic studies have analyzed who our public school leaders are. According to Kolu (2013), demographics suggest that the typical superintendent of a United States public school is a White male, aged 56 to 60, who progressed from high school teacher to department head to principal to superintendent. The demographics surrounding of the one quarter of women superintendents portray a different story. In the only large-scale, national study on women educational leaders, Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that 93% of women superintendents in the United States were White; most (70%) were 55 years of age or younger (with nearly 30% younger than 50); 60% work in districts with fewer than 3,000 students; most (90%) work in more than one district in their career; they more often advance to the superintendency through an indirect career path; and they also enter the superintendency at a later age than most men. Sobehart (2009) adds to this analysis by reporting that women in the field of education are twice as likely to have earned a doctorate in education, yet men are five times more likely to hold the job of superintendent of schools. Derrington and Sharratt (2009) further highlight that the number of women superintendents in the position does not align with the higher number of women who currently hold the degree and certification required to be a superintendent. This suggests that while many qualified women are out there, they are not taking the final step to achieve—or are not being hired into—the position of superintendent. They state, “there may be a hole in the glass ceiling, but for most women, a strong ladder of support is required to climb through it” (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009, p. 9).

Research in the field demonstrates that laws and policies are established to allow full access to the superintendency for women, and that many women already possess the education and certification to hold the position; nevertheless, the ratio of women to male superintendents remains low. This fact has led researchers to focus on more sociological aspects of the superintendency, the most prominent of which is that the position itself is culturally gender stratified.

Summary of the Gender-Stratification in Education

Much like the socially constructed gender stratification of the medical profession, where for many years, men were doctors and women were nurses, education still maintains divided along the lines of men and women. This concept has been proven through both the sentiments and proclamations of prominent researchers on educational leadership as well as through basic statistical analysis. According to Bjork, as of 1999 the public school superintendency was one of the most gender-stratified executive positions in the country. Skrla et al. (2000) reported that men were 40 times more likely than women to advance to the position of superintendent, and another study (Trewartha, 2012) revealed a direct mirror of the percentages of men and women in educational roles, where about 75% of all teachers are women (25% male) and approximately 25% of superintendents are women (75% male). According to Noel-Batiste (2009), males continue to dominate all facets of the educational administration domain except elementary school principals and instructional specialists. In short, the socially constructed gender lines in education illustrate a system in which “[w]omen teach, men manage” (Strober, 1980).

What these trends exemplify is a hegemonic system favoring males in leadership positions. Along these lines, many believe, are androcentric policies, practices, and perceptions that make it difficult to break away from this pattern and deconstruct the extant social

construction. Acker (1990) attributes the gender stratification of the profession to five interacting processes: construction of divisions along gender lines; construction of symbols and images that explain, reinforce, or oppose those divisions; interactions among men and women that reinforce dominance/submission; production of gendered component of individual identity; and the ongoing process of creating and conceptualizing social structures. According to Brunner and Kim (2010), it is the social expectation of the superintendency that reinforces these gender lines, with the typical superintendent perceived as a male with formal education, experience, and the ability to complete the aspects of the job not often enjoyed, available, or sought by women. What is becoming more apparent, however, is that the underlying perceptions supporting the gender stratification of the profession are being researched and therefore made overt, the first step in deconstructing the gender lines themselves. Another complementary indication of education as a gender-stratified profession is the dearth of male elementary school teachers; breaking down the gender-stratified nature of the profession overall will support the access of more qualified people for the jobs they choose to do regardless of sex.

Several studies suggest gaining momentum towards identifying and revealing the social structures contributing to the divide, creating a more explicit awareness of the issue. Beginning with Shakeshaft (1987), a metaanalysis of 30 researched studies suggested that overt sex discrimination was responsible for keeping women out of the superintendency. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) assert that the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency is the result of women's options being limited by stereotypical expectations and beliefs. Furthermore, an enlightening response came out of a study of 63 women superintendents in six southern states who were asked what advice they would give women considering the superintendency. While the biggest response (23%) indicated that the most important thing to do was to learn how to do the

job, the second most articulated response (13%) was that they should understand gender bias. The next two responses are also telling: for women to get prepared for high stress and to take family support into consideration (12% and 10% respectively) (Wallace, 2014). While gender-stratification is evidence of the larger gender barrier, the following sections provide more specific research pertaining to the possible obstacles that contribute to it.

Common Obstacles

Research has shown that women encounter challenges when pursuing the superintendency (Askren-Edgehouse, 2008; Montz, 2004; Wickham, 2007). Many studies have been conducted concerning the barrier and obstacles to the superintendency for women. This section contains an overview, with subsequent sections following for some of the more commonly identified and researched obstacles. In general, obstacles to the superintendency have been largely due to the gender-stratified nature of the profession, social and cultural norms, and the imposed obstacles due to difficult decision making regarding the juncture of professional and personal life. Also worth noting is that several self-reported obstacles have shifted over the last two decades, suggesting either growth or a narrowing of the focus on the most significant issues. It is important to note that as with most discriminatory issues pertaining to gender, the common barrier and obstacles are even greater for women of color (Brunner & Grogen, 2007).

Early comprehensive studies began in the 1990s and highlighted the difficulty women had navigating the discrimination in this role. According to Chase and Bell (1995), common obstacles included the inability to openly discuss problems or concerns and the tendency to disaffiliate with other women due to pressures to “defeminize” (Chase & Bell, 1995). Both of these can be interpreted as ways of trying to set gender aside to assimilate. Later, in a more comprehensive study in 1999 by Kowalski and Stouder, their findings suggested the following

obstacles for limiting administrative opportunities for women: “[a] lack of family support, [b] lack of employment opportunity, [c] gender discrimination, [d] lack of collegial support, [e] familial responsibilities, [f] lack of self-confidence, [g] racial/ethnic discrimination, and [h] personal lack of tenacity” (p. 6). Two studies completed in 2000 reported that 40% of women who were certified to be superintendents chose not to pursue the role; these groups identified both internal (family concerns and desire to continue teaching) and external (politics, lack of mentors, lack of encouragement and leadership development) obstacles (DeFelice & Schroth, 2000; Grady, 2000).

Several other state-specific studies highlight similar and additional concerns. For example, in a study of motivators and inhibitors for women and the superintendency in Texas, potential superintendents in this state identified common inhibitors as paperwork and bureaucracy; community politics; working with the school board; increased commitment; and isolation and alienation from the school campus; no significant distinction was found for age or ethnicity (Harris et al., 2004, p. 110). A 2003 study of North Carolina potential women superintendents (again, qualified but not seeking the role), suggested the following factors as inhibitors: (a) lifestyle issues; (b) age; (c) politics; (d) too removed from children; and (e) not a career goal (Davis, 2010, p.75). As with many studies, these findings indicated that no single factor influenced the participant’s decision more than others consistently; rather, a combination of issues and contextual factors resulted in non-pursuit of this advancement (Faulconer, 2003). Uzzo-Faruolo (2013) identified stereotyping, gender bias, career paths and the role of self-efficacy as challenges faced by women superintendents in the state of New York.

In 2000, Skrla et al. took a different approach to this research and added findings from three women who resigned from the superintendency in Southwest states. Through this research,

she believed, women would speak more freely as a result of being out of the position. The top three reasons for these women leaving this leadership role were: questioned competence; sex-role stereotyping (perception of malleable personalities, emotional behavior, expectations of feminine behavior); and intimidation (particularly by Board members and community members) and silence (both personal and professional group) (Skrla et al., 2000). According to a Caliper Research and Development Study in 2014, of all the obstacles having the most negative impact on women in the superintendency, the top three of five relate to work-life balance issues (2014). Derrington and Sharratt (2009) describe the more significant obstacles to be stress and lack of support from teachers, parents, and the community.

Derrington and Sherratt (2008) asserted that, “recognizing a barrier is the first step towards overcoming it,” and that it is important to learn whether women’s perceptions have changed over time (p. 12). In one study to gauge changes, the Washington Association of School Administrators (2007) replicated a survey that had originally been conducted in 1993. The results suggested a shift in the rankings of obstacles identified by women considering going into the superintendency. In 1993, the top barrier was perceived as institutionalized and rooted in societal practices, such as gender stereotyping and sex discrimination; in 2007, self-imposed obstacles, such as family responsibilities and inability to relocate, were noted as more significant (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008). Some current studies are approaching both second generation gender bias as well as women’s self-imposed barriers, such as encouragement to take on specific roles due to family considerations; not being considered for top leadership positions; and feeling less connected to male colleagues (Bernal et al., 2017). More specific research around obstacles to the superintendency are briefly discussed in the next sections in order to provide a slightly

more detailed landscape surrounding inhibitors, the most prominent of which pertain in various ways to public perception.

Public Scrutiny and Perception

As women move into roles more traditionally assigned to men, public scrutiny plays a significant role in the overall perceptions of these new leaders by various groups. In addition, research studies “validate how even unconscious, systemic bias likely affects even people’s real-world behavior toward women as leaders,” suggesting that people need to develop an awareness of how these penchants can influence and possibly contribute to the underrepresentation of women (Nam, 2015). Key factors in this bias include public perceptions of traditional men and women educators stemming from the gender-stratified profession archetype discussed earlier; the influence of criticism and forgiveness (or lack thereof) towards women leaders; and the influential roles of those in the role of hiring gatekeepers to this position, namely school boards and the search consultants with whom they contract.

Much like the “women teach, men manage” mentality, when men and women are both school leaders, there has traditionally been an expectation about both gender ability and style; challenges to this are not often met with welcome. Some traditional perspectives include public perception implying that women don’t have political and business expertise (Brunner, 1998; Harris et al., 2002). Ortiz (2012) states that there is a strongly held belief that once one enters an administrative position in a school system that they are no longer a teacher, that teachers are not business people; when the public has difficulty seeing a woman as anything but a teacher, a correlation can be made that therefore, women are not good administrators. Using the opposite lens, as teachers may more often be associated caring as a focus (academic, social, emotional, and physical) (Noddings, 1984) (G Ladson-Billings, 1995), many hold the bias that such

characteristics cannot play a role in administration. Therefore, if women enter the superintendency with “different” leadership traits, it may actually be confirmation for some that they are not suited to administration. Brunner & Schumacher (1998) suggest that women are more likely to understand *power to* instead of *power over*. Harris et al. (2004) also report in their findings that women have less tolerance for political games, and politics is a requirement for the position of superintendent.

The conflict of instructor versus business leader is a dichotomy in the position itself and affects the overall gender perceptions of those in or pursuing the role, referring back to the traditional portraits of superintendents. While the mid-fifties White male superintendent has long been an established portrait over the past century, other studies of the typical woman superintendent prove more complicated. Early researchers tried to piece together the portrait of a typical superintendent and were met with difficulty bringing all the information together. These complicated compositions were described as more of a fragmented picture, a “heteroglot articulation premised on multiplicities and particularities [that is] contestatory and contradictory” (Lather, 1991, p. 27). One Iowa study summed up the typical portrait of a superintendent by reporting that it includes many characteristics that are also necessary for males; however, women need to be stronger in these traits, and need to have a preponderance of them:

Perseverance, business acumen and ‘grit’ were pinpointed as necessary traits to successfully access a superintendency. A woman must be highly qualified particularly in the stereotypically perceived feminine weaknesses of math and business. A woman aspirant still needs to juggle home responsibilities with her professional responsibilities and be cognizant of the fact that this pursuit (among other factors) may jeopardize her marriage. She must be mobile, independent and patient. Women typically access

superintendency later than do males. Reasons for this include: caring for children, unplanned career pathways and difficulty with career advancement, including episodes of sexist treatment. She must be able to ‘go it alone’ without benefit of support structures in place for most males. She must be resourceful, fueled by challenges, assertive, and more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated. A sense of humor and a strong personal vision sustain her. (Olsen, 2007, p. 8-9)

Needing “more” is not only an issue with women attaining this role but also with the role itself. Simultaneously, women are moving into the superintendency and the superintendency itself is transforming from a business to a business and instructional leadership position. It is a juncture at which both the people entering the role and the role itself are undergoing complex transformation. One central difficulty with this process is Olsen’s idea that women need to have all the traits of males—plus some. When these expectations become so high and likely impossible (not to mention unnecessary), and with suspicion as to women’s performance abilities, several side effects develop, namely in the judgment of mistakes by women and suspicions when there are challenges to the norm.

Several researchers have shown that women, when pursuing more traditional male roles, are more harshly criticized for their failures. According to the 2008 McKinsey Report (Barsh et al., 2015), a “performance-evaluation” bias clearly exists, wherein men tend to be evaluated more on their potential while women more on their achievements; women also tend to receive less credit than men for success and more criticism for failure. In an effort to prove themselves “worthy” of the position, women often feel the need to try to meet all of the expectations and more, going above and beyond what most men would do (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Ottino, 2009; Skrla et al., 2000). “They feel the need to do more and work harder to battle naysayers and

to demonstrate they can be successful in their positions (despite being women), especially those positions that are typically held by men” (Robinson, 2014, p. 176). Brescoll et al. (2010) examined judgement on women leaders and found clear evidence that women are more harshly criticized for errors. Brescoll et al. describes this effect as “the glass cliff”:

Like the glass ceiling that keeps women from rising higher, the glass cliff is what counter-stereotypical individuals (such as women police chiefs) are in danger of falling from. You don't really know, when you're a woman in a high-status leadership role, how long you're going to hang onto it. You might just fall off at any point” (Brescoll et al., 2010, p. 1640).

When public dissatisfaction with the superintendent occurs, as it inevitably does, without a clear reference point for determination of successful performance, women superintendents already suspect that gender becomes a political liability.

Challenges to the norm in style are also potentially dangerous for women. A wealth of research shows that women leaders, much more than their male counterparts, face the need to be warm and nice (what society traditionally expects from women), as well as competent or tough (what society traditionally expects from men and leaders). In short, when women display male traits in leadership, they suffer for it because it defies preconceived social notions. The problem is that these qualities are often seen as opposites. This creates a ‘catch-22’ and ‘double bind’ for women leaders as suggested by Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2013) through their *role congruity theory*. This concept is also noted through the research on women’s situational adaptation abilities suggested by Zheng et al. (2018), suggesting that women are so accustomed to adapting themselves to situations because of their gender that they become more successful at situational leadership overall. When women superintendents are authoritative, it often causes

concern over their nature. This is often when terms like “witch” or “bitch” are regularly invoked by those whose structures may be threatened. “When a woman comes in politically naïve and sticks to what she believes is ethically and morally sound, she’s uncontrollable—and that is dangerous for the woman in the end” (Brunner, 1998, p. 163). Still today, multiple books, articles, research studies, and entire internet pages are dedicated to moving women beyond the “bitch” portrait and into the successful leader portrait. Since access to the position is an essential foundation, a vital factor in overcoming common obstacles lies with the gatekeepers of the superintendent position: the school board and their search consultants.

School Boards and the Search Process

School boards often default to the “think manager, think male” mindset (Ryan & Haslam, 2006, p.26). These dispositions confirm that public perception of the leadership status quo is difficult to break and that school boards play a significant role in helping to break them. When researching the promotion process, Young and McLeod (2001) suggest that the school system is structured to ensure that women are less likely than men to serve in leadership positions, and the Rand Education Research Brief (Gates et al., 2004) found a substantial difference between rates of promotion in men and women school administrators. Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that board members branded women candidates as unable to handle budget, finance, and management of others. In the same survey, women candidates for the superintendency noted that they felt school boards still belonged to the good-old-boy network. Olsen (2007) reported that sexism was identified by her respondents as a major aspect of school board perception, and one interview conveyed an illustrative example, wherein one superintendent related that when she was offered the superintendency by the board they got up and shook her husband’s hand instead of hers (Olsen, 2007, p. 7).

Many searches are led by a professional search consultant, another key gatekeeper to accessing the role and paving the way for women. In some cases, the search consultant can influence the board's perception and encourage their willingness to hire a woman. Breaking the habits of boards, though, is often not easy. Boards seek candidates who "fit" with their school culture, which has been termed "homosocial reproduction" by Kanter (1993) and Marietti & Stout (1994). "Even well-meaning decision makers often subtly advantage people like themselves" (Linn, 1998, p 16). Tallerico (2000) also reports findings suggesting that males are preferred over women because of the concept of "fit;" both social-psychological and organizational research "demonstrates a human affinity for interaction with those most like ourselves" (p 107). Perhaps as women hold increasing numbers of positions on school boards, this position will start to change. Tallerico continues to note that

the complex mix of unwritten selection criteria...manifest themselves behind the scenes, in the private conversations and interviews critical to applicants' advancement in recruitment and selection processes. These unwritten rules involve headhunters' and school board members (a) defining quality in terms of hierarchies of particular job titles, (b) stereotyping by gender (c) complacency about acting affirmatively, and (d) hyper valuing feelings of comfort and interpersonal chemistry with the successful candidate (Tallerico, 2000, p. 37).

In the two states with the highest percentage of women superintendents in the nation (New York and California), research has been completed on the search process itself. Dedrick et al. (2016) researched the superintendent search specifically in New York, where the search process—like in most other states—has become increasingly difficult due to dwindling numbers of total applicants. In this New York study, findings suggest that women are more likely to be

promoted to the position of superintendent from within their own districts, suggesting that confidence in and knowledge of the specific woman may lead to breaking down gender concerns and allowing access to the position. This could, in turn, lead to more confidence in women overall if that person is successful in the position. In the California study, women candidates self-report that the screening and selection process through the search were clear obstacles to the position (MacArthur, 2010). The gatekeeping from school boards and search consultants clearly has the ability to influence and transform this process into one where more equity is available, putting these people in the function of guide instead of gatekeeper.

Pay

One other function attributed to school boards and sometimes search consultants is the setting of salary for the superintendent. First, it is often difficult for both men and women superintendents to request a substantial salary because of the nature of the education field itself. Education—with its mission-driven history—seems disconnected to a need for money, even though many superintendents do the job of the CEO of a large corporation. Adding a gender component to this causes exacerbation of the issue, since women are supposed to be not only mission driven but focused on self-sacrifice and servitude to children. The following statement from a women superintendent in Iowa sums up this conundrum:

There are people in my life who believe that if I were a male receiving a nice salary, it wouldn't be as big of a story. That may or may not be true. I don't know. I know I make more money [than most people] in a school district that's 70 per cent free and reduced lunch. But I know I make less money than the bank presidents and big corporate leaders. I make less money than other superintendents in Iowa, but...just wondering if part of the pushback is [from thinking that] women don't deserve that salary. (Superville, 2016)

In a Texas study by Harris et al. (2004), the only statistically significant result was for pay, where it was found to be a more motivating factor for men than for women ($M=3.26$ vs $F=2.90$ on a 4-point Likert scale) (p. 469). The most recent figures on superintendent salary indicate women still earn an average of \$4,000 to \$18,000 less than their male counterparts (Finnan et al., 2017); even so, researchers regularly suggest that overall, pay is rarely a factor in women deciding to be superintendents. Work-life balance issues far more often rise to the top of the list of motivators and inhibitors.

Family, Marriage, Children and Location

When it comes to marriage, family, and child rearing, researchers suggest that women superintendents face even greater challenges than just accessing and/or achieving the role. Much of this relates back to the public perception of this gender-stratified profession, yet there are two additional contributing factors: the double bind of women's roles and the influence of the education profession itself as being a mission driven institution. In 1989, Schwartz coined the terms for working women of "career primary" and "career and family women," which later became known as "the mommy track" (Schwartz, 1989). Such research promoted a binary view of working women that remains today. Several years later, Tannen (1994), began research on "the double bind," which denotes the two competing roles that professional women are always supposed to serve: those of career professional and wife/mother/caretaker, however it applies to that individual's life. This is also noted as the "double whammy of impossible expectations" (Spar, 2012, p. 38). The education profession adds yet another layer of difficulty for women in leadership; since it is considered a mission-driven profession where self-sacrifice is an expectation for all educators, it is even more difficult for women to fight for equity, as they may

have to lobby for things that educators should not care about, such as salary, time with family, or time for self.

The double bind conveys the unfeasibility of being an assertive leader while also maintaining feminine qualities. A woman is supposed to be personal and caring but also cannot be personal and caring for fear that she is perceived as someone incapable of handling difficult work. Hewlitt (2002) depicts this as the impossibility of having it all, causing many women leaders to live in a constant state of pretense of the neutrality of gender. “Acknowledging the role of gender in one’s life seemed to suggest an inability to function as a legitimate leader in the given structure of schools, an inability to control her own life and work” (Skrla et al., 2000, p. 70). Lee (2000) concluded in her study that women superintendents in the state of Virginia perceived conflicting demands of career and family and exclusion from the informal socialization process of the “good old boy network” as major obstacles. This conflict becomes even more exaggerated when motherhood is a factor. Bias against mothers triggers assumptions that mothers have less commitment to their careers; therefore, they are held to higher standards and receive fewer leadership opportunities (Barsh et al., 2008). In many ways, this all culminates in putting women under much higher and different scrutiny than men, which runs creates the risk of perpetually viewing professional women through the lens of a deficit perspective by which they are judged against what they cannot do as opposed to what they can.

Marriage is one such area of focus on balance. To gain access to the position of superintendent and then achieve it, school leaders (both men and women) often have to sacrifice other aspects of their lives; in the case of women, this often means “losing their husbands or partners rather than giving up their careers to save their marriages or intimate relationships” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 166). One study of NY state superintendents reported that among

the 416 male superintendents, 4% were single; among the 62 women superintendents, 33% were single (Camasso, 2010). A similar survey in Iowa conveyed that approximately half of the women respondents (52%) were divorced as compared to their male counterparts (8%); according to statistics from Iowa Commission on the Status on Women Report (2000) this divorce rate is approximately 30% higher than the divorce rate for the general women population in Iowa (Olsen, 2005). The 2008 Grogan and Brunner study also reported that in the AASA survey, 76% of women superintendents were married and that 77% had raised or were raising children at the time, including 35% of whom were raising children under the age of 20 when they were first appointed superintendent. Responses regarding spousal support indicated that 19% had a spouse who took a less demanding or more flexible position, 20% were in a commuter marriage, and 20% made other accommodations, which largely included divorce (Brunner & Grogan, 2008). School board hiring was also a factor here, in that boards associate marriage with stability but at the same time worry that if a woman is married she will not put her full efforts into the job—the double bind and role congruity theory in action.

The stressors related to living with the double bind also often place women leaders in a more precarious position than their male counterparts. Many women wind up living in a commuter marriage or weekend/holiday relationship (Robinson, 2013, p. 180). As part of the study of 20 women superintendents who had retired and/or resigned from the position in Southern states, findings report that women—after leaving the position—stated that they were planning on paying back their husbands for time lost; that they intended to make up the time lost with their own children with their grandchildren; that they were seeking treatment for eating disorders and long-term chronic illnesses that they had been ignoring; and that they wanted to try to reverse the damage done to themselves during their tenure, including language similar to that

of PTSD therapy (Robinson, 2013). As with most research on women in the superintendency, some indication of change is taking place with more current studies. For example, women superintendents in a recent Ohio study are encountering fewer family, career planning, gender discrimination/stereotyping, internal, external, and overall gender bias barrier issues when compared to past studies from other states and across the nation. Furthermore, more women in Ohio are accepting superintendent positions with increasingly younger children in their households (Askren- Edgehouse, 2008).

The concerns with marriage and family translate into some concerns over mobility, as evidenced by the feedback on commuter marriages. Women have historically been more place-bound than men. Even though more recent studies suggest that other obstacles are being overcome to open access to the superintendency, relocation is still more of an obstacle for women than men. Search consultants argue that being willing and able to move to a job location increases the chances for attaining a position. In a study of California women superintendents, Wiekham (2008) found women less willing to relocate in order to obtain a superintendent position because of family or spouse's job. The AASA findings suggest the same, stating that the “only true block for women is that they are unwilling to relocate for a position” (Brunner, 2008). While this denotes issues with a more geographic mobility, another key factor in access to the superintendency concerns the more internal mobility a woman makes through the navigation of her career path within school organizations.

Career Paths

While almost all superintendents start out in the classroom, the path taken by men and women can differ overall, which has the potential to affect access and opportunity. Exploration of this phenomenon can be concentrated into four major areas, including grade level effect, linear

versus non-linear pathways, length of tenure, and reinforcing research perspectives from labor market research on gender and leadership outside of the education profession. The common term of “glass ceiling” is more definitively articulated in this research; for example, Williams (2013) added that men experience a “glass escalator,” where the way is paved for them (p. 609). Referring to the lack of mobility options available to women, Skrla et al. (2000) make the following claim about the pathway to the superintendency: “It’s not a glass ceiling; it’s a steel grid” (p.66).

In general, studies suggest that women attain the superintendency later in their careers, have more children, have more degrees, teach longer, have a stronger background in curriculum and instruction, and have typically worked in an elementary setting (Brunner & Grogan, 2008). Skrobarcek and Stark (2002) reviewed the career paths of aspiring women superintendents in Texas and determined that one of the key obstacles is that women have not been socialized to aspire to administrative positions or to prepare for the position. In their research, they found that the school systems they studied were structured in ways that foster male advancement over women, making career aspirations towards leadership more difficult systemically both socially as well as organizationally. This is particularly apparent when grade level work is examined.

Entry level assistant principal and principal positions have more frequently been drawn from the high school/secondary years. Much of this is due to the fact that elementary levels of education have fewer of these positions overall and therefore offer fewer opportunities for elementary teachers to move forward. High schools not only have more assistant principal and principal positions, but they also support building the capacity for leadership through other predominantly secondary positions such as department chair and/or athletic coach, which are common feeder paths to the superintendency (Bjork, 2000; Glass, 2000; Kowalski, 1999). Other

researchers confirm this trend, additionally reporting that women who participated in leadership opportunities while working at the secondary-education level, (e.g., team leaders, department chairs, and coaching positions) rise to the superintendency in greater numbers (Glass, 2000).

While grade level clearly plays a role in limiting access, another factor is that women are more often promoted from within their own districts, adding to the difficulty in both lateral and vertical advancement, which presents another perspective on typical and atypical career paths. Kanter (1993) suggests that career mobility has two prongs: opportunity and power; this can be correlated to the career path itself as a way to offering women both access and opportunity for success in addition to become empowered. The more traditional path to the superintendency can be described in the following linear steps: teacher, assistant principal, principal, superintendent. Zeigler (1967) identified differences in the vertical and lateral career mobility by gender, offering that women have an “in and out” mobility, while men have an “up or out” trajectory. Kim and Brunner (2009) surveyed 723 superintendents and 543 central office administrators on their career paths. They found that males tend to have a more vertical and line-role ascendancy to the superintendency, while women tend to have more horizontal moves and staff positions. Among other biases in leadership and gender, Uzzo-Faruolo (2013) identified the career path as a major challenge faced by women superintendents in the state of New York. This study specifically identified lateral and staff position mobility as a longer route to leadership and the one more often pursued by women. Staff positions without a direct line can lead individuals to a dead-end more often than a straight trajectory towards the “top.” Montz (2004) reports that about 50% of women surveyed held a central office position before becoming superintendent, and Brunner and Grogan’s (2007) national study reported that 51% of women respondents identified their most common path as teacher to principal to central office administrator to superintendent.

It should be noted, however, that nearly half of the women in Brunner and Grogan's 2007 study did not follow that path, as some of the participants progressed to the level of superintendent without ever holding a principal or a central office position. Kim and Brunner (2009) followed up with a later study using the 2007 information and found that the women most successful are those who combine the traditional male and women path (horizontal and vertical), arguing also that this combination may additionally offer the best preparation. The "longer" path contributes to research when considering the length of time in each position as one ascends to the superintendency.

Women more often spend longer amounts of time in the classroom, which can trigger various interpretations as to their ability and desire for leadership. Women administrators have typically spent an average of 10 years as a classroom teacher, while men spend fewer, averaging in the 5- to 6-year range (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989). Some speculate that this may have to do with still having young children at home, a reluctance to pursue the position, or a lack of aspirations (Glass, 2000; Gross & Trask, 1976). Other researchers, however, may see this as a misinterpretation of the data that not only affects the perception of women leaders in career advancement but also skew other statistics regarding their success in the superintendency once attained. In a critique of the AASA study, Brunner cited her own research from 2007 where she reported no evidence that women had lower career aspirations than men; in addition, she reported that women, when entering at a later age, will naturally have shorter tenures than men based on the features of their superintendent career start and end dates. She argues that this data could have the detrimental effect of establishing norms for women that are not completely accurate. For example, because of systemic bias in accessing and achieving the superintendency, "norms may develop surrounding what the typical women

superintendent is, unfair by virtue of its origins” (Brunner, 2008, p. 672). It is important to note that the same AASA study did not report its findings that similar classroom longevity is experienced by people of color, both male and women. Other ways of looking at more classroom longevity could include more expertise in instructional practice and/or a higher value placed on teaching over networking, something first suggested by Shakeshaft (1989).

Taking a step outward by considering career paths and labor research provides additional insight to the variances in women’s career paths. A study by Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer (2006) apply women’s ascent to the superintendency to the typical constraints of labor, finding three main limitations: due to the double bind, women have a structural time crisis in which they are not available all the time, something traditionally valued by management; women do not fit “ideal worker norms,” something that the barrier and bias previously discussed highlight; and that women do not always find themselves next in the occupational queue, where the first in line are usually the traditional workers in that role. This work, based primarily on feminist economic theory, conveys that “what exists today is an institutionalized, systemic pattern in the market that is robust and resistant to change.” (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006, p. 483) The “ideal worker norm” as coined by Williams (2000) connects the traditional labor succession with research on the search process and what Tallerico and Blount (2004) define as the fundamental sexual divisions of labor. This resistance to change results in questions as to whether or not women actually have true choice in their career paths:

Women’s choices are only choices in the sense that they are pathways through which women adjust within the limits that are set by the market structure and adapt to the larger market system. Meaning, they are not truly free and independent of constraints.
(Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006, p. 497)

Vital aspects of choice and access in career path decision making and advancement that may either inhibit or encourage women leaders are the networking opportunities, mentoring and leadership development programs—formal and informal—that may or may not be made readily available.

Leadership Development and Mentoring

Career path decisions and aspirations do not necessarily exist within the isolated individual. There are likely other people and programs traveling along the path with them providing opportunities for both formal and informal leadership development and mentoring. When it comes to this type of support—or the absence of support—for aspiring women leaders, the subdivisions of leadership as identity work, the effectiveness of leadership and mentoring programs, and the connections to practice are highlighted as central issues.

Historical and systemic gender bias regarding women and the superintendency requires leadership development for women that moves beyond traditional preparation strategies and adds a significant amount of identity work in complement. Becoming a leader is an iterative process, whereby every action elicits a decision or response that culls prior information to formulate a position and direction. Women, following men in a male-oriented structure, may have increased difficulty with these iterations if the foundation is far different from their own. Based on this insight, the findings of Ely et al. (2011) suggest that women's leadership programs revisit traditional approaches to standard leadership topics (change, negotiations, etc.) and reinterpret and revise them to meet women's particular challenges in senior leadership. "Integrating leadership into one's core identity is particularly challenging for women, who must establish credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how they should exercise authority" (Ibarra et al., 2013). Ibarra et al. (2013) and Ely et al. (2011) suggest that a

solution is to focus leadership development on the specific identity issues women face with complementary work on a focus of purpose, as opposed to traditional role performance and presentation. Males may continue to dominate this field since research shows that leaders are generally drawn towards leaders who resemble themselves and identity is little to no concern (Finnan et al., 2017). When faced with identity and the overall dearth of women superintendents, it is a simple mathematical fact that there is an identity pool deficit. When women leaders are facing the creation of their own identities, especially when they are simultaneously expected to be male and female in their role, there is confusion as to where to turn for role models and mentors.

In their comprehensive 2007 study, Brunner and Grogan noted their survey respondents reported that women feel a lack of mentoring support even though access may be available. It also does not positively affect the number of women choosing to go into the superintendency. A California study cited limited mentor relationships as obstacles in their attainment of the superintendency (MacArthur, 2010). Lee (2000) concluded in her study that women superintendents in the state of Virginia perceived conflicting demands of career and family and exclusion from the informal socialization process of the “good old boy network” as major obstacles. With limited number of women mentors, women may not get as much guidance as they need if the mentoring is done by a man. Women have also reported concerns over having a close male mentor relationship for fear of repercussions of the appropriateness of the relationship and public perception of questionable sexual politics (Barsh et al., 2008). This same research also supports the need for sponsorship specifically stemming from another avenue of the double bind, where studies show that

women who promote their own interests vigorously are seen as aggressive, uncooperative, and selfish. An equal number of studies show that the failure of women to promote their own interests results in a lack of women leaders. Until one of these conditions changes, sponsors, we believe, are the key to helping women gain access to opportunities they merit and need to develop. (Barsh et al., 2008, p. 40)

This results in what the McKinsey Report would term “sponsored mobility.” Unfortunately, research of sponsored mobility, like that of search and selection processes, corroborates the fact that people are most likely to sponsor people who are like themselves. This, again, could provide limited access for women. In a field where there are few women, “tokens” are often perceived even more stereotypically (Crocker & McGraw, 1984) and they feel more visible, different, and stereotyped by others (Cohen & Swim, 1995; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998). Research on mentorship in general, however, maintains that mentors have a positive effect on women in leadership. Copeland and Calhoun (2014) suggest that social-emotional concerns in particular are helped through mentoring relationships which can lead to supportive and encouraging conditions for aspiring women leaders. This may suggest that while there are concerns with mentoring, it is still an avenue worth pursuing with potentially significant results.

In addition to the disconnect in terms of identity work and access to mentors, there is a similar disconnect between the design of leadership and mentoring programs and actual daily practice. “Often times companies spend a lot of time and money to promote gender equity and then ‘not much happens’” (Ely et al., 2013). This may be due to the fact that organizations might promote this gender equity through women’s leadership programs, but do not simultaneously address policies and practices that promote gender equity in leadership. Irby and Brown (2000) suggest that these changes not only happen in organizations, but also in higher education, where

leadership perceptions can be challenged. Some suggested opportunities to connect leadership development and practice are to have women-only development programs create safe spaces and opportunities for sponsorship, and continue to educate organizations on second-generation gender bias (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Motivation and the Need for Women Superintendents

Considering the common barrier and specific obstacles discussed in the previous section and their significance to women in the superintendency, two questions stem from this foundation of struggle. First, is there a need for women leaders in the profession, and if so what is it? Second, there is clear evidence that women have to fight harder to become a superintendent, so why might women remain motivated to do this work? The first question is answered through research based on both the need for superintendents in a time of critical shortage as well as through evidence that as the role of superintendent changes in the midst of larger changes in public education, women may bring much needed elements to the profession overall. The second question is answered through research based on the motivators for women in the superintendency, that is, the internal and external factors countering the barrier and obstacles discussed earlier.

Over the past two decades, researchers have continually suggested that a critical shortage of superintendents is imminent, creating a need for more young leaders to choose this career trajectory. The retirement of baby-boomers in the superintendency coupled with the position being less attractive to many results in the need to more actively cultivate future leaders. The superintendent shortage is well documented through multiple comprehensive studies (Cooper, Fusarelli, Carella, American Association of School Administrators, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; T. Glass, 2000; Hoyle, 2002; Lowery & Harris, 2003; Rohn, 2001).

One study reports that nearly 80% of the superintendents across the nation are at or near the age of retirement (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000) while another cited in 2007 that an estimated 55% of the current superintendents from across the nation would not be working within the next 5 years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). In New York State's 9th triennial study of the superintendency, it was determined that the average age of a superintendent is 53 and that one-third of all superintendents stated that they planned to retire by 2018. The reality of a shortage provides opportunities for more women to obtain the superintendency as it has become increasingly necessary to widen the talent pool. In addition to increasing the number of women candidates out of necessity, recent studies suggest that the changing nature of the superintendent role itself opens it up to more women due to the leadership skills women bring to the table. "Giving women equal access to the superintendency of public school systems would increase the size of the pool of potential candidates while increasing the proportion of women candidates with superior leadership skills" (Morillo, 2017, p. 22).

The skills required to lead a public school system in the 21st century are more often linked to traits that have traditionally been associated with women in education and women in leadership. The research on the need for school district instructional leadership in particular parallel the same skills identified in research on women educational leaders (Miller, Washington, & Fiene, 2006). This could be due in part to the more "horizontal" career path described earlier in this review, where women spend a longer time in the classroom and other instructional roles prior to moving into leadership, giving them the advantage of an increased knowledge base from which to effect educational change. A Wallace Foundation study identified leadership as the second most influential factor in improving the quality of student learning, making this a central theme in new leadership overall (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004). The

school superintendency is becoming less the traditional business CEO role and more the role of community and instructional transformational leader and visionary, inspiring a slew of studies over the past two decades in both business and education about how women traditionally offer the kind of leadership traits that are more sought after in this time of change and progress. These studies underscored strengths that women possess that make them well matched for leadership positions (Brunner, 1999; Davis, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Johannesen-Schmidt, Eagly & Van Engen, 2005; Askren-Edgehouse, 2008; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014).

Research shows that women, as a group, have more transformational qualities than men, indicating that women have more leadership potential and tend to lead more effectively than men do during challenging times (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women superintendents reportedly experience higher productivity and work longer hours than male superintendents (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). A recent study of 900 managers at top United States corporations reported that “women’s effectiveness as managers, leaders and teammates outstrips the abilities of their male counterparts in 28 out of 31 managerial skill areas” (Coughlin, Wingard, & Hollihan, 2005, p. 136). The skills highlighted in this study include:

bringing compassion, patience, and teamwork to the work environment; offering creativity and a different way of thinking; a cooperative spirit; a gift for ‘reading’ people; patience; empathy; networking abilities; negotiating skills; a drive to nurture children, business connections and the local and world community; an interest in ethnic diversity and education; a keen imagination; a win-win attitude; mental flexibility; an ability to embrace ambiguity; and the predisposition to examine complex social, environmental, and political issues with a broad, contextual, long-term view. (Coughlin et al., 2005, p. 140)

These skills would be vital in navigating the challenges that superintendents face in their role as 21st Century chief education officers.

Thus, two paths of need (the superintendent shortage and the leadership skills newly required in education) have been converging in recent years to create a ripe opportunity for women to successfully move into the role of superintendent. Given the barrier and obstacles outlined, however, the question still remains as to why women would want to pursue this opportunity. As Glass aptly asked in his 2000 research on the shortage: so, who wants to do it anyway?

In a study the same year as Glass's question, Cooper et al. (2000) asked current superintendents if they would advise others to pursue the position; 35% replied they would not recommend the job to anyone. Nonetheless, women are increasing (albeit slowly) in numbers in this role, with key motivating factors across several different studies. Patterson's research states that a key motivating philosophy is that "the superintendency is a lifestyle, not a job; it's an opportunity to do difficult but valuable work" (Patterson, 2000, p. 23). The desire to make a difference, the pursuit of personal and professional challenge, and the ability to initiate big-picture change and community transformation are key factors cited for the superintendency overall (Gunn & Holdaway, 1986). These same factors rose to the top in a Texas study specifically targeting women superintendents (Moore & Ditzhazy, 1999). Another study of women superintendents from Ohio found motivating factors to be almost identical to the two studies above (Askren- Edgehouse, 2008). The motivators for women and men to become superintendents do not appear to differ significantly; therefore, the question is more accurately framed around how women who are motivated to do this difficult job build the resilience to achieve and work in the position given the multiple identified obstacles that need to be

overcome. The difference in the question to pursue the role of superintendent for women is that there is always an awareness of being a woman in the role. Being a woman is always an issue. Most studies through the 1990s and into the 21st century hold true to the fact that women are always acutely aware of the fact that they are women superintendents, not just superintendents (Brunner, 1998; Chase, 1995). This suggests that women may have to ask themselves not if they want to be a superintendent, but if they want to be a women superintendent, starting out with an added layer of needed resilience.

Resilience

The notion of resilience has been examined from a wide variety of disciplines including education, psychology, medicine/biology, sociology, economics, and history, to name just a few of many. With this multitude of studies comes a multitude of definitions. In order to frame the integral concept of resilience for the purpose of studying women in the superintendency, the review of literature here focuses on essential and common aspects of resilience, specifically that resilience at its core involves overcoming adversity, going through a phase of adaptation, and that most importantly it is a process developed over an extended period of time. It is generally accepted that there are five basic phases of the resilience cycle: normal conditions, deteriorating phase, adapting phase, recovering phase, and growing phase (Richardson, 2013).

Resilience is often discussed as capacity, strength, or ability (Hollister-Wagner et al, 2001; Wayman, 2002; Werner & Smith, 2001). These terms all directly relate to the other essential factor in resilience: overcoming some type of adversity. Fullan (2005) suggests that resilience is the combination of perseverance and flexibility. Reed and Patterson (2007) also indicate the ability to remain strong amid ambiguity and change, or resilience, is a skill that can be developed, honed, and cultivated by building up specific resilience skills and strategies. A

Harvard University research study conducted over a 60-year period documents that one can become markedly more resilient during one's lifetime (Coutu, 2002). Haw (2010) reinforces the idea that where resilience is not developed naturally over time through adversity, resilience can be taught. What all of these definitions have in common in addition to overcoming and adapting to adversity is the element of time. Resilience is referred to in terms of "perseverance," "remain[ing] strong," and something that is "cultivated" or "honed" "over one's lifetime." All of these terms imply that resilience is a characteristic or skill that is gained through a process over time. Richardson (2013) presents a resilience model that exemplifies this cyclical process, which will be the starting place for this study, and a key principle of the resilience model is that positive adaptation is not just the act of overcoming a challenge or obstacle, but involves improvement beyond the previous level of competence.

According to Richardson (2013), reintegration occurs when one is able to grow through disruption. Resilient reintegration is a strengthening effect on an individual by which the development of skills enables one to deal with future adversity. Once a disruption occurs, individuals go through a state of disorganization then form new skills to try and recover and correct the disorganization. Disruption is caused when one experiences an adverse situation not experienced before or experienced before without resilient reintegration. Disruptions are what present individuals with the opportunity to grown and learn. Reintegration with loss exists when one suffers a gradual decrease as a result of the disruption and reintegrates at a lower level than before the disruption. Richardson (2013) also highlights that disruption is not always an unexpected experience. Individuals often create disruptions intentionally with an awareness of the opportunities for learning and personal growth; this concept is similar to that of critical vulnerability.

Research on resilience and leadership is plentiful. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) state that resilience is developmental, can be learned, and can be taught, defining resilience as using energy to emerge from adversity stronger than ever. Patterson and Kelleher developed three components of a resilience framework: the interpretation of current adversity and future possibility; the resilience capacity to tackle adversity; and the actions needed to become more resilient in the face of adversity. Resilient people resolve conflicts, turn disruptive changes into new directions, learn from the process, and become more successful and satisfied in the process (Maddi, Harvey, Fazel, Khoshaba, & Resurrection, 2005). Patterson and Kelleher (2005) highlight that despite chronic adversity, there are many examples of school leaders who demonstrate resilience capacity and lead high performing schools. Three sources make up this resilience capacity: personal values; personal efficacy; and personal energy. Personal values consist of one's core values and transcend time and context. Personal efficacy, or belief in the capacity to accomplish challenging goals, is composed of one's sense of self-confidence and competence and strong connections to others who support one's efforts (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Personal energy is a resource that one draws upon when ready to act or do the work needed to move ahead in the face of adversity. According to Patterson and Kelleher (2005), energy comes in four types: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) also argue that one moves from capacity to strength when one adds the resilience dimension of action. A resilience strength is the sum of the dynamic interaction among three dimensions of resilience: interpretation, capacity, and action (p. 11). Patterson, Goens, and Reed (2009) state one can develop concrete skills to boost resilience. These skills are categorized in three areas: thinking skills, capacity skills, and action skills. According to Patterson et al. (2009), resilience thinking skills and capacity building skills are necessary, but not sufficient, to sustain

resilience. Resilience action skills are crucial. One needs to take deliberate actions to apply resilience thinking and capacity building skills to develop resilience, implying an element of self-efficacy in the development of resilience. According to Reivich & Shatte (2002), current literature suggests resilience is a continuum. They indicate that regardless of one's position on the continuum, resilience can be increased through intentional learning and cultivation.

How people gain resilience in their careers has been equally studied in a variety of fields, resulting in a multitude of approaches; the common factor in the majority of this research is that people who successfully build resilience in leadership do so through connection with others. Gu and Day (2007) suggest that resilience is enhanced and/or inhibited by the nature of one's work setting; collegial relationships; the strength of one's beliefs and aspirations; a strong supportive social community; and supportive peer relationships. Reivich and Shatte (2002) find that resilient people have a task-oriented coping style, believe in their ability to control outcomes, and use connections to others as a way to cope. Patterson describes resilient school leaders as people who consistently and persistently apply strategies to operate from a set of personal and organizational values, despite any external adversities. Resilient people are flexible and believe that change is manageable, but they also need to know where to go for their own resilience support (Patterson, 2004). Resilient people resolve conflicts, turn disruptive changes into new directions, learn from the process, and become more successful and satisfied in the process (Maddi et al., 2005). Specific to women and resilience, Brown (2007) cites three key factors in what she calls "shame resilience," which includes acknowledged vulnerability, critical awareness, and mutually empathic relationships (p. 48). This last key factor supports many other notions that the process of resilience requires some type of connection with others.

Importance of resilience in the superintendency.

The role of superintendent is becoming increasingly difficult as education goes through times of great change and challenge. Therefore, the need for resilience is becoming a higher priority. It is up to school leaders to develop their own resilience while simultaneously building resilience among others and the holistic culture of the organization itself. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) describe the current superintendency with the nautical metaphor of trying to ride out the torrent of relentless storms that come and go and come again.

The critical shortage of superintendents is difficult to counter when considering trying to recruit and retain leaders for such a difficult position. Reiterated by Glass (2000), if the superintendency were easy, we would not have a shortage. Hoffman (2004) cites the factors of increasing accountability expectations, the time needed to meet the demands of the job, and stress as key reasons school administrators are choosing not to enter the superintendency. School superintendents today, more than ever, work in an increasingly high-stakes environment full of adversity (Patterson, 2007).

Referring again to Coutu (2002), one's level of resilience determines success or failure more than education, experience, or training. The "storm" that continually strikes superintendents comprises a multitude of challenges from all directions. "Legislative mandates at the federal, state, and local level continually challenge superintendents. Information and demands from parents, principals, teachers, members of the board, federal and state departments, external advocates and programs, and community groups constantly bombard superintendents" (Simmonds, 2007, p. 52).

Some regard this as one of the most rapidly changing roles, specifically citing the following: changes in curriculum instruction and assessment practices and philosophies, annual legislation (over 100 bills in the 2018), shrinking fiscal resources, the need to

build cultural leadership in a time when public schools are under attack, providing the final answer while being expected to know all aspects of the organization in detail, dealing with high pressure community groups, increased diversity, and higher levels of political involvement in the daily activities of the position. (Harris et al., 2004, p. 124). Superintendents have multiple responsibilities as the administrators of complex educational organizations, requiring them to be visionary, implement policy, manage fiscal responsibilities, triage, and work well with a wide variety of constituents. Fullan (2005) describes superintendents as leaders who consider system forces while attempting to alter forces in an effort to transform the system itself.

In analyzing the changing and current role of the school superintendent in the 21st century, Goens (2015) suggests that the chaotic period in contemporary education is long from over. “Resilient educational leaders are imperative for schools to achieve goals during a time of uncertainty and poor economic conditions” (Patterson, 2001). Following up on this research from 2001, Patterson et al. (2009) state that adversity in the superintendency is inevitable and resilience is optional; without resilience, however, either the superintendent and/or the district will not last or succeed. While it is clear that resilience is a necessity for the superintendency, especially in the contemporary context of increasing accountability, adversity, and uncertainty, the question remains as to how women superintendents in particular are able to build resilience.

How women superintendents develop resilience.

While there are foundational similarities in resilience building between men and women leaders (namely the five basic phases of the resilience cycle: normal conditions, deteriorating phase, adapting phase, recovering phase and growing phase), several studies have suggested that there are also aspects of this process unique to women. These primarily involve increased need

for building capacity through connection to others, maintaining a myopic trajectory on mission and values, and the ways in which women leaders wrestle with the dichotomy of professional gender identity.

Gender differences in resilience in leadership report varying results. In *Women Leaders and Resilience: Perspectives from the C-Suite* (2010), corporate leaders in 20 countries indicate that women are more resilient than men. The Leader Resilience Profile® (LRP) data that compares and contrasts leader resilience by gender show clear results that women are more resilient leaders and possess higher levels of LRP skills than men:

Univariate analyses showed significant gender differences on four subscales (Optimism-Future, Personal Efficacy, Personal Responsibility, and Personal Values) with women having higher resilience scores than males. Though significant, the gender differences were small in size, with E^2 ranging from .042 to .09 for the four subscales. These findings show that gender is potentially a strong predictor of leadership resilience and that women's overall greater resilience is observed in the areas of personal leadership. (Reed and Blaine, 2015, p. 465)

On the contrary, a meta-analysis conducted by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) addressed this gender debate by quantitatively summarizing gender differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness across 99 independent samples from 95 studies, finding that, when all leadership contexts are considered, men and women do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness. The internal process of building resilience, however, shows that women have two strategies that differ from their male counterparts, namely connection to others and blocking out distractions from maintaining a focus on the mission and values of themselves and their districts.

In a study of five long-term women superintendents, interviews clearly indicate a major finding of forging relationships as being a key factor in struggling through very difficult times of leadership (Palladino et al., 2016). Finding and/or creating support networks in various forms has been noted in several other studies as well (Barsh et al., 2008; Derrington & Sherratt, 2009; and Wallace, 2014). This concept is also supported through the work of Brown (2007), where resilience for women can be successfully increased through connection with others. Much of this research suggests that finding these support networks help women leaders counter an underlying, pervasive sense that they do not belong, something inherent in situations where a group is in the vast minority of the whole. Isolation, to the contrary, is more likely to cause women to leave the profession. In the educational leadership world, isolation increases as you rise up the administrative ladder, some suggesting that this isolation is so contrary to women's natural work as collaborators that something triggers them to stop advancing their careers.

In addition to finding a support network, women superintendents regularly cite being values driven as what keeps them going in times of greatest adversity, whether from the job itself or from having to overcome the gender barrier; Simmonds refers to this as the "lighthouse" by which women school leaders navigate their paths. Again, multiple studies confirm this as a key factor in driving women to continue in this difficult role (Brunner, 2012; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Derrington & Sherratt, 2009; Kowalski, 1999; Ibarra et al., 2013; Reed & Patterson, 2007).

The most significant and additional layer of resilience building for women lies in how they choose to navigate the dichotomy of their gender and their professional roles. The navigation of gender in the superintendency follows a similar path of progress over time much in the same way that resilience itself is built as the result of a cumulative effort, possibly having a positive influence on women's leadership skills overall. Skrla suggests that gender is something

never complete, but rather in continual production through social interaction (Skrla et al., 2000). Christman and McClellan (2005) call on others to refrain from categorizing women leaders into a gender construction model at all, suggesting that women administrators embrace or disclaim gender norms to varying degrees based on specific situations. “The resilient women administrators exhibit a multidimensional gendered leadership that allowed them to vary their responses to fit the complexity of the organization’s expectations” (Christman & McClellan, 2005, p.28). This suggests a situational response of gender norm choices that are selected based on the situation at hand in light of the holistic organizational culture. Gender and the professional role is then considered fluid and possibly utilized by women to help them navigate times of adversity, suggesting an acute self-awareness of this dichotomy and how to use it as an advantage. This concept of role congruity theory is more thoroughly examined through a recent study that categorizes the gender dichotomy as having two pathways resulting in either a dilemma or paradox mindset (Ibarra et al., 2013; Zheng et al., 2018).

Role congruity or incongruity relating to gender and leadership can be summarized as creating tension between traditionally stereotypical women roles of communion (kindness, nurturing, and collaborative) and traditionally stereotypical male roles of agency (aggressive, dominant, self-confident). Knowing that a superintendent would require both in 21st century school leadership, women are often placed in the precarious position of having to navigate the process of their mindset more than anything else in light of where they fall in this continuum and when; this is known as the role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2007). This language in itself correlates to the “double bind” of women in leadership overall, where there is a continual balancing act of where they are traditionally male and female. “Integrating leadership into one’s core identity is particularly challenging for women, who must establish

credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how they should exercise authority” (Ibarra, et al., 2013, p. 9).

Zheng et al. (2018) suggests that this tension leads to either a dilemma mindset, whereby women have consistent gender incongruity, leading to “depleted resilience, identity separation, and lowered leadership effectiveness,” or a paradox mindset, through which women build psychological resilience, identity coexistence, and leadership effectiveness” (p. 584). Smith and Lewis (2011) define such paradox as “contradictory, yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (p. 382). This sets the stage for women leaders to naturally have a paradox mindset capacity as a result of many years of balancing and navigating their way through a traditionally male dominated culture.

Incompatibilities between agency and communion have been shown to lead to “stress, anxiety, discomfort, or tightness in making choices, responding to, and moving forward in organizational situations” (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016, p. 68). Early research approaches the concept of the dilemma mindset by Skrla et al. (2000), highlighting incongruities between leadership identity and gender. Being women and also being superintendent in Texas in the waning days of the twentieth century required them to attempt to always “navigate the delicate balance between the perceptual polarities of tough/feminine, risk-taking/mistake free, ambitious/modest, and assertive/collaborative” (Skrla et al., 2000, p. 310). Accepting the paradox of agency and communion on the other hand is shown to provide leaders with increased strength and resilience, acknowledging that both aspects are salient to successful organizational work. An elimination of “either/or” thinking has the potential to open leaders to finding solutions to complex problems without limitations on going in one direction or the other (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Unlike the paradox mindset that opens up a wider range of coping responses, the dilemma

mindset limits a woman's ability to consider the entire spectrum of available coping responses, or create and craft new responses, thereby constraining the mental resources she could resort to and hence weaken her resilience. Other studies outside of the education leadership field corroborate that a paradox mindset can help improve efficacy and progress (Miron-Spektor, Gino, & Argote, 2011; Cullen, 2008; Yalcin, 2017).

“Whether women leaders adopt a paradox or a dilemma mindset to manage the tensions between agency and communion carries significant implications for both intra-personal outcomes such as resilience and identity coexistence, and interpersonal outcomes such as leadership effectiveness” (Zheng et al., 2018, p. 595). Adopting this paradox mindset, however, relies on a vulnerability, a “giving in” to uncertainty and ambiguity in order to move forward successfully. This concept of “critical vulnerability” is one that pertains to all leadership regardless of gender with again some specific differences of note for women.

Critical Vulnerability

Given the difficult landscape surrounding the position of the superintendency, its obstacles, and its need for resilience, it is critical to discuss a complementary aspect to motivation when women seek this role: critical vulnerability. While vulnerability alone may suggest that women aspiring to the superintendency are quarry for a host of sociocultural predators, critical vulnerability approaches these aspirations with a sense of strength. The conviction behind critical vulnerability presupposes that there is known risk and uncertainty and that the person willingly chooses to go forward regardless in order to achieve a higher goal or mission.

“Critical vulnerable leadership is an informed process of commitment whereby individuals strategically tackle complex issues with the expectation that repercussions will

ensue” (Karumanchery & Portelli, 2005, p. 330). Critical vulnerable leaders seek to build common ground, embrace difference, and take innovative action, which challenge hegemonic philosophies. Leaders embracing the unknown and the risky are acutely aware that their actions will likely evoke unsolicited and heightened consequences. Women entering the superintendency will likely know they are in the minority group and that they will have leadership challenges relating to some or all of the common obstacles discussed earlier. Thus, women entering the superintendency have the added layer of critical vulnerability for not just the superintendency, but also for the gender norms they will challenge as they develop into competent leaders. Karumanchery and Portelli (2005) call this foundation the “soulwork” that requires leaders to know themselves and reflect upon how they construct their identities, build resilience, and develop themselves as leaders.

Brown’s (2007) work, not specific to education leadership, studies the specific critical vulnerabilities required of women overall; the result of her study is shame resilience theory (SRT), developed from grounded theory work that identified resilience against shame as a driving emotional force for women in the United States. In SRT, there are three main categories that lead to successful construction of this resilience: acknowledged vulnerability, critical awareness, and mutually empathic relationships. These parallel the other work of critical vulnerability, resilience building, and the need for women to create support networks to make positive progress. The absence of these three factors most often results in women just assuming they are actually in deficit and that there is something wrong with them. Embracing the vulnerability actually helps women to find real success and self-efficacy, whereas delusions of being invulnerable foster feelings of deeper self-doubt. In this work, Brown (2007) asked women to identify the areas in which they often feel shame: appearance and body image; sexuality;

family; motherhood; parenting; professional identity and work; mental and physical health; aging; religion; speaking out; and surviving trauma (p. 46). While not a direct correlation to the common barrier presented earlier, there are certainly undeniable similarities in the list itself at its core. This “shame web” as she calls it, is “a layer of conflicting, competing, and unrealistic expectations that are the direct result of rigid socio-cultural norms” (p. 46). Earlier work on this topic found that women who feel trapped by the double bind or this shame, are caused to feel this way due to unreasonable amounts of unrealistic expectations (Frye, 2001). Frye (2001) suggests that countering these realities can often expose women to penalty, censure, and deprivation. Thus, SRT can be another avenue that encompasses the concept of critical vulnerability as a positive way to build resilience and become the type of leader that school districts need today.

Proposed Potential Solutions

Throughout these studies over the past decades, several researchers have turned their knowledge into suggested proactive solutions as to what will help women to achieve and maintain the position of superintendent. Table 1 depicts the various strategies with the accompanying author(s) presented. Like topics are grouped together.

Table 1.

Strategies for Success for Women in School Leadership by Skill and Researcher(s)

Skill	Author(s)
preparation	Skrla et al. (2000); Tallerico (2000); Wallace (2014); Warner (2015); Washington & Jones (2010)
perseverance	Barsh, et al. (2008); Brunner (1998); Derrington & Sharratt (2009); Washington & Jones (2010)
maintaining composure	Washington & Jones (2010)

risk taking	Barsh et al. (2008); Brunner (1998); Washington & Jones (2010)
strong determination/iron will to achieve purpose	Brunner (1998); Derrington & Sharratt (2009); Warner (2015)
surviving scrutiny	Brunner (1998); Derrington & Sharratt (2009); Wallace (2014);
establishing mentors/support networks	Barsh, et al. (2008); Skrla et al. (2000); Wallace (2014)
receive equal pay	Wallace (2014); Warner (2015)
learn to balance gender norms	Brunner (1998); Tallerico (2000)

While no one single study exemplifies all of the recommendations in Table 1, this study uses the model developed by Barsh, et al. (2008) specifically because it aligns with the study of a positive outcome as opposed to coming from a deficit perspective, more appropriate for this grounded theory exploration.

Gap in the Literature

While the majority of research approaches the dearth of women superintendents, to date there is no research focusing on a phenomenon where the process of building resilience suggests potential strategies and mindsets for increased opportunity for women superintendents. New Hampshire demographics indicate a slightly higher than average rate of superintendency with approximately 30% women as of 2019. The only two states with higher ratios are New York and California. New Hampshire provides a ripe backdrop for a grounded theory study on women in the superintendency. In addition, grounded theory methodology is appropriate as it does not have to draw upon any traditional male hegemonic norms of the superintendency. The combined factors of this specific phenomenon, the freedom provided by the methodology, and the study

from the vantage point of a “good problem” converge to create a study with the intended outcome of a theory and model depicting what has worked to build resilience in women superintendents.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrates that the topic of women in the superintendency has been extensively researched both quantitatively and qualitatively over the past three decades; while increases exist in the ratio of women to men superintendents, this progress still falls short of gender equity. This study and its application of constructivist grounded theory methodology helps to move this research forward by approaching this phenomenon with a focus on the *process* of women building resilience on their way to and in the superintendency; how it meets the need to hear the voices of women in the superintendency; and how it aligns to this researcher's identity. Additionally, constructivist grounded theory is well suited to this phenomenon as there is no extant literature specifically bound by women participants in a state experiencing significant positive narrowing of the gender equity gap in the superintendency. Grounded theory also ensures that the information gained through the research is not beholden to prior hegemonic norms, especially in areas where women are attempting to fill traditionally male roles. In summary, much has been studied about what is wrong against the landscape of a male dominated profession, yet little has been studied about what is currently working to correct the situation.

Selection of Constructivist Grounded Theory

Numerous research studies exist regarding the dearth of women in the superintendency and yet the slow progress towards improving the gender ratio continues. This is attributed not only to sociocultural factors of the gender stratified profession of education but also to the way in which prior research itself has been conducted. According to Skrla et al. (2000), Carli and Eagly (2007), and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), the majority of research on gender and leadership in the superintendency has been based on masculinized norms of leadership behavior that could

result in an overshadowing of other dispositions that may arise from non-dominant groups. Chin (2007) suggests that analyses surrounding women in leadership must always be considered contextual, therefore implying a need to study women leaders in their own specific situations.

Contextual research on women leaders requires a primary need to elicit their voices in a safe and secure way. Skrla et al. (2000) suggests that research on women in the superintendency should move beyond “surface-level views to more fully involve participants and to reach out to wider audiences” (p. 65) than traditional research on superintendents. An integral part of reaching below the surface involves creating a comfortable, empathetic, and safe space that provides a place conducive to women discussing stories of their professional journeys, and where their voices and/or silences can be conveyed. In this context, women are more likely to be candid, which may make it possible to “learn how women leaders construct their identities in inherently inequitable circumstances such [as] those found in the superintendency” (Skrla et al., 2000, p. 71). This study provides this space where women leaders of New Hampshire’s schools can openly describe their motivations, obstacles, aspirations, and perspectives on the processes they experienced.

For this reason, studies focusing on the voices of women superintendents is needed to ensure that those voices are heard and analyzed outside of the traditional male theories. Constructivist grounded theory meets this need by first ensuring the co-creation of knowledge with the participants themselves and then by not trying to fit these voices into a preconceived leadership theory. Since the current literature still has little research surrounding positive change, a theory may not yet exist that accurately conveys the positive process of this phenomenon. While a resulting theory from this study is not to be considered generalizable, it could however

provide substantive knowledge that contributes to models and approaches used by leadership development programs, state organizations, and formal and informal networks.

In addition to the general requirements for an outline of methodology such as participants and data collection, constructivist grounded theory calls specifically for the explication of researcher identity, coding and analysis, theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, saturation and verification. These sections of the research process as well as other dimensions are examined in this chapter.

Researcher Identity

When choosing grounded theory methodology, the importance of researcher identity is invaluable to the quality and depth of the research. “The investigator as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis assumes an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 31). This is particularly important in the case of this research; as a new woman superintendent in New Hampshire, I am not only be positioned in the data, but entered this inquiry with my unavoidable preconceived notions of gender and the superintendency. Throughout the research my aim was to remain cognizant of my past and present experiences that have the potential to influence my analysis of the data I collect and to embrace that reality. As stated by Patton (2002), “knowledge of intentionality requires that we be present to ourselves and the things in the world, that we recognize that self and world are inseparable components of meaning” (p.484).

My research interest in gender and the superintendency developed concurrently with my own development as a school administrator beginning in 2009. My first position in administration was as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for a small district in rural New Hampshire. Working closely with classroom teachers, creating and organizing

professional development opportunities, and focusing on student achievement were my main tasks. Though I had occasional conflict with faculty and staff, I considered and still consider those instances to be a normal part of the position I was in at the time. Two years later, I transitioned into the role of principal in the same district, which is when I started to notice the initial seeds of difference in the way my decisions and actions were received based on my gender and the school community. Though I do not believe these differences changed my actions, I do believe they changed the way I presented information and designed processes for actions. I continued in the role of principal for another four years, including one other school, and noticed and digested what I thought to be gender considerations along the way. Over the next several years, I worked as a consultant, and in that role completed five superintendent searches, where gender was clearly an issue that was not necessarily good or bad, but a regular topic of the search process. It was after this that I chose to enter a superintendency myself and continue to note where gender does or does not play a role in my profession. This knowledge is complemented by observations of and interactions with my colleagues as well. My initial inquiry has led me to this current study, almost a decade later, where I seek to understand more about others' experience and ascertain if I can determine any factors, either externally or internally, that have led more women to enter into and achieve the role of the superintendency in New Hampshire.

My next step was to look at who I am as a researcher in the context of this work, including my world views, beliefs, and the underlying thoughts that would potentially guide my actions throughout this inquiry. These include the ontology, epistemology, axiology, and interpretive framework from which I designed my methodology.

My ontological stance aligns with a relativist view of the world. Specifically, I do not assume that my experiences along the path to the superintendency are the same as any other

person; while there may be similarities and possible common themes and/or factors, what I perceive as reality is not the reality of another, and there was no single existing reality I searched for in this inquiry. The concept of relativism poses “that realities are social constructions of the mind, and that there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.43). In their later work, Guba & Lincoln (2005) describe this belief in qualitative analysis by succinctly stating that “universal ‘Truths’ give way to negotiated truths in this antifoundational thought” (p. 177). In a similar vein, Charmaz states that “relativism characterizes the research endeavor rather than objective, unproblematic prescriptions and procedures. Research acts are not given; they are constructed. Viewing the research as constructed rather than discovered fosters researchers’ reflexivity” (2014, p.13). Thus, I needed to acknowledge both my own and the experiences of others as constructions of my/their own personal, social, and historical contexts.

Stemming from the relativist view, epistemologically, I fall into the realm of subjectivity and constructivism, wherein knowledge of the observed is constructed rather than discovered and the observer is always part of the creation. Reality is known only through socially constructed meanings, and this knowledge is generated through the iterative process of the research and its analysis by positioning myself as the researcher co-constructing knowledge with those from whom I gained valuable information. “Emergence [of knowledge] in this approach has a bidirectional conjugate relationship with the researcher, and the researcher is part of the system that gives life to the emergent property” (Levers, 2013, p. 5). Since I was positioned in my research, I identified as a participatory researcher. Participatory research allows the researcher to examine phenomenon “with” participants (Creswell, 2007). I was a colleague of those I am researching, essentially co-constructing meaning in an effort to uncover more information about

ways to achieve more gender equality in the superintendency. This constructivist epistemological stance adopts the philosophy that knowledge is gained through an iterative process that is inductive, emergent, and open-ended. “The goal of subjective research is to develop understanding, increase sensitization to ethical and moral issues, and personal and political emancipation” (Levers, 2013, p. 4).

Diving further into my position as researcher and my values, my axiology with this inquiry was to seek to uncover themes and/or factors that contribute to open access to the superintendency through increased gender equity. I do not believe that women or men make better superintendents; however, it is clear that when gender constraints are placed on any access to a position, there is likely a loss of talent from the applicant pool. This may be similar in social constructions of gender bias to the phenomenon males not having questioned access to positions as elementary school teachers, another branch of education as a gender-stratified profession. In this vein, my axiology contains some elements of a critical theory framework, in that this type of work is “concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, or gender” (Creswell, 2013, p. 31). In the education field, there is also a current need for quality superintendents in a period when retirements, job dissatisfaction, and other complexities of this role in a great time of change in education require a need to review practices and perceptions to open the door to the best possible leaders (Finnan et al., 2017). My values espouse any information that may strengthen this equality to improve an open pathway for qualified leaders for our public schools.

The ontology, epistemology, and axiology I have described led me to move forward with a research framework best defined as interpretive/social constructivism using grounded theory methodology. Constructivist grounded theory is an interpretive framework, as I grounded my

theoretical work as it emerged and derived from the data gathered through the contextual realities of those participating in the study, including myself as researcher. In addition, I agree with the social constructivist view of Charmaz (2013) to “advocate building on the pragmatist underpinnings in grounded theory and advancing interpretive analyses that acknowledge these constructions” (p. 17). This element of pragmatism is important to my interpretive framework, as it provides a basis for the “outcomes of the research—the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry—rather than antecedent conditions” (Creswell, 2013, p. 28). Pragmatist underpinnings support constructivist grounded theory in utilizing any data and data collection that advanced the study and have the flexibility to allow these decisions to be guided through the actions of the research itself. In summary, constructivist grounded theory

can take us into the future. By spelling out consequences of the actions, meanings, and processes we study, constructivist grounded theory encourages us to look forward as well as backward. Constructivist grounded theory propels our thinking forward in unanticipated ways and subsequently sparks new understandings of experiencing and redressing injustice (Charmaz, 2017, p. 42).

Theoretical Sensitivity

According to Charmaz (2014), theoretical sensitivity is the ability to understand and define phenomena in abstract terms and to demonstrate abstract relationships among studied phenomena. This is how codes help meaning to emerge and reveal itself in an effort to gain understanding and potentially the development of theory. The primary focus of theoretical sensitivity in constructivist grounded theory is the concept of abductive reasoning, whereby both the codes and the researcher’s prior knowledge of the phenomenon are used as a platform for an inferential analysis of the abstract concepts the convergence of this knowledge indicates. These

abstract concepts stem from easily identifiable and discernible empirical data from the participants themselves, and the abductive reasoning of the researcher culls the salient from the unimportant as categories are formed for analysis. The reliance on the researcher's ability to interpret the data and to recognize the nuances of the phenomena are key to the development of a rigorous analysis (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

"Playing" with the codes as they emerge was also central to theoretical sensitivity. Strauss and Corbin (1998 and 2008) use a variety of strategies such as the flip-flop technique, far-out method, and constant questioning in order to augment theoretical sensitivity during analysis. As I was a new researcher, I approached theoretical sensitivity with multiple approaches to the data, in order to confirm that I was able to identify the nuances of the participants' answers and how they develop into codes.

While traditional positivist grounded theory research would require entering the field with as few predetermined thoughts as possible, it is impossible and inaccurate to state that I know nothing about the area of women in the superintendency. The literature review is a base from which to draw but with the expectation of continual change as the theory reveals itself. In fact, having a solid knowledge base both through study as well as personal experience in this area helps to distinguish a new emergence where there was none before. In addition, abductive reasoning helps to bring the researcher's preconceived notions and biases to the foreground; when coupled with allowing codes, concepts, and theories to emerge, this method presents an even greater opportunity for new theories to reveal themselves. This might not otherwise occur when "pretending" to be blind or unbiased. The acceptance of having bias and prior knowledge is linked with the underlying assumptions behind the research phenomenon itself.

Assumptions

I recognized and held the following assumptions upon entering this research:

1. Women have had to overcome obstacles and build resilience to achieve the position of and act as superintendents.
2. Building resilience has been a key factor in women accessing and serving in the role of superintendent.
3. Women's experiences in achieving the superintendency and building resilience is at least in some ways unique to the experiences of men.
4. The participants will be in a safe place during the study and have the ability to share their experiences thoughts and feelings truthfully.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include:

1. When using the term gender, this study limits this to only the physical identification of a men and women and the recognized socially constructed use of the term gender in leadership roles. The complexities that lie within the larger concept of gender identification are not approached here, nor are male and/or female leadership attributes or styles.
2. This research assumes that the process of building resilience contributes to a higher ratio of women in the superintendency. There could potentially be other contributing factors to this percentage that are external or in other ways not associated with individuals or this group. It is possible that these may arise during the course of this study.

3. This study is place-based bound in New Hampshire (NH) alone, and while a substantive theory may suggest what factors can contribute to closing the gender gap, there is no guarantee that these are transferable to any other state.
4. As with all constructivist grounded theory, there are no universal claims nor any grand theory that emanate from this study. As I position myself in the study as an “acknowledged participant” (Clarke, 2005, p. xxvii), it is presupposed that any theory grounded in the data was built from co-constructed knowledge.
5. As a woman superintendent in her first five years in New Hampshire, there is likely to be an element of participant observation and potential bias for this subgroup as well as possibly for the group overall. Careful research collection, the development of trust with participants, memoing, coding, and analysis through established methodologies help to mitigate yet not eliminate this bias. Recognition of this bias and prior knowledge of the phenomenon are to be viewed as strengths, yet there always remains the chance for bias to exist.
6. Any theory that may result from this research may not be pertinent to states with struggling ratios of gender equity in public school leadership.
7. As the women superintendents in New Hampshire are majority White, this study did not approach the added dimension of race to the data.
8. Data can become more or less powerful with the number of participants; depending on the number of interviews conducted prior to reaching saturation, the research could be considered to have had limited sources. Follow-up verification, negative case analysis, and other testing may be needed to support the initial collection.

Data Collection Framework

Definitions

- **Participants:** past and present women superintendents in New Hampshire
- **Interviews:** spring of 2019 through completion, which allowed a timeframe for iterative coding between and among interviews
- **Transcription and coding:** ongoing for constant comparative methods
- **Researcher journal and analytical memos:** ongoing for analytical emergence and verification
- **Other data collection:** as needed for theoretical sampling and saturation; could potentially include focus groups, document/artifact analysis, surveys, discriminant sampling, among others.

Data Model

Figure 3 explains the general data collection and coding process representing constructivist grounded theory that served as a base for my research:

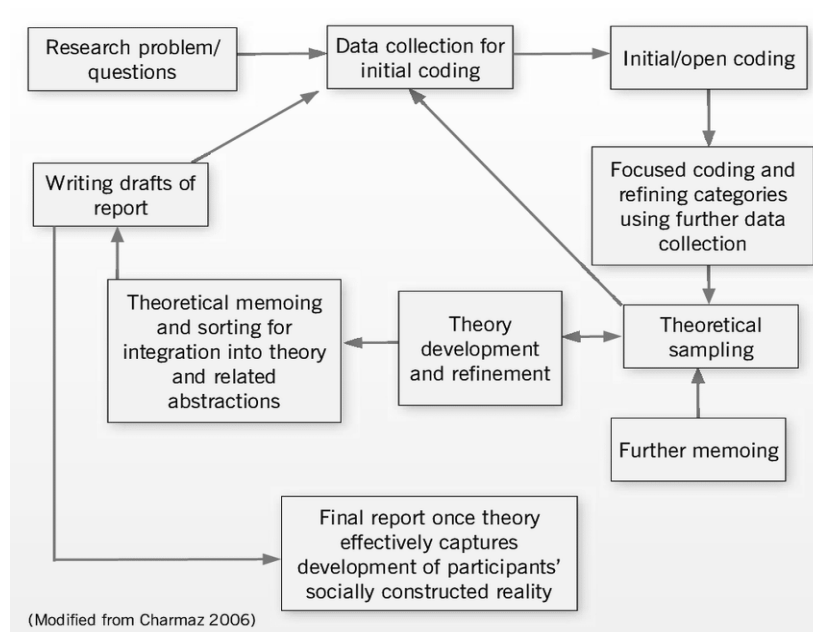


Figure 3. Data collection and coding process for constructivist grounded theory
(Higginbottom, 2014).

Participants

Participants comprise past and present women superintendents in New Hampshire. As is consistent with constructivist grounded theory, no predetermined number of participants was known initially since there is neither a preconceived structure in which data is organized nor a set number of codes or categories it takes to reach saturation. General theory recommends at least 12 in order to have a rigorous and robust study, and this study had 12 participants.

Participants were selected through review of the past and present lists of women superintendents in New Hampshire. As I am a member of this group, I have access to the participants through collegial work channels, committees, and other avenues of regular communication, such as “word of mouth.” This sampling for the initial selection draws on several strategies, including finding participants through utilization of some elements of maximum variation and snowball sampling. Maximum variation was sought in order to provide examples of women of various stages in their career (priority), various ages, and working in various types of districts (rural, urban, small, large, etc.). As stated by Patton (2015), “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (p. 283). An area in which maximum variation may not be achieved is through race, as New Hampshire demographics are primarily White. At the next level, snowball, otherwise known as network sampling, was used; participants recurrently directed me to others who have had similar experiences or who were interested in telling their stories, though I did not get to all who asked to be interviewed.

After these initial interviews, when categories started to take shape, the research moved into theoretical sampling, where participants were selected solely based on their ability to flesh out the core categories and their properties. As the goal of grounded theory is to allow the emergent theory to reveal itself, it is the coding and analysis that determines who else and what else is needed at the next stage more than any particular type of participant. This could include finding additional participants, going back to previously interviewed participants, or even gaining other documents and/or artifacts from the group in order to pursue the surfacing theory. In this case, I returned to three final participants who were at the beginning, middle, and end of their careers respectively.

Participants were assured of complete confidentiality and were represented through pseudonyms. District information was only based on descriptive factors such as size and location. New Hampshire is a very small state with little professional privacy; for honesty and authenticity in the interviews, confidentiality and the safety of participants is paramount. Each participant signed IRB informed consent, had time prior to the interview to ask questions, and had the intent of the research in advance so the privacy protections are established and agreed upon up front. In several cases, I asked participants about specific statements they made to assess whether or not they would be personally identifiable information. Based on these conversations, several pieces of data were either modified for privacy or removed.

Interviews

Interviews are the primary source of data in this study, using the method of intensive interviewing. In order to allow a theory to emerge from the data, the intensive interview is based on the foundation of asking open-ended questions in order to provide a semi-structured interviewing protocol that allows comfort of some structure during the interview but

simultaneously permits the interview topic to go where it needs to go. As Charmaz (2014) outlines, intensive interviews allow an interviewer to:

- Ask for in-depth description of the studied experience
- Stop to explore a statement of topic
- Request more detail or explanation
- Ask about the participant's thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Keep the participant on the subject
- Come back to an earlier point
- Restate the participants point to check for accuracy
- Slow or quicken the pace
- Shift the immediate topic
- Validate the participant's humanity, perspective, or action
- Use observational and social skills to further the discussion
- Respect the participant and express appreciation of their participation (p.69).

Gray, Williamson, Karp, and Dalphin (2007), in describing intensive interviewing, also emphasize how “in this up-close, conversational technique, clarity of communication is a mutual effort between the researcher and those being studied” (p. 151). Through this form of interviewing, the co-created knowledge can be followed up on in a timely manner both in the interview as well as afterwards, for example during initial coding. The essential role of the interviewer is to listen and encourage the interviewee to discuss her experience and process in a safe and comfortable environment. Intensive interviews draw upon the concept of reflexive expression, where participants' views arise through the conversation and may not precede it, and the researcher helps to encourage and elicit the voice in order to let the data reveal itself.

An interview guide was created as a “skeleton” for the initial interviews, and as the categories emerged, the interview guide required change and flexibility to follow the emergent theory. Each participant had the ability to choose her interview location. As superintendents, it may be disconcerting and/or uncomfortable conducting interviews in offices, especially if there are concerns about other employees, board members, etc. being in proximity. A benefit of my participation in this group is that it would not seem odd or suspicious for superintendents to be meeting with me; this could happen regularly for a wide variety of professional reasons and likely helped the interviewees feel more comfortable. It is also helpful that I speak their language on a regular basis, and there was little to no need for explanation of terms, situations, or job expectations. Contrary to this, there can also be a concern that colleagues may not want to reveal raw vulnerabilities to another colleague. In this sense, I did my best to assure them of confidentiality and privacy, my intentions in this research was to help promote gender equity, and then let them gauge their comfort level. My hope was that they would feel comfortable enough and trusting enough that they would open up about their true experiences, regardless of how difficult they might be to discuss. Though I cannot guarantee this happened completely, the information shared and the trust they offered demonstrate that there was certainly a healthy level of safety in which they could speak freely.

Data Analysis

Coding

Coding followed constructivist grounded theory methodology, which is a variation on more traditional positivist grounded theory coding schemas. In constructivist grounded theory, systematic approaches are not adhered to in order to ensure that a system or predetermined order is not detracting the researcher from identifying the nascent theory. While Strauss and Corbin

(1998) prefer the coding process to follow open, axial, and selective coding sequences, constructivist grounded theory from Charmaz (2014) opens this process up to more freedom in order to not miss the emerging theory. The terms used for this are initial, focused, and theoretical coding. It is important to recognize that in constructivist grounded theory, coding begins as soon as data is collected in order to start the process of theoretical sensitivity and theory emergence from the onset. Initially and throughout the entire research process, there is an overview of the importance of analytical memos and keeping a research journal.

Initial coding.

The initial stage of coding from the interviews was done through in vivo coding, where verbatim and line by line transcription from the interviews were used for a first observation and examination. This was done to stick as closely to the data as possible and to honor the authenticity of the participants' voices. In vivo coding in grounded theory is "a heuristic device to bring the researcher into the data, interact with them, and study each fragment of them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121). Star (2007) refers to all grounded theory codes as "transitional objects" (p. 84) from which the researcher is able to define categories and meaning; therefore, in vivo coding consistently roots the researcher in the words of the participants. The use of gerunds in initial coding is highly recommended by Glaser (2012), Charmaz (2014), and (Saldaña, 2018) in that they inherently emphasize process and action, thus again appropriately targeting process as a central theme.

Focused coding.

Focused coding, the step following initial coding, is where more focused codes emerge, from which later categories and in particular the properties of those categories take shape. It is essential to note that even though this coding process mentions moving from initial to focused

coding, there is no direct linear correlation among any and all stages of coding in constructivist grounded theory. It is the expectation that the researcher is continually and intentionally going back and forth in an iterative process to look at codes in all stages to open up the possibilities of new categories and properties. Analytic memos also assist the researcher in maintaining constant, open analysis and in revisiting codes whenever the data takes one there. Codes and categories regularly changed, and an absence of this process would have been considered a detriment to true constructivist grounded theory. Perpetual back and forth examination and iteration is referred to as “constant comparative methods,” terminology coined initially by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. Constant comparative methodology helps to draw out nascent categories, reveal clandestine assumptions, and make processes perspicuous for both the researcher and her participants.

As mentioned earlier with the general concept of abductive reasoning, focused coding also applies this philosophy by adding one’s prior knowledge base to the codes in order to ensure both robust categories and identification of what is unseen, recognizing emergence as both new information as well as gaps. Therefore, though it is not appropriate in grounded theory to have preestablished coding categories as this potentially jeopardizes authentic emergence, it is expected and appropriate to acknowledge that both the researcher and participants enter this endeavor with strong prior information. As aptly stated by Dey (1999), “there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head” (p. 251). Another term invoked by Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) is “theoretical agnosticism,” where a balance is maintained between discovery and proof. “It is a state of preparedness for being taken unprepared” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 221).

Theoretical coding.

“Theoretical codes must earn their way into the research” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 183). The ultimate coding venture is the work that takes place during theoretical coding after rigorous and iterative initial and focused coding has taken place. Once again—to emphasize the absence of linear progression—even in the midst of theoretical coding, it is appropriate and expected to go back to in vivo and focused coding to draw out any necessary information and support theoretical coding work. There is a natural and suitable tension among all stages of coding since there is constant iteration between emergence and abductive reasoning; a primary goal of the researcher is to be comfortable with that tension.

As the categories and properties from focused coding began to morph into abstract concepts and an actual construction of theory, a central category (or sometimes categories) and accompanying properties comprised the foundation of theoretical sampling in order to reach saturation and verified adequacy; this process established the plausibility of the emerging theory itself. It is also important to note here that not all constructivist grounded theory reaches theoretical coding where a theory emerges; in some cases, there is no justification to move forward with a theory as its plausibility is either already established or could not be continued with the data available. At this point, if the latter is true, the researcher needs to determine if going back for further theoretical sampling is appropriate and what data might be needed to flesh out the category in question. If a new theory *is* emerging, then theoretical saturation is essential to its formation.

Charmaz offers an expansion of the traditional definition of saturation. In her definition, since codes are not forced into preconceived categories, then saturation is only recognized when the data continually and consistently support the category(ies) and properties that operate as the

source of the incipient theory. In her own words, saturation occurs “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 89). This goes beyond saturation being just a detection of repetitious information and more truly honors thought and theory as paramount.

Continual theoretical sampling and constant comparative methods are also likely to incorporate other methods of theory development, in this case positional and situational analysis methods. Again, the data and emergent theory drove the process and the needs. At this stage, I also considered and used diagramming, clustering, freewriting, and others. These aspects are essential to transforming saturated data into the abstract concepts necessary for theory development.

Analytical Memoing and Research Journals

Analytic memos captured ideas along the way and served as a schematic of where the codes emerge into categories, where the properties are attributed to the categories, how everything interacts with everything else, and where all of the data might be leading or conversely where it is truncated. They were essential to rigorous and thorough research and provide verification of the research process along the way. Analytic memos were written regularly after each step in the research, such as after initial coding, focused coding, comparing codes, building categories, etc. Memos took on a variety of forms—written, visual, formal and informal—in order to capture the thoughts happening at that given time and what was appropriate to the research at that moment.

Data Verification

Substantiation of the data collected, interpretations, coding, and theory development were verified through member checks, follow-up emails to clarify data, and documentation of

theoretical sensitivity and saturation. Verification along the way ensured a clear, thoughtful, and rigorous analysis. There was one participant who provided some discriminate sampling through negative case analysis and theory testing, mainly because she chose to leave the superintendency and take on a different position. Her information added value and validity to the emerging theory and models.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present both the research findings as well as the processes and decisions used to arrive at a theory and accompanying model seeking to explain this study's original purpose: the development of a substantive theory and model that suggest how women superintendents in New Hampshire cultivate resilience to achieve and maintain the position of superintendent. Three research questions (one main and two sub-questions) serve as the focus to achieve this purpose:

RQ: How do women superintendents in New Hampshire build resilience in order to achieve, act, and thrive in the role of superintendent?

SQ1: What obstacles are encountered by women superintendents that require the need for resilience?

SQ2: What strategies, mindsets, and tools are employed to overcome these obstacles?

To explain the research process and analyses, this chapter will first present the resulting theory and models, as the conceptual understanding of the emergent theory and models is necessary to comprehending how it emerged. I will then introduce the participants, giving relevant demographic data. Participants are identified by surname, and any relevant or personally identifiable information about them or in their interviews has been omitted for their assurance of anonymity. I will describe the coding methodology in detail by using a series of coding matrices that evolved throughout the iterative process of interviewing and coding, and then I will further explain my accompanying decision making in coding, saturation, theoretical sampling, and

member checking. Finally, I will offer some supplemental and incidental information that did not directly influence the models themselves but that remain relevant to the studied phenomenon.

Consistent with many qualitative studies using similar methodology, much of the information presented in these chapters will use the 1st person due to the researcher' positioning in and reflexivity with the construction of knowledge. As stated by Charmaz (2019, p.166), “[w]ith constructivist grounded theory, you can’t hide.”

Overview of Research Process

Presenting the process of data collection, coding, and modeling as an iterative progression for constructivist grounded theory requires merging the divergent and convergent analyses throughout the research. To illustrate this, I offer two options: (a) a visual model that represents the research method from the first interview to the written draft; and (b) a verbal and more linear presentation of this non-linear research route.

Visual Representation of Research Process

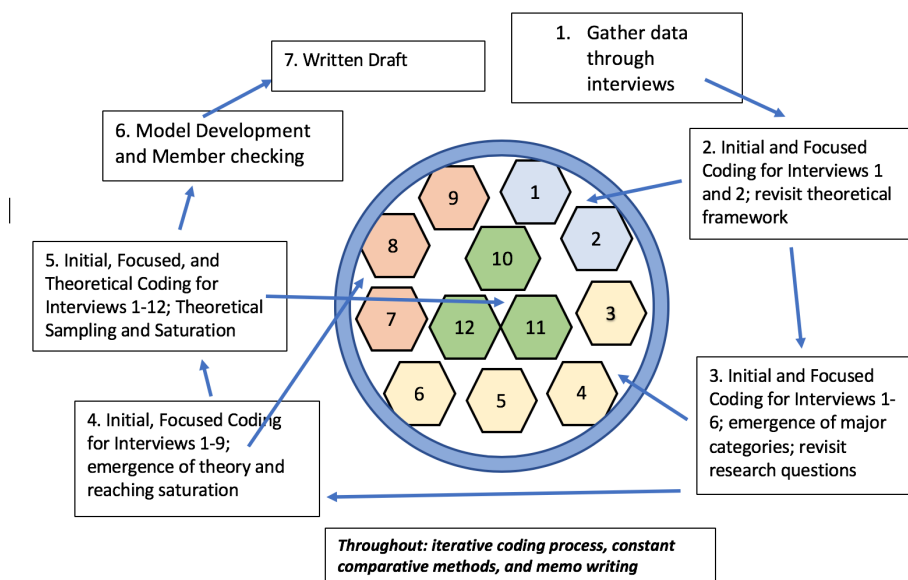


Figure 4. Model 3: Visual representation of iterative coding process in this study

Verbal/Linear Description of Research Process

1. I started data collection for the research study through interviews. Throughout all interviews, I used an iterative process, analytical memo writing, and constant comparative methods. As in the visual model, the interviews together function as the hub for theory development.
2. Using the interview guide, I began interviews with participants, completing initial and focused coding on interviews 1 and 2. At this point, I revisited the theoretical frameworks for resilience theory and the *five dimensions of centered leadership* for women in order to consider possible codes and categories.
3. I completed four additional interviews (3-6) and completed initial and focused coding on all interviews thus far (1-6). At this point, I revisited the original research questions and major categories began to emerge.
4. I completed three additional interviews (7-9) and completed initial and focused coding on all interviews thus far (1-9). At this point, major categories started to reveal the nascent theory and the potential for saturation was becoming evident.
5. I completed three additional interviews (10-12) and while I continued to do initial and focused coding, the primary coding at this stage was for theoretical. Participants 10-12 were selected for theoretical sampling purposes, and the theory emerged and saturation was confirmed.
6. I developed the theory and accompanying model and wrote a summary for member checking.
7. After member checking was complete, I wrote the final summary of findings and completed discussion of the research.

Resulting Theory and Models

The Models

Model 1: The Capacitance Model

Model 1 is referred to as the capacitance model. While there is often research on leadership “capacity,” meaning the ability to *have* a charge (Patterson & Keller, 2005), “capacitance” is the ability to *hold* a charge. I have found this to be the best way to depict the specific type of energy required for resilience, since the ability to hold a charge is the crucial, requisite energy when one needs to recover from obstacles. The three main components of capacitance are illustrated via a sequence through which a “spark” ignites, uses “fuel” to keep flame burning, and then transforms the fuel into “regulated energy and motion”. It is helpful to visualize this as a spinning turbine:

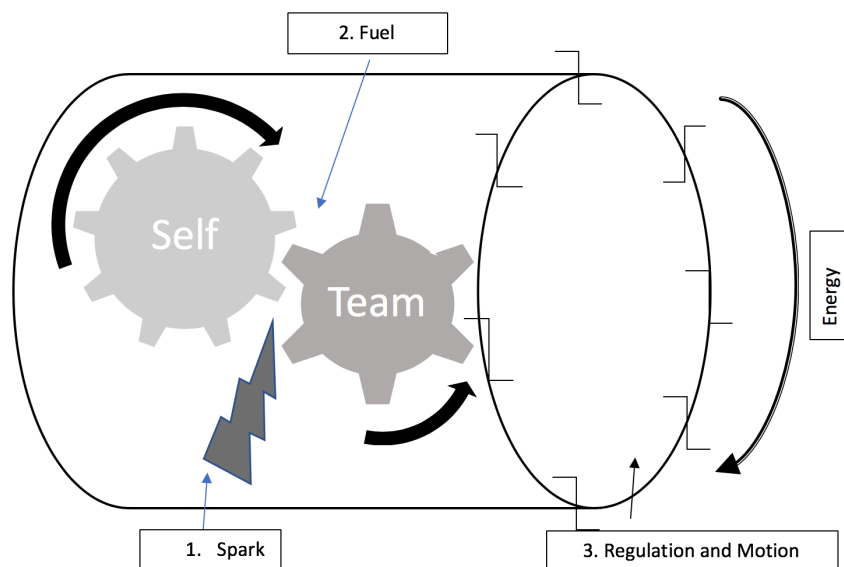


Figure 5: The Capacitance Model

Spark.

The first component, the spark, is made up of two key concepts: mission and mettle. Mission represents the passion for the education of children, and mettle represents the inner and individual strength brought to the position. These two concepts ignite—and continually reignite—when challenges present themselves. It is an iterative process drawn upon with each need for resilience.

Fuel.

Referring specifically to resilience—the ability to bounce back from difficult times—the two cogs represent the concept of “mutual capacitance.” Mutual capacitance, in simplified terms, signifies that the charge, or *fuel* in this case, comes from more than one source, in this case “self” and “team,” where the current, or charge, runs through both sources to create capacitance. *Self* and *Team* collaborate to provide the support/fuel that fosters the creation and renewal of energy. These are clearly the mindsets, strategies, and tools these women superintendents use to overcome resilience by building capacitance. While both self and team are necessary sources, and one was never mentioned without the other, self is depicted as the larger cog in this model, as participants indicated the need for self-support slightly above and beyond that of team. The most significant factors offered for cultivating self support were: self-care, self-talk, self-efficacy, situational adaptation, and self-reflection. Bridging self and team was the category of mentoring, playing a role in both self and team. The most significant factors offered for cultivating team support were: establishing trust; building relationships with a variety of people and groups, including the board/board chair, community, administrative team, and professional colleagues; and support from family and friends.

Regulation and Motion.

The spark and fuel together maintain the charge, represented by the turning of the turbine as a whole; regulation and motion are the work of the superintendent to create, regenerate, and utilize energy. The model holistically represents the process of continually building resilience, referred to in this model as capacitance, and it is this capacitance—the ability to hold a charge—that illustrates the resilience necessary to achieve and serve in the role of superintendent. Model 2 serves to put this concept in the larger context of the superintendency, where working with other energies (primarily those of children and community) and dealing with obstacles both become part of the need for a resilience process. For this purpose, please view the circle in Model 2 as the capacitance model (the cylinder or “turbine”) turned to its side.

Model 2: Capacitance in Context

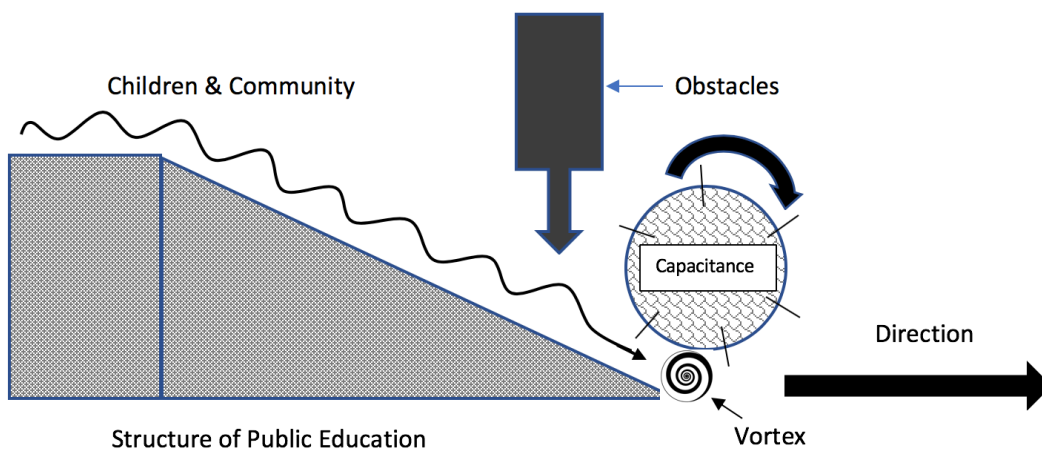


Figure 6: The Capacitance model in context.

Model 2 depicts a more circumspect view of the superintendency in relationship to the structures and influential factors that necessitate building resilience, or capacitance, within the larger context of public education. In Model 2, the superintendent is placed in the role of—

consistent with the analogy of energy—a water turbine. View the above as a dam with hydroelectric power, with each section playing a significant role in understanding the resilience process of the women superintendents studied.

Children and Community. The children and the community are represented by the natural flow of water; in any culture, as long as the population continues, there will naturally be children and a community.

Structure of Public Education. The structure of public education is the social construction in the United States designed to channel the natural “flow” of the community’s children to help them learn; this is represented by the manmade dam, or, in this analogy, the public school system, which is structured to channel the natural flow of children. In this model, as with any dam, the concept is to not simply channel the natural flow but to also capitalize on its inherent energy to help power the system and structure as a whole.

Turbine. The turbine or “capacitor” here is the superintendent, displaying a side view of Model 1, representing capacitance. This turbine has energy on its own, but also generates energy from working in concert with the flowing water (e.g., children, community). Bringing those energies together and using its own motion to regulate itself and the flow of water can make the system run smoothly, until obstacles present themselves.

Obstacles. Obstacles are those things that get in the way of the natural flow of the water and/or the turbine itself, impeding motion. Should the obstacles become too large, or “lodged” in the space between the capacitor and dam, or in other ways stop the positive motion of the turbine, then there is strain on the capacitance of the superintendent. This strain will either stop forward motion; cause the flow to slow or even move counterclockwise; or result in an obstacle getting stuck in the vortex. This represents struggle and the need for resilience. As an example,

an obstacle may get caught spinning constantly with no forward motion; in the dam analogy, this is known as the vortex, or the place at which endless spinning (and drowning) takes place. Should the capacitor start to turn backward, Model 1 would be in reverse and then a loss of motion/regulation, loss of capacitance, and an extinguishing of the spark is a possibility. It is important to note the vortex, while a place to get stuck, is also an integral source to the overall energy created by the dam. This is when the superintendent would think of conflict as opportunities.

The participant responses result in two main categories of obstacles, one general category and one specific to gender obstacles. The general category comprises handling the hardest times, navigating politics, working with press/media, and weighing difficult decisions. Obstacles that participants suggest have a connection to gender comprise a general awareness of gender, belief/disbelief in gender differences, overt sexism, navigating the gatekeepers, perceptions of job responsibilities, and handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment.

Direction. The channeled flow of the water is a metaphor for a strategic direction for learning in the community.

Results and Analysis for Theory and Model Development

Participants

This study included 12 participants, all of whom are currently or have been a superintendent in the state of New Hampshire. Maximum variation was sought in terms of length of years as a superintendent as well as geographic diversity around the state in order to get a cross-section of this demographic. Relevant demographics of each participant is given below,

using pseudonyms. All participants signed a Southern New Hampshire University Informed Consent release (Appendix A) prior to interviews, with the ability to ask questions in advance.

Table 4. 1
Demographic information of participants

Interview	Pseudonym	Current Status	Years as Superintendent	Number of Superintendencies
1	Julie	Retired	10 or more	1
2	Felicity	Retired	10 or more	2
3	Lilly	Active	5-9	1
4	Mary	Active	0-5	3
5	Amy	Active	5-9	1
6	Brenda	Inactive	0-5	2
7	Dorothy	Active	0-5	1
8	Nancy	Active – Retiring soon	10 or more	3
9	Helen	Active – Retiring soon	10 or more	1
10	Alice	Active	0-5	1
11	Jennifer	Active	0-5	1
12	Barbara	Active	5-10	1

Reflexivity

A key factor in interviewing and coding was researcher reflexivity, and this remained ever present during all stages of research analysis. This became particularly important as I am personally a member of this group of participants, raising issues of participatory and insider data collection. According to Charmaz, “[t]he inherent emphasis on reflexivity in constructivist grounded theory prompts us not only to examine who we are in relation to the research but also to remain reflexive about how we use grounded theory strategies and make claims about our

findings” (Charmaz, 2019, p. 165). The iterative coding process made it apparent that abductive reasoning is prevalent throughout not only the relationship to current literature but to the ever-changing base knowledge that is gained and built upon with each successive interview. The continual knowledge and awareness that I was positioned in the research with my participants and that my own biases and perceptions would affect the data created a “methodological self-consciousness” (Charmaz, 2017, p. 35) that required iterative reflection; in short, with each interview and each layer of coding, I needed to revisit where I was in relationship to the codes and categories, creating a process in which my potential biases were continually brought to the forefront.

Analytical memos served as the main vehicle to provide these checks and balances; in addition, these memos were integral in being able to manage the iterative coding stages that were non-linear and often times unsettling. A continual self-reflection took place in me as the researcher in order to check myself for bias and assumptions. Locke, Golden-Biddle, and Feldman (2008) state that “willing to doubt one’s convenient explanations takes reflexivity to a deeper level and simultaneously can spark new conceptual insights” (p. 910). For a specific example of this, I refer to a brief excerpt from Interview #3 with Lilly:

SL: Do you think male and women superintendents in general work...in different ways?

Lilly: That's a very tough question for me. And I'm one who doesn't tend to see a lot of differences between them.

This interaction was early on in my interviewing process, and I had a moment of surprise from this answer; after writing up a memo on this and doing additional self-reflection, I realized that it had not occurred to me that the women I interviewed would not find any differences between

themselves and their male colleagues. This was a significant bias I needed to identify and it was fortunate that it happened early on. This interview with Lilly developed into further exploration of gender in the superintendency, and she began to reveal additional thoughts about gender that helped to refine future directions of this study. In this case, it was essential that I not react in surprise to her statement and that I allow the interview to progress in the direction she was exploring. In the end, this was a key moment to understanding some of the developing categories, such as perception of job responsibilities and awareness of differences. In addition, later interviews at the stage of theoretical coding circled back to these categories and started the development of a new category in maneuvering obstacles, through which the participants' discourse revealed an underlying question of truth-telling and perception of women in the superintendency. In the end, it was the continual reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness that was essential to allowing information to reveal itself.

Coding

First interviews and initial coding.

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol using intensive interviewing strategies and an Interview Guide (Appendix B) to drive initial questions, with each interview developing into a conversation on its own and new questions offered as the theory emerged. Intensive interviewing is well suited to constructive grounded theory work as it seeks to find a balance between direction and allowing a nascent theory to emerge. "Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 85). When responses presented themselves for further definition or explanation, I asked the participants to define those on their own in order to elicit their own definitions, assumptions, reflections, and meanings of the given topic; this is essential

to constructivist methodology and helps draw out more information from each interview. Doing this also helped to guide subsequent interviews.

Initial coding followed line-by-line in vivo coding, utilizing gerunds as codes to emphasize process; this was not always possible, and some codes initially take on a different form, i.e. “awareness”. The first two interviews primarily followed the interview guide, until I became more comfortable with interviewing; I also initially sought to ensure I was not leaving out any questions.

I used the NVivo transcription service and the NVivo 12 research analysis program to code the data. I found that while NVivo transcription was somewhat helpful, it would take me approximately twice the amount of time of the interview to fix the transcription; in many ways, this helped me to be more deeply familiar with the data; however, as I completed more interviews and focused coding was more defined, I switched to Rev.com transcription services which offered increased accuracy. In addition to the accuracy, I found that I was recognizing the emergent theory and did not have the same need as I did in the beginning stages to be as intimate with each word of the interview.

The list of initial codes from the first two interviews follows, given in alphabetical order:

- Awareness of Gender
- Building Relationships
- Compensation
- Creating Trust
- DDD (for lack of a better term, I started this code with “double dog dare” which later changes to “Mettle”
- Do-Overs
- Finding Support
- Finding the Fit
- Gatekeepers
- Handling Hard Times
- Handling Politics
- Handling Press and Media
- Listening

- Making Mistakes
- Mentoring
- Navigating the Search Process
- Perceptions of Job Responsibilities
- Personal Life Balance
- Questioning Ability
- Receiving Feedback
- Self-Describing
- Situational Adaptation
- Thoughts/Advice for Future Women Superintendency
- Why Stay?

Beginnings of focused coding.

After reviewing the coding of these first two interviews and preparing for focused coding, I revisited the theoretical framework for the dimensions of women's centered leadership (Barsh et al, 2008), specifically the five main categories and sub-categories suggested for successful women's leadership:

- Meaning (happiness, signature strengths, and purpose)
- Managing Energy (minimizing depletion, restoration, and flow)
- Positive Framing (self-awareness, learned optimism, moving on)
- Connecting (network design, sponsorship, reciprocity, and inclusiveness)
- Engaging (voice, ownership, risk taking, and adaptability)

Taking these ideas into consideration and seeing where they did and did not fit with the data, I returned to the initial coding of the first two interviews and started focused coding. This resulted in my first list of focused codes:

Table 4.2
First matrix of coding categories and sub-categories

Category	Sub-Category
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Finding Purpose	Mettle Compensation Why Stay?
Managing Energy	Personal Life Balance
Framing Self Awareness	Receiving Feedback Situational Adaptation Self-Describing
Building Relationships	Creating Trust Listening
Obstacles	Handling Hard Times Handling Politics Handling Press and Media
Thinking about Gender	Awareness of Gender Perceptions of Job Responsibilities
Making Mistakes	Do-Overs Questioning Ability
Getting into and Staying in the Position	Finding the Fit Navigating the Gatekeepers Navigating the Search Process
Finding Support	Mentoring
Thoughts/advice for future women superintendency	

At this point, I returned to interviewing, continuing the process of initial and focused coding with each subsequent participant. For the next four interviews (interviews 3-6), the interview data confirmed all of the existing categories and added several sub-categories. The

coding matrix of categories at the end of interview 6 looks as follows, with changes and/or additions from the first table shown in italics:

Table 4.3
Second matrix of coding categories and sub-categories

Category	Sub-Category
Finding Purpose	Mettle Compensation Why Stay? <i>Why start in the first place?</i>
Managing Energy	Personal Life Balance <i>Mental Health</i> <i>Physical Health</i> <i>Self-Care</i>
Cultivating Self Awareness	Receiving Feedback Situational Adaptation Self-Describing <i>Self-Talk</i> <i>Self-Efficacy</i> <i>Exterior Persona</i>
Building Relationships	Creating Trust Listening <i>Variety of Relationships: Board, Community, Administrative Team, and Professional Organizations</i>
Maneuvering Obstacles	Handling Hard Times <i>Making Difficult Decisions</i> Handling Politics Handling Press and Media <i>Being Tested</i>
Thinking about Gender	Awareness of Gender Perceptions of Job Responsibilities <i>Belief in Differences between Male and Women Superintendents (multiple perspectives)</i> <i>Overt Sexism</i>

Making Mistakes

Do-Overs
Questioning Ability
Thinking of Leaving

Getting into and Staying in the
Position

Finding the Fit
Working with Gatekeepers
Navigating the Search Process

Finding Support

Mentoring Opportunities
*Finding support through variety of relationships:
Board Chair, Administrative Team,
Professional Colleagues, Spouse and Family*

Thoughts/advice for future women
superintendency
Finding a Sense of Belonging

It was during this stage that several key concepts continued to emerge and several categories where the data suggested similarities. In particular, it was during the interview with Mary that the concept of self-talk became apparent:

SL: Have you ever reached a point where you thought you couldn't do it again? Like you couldn't do it anymore, where you really thought, OK my resilience is gone?

Mary: Yes. Yesterday (a little laugh)...but you put your head down and you do the work and you're just going to convince people by the work you do. And that's what I just tell myself every day. And a lot of it is self-talk to me. You know, we have to--as women—as just human beings—if you're going to be resilient you have to self-talk. You know, 'I can do this. This is going to be a great day. You know, we're right in this,' and that's what I try to do for myself and my team.

It was because of this statement that I went back to review the first two interviews and realized that each participant had in some way discussed self-talk, even though they did not call it that. This continued to emerge through the subsequent interviews.

Constant comparison.

Because of new emerging concepts and categories as well as recognizable similarities in the data, I completed another round of focused coding at the end of the 6th interview. At this point, I found it essential to dive into intensive constant comparison practice through visual and manipulative strategies. This included writing down all categories onto notecards and then moving them around on a large table to attempt to match them to the research question they were addressing. This exercise enabled me to see where something fit, where there were cross-over categories for more than one research question, what initial or focused categories began to become supplemental and/or incidental, and finally if my emerging categories were actually answering the questions I was asking. The NVivo software at this stage did not satisfy the way I felt I needed to manipulate and “play” with the categories to see possible emergence. At this stage, a few major categories began to emerge and constant comparison methods enabled me to apply inferential analysis to the budding abstract concepts.

As the driving force behind this particular stage of coding was to return to the original research questions, I began to code both initial and focused categories into a matrix set up with a base of the three research questions themselves. It is important to note that the original research questions – not those presented in the final document – were used as this backdrop and are listed in Table 4.4 in the far left column:

Table 4.4
Third matrix of coding categories and sub categories in relationship to research questions

Research Question	Category	Sub-Category
What common barriers do women encounter as they advance to the level of superintendent?	Maneuvering Obstacles/Common Barriers	Handling Hard Times, Politics, Press/Media Making Difficult Decisions

	<p>Maneuvering Obstacles/Awareness of Gender</p>	<p>Perceptions of Job Responsibilities Making and Recovering from Mistakes Belief/Disbelief in Male/Women Gender Differences Overt Sexism Situational Adaption</p>
<p>How do women navigate and build resilience around these barriers?</p>	<p>Building Relationships</p>	<p>Creating Trust Building Relationships with Board, Community, Administrative Team, and Professional Organizations, Colleagues, Mentors</p>
	<p>Cultivating Self</p>	<p>Self-Care Self-Describing Self-Talk Self-Reflection Do-Overs Self-Efficacy Questioning Ability Mentoring</p>
<p>Why do women continue to pursue the superintendency in spite of the barriers?</p>	<p>Starting and Staying</p>	<p>Finding Purpose Mettle Navigating the Search Process Working with Gatekeepers Finding the Fit Thinking of Leaving</p>
<p>General</p>	<p>Thoughts of the Future Advice for Others</p>	

Analogy for iterative coding.

At one point while writing an analytical memo, I felt the need to summarize the process of iterative coding in constructivist grounded theory. I decided that an analogy would be helpful and thought of one in terms of classroom teacher seating assignments.

In the classroom, seating assignments may be used for a variety of reasons – management, heterogeneity, equity, individual needs, diversity, collaboration, culture, etc. When looking at seating assignments, the teacher will take into consideration all of the individual characteristics of students and arrange a seating arrangement for one or more of the purposes outlined above. What happens throughout the year, though, is that you always have new students coming in. When you have a few new students come in (like new data), you do not just put them all in one area – you will look at those new students in light of your class configuration overall and most likely rearrange everyone. When the next group comes in you do the same, and so on. Thus, each time new data comes in, you return to all of your previous data and rearrange everything so the whole makes sense again. This process happened with me after each interview, and sometimes again after a series of interviews had occurred and new categories emerged.

Emergence of Theory

After coding into the research question categories, I approached Interview # 7 with this general schema in mind. During this interview, I was able to ask questions that more clearly defined these focused categories and very easily found that coding this interview with the others was a clear fit with what was presented. There were no additional categories at the initial stage. At this point, I also found that the NVivo software was not sufficient to suit my needs to check for theory emergence. Instead, I knew that sketching and drawing various models would be a

much more acceptable way to openly explore potential theory emergence. In particular, I wanted to be acutely aware of:

1. moving away from binary thinking, and
2. whether a sequence or order was present in the exploration of the process.

Binary thinking.

With self-reflection, I found myself falling into the traditional Western pattern-making “trap” of binary thinking. I started moving focused categories into theoretical categories in terms of self/other, male/women, work/home, and positive/negative. There were too many examples from the data that proved little clear delineation within those terms, and therefore to move away from this way of thinking, I started manipulating the same focused categories into a process. The practice of binary thinking is detrimental to gender studies, in particular, and best summed up by Bergvall, Bing, and Freedman (2013) in which they realized very early on in gender studies that much of our experience does not fit neatly into binary categories, and is better described as a continuum with indistinct boundaries. People relaxing at dusk experience the gradual change from day to night with no concern or the precise word for the exact moment when day becomes night. Because language is discrete and biased towards dichotomy and clear language, the scalar values and unclear boundaries of reality are sometimes difficult to recognize and readily accept; we must continually remind ourselves that reality and language can conflict. (p. 9).

For this reason, I asked with each manipulation of a category to what other category it connected, and how? While this process was slow and at times frustrating, it was clearly the process through which the nascent theory and model emerged and very literally took shape.

During this stage, I also returned to several processes recommended by Clarke (2005) through which the categories are played with, reordered, and repositioned through relational analysis (in this case a process), positional maps, and where all of the information fit into the social arena. This heuristic was particularly helpful and the visual and physically manipulative actions challenged and questioned my thinking and decisions.

Process and sequence.

Taking these same categories, I began the manipulation of categories into a potential process or sequence based on the development of resilience as a process. This resulted in the origins of Model 1 (through which the women superintendent is viewed alone); and Model 2 (through which the women superintendent is placed in the context of public education).

I questioned whether Model 2 needed to exist at all, and concluded that it does. While Model 1 suggests how a women superintendent develops and sustains resilience, the need to do so would not be prevalent without the larger context of her work in public education and its multitude of recurrent obstacles presented. Thus, the larger picture provides a more comprehensive view of resilience in light of the social structure in which it is required and often challenged. In this sense, the process of building resilience suggested in Model 1 exerts influence over how this more subjective experience is portrayed as a part of the larger social construction of education. Model 2 was developed with the same methods of visual manipulation and illustrated in light of a process or sequence of events. Model 2 was also confirmed by virtually all member checking responses as necessary to the larger context of the process.

Researching literature in other fields.

Thornberg and Dunne (2019) suggest that reading outside the initial literature review into other disciplines aids in the development of a model. In order to fully develop the model, I

needed to do additional research in unexpected areas: energy and electricity, dams and water turbines, self-talk, and teasing out the very subtle differences between resilience and self-efficacy. The topic of energy became particularly important, due to the regular emphasis on how participants kept themselves going, leading back to resilience. Reading about energy soon led me to reading about the concept of a “source” of energy and to the idea of a spark and charge. Originally, I started thinking of the process of a combustion engine – spark, fuel, engine turning, differential, and finally, wheels turning. When I started thinking of this model, I started thinking about how what these pieces might be for resilience, which led me to look at electricity. This is where I found the concept of capacitance, which immediately “fit” what I had been consistently hearing in my interviews. Capacitance, in terms of a charge, is also delineated through terms of “self-capacitance” or “mutual capacitance” which clearly resonated with the data I collected on the need for both “self” and “team”. All of this additional information and conceptual thinking helped to clarify and then solidify terminology, process, and perspective for the categories with which I was working.

Saturation.

Interviews 8, 9, and 10 clearly demonstrated the “fit” into the models and revealed a level of saturation consistent with constructivist grounded theory practice. Specifically, “...no new information seem[ed] to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, action/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). An additional sign of saturation was the ease with which coding proceeded, where coding each successive interview became smooth, with little deliberation as to where information was best codified. Two additional perspectives are important to mention in terms of saturation. First, saturation in this method of constructivist grounded theory mean theoretical saturation;

specifically, that no additional information in those three interviews after the model was drafted gave reason to alter the models themselves. Second, even though theoretical saturation was achieved for this study, there are still many categories within the model that propose new questions and beg additional research in future studies. Therefore, this model is a base, or gateway, to understanding women and resilience in the superintendency but certainly does not suggest any consideration of a full understanding of the complexities of its many individual parts. Suggestions for future questions and studies are provided in Chapter 5.

“One of the concerns often expressed by those new to grounded theory is when to stop collecting data. The answer is deceptively simple. One stops when one no longer needs to continue” (Holton, 2010, p. 23).

Theoretical sampling.

By the end of the 9th interview, I felt secure in the models presented and saturation of information; thus, it was time to look into final theoretical sampling. Through abduction, I was able to fill out several properties of the categories to better explicate the models and resultant theory. In order to do this, I specifically chose to interview three women superintendents: one in her second year, one mid-career, and one at the end of her career. This strategy for theoretical sampling would enable me to see if the process holds true for women at any stage of the superintendency and provide validity for the process of developing resilience itself. Essentially, this allowed me to not just check the theory but also check how the subjective experience of my participants was portrayed in the socially constructed world of their positions.

After final positioning of the data and theoretical sampling, the schema representing the theory and model of resilience is presented here:

Table 4.5

Final matrix from coding, including major categories, categories, sub-categories, and general questions.

Major Category	Categories	Sub-Categories
Spark	Mission	Starting and Staying Contemplating Leaving
	Mettle	Innate/Natural Strength
Fuel	Cultivating Self-Support	Self-Care (Mental and Physical) Self-Talk Self-Efficacy Situational Adaptation Self-Reflection
	Cultivating Team Support	Creating Trust Building Relationships with Board, Community, Administrative Team, and Professional Organizations, Colleagues Family and friends
	Mentoring (intersection of self and team)	
Common Barriers for Women in the Superintendency	Common Obstacles	Handling the Hardest Times Navigating Politics Working with Press/Media Weighing Difficult Decisions
	Gender Obstacles	General Awareness of Gender Belief/Disbelief in Gender Differences Overt Sexism Navigating the Gatekeepers Perceptions of Job Responsibilities Handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment
Final Questions	Do-Overs Advice for Others Thoughts for the Future	

Member checking.

The final schema above allowed for the theory and model to be finalized, with key categories and processes outlined both in visual and verbal format. Once this was done, I summarized the theory, model, and findings into a Member Checking document (Appendix C), which I subsequently sent to each participant for feedback. This document also included two questions that were still not completely understood through the data: (a) clarification and thoughts on why cultivating self-support emerged more strongly than cultivating team support; and (b) asking their thoughts on the most diverse data collected pertaining to differences in experiences of male and women superintendents. Member checking is a critical stage in constructivist research to ensure that the participants' voices are heard and interpreted accurately; it also afforded me the opportunity to test the model on participants to see if it resonated with their experiences.

Participant validation remains an integral part of trustworthiness and ensuring robust analysis in qualitative research. By creating a summary for participants, I employed the concept of synthesized data analysis to give participants an opportunity to review the model and description and consider its resonance to their own experiences. This type of checking mirrors the basis for constructivist grounded theory, where emerging theories are tested and enhanced through further data collection (Charmaz, 2008; Harvey, 2015). In this method, member checking validated results by allowing participants the opportunity to agree and/or disagree with the model and/or any of its parts; this opened the research to them by giving them the chance to actively participate in the analysis of the findings. One participant during member checking stated, "I really feel like I was part of this research with you." This, in itself, provides evidence for the participant involvement that enhances constructivist grounded theory in whole.

Eight of the twelve participants provided feedback either via phone or email during member checking (67%). There was general agreement on and enthusiasm for the models, and it was clear that the models accurately conveyed their respective experiences relative to the process of resilience development. I asked participants if they felt that Model 2 was necessary, and all agreed that having the context represented in the second model was critical. Two participants commented that while Model 1 might be more accurate for women, Model 2 might be seen as universal for all superintendents regardless of gender. Member checking respondents agreed that the cultivating self-support was more prominent in the theory because of the nature of the position itself, though they also all agreed that it would be fascinating to see if the same was true for men. The final question regarding the differences in experiences for men and women superintendents suggests that this question warrants further study. Several member checking respondents thought that it would, indeed, be more difficult for women to admit that there are differences because it puts their position in jeopardy. One participant was adamant that someone's experience is theirs alone and should not be questioned at all.

In addition to member checking with participants, I checked with two engineers – one with an understanding of electrical engineering and one with knowledge of hydroelectric power—to review the concept of capacitance from the models. Both agreed that the general concept of capacitance was accurate in its application to leadership and resilience. The electrical engineer felt that more detail would help flesh out the model, wanting to add more components such as circuits and breakers; while that may be appropriate for further study around capacitance in leadership, I felt that this basic concept was well suited and sufficient for this initial study. The hydroelectrical engineer offered her perspective that the concept of capacitance not only

resonated with her as an engineer, but also with her position as a woman engineer – another field where women are breaking through the barrier of gender bias in a male-dominated profession.

Presentation of Data

In the following sections, the verbatim data from the participants is presented in each coded category, following the order of the components depicted in Model 1 and Model 2.

Spark

As the process of building resilience for women superintendents begins, there are several elemental characteristics and mindsets already brewing within them. The major category of *spark* emerged from the data as a means of encompassing the preexisting sources of strength that came through from all the participants, without exception. In each interview, participants clearly articulated their reasons for becoming superintendents, described how who they are as people influences their actions, and—critical to building resilience—why they stayed in their positions when situations became difficult to almost unbearable. The elements of *spark* can be summarized through the sub-categories of *mission* and *mettle*, and this category is the source that not only initiates but sustains these leaders throughout their most challenging times. Relating this in terms of the capacitance model, this category explains the firing of the engine.

Mission.

It is abundantly clear that each and every woman interviewed has a genuine passion and purpose for education and effecting positive change for the children in their districts. This *meaning* and *mission* is what got them into education in the first place and it is often where they return when they need to reignite the flame. This makes the level of their passion for children and learning a source of strength for them. Mary stated that “we just have to continue to be principled about the most important thing and that's kids first, right? I'll always fall on the sword

when it comes to putting kids first.” Alice expressed how much this passion gives her the strength to do the hard things, as she states that she’s “here to do what's in the best interest of kids,” even going as far as to say that she is “only worth how successful we are able to be in support of our students.” Helen summarized her similar feelings in this way:

This work is about making things better for kids, putting systems in place that will support youngsters. So that's really what drives me. How can I make that better? And superintendents can make it better. Leaders can make it better. I think that's what resiliency is. Picking up your bootstraps, looking at it, and then putting in place the kinds of things that you need to have for kids.

Brenda spoke directly of her specific skills that would give her the ability to “transform school districts,” and “was really looking forward to being able to take [her] curriculum knowledge, and instructional knowledge and put it to work.” Barbara noted that she always returned to her mission particularly when she did the hardest part of her job, stating,

I love the job. I love the people I worked with. I love the kids. And this was just a piece of the puzzle that I needed to deal with. So it was torture to go before the budget committee, but I also knew I had to put my best foot forward. And so I just went and did it.

For several participants, the idea of meaning and purpose specifically related to the top role of superintendent—even knowing it would be difficult—because it afforded them the opportunity to make the greatest change for kids. Helen stated that a superintendent has to “have the fortitude to be able to say, ‘It is hard work, but it is important work, and I want to do it.’” When asked about her move from the assistant superintendency, where she admittedly felt underchallenged, to the superintendency, she replied:

Very honestly, it may sound bizarre, but I really do like having the top responsibility, which is why I left the assistant superintendency for a superintendency. I like the notion that my ideas can be heard and if they're validated, I can see them through to fruition, right?

This was echoed by Felicity in her comment that she “found it [the Assistant Superintendent job] to be an incredibly boring job. Mm hmm. And that was when I went to be the superintendent in [Town]. Yeah. It was all about doing what I could do for kids.” Julie offered a beautiful analogy for her feelings about how “she would have done anything in her power to stay the course” by moving from the Assistant Superintendent position to Superintendent:

I know there is an element about the position [the superintendency] that's unsafe. I agree with that. But it doesn't, you know, it doesn't counter wanting to do that kind of work, no...So, I think that's why I have so much regard for it--because again the orchestration of it all--it's like...it's like being a conductor or the first violinist, right? And so...but the two roles are so vastly different. I can see why an assistant superintendent would be what would be promoted because it would be, like, ideal--you can have your cake and eat it too, right? You're not on the firing line, per say. And you can be building a system and you can be out there. You know the rest of it? I get it. If you almost look at the two in juxtaposition, why this [the assistant superintendency] is much more appealing than this [the superintendency] in every human right. But the downside is that you don't get to do that great work. I mean you do some of it, but you don't. You are not the conductor, you're the first violinist. Yeah. I wanted to be the conductor.

She also stated that as an Assistant Superintendent, she described her position as an “influential shadow” and she then wanted to move into the forefront.

The meaning and purpose also came through strongly when some of the participants had contemplated leaving the position because it had become so difficult to bear. Though participants expressed different levels of contemplating leaving – from actually leaving the superintendency to just musing about it – all participants with only one exception discussed thinking about leaving and what prompted them to stay. This information helped to solidify the *spark* of the model, as it proved to be both an initial source as well as a revisited source when resilience is needed. According to Alice, her strength keeps things in place for children:

I'm not easily intimidated. I'm here to do, at least I believe, or I'd like to think I am, I'm here to do the very best I can in my role for the children of my school district. If that means taking people to task...Then, I'm going to put my truth out there, and if you don't like my truth or my truth is inconvenient for you, I'm okay with that because ... I'm just okay with that.

Why do I keep coming in? I really believe in public education to the core of my very being, to the tips of my toes. Walking away just isn't an option. There's too much need, there's too much work to do. I came back for the mission. I came back because it's not about me or how I feel on that day.

Alice also commented at this time about how part of her strength is because she feels an obligation to “make it easier for the next woman.” Her strength is for children, but also encompassing an acute awareness that she is a woman superintendent and that her strength can have repercussions for future women in that position. Dorothy stated that when she thinks of leaving, and she says, “I don’t want to do this today,” she clears space on her calendar to get into the schools – that physically being with the kids and teachers and seeing the good in action keeps that meaning alive. One very poignant interview brought forward the depths of this strength. In

speaking with Felicity, she shared with me some incredibly difficult times and how she struggled to persevere (more is offered about this in the *self-care* section). After listening to her, it was hard for me to believe she continued on, so I asked her after all that, why did she stay? Her reply encapsulated it all:

Because, like I said, it's the best job in the world. I always thought, if I could just get through it, be tough enough to get through it however I had to, then I had the opportunity to make amazing things happen for kids. I would be able to make changes -- big changes -- that no other position would ever be able to make. That's worth it. Schools need people to be that strong to do those kinds of things that kids need, and I figured that I could be that person to do it.

I asked Mary when the last time was that she thought her resilience was gone, that she couldn't do it anymore. She laughed a little and replied, "Yesterday." She added, "So far, I think that our day, you know, the sun came up, so no matter what, we know that for whatever period of time... this last year, you know, it's been tough. Yeah, but the sun will come up." And at the time of the interviews, Nancy had been experiencing some of her most difficult times as a superintendent and was contemplating her future with some uncertainty. She hesitated to say, "So, I'm not sure I'm going to rebound to be a superintendent, so you have to think about that. Maybe I'm at the point where I've had enough, right? But the resiliency comes...I'm just not sure what might be next for me." It was unmistakable from these two participants in particular that resilience is a continual struggle, not one that happens and is finished, emphasizing the process and cycle of capacitance. Barbara discussed needing to leave one superintendency, and instead of leaving the profession decided to move to a more manageable sized district: "It was too much time and I was

never home, there were meetings every night. The only time I really talked to my husband is if we left the country.”

Strength through meaning and purpose clearly started and continues to be a source of energy for these leaders, but during the interviews it became apparent that this strength had something to do with them as individuals outside their positions. The concept of *mettle* emerged as the second key part of the spark that sustains resilience, and this mettle represents who the participants are as individuals and how they developed their strength outside of education.

Mettle.

It took some time to come up with the name for this category. These responses and subsequent category came from participants’ discussions more about who they are as people, or how they grew up, compared to specifically talking about themselves as superintendents. At first, I coded this “double dog dare” (DDD) from the film *A Christmas Story* that depicts the type of dare from which only the truly strong would never back down. This clearly developed into a category of something in these women’s “nature,” as opposed to strength “nurtured” through their lives as educators, so I wanted a name that would represent a person’s character and constitution. I considered “fortitude,” but the etymology of that word has too much to do with strength and battle, more traditionally and stereotypically of male origin. I considered “tenacity,” but that is more situational in nature as opposed to a way of being. I thought of “moxie,” but felt it to be too light and slang-like. I settled on “mettle,” because its origins are the same roots as that of “metal,” more aptly conveying what one is made of, elementally. These responses shed light on what the participants felt they were made of and how who they are as people helps them to develop resilience.

Several participants felt that their family backgrounds helped to create their inner strength long before they decided to become superintendents. In Alice's case, she discussed how she has been influenced by strong female role models in her family. She feels that this aspect of her strength is quite literally in her genetic make-up. She stated that she "won't give it up without a fight, you know? I'm here. I'm not going to...again, if my truth isn't convenient for you, I don't really care. Eventually, you're going to have to deal with me." When asked if there was something in her nature that helps her have resilience, Helen states that her "family would say yes. If somebody tells me I can't do something, oh, now I'm in 110%. That may have played a part in it, as well. Go ahead—tell me I can't do something." Nancy also felt that her family influenced her inner strength; she stated, "I always had some desire to make things better for people. That's the way I was raised, that kind of value. I had a family member with a disability, so I knew that I needed to make things better."

In a more general sense, several participants felt that this mettle was certainly necessary for resilience in the superintendency, regardless of where it comes from. Mary offered:

It takes a tremendous amount of resilience to do this...to do this job and to do it in an environment like this. You know, it's not for the weak of heart. I'm a tough, tough girl. Yeah. And anybody who I've ever worked with will tell you that, you know, anybody who knows me will tell you that.

According to Lilly, "I think you have to have something in your core before you start; I don't think everyone is cut out for this, that's for sure." And Amy states, "I can't exactly pinpoint where my resilience comes from. It's just my life experiences and building that strength. But you have to be strong. I often think, I am not letting these people win." Helen believes some of her strength, especially in regard to gender, may have come from attending an all-women's school,

where she never had to compete with males and also never thought that gender played a role in her potential success; limitations were not a factor. Dorothy contemplated that holding one of her previous positions (a very traditionally male position) and having success in that environment allowed her to carry that strength forward into the superintendency.

No matter its origin, having this inner strength as people clearly played and plays a role in resilience. Felicity discussed how proud she felt to have proven people wrong about being a strong woman superintendent:

I think being a woman -- and being a very strong woman--I think I surprised people a lot. They didn't expect me to be so strong or to be able to manage something like.... a construction project, or a 30 million dollar budget. Or negotiating with seven unions. One year it was all seven. It was fun to blow people's expectations out of the water. And so, I think that was a benefit [being a woman] because sometimes I felt like they didn't have as high a bar for me because I was a woman. 'Well she'll never take that on....' Absolutely, I will. And I'd work even harder at it to make sure that I could, yeah.

Because no -- I don't want to prove them wrong; I wanted to blow them out of the water. Helen, who was going through some of her hardest stretches as a superintendent at the time of the interview, took pride in discussing how her innate work ethic was seeing her through and helping her to remain resilient, "I think work ethic is a huge part of it. I was bound and determined. I haven't missed a day. In all of this, I have not missed one day." The notion that mettle is independent of the superintendency and attributed more to innate strength is reinforced by Brenda's comment upon choosing to leave the superintendency: "Because for me, it's about being principled. Those principles are both an asset and a hindrance. But I have the strength to say that I can put my strengths someplace else, and that's ok." Leaving the superintendency did

not diminish her innate, internal strength, as she was able to draw upon that very strength to make a conscious choice to use her talents elsewhere. Barbara summed mettle up succinctly by stating, “I was young. I was [age] years old when I became a superintendent. So, it was like, ‘Okay, I’m not going to let them win.’”

Knowing that the spark is lit through meaning and mettle, the next step is identifying the fuel needed to keep the energy sustained.

Fuel

As mettle and meaning comprise the basis of the spark that starts the capacitance cycle, the fuel that keeps it going emerged from the data into two main categories—cultivating self-support and cultivating team support. The participant data suggest that these fuel sources do not exist in isolation, and that they are both necessary. In the capacitance model, this is referred to as the concept of “mutual capacitance,” where both sources are required to “hold the charge” and consequently play their part in the resilience process. Mutual capacitance simply means that there is no single source of energy, in this case self and team work collaboratively. The following section presents the participants’ responses about these categories and the sub-categories that comprise their major components. Mentoring was found to cross both the self and team categories and will be addressed at the end of both representing its position at the cross section.

Cultivating self-support.

When asked generally about resilience or finding support – often followed up with questions about specific self-support strategies or practices, several sub-categories emerged, including: self-care (mental and physical), self-talk, self-efficacy, situational adaptation, and self-reflection. The number and depth of responses, plus the member checking regarding the importance of *cultivating the self*, gave this category a slightly higher importance than its

counterpart, *cultivating the team*; this is visually represented in the capacitance model via the “self” cog portrayed as slightly larger. During member checking, participants were asked why self may have come through as more important, and all respondents agreed that it is due to the nature of the position that self takes precedence. As Dorothy stated, “It’s a lonely job,” and Amy added, “You’re so isolated in this day.” At the end of the day, resilience comes a little bit more from self than team, especially since the superintendent is in the role of supporting others.

Self-care (mental and physical).

The importance of self-care is noted more because of its absence for the majority of the participants. Two of the twelve women interviewed claimed to regularly care for themselves, while the others gave examples of how they would like to add this to their lives or how the absence of self-care has affected their resilience efforts, both physically and mentally.

Of the two women who said they regularly made time for self-care, that became a combination of physical and mental activity. Lilly discussed how she has made time for working out in the mornings this year, saying, “So even if I get to work a little bit later than what I used to, you know later than I used to, I still do it.” It has become a main priority for her, and while she does her workouts, she is able to mentally prepare for the day ahead. Dorothy added, “I think having the self-awareness to know that you just need a break...sometimes you just need to step away. For me, I try to go to the gym every day. If I don’t, I get a little antsy.” Others discussed how self-care was something they really wanted in their lives but had yet to make it happen, mainly due to their positions as superintendents.

The majority of respondents had a practice of prioritizing work over working out, primarily due to commitment to their mission of doing what is best for the children of their district. When asked if she takes care of herself physically, Julie replied, “If I go back and look at

it, well, I don't think I did that well. I think I would be said to be industrious almost to a fault.”

She said she would not be considered an “exemplar” in this area and emphasized that she should have tried harder for this, because “you’ve just got to have balance or it will eat you up.” When asked the same question, Helen very succinctly stated, “I'm not good at that. There is no balance. I'm going to be completely honest with you. There is no balance. Again, as I tell anyone who will listen, part of it's my fault.” In both of these cases, it was heartbreaking to hear that these women not only did not have the self-care they wanted, but that they also blame themselves for it on top of that. Mary said she was overdue for self-care in this reply:

I haven't had a vacation in a year, and I need to find some time to refill my bucket. Yeah, you know, because you can't be resilient all the time, right? And so you have to find ways and find places to take good care of yourself. But I've just had this type personality and this is just who I am. If it comes...if there's something that has to be taken care of here or in any of my jobs or me...I'm always going to take care of my responsibility first, right?

This sentiment was reiterated by the majority of participants, where they always come second to their districts. In several cases, this dilemma presented itself with some significant health issues, weight gain being the most prevalent. Alice, Felicity, and Brenda stated this about their health, weight, and efforts at self-care:

Alice: I'm working really hard at it, but since I became an administrator, over the last [number of years] years, I've gained [number of] pounds. I don't exercise regularly. I try and I think that I've been better lately, but it's really hard. It's like the last person I give time to is me. So, yeah.

Felicity: It's been really hard, especially with my weight. I've gone up and down about [number of] lbs. since I became a superintendent and it wasn't until I retired that I was able to take about [number of lbs.] off and keep it off. Except I'm up again now. And the stress doesn't help. There were so many days when I didn't get to eat, and on my way home at 10:00 o'clock at night after a board meeting, I'd grab a bottle of wine and a pint of Ben and Jerrys and that was dinner.

Brenda: I had stress-related migraines and they were increasing. I was horribly, horribly sick for the better part of my first year, like ear infection, sinus infections, I had the actual flu at one point, like my doctor quarantined me. I definitely also gained a lot of weight, because I was working all hours of the day, I wasn't sleeping, and I just grabbed what was available for a quick food, which is not usually what I should be eating, of course.

Amy had similar struggles with her weight, and she found a way to tackle this issue during one of the hardest years of her superintendency:

So, I had started losing weight, and I was...I had started in May and this happened [the bad incident at school] in the fall. So, this is happening, and I'm thinking, I've spent my whole life eating my problems, like...here goes all the progress I've made, and I didn't skip a beat. I stayed on track. I ended up...by that May I lost [number of] pounds.

For Amy, sticking to her new eating plan at the most difficult time in her professional career provided a mutually beneficial strategy for building resilience and one bolstered the other throughout that time for her. While physical health (or lack of) and weight were common issues among the majority of participants, several also offered stories regarding their lack of mental health self-care, which was of greater concern.

The pressures of the superintendency presented themselves through several participants who struggled and then found ways to take care of their mental health. Two women turned to their faith as a source of mental health support. Helen prays each morning on her way in to work, and Julie, who—when asked what helps to see her through the hard times—offered, “I’m a woman of faith. So, I think I think my faith sustains me.” Lilly turns to friends as an outlet, stating that the best thing about them is that they “don’t talk about work....we do other things and we don’t think or talk about work.” And Mary is looking for those kinds of friends as an outlet but has not had the time to find them:

I think one thing that I really need to do is, like, I need to find a hobby and find some women friends that...you know, I listen to people all the time, my colleagues and my team here...they’re saying, ‘I’m going out with my girlfriends Friday night; we’re going to go to a fashion show...I’m going on a girls’ weekend vacation...’ I need to...I need to get that—yeah, I need to find other women friends and find them and make the time. You have to have those types of relationships because otherwise your life gets consumed--the world is consumed by, you know, this and this. And then what little is left of you, right? You know.... when you’re exhausted...when you’re exhausted.

Finding outlets for mental health was a common theme for all participants though it took various forms. The most common denominator mentioned throughout these conversations was the need to compartmentalize the superintendency from the rest of their lives as a resilience strategy. To illustrate the importance of this, Felicity offered the story of her own struggle with mental health and loss of resilience that reached a critical point in her life:

He [her husband] was the one who said to me, when I came home one night, and I’m very serious, I said, ‘I’m really happy!’ And he said ‘Great!’ Because that didn’t happen a lot. I

didn't come home happy a lot. And even though I loved the job, by the time I got home I was so tired that I wasn't anything—I was just tired. Yeah. And I said to him, 'I found the perfect tree to drive my car into.' And he thought I was kidding, and I said, 'No, I'm serious. It's perfect. Nobody will know that I've done it. And then you don't have to be worried about me anymore. And nobody will ever find out that I'm really incompetent. And everybody would be better off. So, isn't that exciting?' He didn't know what to do. So, a couple of nights later, I came home and said, 'I found another place that it would work, too.' And he said, 'You're serious.' 'Yeah, yeah.' He said, 'So we're going to go into the office here at home, and we're going to call the therapist that you saw when we first got married. And I don't care that's 9:00 at night. You call her. And you get an appointment with somebody tomorrow morning because this is not OK'

She [the therapist] said, 'You need to see somebody not in the [Town] area because you don't want people talking about the fact the superintendent's crazy--she's going to see a therapist. She said, 'This is the best thing you're doing for yourself, but you don't want people to know about it--it's none of their business.' Great recommendation. It was a tremendous recommendation. You just don't want to feed the beast.

You need strategies about how to leave the job at the door when you get home. And having your home be sacred, not contaminating your home with the things that could. And I was letting them in—they became a part of my relationship with my family, which meant I didn't want to go to family gatherings. I didn't want to do stuff because there was so much darkness in me. So literally, I started doing silly things, like, my therapist asked, 'Do you have a tree on either side of your door? A bush there?' 'Yes.' She said literally, physically, as you walk in the door—stop, the things that are most

present in your mind from work—hang them on the tree. And leave them there. You may not talk about them when you're inside that house until you come out in the morning. You can pick them back up again on your way to work. And so I said to her, 'That's stupid.'

But then I did it. And. It. Helped.

Felicity's story is not only difficult to hear for her struggles with staying resilient but also how difficult it is for a person in the position of superintendent to find help, when the community looks to that person as the one who should not have needs because they are helping others.

Compartmentalizing was a self-care strategy mentioned by several other participants as well.

Nancy said, about bringing her work issues home with her, "I think that can be very wearing on a relationship, I really do. I'm not interested in sharing all of that. That may be good or bad, I don't know." Helen replied with a similar comment:

The other thing for me was that I think I tried to separate the job from the rest of my life.

When I came through the door ... And maybe it's part and parcel to having a [length of time] commute, but I was able to, with every mile that I drove almost, I was able to leave a little bit more of it behind. I didn't leave it completely behind because it's always on your mind, but I was able to gain enough separation that, for me, I could find that mental balance, and I did not allow the job to become all consuming. I think that's a critical piece.

Alice agreed, stating, "I compartmentalize pretty heavily. Part of that is for my home to be my home and my job to be my job because, as you're aware, this job seeps into your whole life. That mission is all-encompassing."

Self-talk

The category of self-talk was one that very clearly emerged on its own from the data; it was not something that I had encountered during my literature review and it quickly became an

exciting part of the interviews. Participants' responses varied in their type of self-talk and what was actually said, but each participant practiced some form of it.

For Helen and Julie, self-talk often presented itself in the form of prayer, and for Julie in particular, self-talk also took the form of talking to her husband, but insisting that his role in the conversation was just a listening part; he had to promise not to say anything in return. Helen, Dorothy, and Julie all mentioned how valuable their time was in the car on their respective commutes to practice self-talk, in whatever shape worked well for them. For Alice, self-talk came in the form of various family member's voice in her head. One saying she recalls in particular read, "Be the kind of women who, when you put your feet on the floor, the devil says, 'Oh shit. The bitch is up.'" She discussed how much that voice in her head and other self-talk keeps her resilience up on a daily basis. Another favorite mantra she says to herself is, "It's always going to be ok in the end, and if it's not ok, it's not the end." Amy gives herself a pep talk in difficult times, asking herself questions, such as, "What am I doing? Are you going to stay home and cry? Like no, I can do this. I can get through this." This type of self-encouragement was analyzed in more depth in relation to resilience by Mary, who is explicitly aware of her own need for self-talk:

You put your head down and you do the work and you're just going to convince people by the work you do. And that's what I just tell myself every day. And a lot of it is self-talk to me. You know, we have to—as women—as just human beings—if you're going to be resilient you have to self-talk. You know, 'I can do this. This is going to be a great day. You know we're right in this,' and that's what I try to do for myself and my team.

And I keep telling myself, you know, 'It's always darkest before dawn, and the sun comes up every morning, right? So today is a new day. And you know we're good—let's see what today brings.' I'm going to keep telling myself that, and I tell my team that every day, you know, and the sun IS going to come up again today.

Helen also discussed self-talk and resilience in depth, providing some strategies for how other women superintendents can utilize it as a good strategy:

SL: Part of me wonders if self-talk is prevalent in the superintendency because it is generally an isolated position.

Helen: Absolutely ...

SL: Then here would be the other question. If self-talk is really important to women in the superintendency, and if we want more women to become superintendents, what can we do with self-talk to help people?

Helen: Well, I think, first of all, share that we do it. People might think that you're nuts. You talk to yourself in the car? You talk to yourself on the beach? What are you doing? Maybe we make it not one of those non-discussables, right? But we put it out there and say, 'This is a really good coping strategy.' We validate that coping strategy.

SL: We could have little signs that we put up when we're doing it so people don't think that we're insane, right?

Helen: Right! Yeah. Put up a little thing that says, 'Please, do not disturb. I'm in the middle of a conversation with myself'. Right?

Julie also commented that when she gets in the car, she asks herself, "So, what can I do to make a better tomorrow?" In sync with some humor about self-talk expressed by Helen, Julie added that one of these times recently she was smiling to herself and said, "Oh, I could do so much more than this," and then [she] thought, "Well, Julie, you're in your car and you talk to yourself, maybe you shouldn't do any more." Perhaps this self-talk conversation was regulation of her own resilience and limits.

Brenda speculated that self-talk is likely the first "go-to" for most women superintendents when the need for resilience kicks in. As she states,

You have to go through that initial, 'I just got kicked in the gut' moment, because it's usually when you need self-talk. You don't need it when things are going well. I often had to engage in self-talk to get quickly past the 'kicked in the gut' response and quickly to 'how am I going to fix this'?

She also stated the dangers of having self-talk turn negative, impeding the ability to build resilience. She recalled that there were "definitely days where I was like, 'Wow, clearly everything I do sucks.' There's the detrimental kind of self-talk." She noticed that the positive self-talk needed to be fostered in order to not break down her strength.

Several participants commented that they would remind themselves that they had been through difficult times before and made it through. While this essentially aligns with self-talk, it also brings forward another critical element in *cultivating the self*, namely self-efficacy, which was a prominent finding with all participants without exception.

Self-Efficacy.

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1997) as “the belief in one’s ability to influence events that effect one’s life and control over the way these events are experienced” (Tugsbaatar, 2019, n.p.). This concept is very similar to resilience, in that they are both built over time, increasing one’s actual and/or perceived strength with each successive experience. Participants discussed self-efficacy as one of the critical factors in cultivating their own resilience in the superintendency.

Starting with Dorothy, she expressed self-efficacy through the common saying of, “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” She elaborated on this, relaying a recent conversation she had when advising one of her principals on a tough situation. Dorothy conveyed some of her strategies relating to self-efficacy, where she plays scenarios out to their worst end and then realizes that she’s been through things like that before so she will be able to again: “Whenever I feel myself getting close to the edge, that's one of the things I do.” Getting a little more serious and contemplative, she added, “Well, I could just sit here and tell you that eventually you're going to develop thick skin, but the reality is, you won't. You just develop a better ability to take it for what it is.” The “thick skin” analogy revealed itself in Alice’s interview as well, as she reminisced about some very difficult times, and said, “Yeah, maybe it's tenacity, maybe it's resilience. Maybe it's just that surgery I have every year where I have an extra layer of skin put on. I don't know if they get easier or I become more skilled.”

Universally, participants felt as if going through difficult times and coming out on the other side was a consistent and essential factor in their resilience. Felicity stated that this “was the wisdom that comes from living through something,” and Julie suggested that this process was a “layering” process, where “going through those situations makes you even better, don’t you think?” And Mary described her own self-efficacy through the metaphor of journeys:

I kind of attribute it to like this journey – it’s a tall hike that you’ve never done before, and so when you think about it, you know as you’re going up the mountain there’s gonna’ be times where you reach a place where you look up and you’re like, I don’t know if I can get to that point. So, I think it’s experiencing the bumps in the road, right? So, you just don’t wake up with resilience. I just...I mean... I don’t... I don’t know of, you know, some magic pill that you can swallow down and all of a sudden, you’re a resilient person. I think each experience that I’ve had where I’ve needed to sort of develop the skin in order to do this job has helped me in the next scenario.

Helen, with her many years of experience and having built up a lot of self-efficacy, very succinctly and plainly said, “You can choose to look at what’s going well, or you can put all of your energy into what’s not going well. One way or another, what’s not going well is going to work itself out, right?” In discussing self-efficacy with Felicity, I asked her if knowing you could live through something was actually becoming jaded and not really self-efficacy. She replied, “No, that’s not jaded—that’s using experience to inform future decision making.”

As self-efficacy demonstrates that these women superintendents have built resilience *from* living through things, *how* they lived through things guides the research to some specific strategies for success. The first of these strategies is the practice of situational adaptation, which

emerged from the interviews as a strategy that helps cultivate the self in the process of building resilience.

Situational Adaptation.

Zheng et al., (2018) discusses the practice of situational adaptation in terms of women being particularly adept at fluidly switching roles and seamlessly adapting themselves to whatever the situation requires. While some participant comments regarding situational adaptation are specific to gender roles, it is also apparent from the interview data that some of this may be considered political and leadership savvy.

Amy discussed gender situational adaptation overtly, offering her thought process and intentionality:

There's probably some times when I'm male, you know, they're looking at you and talking to you a little bit differently than they would a guy, and I can probably say that I probably played up on that. And then people say 'lady,' oh, so you know he's treating me like a daughter, and I'm so cute, so I can do that. I can play that, Yes, I'm so sweet and cute and get what I want. Yeah, no problem. And I just feel like I got to do what I gotta do.

Felicity said that, especially with building projects, she felt she “had to be one of the guys” and worked to do that, but when things got very difficult with the community, she had a male business administrator that she would bring along in case she could not switch enough. Julie said she consciously realized that, at times, she would “be called upon to be something different” because the situation warranted it. She also cautioned, “If you can pull that off, use it sparingly. Then you can get a lot off of it.” Brenda recalled the following citing both gender and political issues as the source:

I frequently shifted my approach based on who I was dealing with, what the situation was, what the parameters were, and of course what information I had, because that can change as you know at any given moment. I definitely felt that my style was very fluid based on all of those factors.

Lilly reminisced about her first months in the superintendency and how she followed a large man with a booming voice and reconciled this with her small frame and quiet voice. She said there were times she thought of trying to be more like him but only because he was so successful and wanted to have that success as well. Though their thinking was incredibly similar, she quickly realized those aspects were not in place for her so there was no reason to try. The difference was too great and she went down the path of establishing and proving herself just as she is. This required a lot of self-reflection, which also materialized as an essential part of building resilience within each participant.

Self-reflection.

Self-reflection was an inherent part of the participant interviews, since I was specifically asking them to reflect on their position and journeys. When asked about successful practices, reflection overtly emerged as a common exercise. Participants expressed the state of being continually reflective and making this a regular part of building their resilience through the practice of internal deliberation. Their various approaches suited their individual personalities and styles, with complementary mindsets and reflective habits.

For Helen, being reflective means leaving the bad parts of the daily work behind her and intentionally focusing on the good that happens in the district. Julie said, “the more open and reflective you can be, I think that contributes to resilience. So out of every situation, something, I

think, can be learned if you take the time to say, ‘So what?’” Dorothy and Felicity have more in-depth explanations of their actual processes:

Dorothy: It's not that I don't look back and go, ‘Yeah, I could have done that differently.’ But I don't spend a lot of time obsessing over it, because it doesn't help, other than to just take a quick look back and do a quick, we'll do a check-in after things, ‘How'd that go? What could we have differently? What could we have done better? Okay, we're moving on.’

Felicity: I'm always evaluating how the system did...how I did...And where were the kids when we were done doing whatever we did, right? And saying, what are my lessons to learn? What do I want to keep doing because it was really important for those kids?

In both statements above, the respondents emphasize their self-reflection, with Dorothy being acutely aware that she should reflect but not dwell in reflection, and Felicity focuses her reflection on what happened for the kids, returning her focus once again to the mission.

Mentoring.

Self-reflection leads into the realm of mentoring, which presented itself at the intersection of cultivating the self and cultivating the team. Mentoring is not exclusively an individual activity (self) due to the presence of the mentor (team), but the mentoring relationship becomes a deeply reflective and individual relationship providing the opportunity for growth. Respondents shared their experiences with their own mentors as well as situations where they mentored another; in both cases, the data suggests that the mentoring relationship is potentially a successful strategy for building resilience.

For several participants, their mentors were the ones who encouraged them to initially apply for the superintendency. Amy, when serving in the role of district special education

director, said her superintendent at the time was her mentor and sat her down to advise, “You should do this. You should get your certification. It’s time to move forward.” Lilly said of her superintendent when she was still in the assistant superintendent role, “I think without a strong mentor like him, it would've been much harder to come into this position, and in fact I never would've even aspired to be a superintendent.” This was also the case for Felicity, who recalled, “I had a really strong superintendent who really mentored me and helped me get my first job.” In these cases, the mentor also served as a gatekeeper and sponsor, helping to pave the way for women who might not otherwise have taken steps forward to lead their districts. In all of these cases, the mentor was male, and in no case did the participants think that gender made any difference in or in any way diminished what they gained from that relationship. As Julie put it, “Well interestingly enough, I have always gotten probably more support from males. In my career there were no women I had to model since I was always the first.” Brenda spoke specifically about having strong women mentors and how important that was to her:

I also had some really strong mentors around me over time, who encouraged me and helped me develop the skills along the way to be able to do it. These were some really strong women mentors. One was a superintendent, one was a curriculum director. Then, there were others kind of more peripherally.

As these mentors provided a source of external support and encouragement for these women, on a different level, this relationship offered them a chance to be challenged in a safe way, which helped to build resilience within a comfort zone. The following statements articulate the special and unique benefits of this relationship:

Felicity: So, having a mentor just for you, having people who have their feet/their ears to the ground and who you can trust to give you information that maybe isn't easy -- like

‘What you said didn't play very well, and here's why’.... that kind of thing. So that was really important support. And I think stepping into the superintendency-- it's really important that each of us, male or female, has a mentor role model that you can implicitly trust to tell you where the landmines are and not to be put off if you're sad or you're angry or you're anxious or you're scared or even if you cry, that's OK.

Helen: Although my mentor had told me ...he and I just clicked. He understood my thinking. I appreciated his advice. Any time I would ask him a question, he would give me something to think about that I may not have thought about on my own. That sparked a real friendship, a professional friendship.

Mary: [on former district] And so they assigned you, like, a retired superintendent mentor, and I found those are valuable. But I also think it takes the right person to really feel connected to them and that's hard to find all the time, you know.

Nancy echoed the importance of having a mentor through her own experiences mentoring new superintendents. Her concerns, though, are that having a mentor can be a source of vulnerability for new women superintendents, as expressed through the following dialogue:

Nancy: Now, talk about women, and you're trying to show that you have leadership skills and that you have confidence in your work, and the first thing you asked for is help.

SL: A double whammy?

Nancy: Oh, Yeah. I actually—throughout some work with new superintendents—I think that new superintendents are often left on their own and they don't have anybody that they can really pick up the phone and call immediately.

SL: So how will you help them?

Nancy: By supporting them, by encouraging them, by giving them feedback. By making sure...touching base with them. Relationships are so important, and that's an important part of the superintendency.

As seen through several responses above, one of the key factors in the mentoring relationship is the establishment of trust. This solid foundation was also representative of the basis for building relationship, which leads into the realm of cultivating the team.

Cultivating Team Support.

Building Relationships.

The complement to cultivating self support is that of cultivating team support, which comprises the initial establishment of trust, then followed by building relationships with a variety of groups. These supportive relationships included the superintendents' board and/or board chair, their administrative teams, community members, professional colleagues, and their families/friends.

Trust.

Building trust in relationships came across in questions regarding cultivating team support, both in general terms of building relationships, focusing on trust, and also several examples of when those relationships and/or trust are jeopardized. Julie recalled,

I worked a great deal of time building trust. So that my word meant something--if I said I was gonna' do it, it was going to be done. And so if it wasn't going to be done for whatever reason, then I would call and say why. And it caused me to be much more pensive about making a decision, too, so that probably instead of deciding within 24, I would say, 'I shall take that under advisement and get back to you. And if I'm seeming to

take longer than normal, it's because I'm still thinking. Don't worry, you'll hear from me.

But don't ask me again, because I'm giving thought to it.' And once I was consistent in that, that was really very helpful because people knew they could trust me.

Felicity conveys a similar reliance on trust during difficult times by offering how she and the school community will reach a “hot spot and be able to pull on the trust and the knowledge...that I'm going to do my best to look after them, maybe they won't agree with the way I do it, right? But they know I'll do it.” Amy stated that much of her success is due to the fact that “everyone knows me,” and that they trust her to make good decisions; she stated that trust at that level helps her to get through very trying times.

Unfortunately, the connection between trust and resilience has also confirmed its importance through the loss of trust. Mary discussed this in terms of trying to form a circle of trust that she can rely on, where “we establish trust...where we're able to be vulnerable and have productive conflict.” When asked if she has that, she replied,

I don't know if I've ever found that small circle, you know, because I've been disappointed by my confidentiality being breached or you know, just people sharing and things coming back to me that I really believed was just between us. That's been disappointing to me.

Nancy, about to leave her current position after some very difficult times, felt that, “It's time to move on. I lost some relationships, I think, and I lost some trust.” Trust or its absence revealed itself as a primary foundational need for building various relationships, those of which focused on several specific groups to be discussed in the next sections.

The following findings came in response to the open question, “Where do you find support when times are rough?” Julie stated without hesitation, “I think in order to be resilient

you have to build relationships,” overtly making a connection between the two. Felicity made a reference specific to resilience and building relationships to aspects of gender, saying:

I would see them [male superintendents] almost try to power their way or bull their way into a decision or managing a situation. And it wasn't relational. It was on power. And sometimes size. And... they didn't find it to work. Well, I didn't find it a good way to be a leader. I don't think powering your way through something works...I have always found that having a relational approach to it and a collaborative approach is best, and when you need it, those relationships are there for you, too.

Building relationships with the board chair and/or board.

Having a board and/or board chair with you was reported to be an integral part of remaining resilient during challenging scenarios. Mary feels that, “You really have to have a focus, and you have to have a board behind you. I mean, I know many boards would have thrown in the towel with this, but this board believes in the strategic plan--they believe in this work.” Alice moved into the position of superintendent from within her own district and said she “had a solid relationship with the board pretty much since [her] second or third year.” She said she “worked really hard to build those relationships...consistently proving myself over a long period of time, so they kind of already knew what they were getting.” Felicity described her board chair as her “thought partner,” which turned into “a really amazing relationship.” Upon hearing this question, Julie responded, “right off the bat, I knew from the very beginning that the most significant thing for me to do was to build a great relationship with the chair. And I had [number] different ones during my time and they were all—if I lined them up—you would be shocked at how different they were, but that relationship helped get me through all those times with all those chairs.

As with trust, the absence of a relationship was equally an indicator of the importance of this relationship. One of the signs that Brenda knew her time at one district was coming to a close was when she recognized she had lost support of the board, which mainly stemmed from their protection of another administrator:

At least 50% of the issues were created by this one individual who was basically untouchable, because the board would not allow me to supervise the person. They would tell me to, but then they wouldn't back me up on the hard decisions. I wasn't finding any change in board leadership and that also made a difference. So, I just wasn't...I wasn't feeling that level of connection and started to see the writing on the wall.

Similarly, Helen had a board chair who thought he was helping, but essentially this meant both micromanaging and undermining her; the foundational trust and therefore the relationship was not there and thus countering the prospect of support. She finally asked him to meet and said to him, "What you can do for me is you do your job and let me do mine. If I fail, then I understand, but you haven't given me the chance to try to succeed at this position, to unscramble this problem." Helen said he did not completely understand until she asked him to put himself in her shoes; he was a business professional, and when she asked how it would be if his boss did the same thing, what that would be like. After that, the relationship began to improve and more mutual respect developed. The board and board chair are also the representatives of the larger community, which several participants noted as a source of help when needed.

Building relationships with the community.

Not quite as prevalent as the relationship with the board and/or board chair, the

relationship with the community—and sometimes just individual members of the community—suggest that this is also a group that offers or inhibits team support. Julie in particular worked hard to make the community a source of support:

I got very involved with Rotary, and I did that when I was an assistant superintendent and felt if I could spend some quality time volunteering and being a part of the movers and shakers that would help me a great deal. That definitely helped me as far as being resilient because in the beginning they have a whole lot of questions about the school district and a lot of misperceptions and I could just change that very quickly. I understood the importance of establishing a relationship with the Department of Education and any other entity: Chamber of Commerce, Police, Fire, you name it. So again, I learned if you can build these relationships, if you do get into dire straits or in trouble, they will help you.

Reflecting on one of her most challenging times as a superintendent, Amy recalled that one of her community members happened to run a PR firm; she said this person “did so much—she gave us, like, 2000 dollars and helped write all the bright stuff. I mean, you know how much it would have cost us to pay for what she did? She was a lifeline.” Support from community members can help in other ways as well, as Mary said during a very difficult time, a community member gave her “a big hug and said, ‘You’ve got this, you know you’re a strong woman, you know you’re smart, you’re resilient, you just need to keep moving forward, put your head down and just do the work.’” According to Mary, just this one act did keep her resilience up and inspired her to power through.

When discussing the absence of community support, several participants mentioned

difficulties with their town or city's budget committees in particular. While budget committees are inherently positioned to be "watchdog" groups for community taxpayers, the lack of this support takes away from the ability to cultivate support from the surrounding potential team players. At one point, Dorothy decided to stop having her administrative team attend budget committee meetings because they felt so harassed and bullied, as did she. Ultimately, the budget committee took this opportunity to, as Dorothy stated it, "bash me publicly behind my back" until we let enough time pass to try move forward with the next new budget season. Having that additional lack of support, however, made it more important for her and several others to rely on their inner team support, mainly their administrative teams and professional colleagues.

Building relationships with the administrative team.

The relationship with one's administrative team revealed itself through the data as an integral part of support in the superintendency, though the process by which this team support was created, developed, and/or nurtured varied among the participants. For Amy, her team support developed out of a team of administrators who had worked together for many years. "We're all a really close team; a lot of us have been here for a long time." That longevity and shared experience gives her the knowledge that they are a place she can turn to when she needs to keep her own resilience going. For Felicity, longevity also played a key factor with her first administrative team, and this support continued with these individuals even when she changed districts. "I had a very strong administrative team in [Town] and we always get together, and many of them had been there for a while. So I had people that very quickly I knew I could trust when I needed a sounding board to test things out. And that level of trust is very important as you know." The team collaboration evident in her statement, about the "sounding board" was

also an important part of team support for Julie and Lilly, both of whom cultivate their team support through group problem solving:

Julie: I would talk openly with the leadership team, too, who all contributed to where I'm going... about process. So, when you say you're looking at resilience as being a process, I would say that's terribly important to your leadership team because normally they don't know why a mistake was made. What contributed to that not going well? So, I would openly talk about the outcome. And then I'd back it up and talk process. And so...and so interestingly, that would be like one of those pieces that I would share with the leadership team, I'd say, 'I have something interesting to give you to think about. Listen up and see if you see it too.' So, I called that...I call that...a support network.

Lilly: I feel good about the relationship I have with the administrative team. We sort of have a culture and an ethic, too, that we've built that we're here to support each other, right? And that everyone is going to make mistakes. We just talked about this yesterday because we have a couple of new team members. Everyone is going to make a mistake. I am. They are. Teachers are. So just accept that, right? Thinking through those mistakes together makes us all stronger.

Team support was also discussed in terms of certain members of administrative teams. When asked about where her main sources of support are, Helen simply replied, "I think my work family is." She discussed several key members of her administrative team and said she tends to keep those particular people "close to home." Dorothy also talked about the importance of select members of her administrative team, saying "You've gotta have somebody – or more than one somebody." Nancy immediately noted two members of her administrative team whom she sees

as key partners; she noted that both are younger women administrators and that she is regularly using the team approach to build resilience in them.

In two cases, administrative team support came about by building one's own team because the ones they inherited were not aligned with the district's goals and vision:

Alice: I actually have an incredible team here. I've hired all but, oh my God, all but one of them at this point. For me, my [naming two positions], I'm really sitting down and saying, 'Okay, tell me if I'm overreacting. Am I overreacting to this?' So that, that ability to have those collaborative relationships with those two specific individuals has been my support and my...probably my saving grace.

Mary: You know, what's great is that the new leadership team—again, you know, this didn't just impact teachers. You know, I was also kind of plopped down on a leadership team that for many years had a lot of independence and autonomy. And it was a bit of a culture shift to say like, you know, we're a team, which means that we have to establish trust; we have to establish.... we have to be able to have productive conflict. Now, after some turnover, we're really kind of moving forward in lockstep.

Equal to administrative team support were the statement made regarding the sense of team from professional colleagues, i.e., other superintendents.

Building relationships with professional colleagues.

All participants referenced a reliance in one or another on other superintendents. While some referred specifically to other women superintendents and groups, overall gender did not appear to play a major issue in this support; the responses suggest more that it is the critical role of empathy in reaching out to those who have gone through similar experiences. When asked about where her support comes from, Dorothy did not hesitate to answer, "Other

superintendents.” Julie stated, she finds support “with my colleagues...that helps people, you know, I think in developing flexibility, adaptability, being able to rebound because you've got people to play off of who are in the same role.” She added, “The notion of being able to confer with people in real life positions is worth its weight in gold.” Mary offered,

Reaching out to fellow superintendents and having places that you can have confidential conversations...with people you trust, that you know you can problem solve with and just say, ‘Look, I have no idea how to do this... Do you have a suggestion?’ Or even just a safe place to be able to say like, ‘I'm just overwhelmed,’ you know?”

Nancy said, “My colleagues were and are of help. And I think that helps people gain that ability to come back from bad, difficult situations, because you recognize that somebody else has had terrible situations, right?”

Lilly and Amy both said that their collegial support came from the regional superintendent meetings arranged through the state organization, New Hampshire School Administrators Association (NHSAA). Lilly said, “There are some relationships that I've developed there, and that's been really great.” When asked if it would be helpful if groups were arranged for women only, the responses were mixed. In the same conversation with Lilly, she contemplated this option, stating, “I think the regional group is good, and the people that are more like-minded, men or women, it wouldn't matter. I'm sure that there are some unique challenges [for women], but I don't know what they would be.” She also followed this with the statement,

I'm kind of surprised at my own answer because, you know, being sort of feminist minded. I think most women would say, ‘Oh yeah, I would like the support of women,’

and I would like to be, but I don't know that there's anything unique that I would get from that environment.

For Lilly, it was clear that support from superintendents going through similar situations took precedence over gender, a sentiment echoed by several other participants.

On the other hand, an almost equal number of participants said that having the support of a women's only group would indeed help them gain more resilience. Nancy noted, "Isn't it odd that we're one of the only states that doesn't have a women superintendents' group?" Felicity had the most to say about the importance of a women's only group, having experienced it earlier in her career:

The men [speaking about colleagues] that I connected with supported me in different ways--and I went looking for the support. The kind of men that I would say had the soul of a woman. And so there was no judging or stereotyping or gender-typing. It was that they got who I was as a woman leader and they were good with that; they supported, they cheered. They wanted me to be successful as a superintendent as well as a woman. And so I was very lucky that way. I'm still friends with several of those people.

There was a conference in Rhode Island many years ago just for women superintendents and we came from all over New England. It was great -- you just knew that you were in a room with a whole group of women who've shared your experiences and it was so freeing, such a relief. We had great speakers and we had great conversations. It was usually three days and it was heaven. I wish they still had it but I think after a few years the funding must have dried up or maybe somebody didn't think it was very important or something.

Felicity tried to create her own women superintendents' group, but she said, "It was fun but it fizzled over time. Something more organized like the conference might still help people and give new women superintendents a way to fit in." When asked if she feel that same sense of belonging from the NHSAA groups, she replied, "No, not really. It was and still is really an old boys club, and I didn't really think that I got much useful out of those meetings."

The final source of team support was evident through personal relationships, mainly family and friends. Dorothy stated that one of her main goals was to continually remind her board that "administrators have lives and administrators have families." This was for herself, but mainly out of a need to protect her administrative team. It was critical that the board remember that time with family and friends is part of what keeps everyone going.

Team support from family and friends.

All participants responded in some ways about their spouses, families, and/or friends having an impact on their ability to stay resilient. Spouses were a significant finding among respondents; all but one participant is married, and she replied, "I don't have a personal life. This is my marriage, right? [referring to the superintendency]." Others referred to their spouses as a main source of support, helping them to get through challenges. Helen said, "I married a man who is absolutely 100% behind me every day. I've had some really good foundational support." Julie said, "I have tremendous support. Family wise.....refer[ring] to my retirement gathering, the first person I addressed was my husband." Julie also commented on the fact that one of the things that made her husband so supportive was that, "not once...never once has he ever put me in a situation where I felt conflicted over giving time to him or work." Alice refers to her husband as a great "sounding board" and discussed the importance of having that kind of person

in your life. Lilly summed up the support of her spouse by adding, “He’s always been supportive of what I wanted to do. That’s why I’m still married.”

Other family members and children also made a difference in the feelings of support. Amy discussed her powerful relationship with her daughters and feels she is able to model for them as well as receive their support. Mary talked about a very difficult board meeting during a time of crisis and she looked out at the public and saw her daughter there, who had come just to be a physical presence of support. Two participants mentioned sisters they speak to almost every day, if not every day, and several participants mentioned the support they gain from friends, sometimes especially when they cannot discuss school specifics with them; that can provide even greater support because, as Barbara said, “It’s just great not to think about it for a minute and feel like you’re ok.”

Maneuvering Obstacles

Without obstacles to maneuver, there would be no need for resilience. This next major category revealed what the participants’ identified as major obstacles, first looking universally at the common barrier of gender bias and then honing in on specific obstacles they experienced: those that likely pertain to all superintendents and then those they found to be unique to women.

Common Obstacles

Throughout the following section, there are multiple accounts of common obstacles experienced by participants, which they discussed not directly making an association with gender. These are coded into four main sub-categories: handling their hardest times, navigating politics, working with the press/media (especially social media), and weighing difficult decisions.

Handling the hardest times.

It is important to note that full disclosure of “handling the hardest times” is addressed by all participants, though several had concerns that the incident discussed would reveal their identities. Therefore, this category is reported through the participants’ responses in ways that present the essence of the hard time and/or the experience of the participant, but not necessarily the incident itself; some needed to be excluded altogether. In order to get at the heart of resilience, I needed to ask participants to walk me through their hardest times; this is the way I could start to cull their strategies for successfully moving out of those hard times. Responses presented here get to the core of how the participants described their hardest times:

Amy: I took a lot of heat from the community, that, you know, people made assumptions. People said, ‘You should resign, you should be fired,’ like just talking about us like we weren't there, but at the same time looking right at us, you know, pointing fingers. It was like an angry mob. It was horrible and it didn't get much better. It went on for months and I had threats over email.

Barbara: It’s always hardest when you have to balance everybody’s interests. At one of my darkest times, I had to balance an employee issue and that employee’s right to privacy with student privacy issues all in the middle of a very public problem. It was a mess on all sides.

Brenda: It's never just one little thing, or even one big thing. I'm actually fine with the big thing, because I can work the problem. But a colleague of mine used to say, ‘You just sometimes have jobs where you get nibbled by goldfish until there's nothing left of you.’ Right? I was being nibbled by goldfish...and there were sharks, too.

[On her first day of her second superintendency] Literally, that first day, a pile of skeletons fell out of the closet, and they never stopped. Never...stopped. Like, we [she

and her assistant] kept looking at each other going, 'There's got to be a day soon when this at least slows down,' and it never did. And I felt so sucked dry, particularly in those last two years, it was horrible, and I was actually hoping to retire from that district. I was really hoping to be there for like 15-20 years. After a year, I knew I couldn't be there at all.

Helen: I spent, really, all of my time focusing in on those negative people. The one lesson I learned was that, first of all, the people who were with me, 100% with me, they weren't even paying attention to us. I'll get the occasional 'thanks for doing that,' but you're not really focusing in on us. And the people that were in the middle, which tended to be a good third ... I think I had a third, a third, and a third. They were seeing that the negative people were getting all the attention, so ...maybe we should be negative, too. What I learned was you need to feed the people that are with you, and you need to focus on them. And the people who are on the fence, I think, will see that. You're going to move the needle more in that direction.

Felicity: There weren't any more minutes in any day because I had four boards, seven unions, four budgets, and three building projects. It was relentless. On top of that we had deaths from car accidents and a suicide. It was relentless.

Julie: So, I went through Hell then and I saw what it looked like. I saw what Hell looked like because we had [protests], police escorts to my car, all the rest of it. So as a system leader I saw it in its worst form. Other places got a dose of that but we were really in the crosshairs. And when you go through anything that big, that tumultuous, I mean it really affected everything. People were even scared to teach.

Lilly: You know we've had things...we had a staff suicide in [year], and you know people have all kinds of opinions about why those things happen and why sometimes the role you play as a supervisor or as principal or part of the organization they are working in, you know...rumor. There are rumors. Absolutely. And you have to be in such a situation like that you're not talking about it, right? That's a private family thing. So, you just have to have that mental toughness and you have to know what you do is the right thing, right? And that's the best you can do.

Mary: I said that we're going to set up processes and structures and systems, and the response I got was a no confidence vote... And the response I have gotten has been just like this mobilization and just a very aggressive reaction from a very small group of people that, like I said the other day in our meeting, feels like thousands, right? Because they're so loud. They're just so loud.

Politics.

Several participants identified the navigation of politics as a significant obstacle, and the position of superintendent is invariably a political position due to the necessary connection to the community. Difficult times were often the result of political turmoil. Brenda called one of her communities a “very, very, very political community.” It became clear to her that a lot of her issues arose because “it was also apparent in that community that the school district and the city were always going to be pitted against each other.” No matter how much she tried to remind people that what is good for the school is also good for the community, it was rarely seen that way. Mary said, “I think what superintendents are facing nowadays are the political pieces...that constant barrage and obstacles from so many directions...it's just challenging times.” Amy recalled that at one point, there were such horrible political issues that, “a community member

sent a flyer to everyone in the [name of city] with the SAU contact information on it, telling people to call me if they were upset. We got a lot of calls but we dealt with all of them.” With a similar strength, Julie described that she learned to embrace the politics because they were not going away. She said, “I came to love the politics. Yeah, right? Huh? OK. We're ready to get this. Who has to be involved? Should they be asked to do it? And also dealing with the board. I find that all fascinating now.” Similar to the community element of politics, the press and media – social media in particular – were presented as particularly difficult obstacles.

Press/media/social media.

While regular communication is a critical aspect of the superintendency, communicating through and working with the press and media can become obstacles during a challenging time; the newly added element of social media was discussed by several participants as well. As Felicity stated with some sarcasm, “one of the great things about being a Superintendent is that a lot of the time your biggest mistakes wind up on the front page of the newspaper, so you could still read about mine whenever you want.” Julie added, “The bad press I encountered for someone who was just starting was horrendous for a beginning...that was when people began to be affected, the press was terrible, then all of a sudden other people decided to join in.” Barbara said she and her fellow superintendents used to call each other and try to laugh, asking each other, “So, are you above or below the fold today?”

Social media was brought up by several participants as well, creating an even more difficult situation specifically attributed to its inability to be controlled. During the difficult time Mary described, she emphasized that social media made everything worse:

With social media, you know, my gosh did that one blow up! But the things that are blowing up on social media make the need for resiliency so much greater because

something so small that can just be twisted a tiny bit can be blown up on social media as scandalous, right? And completely misconstrued. And you have 300 comments asking for your head or administrators' heads, and so that in and of itself is something that no one's trained us for. I'm not on it. I know this is going to sound kind of funny, but my husband is on the [Town] residents' page. That's how I can find out if something's brewing.

She continued to describe social media as a "tidal wave of misinformation." In her thoughts, social media is like "this complete massive wave coming in—a tsunami—and you're constantly underneath that and you can't get out no matter how much you try to push out information. The wave is always faster, right? Facebook is always faster." Similarly, Lilly said that the very morning we were doing our interview, she had to work with one of her new principals who was getting consumed by the local Facebook page:

I just told someone today, a woman principal--she was concerned about what's on Facebook. I said, [Principal's Name], don't look on Facebook—Do. Not. Look. At. It. There are a number of people who respect you and love you for what you do. But you're not going to find them on Facebook. What you're going to find is, you're going to find a lot of people who are going to criticize you and they're going to be really mean. Yes. And so why put yourself through that? You just don't do it. Don't look at it.

A common occurrence that does wind up in the press and/or social media is when superintendents are in the position of having to make difficult decisions and then have to work with the aftermath.

Making difficult decisions.

Maneuvering obstacles regularly requires difficult decision making, which is part of the fabric of the superintendency. The experience of difficult decision making was expressed

through statements around the strength needed to make difficult decisions, which in most examples referred back to the “mission” concept; making difficult decisions is the right thing to do for kids. Dorothy recalled a situation where she knew she had to terminate a high-level person in the district, and how sometimes you have to take risks to do the right thing. She said, “When it all went down one of two things was going to happen. We're going to move forward...and things will be better, or I'm going to be out of here. But this is the right thing for me to do, so either way I'm okay with it.” Mary emphasized this strong sense of purpose as well, by describing what it feels like to make those difficult decisions:

And that...that isn't always the easiest thing to do, and that means sometimes you don't bend over backwards, right? You know, that means that you have to know when or what you are going to stand firm on in terms of principle. And I just feel like that's really hard to do, right? Nobody wants conflict. Nobody wants to feel like people don't like them, but there are certain things that have to be done. If we're going to educate all children, and we're going to provide equity for all.

Felicity and Helen expressed similar feelings about the need to make difficult decisions, but described this in two unique ways. Helen said that people would ask her why she was addressing a concern instead of letting it go, literally asking her why she would be taking on somebody else’s “monkey”. Her reply was, “No, I'm not taking it on. I'm not saying give me all your problems and I'll solve them. How about we put the monkey in the middle of the table and see how we can make that monkey go away completely? It's not that *I* take on the monkey.” In this sense, she underscored the need to tackle the big problems but that it was most often collaborative decision making, not her alone. Felicity said that while she did not shy away from the big problems, she learned throughout her career that, “a lot of times a decision is doing

nothing. That's as active a decision as doing something. Sometimes it just needs to settle because it's not as extreme as it might be in the moment. Then people aren't as heated.” This added the element of having the wisdom to know the right time to make the most difficult decisions. Julie agreed that she, over time, also learned to look at these difficult decisions as an opportunity to grow. Upon being in a similar situation to Dorothy—where she had to terminate someone—she recollected, “If you were willing to take it on and address it, and you're tried and true...it's the real deal, right? Then more than likely both of you will grow from it.”

Brenda had the most thorough response to the discussion on decision making, as the ethics and importance of these actions were a critical factor in her life as a superintendent:

I don't remember who the quote is, and I'm probably going to butcher it, but someone made a statement once that there are no hard decisions, it's really about whether or not you're willing to live with the consequences. And I think that's true. Because in your gut, you know what the right thing is almost immediately. I mean, really, if you think about, whether it's professionally or personally, almost any life situation, you can get a pretty quick read on what ethically is the right thing to do, even though I know that a pile of poop is going to land on my head. And it often does. And so, when I'm making a decision that I am willing to live with and know that I made in my conscience...and is it a decision that's good enough for the important young people in my life? I try to make decisions that I felt I would want someone to make on their behalf.

I didn't ever need to talk myself through the ethics. That was easy. Because as I said earlier, there were really no hard decisions, you just have to be willing to live with the outcome. But I had to make sure I dotted every ‘i’ and crossed every ‘t’. Because the

decisions we make as superintendents are weighty, and have far reaching implications both for the well-being of the community as well as the well-being of the district.

The clarity surrounding the need to make tough decisions is coupled with the acute knowledge and acceptance that one will live with the decision after the fact. Mary, Brenda, and Alice each noted that their experience had been that men, especially their predecessors, had been more likely to let things go, which caused them to be judged more harshly for their decisions. Mary recalled the shock of her community when she began her third superintendency:

When I first came here, the schools were operating very independently and autonomously and there was no system or systems approach to the work. And I can understand the perception of sort of a young energetic, you know, woman, coming in to the dynamic of the status quo, like, I'm talking a decade of status quo...I can understand how that would be shocking to a small, very tight-knit community who felt that the status-quo worked.

Who felt, like, 'We're good and we're all set. We don't need this.' That's right, right?

This added layer of gender in judgment for decisions making is one of the upcoming sub-categories in which participant felt that their resilience was tested not just through the common obstacles of the superintendency but through the additional layer of gender obstacles as well.

Gender Obstacles

This second major category pertaining to obstacles emerged in the specific instances where participants believed that gender played—or plays—a role. While there was general agreement that resilience in the superintendency was critical regardless of gender, an added layer of need for women to build resilience emerged in the following areas: a general awareness of gender, belief/disbelief in gender differences, overt sexism, navigating the gatekeepers, perception of job responsibilities, and handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment.

General awareness of gender.

A general awareness of gender was itself an indication of its place as an obstacle. When sitting down in the interview with Amy, her first thoughts about this topic were, “So, I thought that what was telling was this—that we're still having this conversation, right, today...it's still being talked about. Mm hmm. I wish it wasn't, right? It shouldn't be an issue anymore.”

“It,” meaning, gender, which in her opinion should not be a factor anymore at all. She said she still has a general awareness of gender, which she has noticed at the NHSAA regional superintendents’ meetings in particular:

You know, and I think just recently at the [regional] meeting, we looked around and a couple of us commented like, ‘Oh it's starting to fill up again, because we've noticed over time...there were a lot of women at the table at these meetings, and it's starting -- just recently we noticed like the whole table going around is men. And then there's a group of women that tend to sit together, and it was just one of those moments. I don't know why that's happening, but it felt really good for a while that there were so many more women in the field, and I don't know if it's just our region that it just happened to shake out that way.

Lilly had the same comment about her experience at her regional superintendents meeting:

But the last [regional meeting] I went to....when I first started in the regional group, it was me and a couple of other women. Totally gray haired men in suits. Yeah. Mm hmm. And so that started changing. So, for the last maybe three years it was about 50/50 and I thought, Oh, this is awesome. This is really good. Mm hmm. Yes. Yeah, I walked into the room for our first meeting this year, yeah, and we were back to maybe 20 percent women. Yeah, I was shocked. Which made me think, what is happening, right?

Nancy noticed changes in her regional meetings as well but also said she started to look at a New Hampshire school district map one day:

I just looked around first in my [regional group]. You start off at [Town], and I work my way down the line, that whole group is men except for me and [District Superintendent Name] And she's leaving, and I'm leaving. But when you look at all the positions in New Hampshire that are high paying, very high pay, [names several bigger districts], any of those bigger places, you'll see that the salaries are quite high. And they're all men that are in charge in those positions.

Brenda said for her this general awareness comes simply from the statistics, where she said, “about 25% of superintendents are women – in a field completely dominated by women. It doesn’t make sense.”

Three participants recalled their experience at a national superintendent conference, particularly on watching the annual Superintendent of the Year ceremony. Helen said she watched the superintendents of the year from each state on the stage, and “there were five women up there – five.” Nancy also recalled a year where she observed that ceremony, and recalled that there were eight women. Neither the representation nor the recognition was visible. At one of these national conferences, Alice was working in a break-out session on diversity in the superintendency where the facilitator asked everyone about what issues they see:

Alice: I finally raised my hand. I said, ‘You know...has anyone looked around this room?’ They're looking and they're looking, and they're like, 'Yeah, no. There's still less men of color or people of color.’ I said, ‘There's 32 of us and there's only two women.’

SL: Nobody had noticed?

Alice: I did. I noticed.

Alice, similar to Nancy, mentioned that she saw that her male colleagues are “often in positions that are considered ... more desirable. They're also making more money.” She followed quickly with a statement that she also consistently found supportive male colleagues as well, so she felt that it was more the general systemic problem than the people themselves. The general awareness of gender led into discussions of whether or not participants believe that there are differences in the experience of men and women superintendents.

Belief/disbelief in gender difference.

Throughout the interviews, there were various responses expressed regarding belief and/or disbelief in gender differences and how this is or is not experienced by women in the superintendency. These responses, in addition to the member checking that followed, constituted the most significant disagreement among participants. Participants ranged from not understanding how anyone could think is no difference to adamantly believing that there is no difference and that looking for one does more damage than good.

For participants who believe that there is undeniably a different experience for men and women in the superintendency, there is clear conviction in their responses. As put very succinctly by Alice:

I didn't know there was a glass ceiling until my head hit it. I know how bad my head hurt the first time I hit that glass ceiling, and the shock that it was there in the first place because I didn't see it coming.

Alice discussed how she truly went into the superintendency believing that there were no differences but when reality hit, she could not deny the existence of difference. She recalled a time not long before our interview that the question came up about gender difference in the superintendency at a roundtable session at a conference. She said there was a general feeling that

there were no experienced differences, but she felt that those statements were more of a “non-acknowledgment of difference.” I asked her to clarify what she meant by that, and she stated that the thing that idea that struck her the most was that, “this isn't even the right environment to ask women this question.” She felt that sitting at a table with your colleagues, of both genders, would put women who did feel there was a difference in jeopardy. She kept feeling that it would not be safe for a woman to say anything different because it would, quite literally in this case, jeopardize women’s place at the table.

Mary said her belief in a clear difference came about because she is a woman, and also because she is a young woman, which challenged the traditional “old white man in a suit” image:

I think first of all being a young woman has been a challenge. I think I've found that men get more passes. Men...strength in a man is seen it seems as a strength and strength in a woman is perceived as aggressive. And I think that it's just a challenge being a young women superintendent that I've faced.

I followed gentlemen who didn't really push hard on anything, or really kind of stood for anything in terms of moving the district forward. They were managing. Yes. And I've said to my team we're not here to manage, we're here to lead, right? And I think that the perception of women leading is not looked upon well because women are supposed to be subservient and docile and, you know, just the basics.

And again, like, I wonder how that would be perceived if I was...maybe if I came in a different package?

Brenda said that she was in an interesting situation because both she and her husband were school administrators at the same time:

And I remember my husband saying at one point, he was like, 'You are working like 15 times harder than I ever have to get traction on the same issues.' We saw that for years throughout our parallel administrative careers. It was so evident.

Brenda believes strongly that the gender difference is experienced mainly through perception of others, similar to the sentiments of Mary, about how others perceive women leaders. Brenda stated, "Women in positions of power tend to be seen as bitchy, as power hungry, as uppity. Those kinds of things. Not unlike what we saw in the last presidential election." Her experience also echoed that of Mary in terms of her experiences with men superintendents throughout her career:

[T]hey [male colleagues] were less flexible in their approach, in their thinking. I actually often watched some of my male colleagues just sort of say, 'I don't really want the headache. So, I'm going to listen and give it lip service and then I'm just going to kind of ignore it and hope it goes away.' So, I had that experience a lot both coming up as an administrator, working with men as well as my male colleagues who were superintendents. And I really saw it more when I became a superintendent and was watching and had more contact with other supers.

I think part of the key to longevity was something that I just wasn't able to do. And that was to let more things go. And I don't mean hang on to it like I have axe to grind. That's not what I'm talking about. But overlooking things, or ignoring things. And there is a time and a place to ignore, absolutely, but I just, I think that when you have a compass and you hold the line of that compass, because you have to live with yourself, that's already hard enough. And when you're a woman who's doing it, it adds about 10 layers of muck that you have to climb through.

Nancy echoed this sentiment, discussing observed differences at organization meetings and noting double standards for men superintendents. She noted that women have to be very careful not to seem emotional or anything but steady, “yet there are men in that same organization, that their assertiveness, their outspokenness, their craziness is acceptable.” In Nancy’s opinion, the biggest problem with difference in gender experience comes subtly, not overtly:

Because I think there's some...I believe there's implicit biases relative to women, but it doesn't really come out. It's just in a way... If you walk into a room, you'll see the men slapping each other's back and all that kind of stuff. And that hasn't always happened with women.

Interestingly, Nancy also recounted the recent roundtable discussion on gender difference in the superintendency and had similar feelings to Alice:

We had a round table, and there's mixed feelings about it. The women are saying, well, we don't have a problem. The men really respect us. I contend a little bit, that they're not really telling you how they feel. Because would you say that? Would you be willing to say that right then and there?

Those subtler differences are believed to be true by several other participants as well. For example, Amy stated matter-of-factly that, “people don’t always make open, derogatory comments, it's just that this is the old boys club, and look, this isn't changing.” At the same time, she notes,

I think I can be really vulnerable with them [male colleagues], and now that I think about it, I don't...I think they may perceive that as weakness, and I may not want to be that vulnerable with them. It’s that it’s usually the women that are being vulnerable, and I

mean they [male colleagues] certainly have plenty to say about how you should be doing things.

When asked about difference, Julie commented, “I think men have--for the most part--bigger egos. And I just think it's awfully hard for them to admit when they haven't done something well or whatever.” Lilly made a similar statement, contemplating that one difference she notices is that, “the current male group [of superintendents] talks more whether they have anything to say or not. They talk more. And I would say that they're...they, I'm not sure that they are more confident, but they certainly project themselves as quite confident.” She also stated,

I think I see much less ego out there to do with women. And I'm one who doesn't tend to see a lot of differences between them [men and women]. But my first reaction to that is, I don't see it as much with women. I see women being more.... collaborative.

She says this, however, with the caveat that she has male colleagues whom she believes to be highly collaborative and with whom she has strong working relationships. So, for Lilly, as with Alice, statements about difference are general in nature and not a blanket statement about men superintendents, as they both have a lot of respect for many of their male colleagues. Lilly followed up by discussing perception more: “I just wonder, though, because I think often the perception is that no matter what, the men are just better at it whether it's.... whatever it is, men are better at it. Mm hmm. So, no, I guess I'm not as optimistic as I was.” Again, the perception takes precedence over the reality of the individuals. Thinking of an administrator in her own district who has been struggling, Lilly made sure to look at the issue of resilience and gender from all sides:

And so, you know reflecting I would say he's [male administrator in her district] a sensitive person who really took things to heart, and yet he does not completely have that

mental toughness. So maybe not all men have that mental toughness either, right? You know, I mean, I guess I'm stating the obvious there. But you know I think that's important.

Moving more towards the other end of the spectrum, Dorothy, Barbara, and Helen expressed that they feel there are almost no differences in gender in their own experiences. Dorothy started by recalling her own career path and expressing her thoughts on potential gender differences:

Like I said before, I am largely blind to slights regarding gender. Last year, when we were at the national conference in [City and State], the last session I went to ended up being more of a rally. It was about equity and equality and I was like, 'Okay, I'll go to that.' And it ended up, it was way, for my taste, over the top about women in leadership and just the injustice. I'm like, 'Well, I don't really feel that way.' But then again, maybe I just don't see it.

My first administrative position, I was a [position]. That's a male-dominated profession. I was a young woman in that role with a bunch of good old boys, and it was very much a good old boys' network. But I never felt that I was slighted by it, just like I've never felt slighted by the fact that I'm a woman superintendent, because I think, we talked earlier about the network, we're all in this together. I think there are a few exceptions, but overall, I've never really felt that negative aspect.

At this statement, I asked her what she thought those exceptions might be:

The budget committee in particular, it's a good example, is male-dominated, and they're nasty. They're like your classic good-old boys. And they make derogatory comments and insulting comments regularly. And I think they honestly just don't see it in themselves. And it just got to the point where I couldn't deal with it anymore. At some point, my

reaction to their misbehavior was, I can't remember the exact quote they used, but it was something akin to because I was a woman I was offended or something like that.

In discussing the exceptions to gender difference, Dorothy expressed that though she primarily sees little difference herself, there are issues around being a woman and discussing difference as well:

I think it's dangerous to be, you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't. If you're viewed as someone who's very feminist and very much, 'I'm going to right all of the injustices over time,' I think that that can be a negative, but people are passionate about that, so for me that would be a negative. But to be oblivious to the fact that it exists, also not a good strategy. So, there's somewhere maybe in between to be.

But I think I tend to be a glass-half-full person most of the time. So, sometimes people point things out to me and say, 'Well, that wouldn't happen if you were a man.'

And I don't see it, because I just don't look for it. You know what I mean?

Barbara told a similar story about her budget committee, stating that it was likely the notable gender issue she had come across professionally, where she largely did not come across them. She stated much of the issue had to do with the transition from her older white male predecessor to her, "When I went to budget meetings as his assistant, they'd asked him a couple questions, no problem. My first two years, I was drilled night after night about the budget." Helen expressed similar feelings, where she herself feels little gender difference in her experience, though acknowledges that it can, at times, exist:

If I'm faced with a challenge, the first place I go is not, 'Well, is this happening because I'm a woman?' It's not my first place to go, so I think it really has to be, for me, almost

egregious before I will go there and say, 'Is this happening because I'm a woman?' But there are two examples that I can cite for you.

In 10 years I only can probably give you two examples ...one is with a male principal who gave me pushback all the time, and I'm absolutely convinced. I talked to my mentor. I talked to my husband. I talked to other males about it... obviously, your husband, you hope he's going to stand up for you, but I talked to three or four different people in different professions, in different walks of life, and their reaction was all the same, that if you were a man, he wouldn't be doing this. He wouldn't be dismissing you this way. The second example was with a hiring committee. [hiring committee example in the *navigating the gatekeepers* section]

Because she became a superintendent more than ten years ago, Helen states that, "most of [her] role models were male, but the people that [she] went to and asked for advice and bounced ideas off were very open. They weren't closed-minded in terms of, 'You're a girl. You can't do this.'" She said it never crossed her mind that any gender difference would matter in her ability to become a superintendent and to be a good one.

Since the above responses were so varied in extremes, I followed this topic up in member checking, asking participants themselves what they thought of the spectrum of experiences. These member checking responses were similarly polarized. Those who believed strongly in gender difference stated they believed that women who said it was not an issue were acting out of fear of losing acceptance in a male-dominated role that they fought hard to achieve. There were also sentiments that women may be afraid to discuss gender differences in groups because they do not want to be perceived as "being like that," an anti-feminist concern, or being vulnerable, something dangerous in a superintendent. On the other hand, several member

checking responses stated that nobody has the right to question someone else's experience, so if someone said they do not see difference, then that should be accepted as truth. There was also a response stating that there could be danger in "looking for it" too much. It is notable from a research perspective that on both ends of the spectrum, the word "danger" was used by participants. This is clearly a sensitive topic that may benefit from further exploration.

Overt Sexism.

While perception and subtle difference was discussed when contemplating gender difference, several participants noted more blatant examples of actual outright sexism that they have experienced, though these are less frequent.

One of the commonalities for this overt sexism lies in the word, "bitch," which participants often referred to as an offensive gender obstacle, in some cases very specifically:

Brenda: I got a call from a parent whose daughter had done something really inappropriate; it was a high school student. He called me and I listened to him, we had a conversation, I ultimately said, 'You know, I appreciate the conversation, however, she still did what she did. It wasn't okay.' So, he ended with, 'You're such a fucking bitch.' So, you know that no male would have ever been called something like that. And I just paused for a moment and I said, 'Well, it sounds like the time for this conversation to be over. I appreciate your time. If you would like to speak respectfully to me, I'll be happy to talk with you again. I hope you have a wonderful afternoon.' And I hung up quietly. He was expecting a tantrum and I wasn't going to feed that. Things like that actually happened fairly frequently. So, my gender became an issue when someone got mad and I needed to respond. Like it was suddenly me being a bitch, or power hungry.

Alice: [on having difficulty with a directive to a male staff member in her office]

SL: What would happen if you give him the directive? What do you think the reaction would be?

Alice: Oh, I would get 50 excuses about how ‘I don't understand,’ and then, you know, ‘You're a bitch.’ Excuse my language. The things people say... ‘She's just a bitch,’ and, ‘She's just getting rid of them because she wants to put a woman in that position,’ and I'm thinking, ‘If you only knew what had actually happened.’

Alice also referenced the superintendent of the year ceremony as a blatant example of the sexism in the profession. She said, “You know what they give them as a prize up there? A blue blazer, a symbol of the old boys club.” Nancy also relayed a story about when she was an assistant superintendent and she and her superintendent went to a local community group to start forming some solid community relationships. She said, “I was in [name of group], nominated by my superintendent at a meeting when the members voted not to allow women in the [organization]. I had to walk out of the meeting with my superintendent. He was furious. They voted not to have women.” Not only was this overt sexism but was also clearly going to be an obstacle for her as a superintendent, since working with the community is essential.

At her local level, Amy recalled a time when her district was being presented with an award, and a leader in government came to participate in the ceremony:

He marched right up to the man to my left [a principal in her district] and reached out and took his hand. My principal said, ‘Oh no, no that's not me. This is the boss’ [pointing to Amy], and I was like, so nice to meet you, asshole. Yeah. Really. That was one of the moments when I thought, Wow. Yeah.

Dorothy, starting her first superintendency, was expected to overlap via a transition period with the outgoing superintendent. When she arrived, the outgoing male superintendent was still completely set up in the office; he pointed to a desk in the reception area and said to her,

‘That’s for you.’ And I’m like, ‘Okay...’ I was going to get along to go along. Go along to get along, right? So, I sat there and he would...he treated me like a child at best. At worst, he would, on a couple of occasions, ream me out. I don’t take that crap. I’m like, ‘Okay, I can’t.’ What I was worried about is the optics, what people were seeing. I eventually called the board chair and said I would come back when he [outgoing superintendent] was gone, but that I wouldn’t be returning until that happened. They had him leave, so then I got started.

Lilly said it was mainly her instinct she listened to more than anything, and she described those feelings about a time she was confronted with a complication that she felt pertained to gender:

And it’s just, it’s just a vibe that I get. Yeah. And I think that’s what it is a lot with men who are like that. You know, you can’t necessarily quantify it. You can’t even describe it, right? But you can feel it. It’s sort of like the definition of obscenity--you know when you see it. Yeah. You know it when you feel angry, and I feel it with him, too [referring to a local government official]. But I think when you have a conversation with him, his conversational style with women, I think, is rather dismissive.

With a similar reliance on feeling and instinct, Julie conveyed the following conversation she had with her board chair at the end of her first year as a superintendent:

Julie: At the end of my first year as Superintendent the chair and the vice chair convinced the board that I should be given a three-thousand dollar bonus that wasn’t added to the bottom line. It was outright, and what they said is, ‘Julie, you

did it!’ And I’m like, ‘Of course I did it. Why wouldn’t I? I mean—I’m driven to do it!’ But I mean I was being given this three-thousand dollar bonus for having done it. And I would say having done it as a woman--not just having done it.

SL: So, do you think they would have given that bonus to a man?

Julie: No. So that further differentiated that people were wondering, can she pull it off?

Felicity was starting her career as a superintendent at a similar time as Julie, and she discussed the various ways she was treated by men around her. At a building project meeting, for example, she was often in the position of meeting with tradespeople and their representatives. At one meeting, she said, “a union lawyer once walked into a negotiating room, and said, ‘Good afternoon, gentlemen. And you.’ That immediately put her leadership position and authority in jeopardy for that meeting. Thinking of a different relationship, she said that one of her board members was originally tough on her and then grew to be supportive, “but this is also the guy who would still print off blonde hooters kind of jokes off the internet and bring them into me with a soda and say, ‘I was just thinking about you.’” This was one of the things she just ignored to preserve the relationship at that time. She recalled that one of her biggest moments encountering a gender obstacle was during her first interview for her first superintendency:

In my interview in [Local District], they had all been set up by the consultants, and what they could and couldn’t ask—even back then. And yet one guy who ended up on the school board said to me, ‘So, our current superintendent is kind of a bully and that’s what you need to be here.’ He said, ‘I don’t see a woman being able to do this job. How can you convince me that you—as a woman—and you’re a young woman—how can you convince me that you could do this job? This is a tough job.’ And so I said, ‘I think you’ve probably been told that that’s not a good question to be asking.’ Then he said, ‘No

shit, but I still want to know, do you have the balls?’ I said, ‘Yes, oh yes, I have the balls, and I have a firm grasp of other people's balls when I need to. I'm not afraid to squeeze.’

He was like, ‘No shit!’ And then I got the job.

This last story serves as a good example of another category that revealed itself to specifically be a gender related, that of navigating the gatekeepers.

Navigating the gatekeepers.

In many cases, women’s access to the superintendency lies in the gatekeepers—the school board, other superintendents, and search consultants. Participants revealed both positive and negative experiences with these gatekeepers, suggesting that this is truly an area where initial access to this position can be either fostered or hindered. Compensation and negotiation also come into play in this arena, as these are customarily factors in the hiring process.

Continuing with Felicity, she did get the job offer and then had to go through contract negotiations:

Felicity: I didn't really negotiate.... this was just the work I wanted to do and the kind of District I wanted to be in, so it was more about the fit than about the money. I did, however, get hired for about \$15,000 less than the superintendent before me.

SL: Did you think that had anything to do with you being a woman?

Felicity: Yes, I think so. I think men have the egos they need to negotiate—I’m not sure if women do—we tend to think of other things.

Negotiation was also something that Lilly chose not to do:

When I assumed this role, I assumed it forty thousand dollars less than the former superintendent. Now granted, he had a lot more experience than I did and he had been here for, I think, [number] years by the time he left. So. But. I do think... and when I was

told my salary, the school board chair said, 'Is that OK with you?' And I was not going to start out on a footing with the school board where I started wrangling about salary. I just didn't think that was a good idea. I think perhaps if I were male there would've been a higher salary offer. And the other thing is perhaps if I were a male I would negotiate, and I think there's research on that.

Lilly's initial application and hiring process also factored into her navigating access and opportunity. She said it was her former superintendent, a man, who convinced her that it was time for her to take on the lead position. She said, "He's [her former superintendent] the one that inspired me, he said, 'You should be thinking about this. You should be in this type of job.' It wasn't me that initially thought that." I asked if she had gone through a search process or if she was promoted internally into the position; she said she had gone through the full search process and felt this about it:

I was happy about that process because I felt like that legitimized hiring, you know, rather than saying, 'Oh we're just going to appoint Lilly, right?' I guess as a pro if they'd done it that way you could say, well they were so confident that they just knew that I was the right person, or you could say well, it's better because they looked—they did a large search and looked and still felt that I was the right person. So, I felt good about the search piece of it. Really good.

In her first months in the position, her next gate to go through was with one particular board member. Lilly believes that, "anytime you come into a new position you have to prove yourself. With him [a board member] it was just a little bit more obvious that he was testing...and not always in the nicest of ways." She said she has proved herself and that board member became an ally.

Julie, Amy, and Barbara all had very supportive gatekeepers. In Julie's case, she was an assistant superintendent when her superintendent walked into her office and said, "Are you interested in the superintendency?" Julie replied, "I am," and then her boss said to her, "I'm going to take out the chair and the vice chair of the board for lunch and I'm going to talk about your candidacy. You're still going to have to interview, but I will pave the way." And that was her entry into the position. Amy said her board repeatedly asked her to take the position, as she had been in the district for many years and they already had faith in her. She turned them down several times, but then recognized that the people they hired were not lasting and the pool of applicants was very shallow. She finally agreed, and was able to enter the position with the confidence that she was their choice and she was ready to move into that role for the sake of the district. Barbara said she was in the assistant superintendent role when she was offered the position, remembering, "the school board approached me and said, 'Listen, the superintendent recommends you for this job. Do you want it?' And I was like, 'Okay.' I didn't think I was prepared to do it, but I thought, if they think I can do it, I have to trust that they see me as capable." Barbara also did not negotiate for salary, stating she felt it is "humbling in the sense that what I do make when you're the top paid employer in the entire district."

Brenda said her experience was that gender played a major role in the hiring process, particularly with the full search process:

Yeah, there definitely was [a search process]. I went through a lot of interview processes, and frequently men who were less qualified and less educated got the job. So that's an indicator. It's not a shoe-in, because there's also personal fit. So, that's fine. But the district where I ended up working, before I even started there, I actually had a board member talk to our local newspaper and say that she had voted against me because, 'This

girl was not experienced,' Yeah, "this girl." When you have people saying things like that, and that carried through my tenure there, not only from that particular individual board member, who distinctly treated women differently than the males in our employ, but also in the community. It was pretty apparent.

When deciding to leave that district, Brenda said it had to do with that constant pushback. She recalled, "I wasn't enjoying the district, this is not fitting me anymore, and the money is not what this is about. I mean, it wasn't great money, but it wasn't horrible. It's just not worth the constant abuse."

In Mary's case, she did not go through a search process and was appointed to all three of her superintendencies. She surmised that this may be a factor in some of the community resistance she was feeling currently:

In this situation, I was again appointed as an interim and the board decided within [length of time] to appoint me permanently, and then gave me a [length of time] contract with no process in the community, so I think that circumstance was really sort of the spark that has catalyzed a lot of the feelings from some people that are so visceral, that we were promised X and then this person was just sort of planted. So that's different than when you are sort of the "golden choice." You get a honeymoon period, right? I don't have that.

In this case, Mary feels as if the search process would have helped her, whereas the board was acting out of their complete faith in her; it is clear the board gave her their support, but that did not automatically guarantee support from others and left her open to suspicion. Alice was also promoted from within her district and their first woman, which she feels helped to establish herself with more solidity:

SL: So, you're the first women superintendent here?

Alice: In the district's history.

SL: In the district's history, which is exciting.

Alice: Yeah. No, not only that, but I hired a female assistant superintendent. I

think I was their first female assistant superintendent, too, so yeah. I was the first woman who did both... And that was interesting. I didn't realize it, but the board realized it, and that was something they are very proud of.

Alice said that she did not negotiate much for her first starting salary, but she was recently given a significant raise by the board without requesting it. This has caused her anxiety:

Alice: I was surprised. A little concerned, which I shouldn't have said out loud, but I did.

I said to the Board, 'I'm a little concerned. That's a really big raise.'

SL: Worried about community reaction?

Alice: Hm mm...Community reaction... and then they said, 'Well we don't care. That's

our job to deal with that,' but then the board chair came back later and said,

'Well, maybe we should do something else,' and I'm like, 'Whoa.' So that was

really interesting, and I remember thinking, 'Would that have happened if ... I was

a man and this was it? But, on the other hand, if I was a man, would I have even

processed that like, 'Oh, community reaction...' Are these things I'd be worried

about? Because maybe they [men] don't have that same self-preservation, because

at the end of the day, the community's reaction was, for me, about self-

preservation, about not wanting people to be at deliberative session saying, 'Why

does she make so much damn money?'

The other aspect of gatekeeping that Alice discussed was that of recruitment, and her surprise at who gets recruitment calls and who does not:

Any time I've gotten a direct recruit call, I'm always surprised at the districts that are calling. They're always smaller than I'm presently managing with less of a budget and they're usually not considered as desirable. I've also been surprised at calls that I haven't gotten where I look at the job geographically, based on the work I've done here, and my background and qualifications, and I watch people be recruited through like a golf game with the board chair, and thought, 'Wow. I was a really good fit for that job and no one even picked up the phone,' and that's okay because I'm really happy here, generally speaking, but that has been really interesting for me to watch ... and a little bit insulting and offensive, and I think sometimes, like, you hired that guy? Okay, wait a second. I've been in conversations with that person and I know they don't jack about X, Y, and Z and right now, you need X, Y, and Z in your district' It's just really an interesting piece.

Again, in this case, the gatekeepers and their particular biases may influence the flow of women into the superintendency.

Dorothy and Helen both went through search processes and also were the only two participants who said they formally negotiated for their starting salary and contract. Dorothy reflected on this experience:

SL: When you were going through the search process, did you feel gender had any power in that process at all? Any influence?

Dorothy: No, I don't think so. I think it was ... No, I don't think it had any influence. I think it was noticeable, but I don't think it had an influence. It's a male-dominated field, so what does that mean? It means that there are fewer jobs

for women in this particular role. That in some cases it can be harder for a woman to get the role if there is a man. And so, if you're a board and you want somebody there at your beck and call, are you going to pick somebody who's going to say, 'Well, no. I have other responsibilities'? But I think there's a way to present those responsibilities that doesn't make it look as if you're weak.

SL: And when you were going through the process and they offered you the job, did you negotiate for salary?

Dorothy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

SL: You did? OK. You're actually the first person who said yes to that.

Dorothy: Oh, wow. Really?

SL: Yeah.

Dorothy: Yeah. It was a long couple of hours, because it was non-public session.

I think it was a two and a half hour session. But I got what I wanted.

Though Dorothy is admittedly a woman superintendent who does not see gender as a roadblock, her response also suggests that she knows there are approaches to gender that open the gates for women. Her comment about not appearing "weak" speaks to this, and her need to assure the board that her family will not get in the way of her job. Helen went through a similar search process for two superintendencies at the same time; the board interview process for one of the districts was one of the two instances where she felt that gender was an issue:

There were questions about, 'Are you sure you're ready to take this on? Do you understand the dynamics that happen between the board and the town? You're going to have to mitigate some of this. Are you up for that kind of a challenge?' It wasn't overt, but it felt a little bit like, 'Can you really handle this?' It felt that way, 'Can you really

handle this?' As I said, it clearly was not stated, but can you ... I'm not sure, had I been male, if that question would have even come up. I just felt that way.

Helen was also the other participants who had negotiated for her salary. She recalled, "We landed in the middle at [dollar amount], but I said I was not taking it for a penny under that, and I was ready to walk. They agreed to that." She also felt that these two interviews were a good indication of the importance of fit as well, no matter the reason. Her words of advice on this were, "You interview your community as much as that community is interviewing you, and if you feel that it's not a match, remember the work is too important, and you need to walk away—there will always be another opportunity."

Nancy had a critical time in her career where she needed to find that other opportunity:

Nancy: Talk about resilience. I was not selected as a superintendent [in her own district] and they selected somebody else from another town. It was, again, very political.

SL: Do you think these things happen because of gender?

Nancy: Politics and gender. I've had such a long tenure, and I've seen what's happened over time in these positions—who gets them and why, and it always seemed that the school boards were comfortable with a man in charge. Now, whether they admit that or not is a different story.

While these experiences and stories reveal both positive and negative aspects of gatekeepers, the information itself suggests the importance of these roles in opening the door for women into the superintendency. During gatekeeping as well as when the position is attained, the perceptions of superintendent job responsibilities are likely influenced by gender.

Perceptions of job responsibilities.

Perception of the job responsibilities of the superintendency are undoubtedly influenced by gender, as it would likely be for any traditionally male-dominated profession. When a culture perceives an image of that position, changing that perception is often the most difficult task. Just as Mary wondered if things would be different if she “came in a different package,” so do other participants when thinking of how they’re perceived by others as a woman in the superintendency. Some of participants’ general thoughts on this are presented here:

Julie: And I just thought, I'm up against what I perceived to be some odds. I had come out of a curriculum background, curriculum and instruction, and he [her predecessor] was all about bricks and mortar and budgets and law and politics. I perceived that some people would say curriculum and instruction is soft and the law politics and budget are strong or hard or whatever. So, in other words I realized I was up against, perception-wise, some odds. I think it was all right for a woman to be an elementary assistant principal or an elementary principal...middle school may be a question. But the minute I got to central office, I was the first. So, I think people questioned, can she do it?

Lilly: I think there were certain board members that maybe wondered whether a woman could lead the district. One of them came on the board later--he was off the board during the period of time when I was hired so he really didn't have a say in who was hired--and I was here when he came back on the board. He's an older gentleman, and I would say he really put me through my paces the first, probably, two years.

Felicity: I think being a woman -- and being a very strong woman--I think I surprised people a lot. They didn't expect me to be so strong or to be able to manage something like.... a construction project, or a 30 million dollar budget. Or negotiating with seven

unions. One year it was all seven. It was fun to blow people's expectations out of the water.

These responses align with current literature in that there are two trajectories converging: one path of women entering a male-dominated profession, and another path of the changing role of the superintendency itself from business manager to learning leader.

Two participants specifically brought up the perception of job responsibilities in relationship to stereotypical personal responsibilities for men and women, particularly in terms of parenting:

Alice: Well, and I look and I hear about my male counterparts doing this, going here, and participating in all these levels of our association. I'm like, 'How do you find the time to do that?' I mean there's that whole 'I'm a mom, too.' And this is actually a funny story. So, I was out discussing some things, we were just having a discussion, and I was like, 'Who do you have do that?', and someone said, 'My wife.' I was like, 'Oh, well how do you balance this?' and, 'Oh, my wife does that.' Then someone says, 'Well who does it for you?', and I look at them and I say, 'I'm the wife,' you know, and I still do it. All of it.'

Julie: I think it just now has something to do with balance probably. And we talked about the significance of a woman usually who is kind of the master of it all. I mean just the scheduler, the organizer, planner for the most part, right? And I think I really feel for a woman who is a mother. I mean, I wondered to myself, would I have gone this route if I had had a child or children?

Other than these comments, none of the participants indicated that their role as a mother, or not as a mother, influenced their experiences in apply to or becoming superintendents. And only

Julie's comment above suggests speculation around the hypothetical influence motherhood might have had on her decision to become a superintendent. More thoughts on how to shift these larger cultural perceptions of job responsibilities and gender are listed in the "Thoughts for the Future" section.

Handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment

A significant area of common alignment among participants, regardless of their opinions on difference in gender obstacles overall, is that of women superintendents' unique subjection to harsher judgment than their male counterparts. In many cases, this judgement comes from the backlash of a difficult decision or situation, but often it is the result of recovering from a mistake—sometimes their own mistake but more often the mistake of another employee for whom they are responsible. This added layer of difficulty is a critical dynamic in the need for resilience, as recovery is inherently part of coming back from error.

Mary believes that she has been judged more harshly due to her gender, specifically in a recent situation where she received a lot of community criticism:

Mary: I asked myself a lot, 'If I was a man—an older man or even if I was an older woman—would that be seen as strength or would that be seen as, you know, I think, you know, a young, aggressive, driven leader, right?

SL: Do you think there was harsher judgment because of being a young female superintendent?

Mary: Oh, without a doubt, and I think I kind of mentioned that before, just following the gentleman, I mean they were older, you know, and on the verge of retirement, or they had been here a long time. One hundred percent.

SL: What were some of the reactions?

Mary: I took a strong stance and it was taken as, 'How dare she.' And I have no doubt if I was if I was male and older that wouldn't have happened. I just don't believe that it would have been given the same type of visceral reaction.

Brenda had a similar situation in which she had to make a very controversial and very difficult public decision. She began this memory with a preface of, "It was very evident on several occasions that my being a woman just was making it harder to do my job." In this situation, she had to terminate contracts of two very well liked male employees and it was very public. Her reflections on the reactions to her decision made a correlation to women and harsher judgment:

I terminated them, and I actually had a school board member, who considered herself quite a feminist, tell me that that was just emasculating. Well, would you ever say that to a male superintendent who had just terminated [positions]? No, that would have been taking a strong stand. So, it just, like those kinds of things happen all the time.

At a different superintendency, Brenda said it became clear that she would be the one to suffer judgment regardless of what mistakes others had made:

So, I started getting accused of mismanagement, and that it was a leadership problem, and at the same time, I had another administrator who was not supervising her staff, and a child could have died because of it, like "this close". So, all of this stuff started happening all at once, and I wasn't getting backed. And it was really clear that I was going to become the sacrificial lamb if somebody made a stink or if someone got hurt, I was going to be the one who pay for it. I know that could happen to a male superintendent, too, but I think this is just something that happens to women more.

Alice's experiences are expressed with similar considerations:

I think that being a ... I think that sometimes as a women superintendent, the reaction to you is different from everybody: from your staff, or at least it appears that way. I've never been a male superintendent, so I don't really know what their experience is like, but it appears that the staff's reaction to you, the community's reaction to you, the way you interact with the board, those are all different. I was recently publicly reprimanded by a colleague, and there was definitely a piece of me that wondered, 'Would he have done it if it was ... I don't know, say ... [Name of Male Superintendent]'?

And I hear people criticizing women superintendents all the time, and it almost always has to do with a time that they took a stand on something. [On a recent situation with a local superintendent:] People say things like, 'She should've been more sympathetic to the situation because she's a woman. She should have been ...' you know. And 'How dare she speak back?' When I saw that superintendent stand up for herself, I was proud of her. We all need to do that so it becomes accepted.

This last comment brings up the concept of breaking the vicious cycle of perceptual gender bias, in that both women leaders and the public have work to do to make it stop, which is also considered by Amy. The following conversation with Amy indicates that the judgment is taxing not just because of gender but because it quickly becomes personal as well.

Amy: Yeah. I was upset and it was...I wanted to scream from the rooftop. 'What do you think I gain from this?!' I don't know what possible gain could I have. Why would we want this to happen? It was just such a personal attack. That's what...that's what's hard. It's just when it's personal.

SL: Do you think that the same kind of personal attacks would have happened if you were a male?

Amy: It's a good question. No. I wonder if I took more than a man would have taken. I try to hold myself to a high standard; I try not to get into the weeds; I try...I never respond to social media. I just try to just ignore that and I...and I wonder if a man would have stood up and, you know, been a louder voice and been more defensive. I think about that—like should I have? You know, I didn't. I followed the advice of both attorneys and people that I respected. But in hindsight, should I have stood up and been stronger and said, 'Look...' you know, but I didn't. I'm sure people think I'm a stupid woman, or you know, she doesn't know what she's doing or what she's talking about.

Nancy recounted her own experience with this as well as the experience of a young woman administrator in her district.

Nancy: So, as I think about our discussion this morning about my current situation, that was one of the other things that I think is part of it. I think that in terms of women in the leadership role, I've heard people say, 'That would never happen if a man was in charge.' So I think about that with what happened with me. I ask myself, 'Would it have been different if I were a man?' My husband says yes.

SL: Do you think so?

Nancy: I do think so. Having interviewed, having been around, having seen storms through... I don't know, I think so. I think there's just enough difference. Take this situation with this [women administrator in her district]. She was assertive, she spoke her mind, the principal [male] couldn't control her. She had to keep her mouth shut even though she was totally in the right. And she was the one who was judged, not him.

Julie and Lilly experienced this judgment after mistakes and then proactively worked to create a culture in which mistakes were perceived in more beneficial ways. Julie said,

When I made a mistake—of which there were many—I owned it immediately. I don't believe in blame. This taught me to go slow to go fast, and be very deliberative about what you're doing. And when I began to hear the tom-toms beating, I knew to get ready.

Lilly is working on a similar approach with her administrative team by setting up a culture where mistakes were perceived differently for all:

We're sort of setting up a culture that we don't judge each other harshly for mistakes...that we support each other through mistakes and try to learn from them and not repeat them, right? But mistakes are inevitable--they're inevitable. Yeah, everyone is going to make them.

As discussed in the section on gender difference, both Helen and Dorothy leaned towards not believing there is a difference and that women should not look for one. In the instance of harsher judgment, however, they both agreed that there is an element of bias there.

Helen: Early on in my tenure, and I don't know if it was...I was being tested, but I was getting over a bad incident. As I said, I don't typically go to gender first. I go to, 'Well, maybe it was my lack of experience,' but in retrospect ... and this was with the board chair. In retrospect, I'm not sure if he would have done the same thing with a male superintendent. I definitely took more criticism.

Dorothy: [on gender difference] It's just not, it's like color blind people, I just don't see the color blue or green. I'm more like color blind when it comes to gender. But your question about being judged more harshly for your mistakes, I think that makes sense. It makes sense.

From all participant responses, the concept of harsher judgment for women is a gender obstacle, and other thoughts on improving this and other aspects of women in the superintendency follow in the final section.

Final Common Questions

In each interview, three common questions were asked of all participants. They are:

1. If you could have a “do-over” in your life as a woman superintendent, what would it be?
2. What advice would you give to a young woman administrator thinking about going into the superintendency?
3. What are your thoughts for the future of women in the superintendency?

Since all participants answered these questions, all answers are presented here in alphabetical order. Any participant responses not here were omitted due to potential breach of confidentiality.

Do-overs.

If you could have a “do-over” in your life as a woman superintendent, what would it be?

Alice: I think I would have been more strategic about my partners and more strategic about who I said what to when, and how I developed relationships with people... I don't think I would've been as trusting with some of my colleagues as I have been. I would've probably held back a little more. Again, not because I have any problem with them being uncomfortable with my truth, but ... in some cases, I think because I've spoken loud enough often enough, it's easier for them to dismiss it, particularly since not everyone is willing to say, 'This doesn't work for me,' and, 'This is the truth and you just don't want to hear it.' So, when you're sometimes the only person, that makes it hard.

Brenda: I think I'd say maybe don't do it – I'd stay in the Assistant Superintendent role, where I was doing the work that I was really passionate about.

Dorothy: So, when I was coming on board, the board thought it was a great idea to have an overlap with [Outgoing Superintendent] and I, I'm like, 'Whatever.' Little did I know...I kid you not, my do-over would have been to tell the board, 'No thanks. I'd rather come in cold.' So that would be my do-over, I would have been a little more assertive from the beginning about what's appropriate and what's not.

Helen: I guess, if I had one do-over, I would have started a student advisory council to the superintendent because I was a high school principal and I had a student advisory council as a high school principal, but I've lost that student voice inside me. I really would have liked to have maybe, even if I did it quarterly, have a council that I could have gotten together with and to be, 'What issues have you seen? What can you do about it? What can I do about it?' That's what I probably ... if I had a regret, that would probably be it.

Felicity: I would have left work at work. It's something I always had trouble doing and that's what I would do differently if I could.

Julie: So, if I could do...if I could go back and do it over again, I would be much better about declared time. I just think it just...it was just always present and like on a weekend in order to get ready for Monday I would just feel like I had to do work in order to get ready for it.

Lilly: If I had more time, there are certainly more things I would've been able to do with my kids. I can't imagine anyone not saying that, right? You know, as any professional, I think, probably with a demanding job would say the same thing.

Nancy: I probably ask myself that all the time. What would I do differently? That would ease some of the pain, right? Because it's difficult. So, you ask yourself all that, all the time. I guess I would say that I would continue at a higher rate of development, fostering those relationships. I think as much as you think you have them, I'm never sure you do. And so maybe the do-over is to improve that area. Although that's a big part of what I do every day. But maybe that's part of it. I don't know. I'm not sure I can answer that question. I know when I think about the difficult situations, what would I do differently? [long pause] I know one thing, when I was younger, I would have been a little bit more assertive. I remember when I started out my career, it was all men. It was all men. And you sort of had to follow...I had to play the game, and I wish I could have broken out of that game earlier. I guess that's what I would say. I wish that as a younger woman, with support however, I'd been able to get in the game a little bit sooner.

Advice.

What advice would you give to a young woman administrator thinking about going into the superintendency?

Alice: You're going to have to work harder. You're going to have to lay groundwork that other people haven't had to lay. Make it easier for the next woman coming down the line. Stay mission-focused, because if you get sucked into all of the other stuff, the politics of the job, it'll eat you up.

I think part of my responsibility as the first women superintendent in this district is to say, 'Hey, this is why this job is really hard, and being a woman makes it a little

harder, so here are the things you need to be prepared for, and here are the things that I can lay the groundwork for you so it's not as hard.'

Amy: To know that that she can do it. Absolutely. And there is...no there should be no barriers to that. And encourage her to reach out and form a support group. Whatever that looks like. What's going to help? Well, definitely believing in yourself.

Barbara: Do it. Do it but be strong. You can't be wimpy in these jobs. And I've met some people who want to be superintendents as females and I'm like, 'You just have to have the personality. You can't be that second grade teacher.' And I always suggest to people be like, an assistant superintendent. Be in central office first because you do get a good feeling. I mean, going from building level to superintendent is very challenging because there's so many dynamics that happen at an SAU office and so many things that you don't recognize by being in a building. But I would say, absolutely, do it.

Brenda: Think about why you really want to do it and if it's all worth it. What's your passion and will this role fulfill that passion? Is there a different role that will do that for you? If not, then go for it, but be prepared for the things it will do to you.

Dorothy: Have a network. Don't try to do it all on your own; reach out to your colleagues, use your colleagues. I don't know that all states have the great networks that we do. And even those that do, the bigger states I'm sure it's a lot harder, maybe. But to really depend on other professionals, women professionals in the same role. Have a balance. And don't live here. Go home. And I think that the other piece of advice I would give is to don't tolerate it if you do come up against it [on gender discrimination].

Helen: Although it's difficult, you have to move across your threshold, whether it's seven o'clock at night or at midnight, whenever you cross that threshold, do your absolute best to leave that behind and focus in on your own family and the needs that are there.

Felicity: I would tell her to just do it. Be bold and just do it. It's the greatest job in the world.

Julie: I would tell her it's probably on its best day the most exhilarating position that you can have in the field of education because of the influence that you can have and the impact that you can make within a school district. This economy of scale. It's just bigger, broader, and better than any position I've had.

If I thought that any of the women who had been on my leadership team would say that this [the superintendency] is not attainable, I would probably put my head in the [Local] River because it would be so unlike what I think I was saying or offering...that would just be my undoing.

I would suggest to perk up your desk or whatever you have, and have a drawer what I call [what she named her drawer]. And within that drawer I put every note that I've ever gotten from a student, teacher, parent or whatever. And on the day when things are going south, I simply hold open the drawer a little, see it, shut it safe, and remember.

Lilly: Find a good mentor. That would be number one. Find help. Evaluate why you want to do it. Make sure that it's something that is going to give that person purpose and be meaningful to them. Make sure you have a supportive spouse or partner—make sure they're supportive, that is important, and find something that you can do for yourself to keep you in balance and to relieve stress, because you will have stress.

Mary: Wait. I'd tell them to wait. This job is not the same job it was 15 years ago when you could stay in a position for 15 years and 20 years or be a superintendent for twenty five years. And you know a lot of my colleagues who are young superintendents now, we look ahead like, I look ahead 20 years, and I think to myself...that's a good time to have the will and the strength to do and endure some of the things daily that you have to do in this job now. And so I would say wait. Enjoy the best job in the world, which is the number two spot, and if possible work for someone who will empower you.

It's always easier to become a superintendent in a place you've been for a while. Moving from number two to number one is so much better than going into a new community as a stranger and having everybody wondering, and having to build trust from ground zero, right? So, I would also recommend that you find a great community, be a number two, and move your way into the front office.

Nancy: Grab it, take the risks. Don't be afraid of it. I guess that would be it. And find the support systems that you need, because it's going to be a rocky road every week. I mean, I don't know what the rest of your week's going to be like, but I'm sure something is going to come up, right? And I'm sure something's going to come up with me. That's what I'm saying. And it's stressful, and it's tension, and there's anxiety around it. So, surround yourself with support systems, whatever that might look like. Good friends, partners, husbands, colleagues, people that you can trust.

Thoughts for the future.

What are your thoughts for the future of women in the superintendency?

Alice: Injustice comes in lots of shapes and sizes, and at the end of the day, someone can say, 'Well, it's different if it's this type of injustice or this type of injustice,' but in my mind, if we don't call those injustices out, then we perpetuate them, and not necessarily for ourselves or for the women behind us, but for anybody.

I would like to say that it's going to get better, but I actually feel, and I don't know if this is because I'm just ... Like I said, I didn't see the glass ceiling until my head hit it. I actually think, or it feels to me it's actually gotten worse, and I don't know if that's because I'm older so I'm more cognizant of what's going on, or if the political climate right now has made it worse, but the job keeps getting harder. I think if you looked at how many assistant superintendents are women and they're actually choosing not to go into the job, they're saying, 'Yeah, I'm good where I am.'

Amy: I think things may be changing because of the number of women that are...that are feeling more comfortable that they don't want children. You know, I hear it's...I think we're moving further and further away from women feeling like their purpose in life is to get married and have babies. So maybe there's hope, in that women are stronger and women are, you know, not entering into traditional marriages and expecting if they are married...they're expecting more typically from their partner, and I would encourage them to do so because if you get caught in that trap of being the primary care caregiver for the family, then you can't devote the number of hours you need to this job, right?

Barbara: I think we need to work hard to get more women involved. When I started as a superintendent, I was one of five superintendents that were female. I mean, it was a small number. And then we saw that grow. So actually, even in the [regional]group, four years ago, five years ago, it was almost all females. We had a huge female contingency of

superintendents and it has swapped over to almost all men. You go to the meetings, and it seems like all the faces that I don't know, new superintendents are all men, which is interesting. I think a lot of women are intimidated by these positions. They think, 'I can't do that.' And it's like, 'You can.' We need to convince them.

Brenda: There are so many factors that play into it that it's difficult to imagine. Given the national stage and how our presidential issues and campaigns are negatively influencing all gender issues, it will be more important for women to continue down this road, but that also means it will be a harder road to travel.

Dorothy: I think that in general the future of the superintendency, in general, I weep for the future, I fear for the future, because what happened to [Local Women Superintendent], what happened to [Another Local Women Superintendent], I don't think that had anything to do with their genders, it's just sort of one bad decision, whether you're male or female, can take you out at the knees.

Helen: She [her Assistant Superintendent] said to me, 'No way I want to do what you do.' Now, I guess that's good...that she could get that out, but I said, 'Can you tell me why you don't want to do it?' She said, 'The job is miserable.' For the last six months, I've been talking to her about the joys of the position. It's not all misery unless you allow yourself to be down on everything. It's just like life, right?

I don't know if that's part of it, if they feel that their families would suffer if they took on these roles. Then I think about that. Does that really deter women from becoming lawyers and corporate law firms? I don't know that it does. Does that deter women from becoming physicians, who also have crazy hours? I don't know that it does. But I think the difference is that if you become a lawyer, you probably haven't spent 15 or 20 years

watching someone else do that job and say, 'I want no part of it.' I think we have to look in general and consider, 'What do *we* say?' I made it a point that when I go into school, people would say, 'I never would want your job.' I respond, 'I've got the greatest job ever.' And I think it's in that messaging, right? Because you say, 'Oh, my goodness. I'm exhausted. I've been out three nights, four nights, in a row. I've got the finance committee breathing down my neck. I've got another board meeting. God ... '. I think it's all in the messaging. I don't know how but we need to tell current leaders to look on the sunny side of the street.

Felicity: I hope it continues to climb, but I think we're in a decline in New Hampshire, right? We'll see.

Julie: I would hope that more would seek this position. I would hope that through efforts like what New Hampshire is doing with the GSL [Granite State Leadership], that that would begin to open up avenues for people to pursue it so that they could engage with those who have been in the world and say to themselves, 'Oh, I want it,' you know... almost like solid marketing. I mean I don't think it can be assumptive. I think it has to be worked on, has to be proffered, otherwise people might think, 'Oh I don't know that I can do it.' Yes, you can.

So, I would hope that I modeled and talked positively about it such that women would want it. And so I think women that are in the role need to be about making themselves ready either to help mentor, to sit on panels, to do anything in their power to help make it happen. But I think it does have to be networked and worked out like any other case.

Lilly: So, I'm uncertain now about what the future is because I thought it was going to be pretty bright and we'd be seeing a 50/50 split which I think is just awesome. But that's not what I saw when I walked into that room [referring to local regional meeting]. And that's not what's happening nationally.

Mary: I do worry about the sustainability of this work. And in the current societal state we're in. And I think it means that more and more women have to be speaking out and doing studies and presenting on this very topic. If we're going to break through, we have to be encouraging other women and we have to be mentoring and coaching women to want to take on these roles. But again, you know, being fully prepared for what it is that they are going to face. So, I think that's the challenge we have. Sort of leading this movement is, we're going to take the biggest hits paving the way for others and changing that perception. But I think if we don't, and if not now, it's going to be never. And so, you know my hope is that women following us are going to look back on the hits that we've taken and they're going to say thank you.

Nancy: I think we're beginning to see a shift with younger women, but that's not who's in superintendencies. So, another premise that I would think is reflective of it is money. I think that money is not always appealing in a superintendency. When you think about the long hours and the variety of skills that you have to bring to the table. It's not just about understanding pedagogy, it's not just understanding child development and all those pieces that we studied. The breadth of the work is so much greater, and I think that the salaries have been tamped down in New Hampshire, making it maybe not as appealing.

[on mentoring] Nobody wants to pay for it. A board doesn't want to hire a new superintendent with a doctorate degree, and this and that and the other, and then all of a

sudden, they say well, I need a mentor. And yet that's commonplace in business. Mentors are regular practice in business but in education they can be seen as a weakness.

I think for women it's about if they want to continue and have that resiliency and be able to overcome those situations of meetings and interactions with their peers, they have to take a more assertive posture. And I think you have to walk up and set yourself in the middle of a conversation and be a part of it. I think if you stand away a little bit, I think that hurts. But we certainly have seen less women.

The best I can say is, is that we need—as an organization—we need to encourage. Because we're only getting, what, 20% of the talent? 20% of talent is available to us. That's not enough. [speaking on the national average]

And I think we have to ask, is it our own fault? [referring to women] Do we not put ourselves out there enough? Do we not brag about it...? That's probably not a great word to use, right? But do we not talk about all of our work enough? I always want to showcase somebody else. [Superintendent Name] always said, 'Hold the ladder for somebody else so that they can move forward.' Is that what we've done? Is that because women already always hold the ladder for others? Isn't that part of our DNA?

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Patterson et al. (2009) state, “Adversity in the superintendency is inevitable and resilience is optional; without resilience, however, either the superintendent and/or the district will not last or succeed” (p. 136). In a time when superintendents are in demand and resilience is required, tapping into the talented women administrators in the nation and helping them to build resilience may advance the overall leadership in our nation’s schools. This study used constructivist grounded theory methodology to develop a theory and accompanying models of how women superintendents in New Hampshire have gone through the process of building resilience in accessing and serving in their roles. This substantive theory and models offer an understanding of participants’ experiences and can be used to further examine issues of gender in educational leadership.

In this chapter, I restate the original problem and purpose of the study, revisit the research questions, review and illustrate the methodology, discuss the findings and analysis through explication of the resulting model and theory, relate the research to both practical and theoretical implications, reconsider the limitations of the study, and finally provide suggestions for further research. As is the role of grounded theory, this research is designed not be generalizable but rather to serve as a gateway to continued study.

Problem and Purpose of Study

The rate of women superintendents in the United States is significantly low, with fewer than one quarter of all superintendents being women (Finnan et al., 2017). There are two main reasons for an increased ratio of women superintendents. First, there is a national concern regarding a lack of superintendents overall, as fewer educators are choosing to serve in this role

(Glass, 2000; Harris et al., 2004; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014). Second, the lower ratio is an indicator there are talented leaders in the field who may be overlooked and/or marginalized due to gender; tapping into this talent pool may potentially reduce the risk of not only having enough superintendents but also having the highest quality superintendents available for the future of our national education system.

The purpose of this study was to develop a substantive theory and accompanying model to suggest how women superintendents in New Hampshire develop the resilience necessary to achieve and serve in the position of superintendent. The process of building resilience functioned as the foundation of inquiry, as resilience leads to the identification of successful strategies and methods for the requirements of the superintendency. No participants indicated opposition to the concept of resilience as a critical factor for success in their positions. This study adds findings to the current scholarship and theoretical body of knowledge surrounding women in the superintendency, resilience, and gender and leadership.

I selected constructivist grounded theory methodology to (a) best illustrate a phenomenon that is a process, (b) allow for in-depth interviews to hear directly from women superintendents in New Hampshire, and (c) create a theory and model that did not yet exist in current literature. Twelve women were interviewed through the course of this study, all of whom have been or are currently a superintendent in New Hampshire public schools. This study provided a platform to hear women superintendents' voices directly as they conveyed their overall experiences, when those experiences specifically pertained to gender, and how they continue in their roles when inevitably, as one participant stated, "things go south" (Julie), reaching the heart of resilience. Understanding how participants climbed their way out of thorny places and continued leading with strength and commitment highlighted the strategic components comprising the process of

building resilience. To develop the theory and model, three main research questions framed the basis for inquiry.

Research Questions

RQ: How do women superintendents in New Hampshire build resilience in order to achieve, act, and thrive in the role of superintendent?

SQ1: What obstacles are encountered by women superintendents that require the need for resilience?

SQ2: What strategies, mindsets, and tools are employed to overcome these obstacles?

Methodology

This study followed constructivist grounded theory methodology, mainly but not exclusively adhering to principles outlined by Charmaz (2014). The literature review including two preliminary theoretical frameworks for (a) the resilience process, and (b) women in leadership, both serving as a foundation for abductive reasoning and providing a platform for initial and focused coding. Consistent with Thornberg's (2012) methods, employing current literature and models adds substance to the development of new theory and models, as the existing literature fosters the clear identification of gaps in the literature and allows for the emergence of the new.

Constructivist grounded theory suited this study for three main purposes. First, the majority of research on gender and leadership in the superintendency has been based on masculinized norms of leadership behavior that can result in an overshadowing of other dispositions that may arise from nondominant groups (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Skrla et al., 2000). Intensive interviewing offered participants a safe and

secure way for their voices to be heard, and member checking provided accuracy and clarity of these voices once the model was developed and shared. Second, current literature on women and the superintendency did not contain an existing theory or model that illustrates positive strategies of women superintendents as they go through the process of building resilience. This fact made it necessary to work with a methodology that would appropriately help to understand this phenomenon, with grounded theory being best suited for the study of a process (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 2010). Third, constructivist grounded theory, with its inherent close relationships between researcher and participants, was best suited for my own needs as a researcher. As a woman superintendent in New Hampshire, I am positioned organically as a part of the group I studied, benefitting from the co-construction of knowledge between me and my participants.

The iterative process of data collection and theory/model development is illustrated in Model 3 (see Figure 4). Twelve participants were interviewed, all of whom have been or are currently a woman superintendent in the state of New Hampshire. Each interview was coded using in vivo coding and was followed up immediately with focused coding in a continually iterative process. Focused coding also took place more holistically at two junctures: after the second interview, where I revisited the theoretical frameworks; after the sixth interview, where I revisited the research questions; and after the ninth interview, where the theory was emerging and saturation was recognized. The final three interviews, while still being initially and focused coded, concentrated primarily on theoretical sampling to flesh out the nascent theory and check for holes and inconsistencies.

The following model represents the detailed process used for grounded theory methodology:

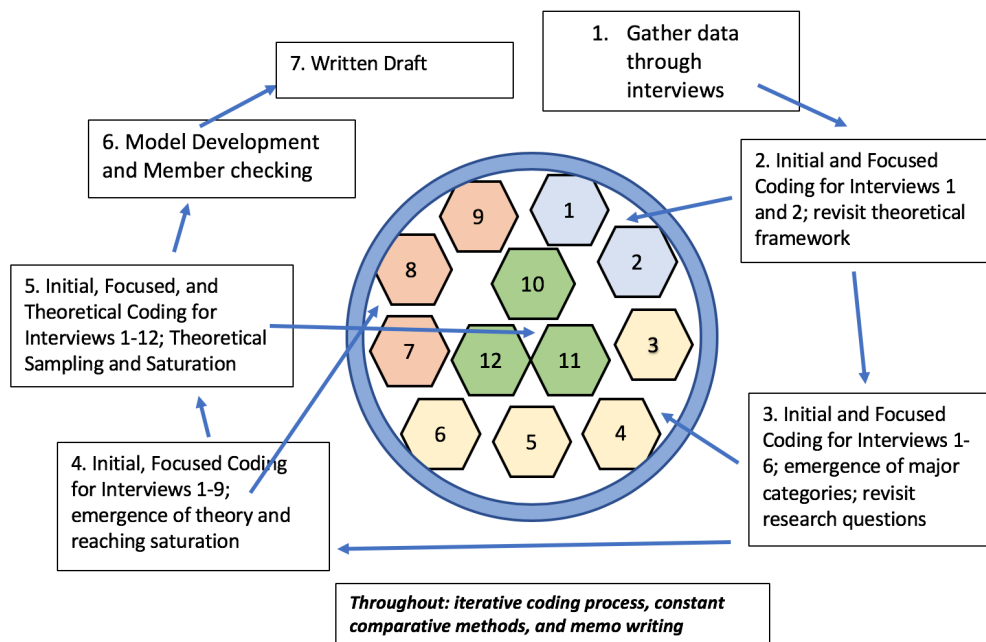


Figure 4: Model 3: Grounded theory process utilized in this research study.

Interpretation of Findings

As presented in Chapter 4, two models depicting the process of building resilience for women in the superintendency in New Hampshire emerged from the analyzed data; these two models are *the capacitance model* (Model 1) and *the capacitance model in context* (Model 2). To discuss these findings and their relationship to current research, I first offer two complete models with accompanying explanations of the various concepts. After presentation of the models, I discuss key concepts in the order the models represent: (a) a spark to ignite, (b) fuel to keep going, and (c) the obstacles that challenge but simultaneously compel the development of resilience strategies.

The Models

Model 1: The capacitance model.

Model 1 is referred to as *the capacitance model*. While there is often research on leadership “capacity,” meaning the ability to *have* a charge (Patterson & Keller, 2005), “capacitance” is the ability to *hold* a charge. I have found this to be the best way to depict the specific type of energy required for resilience, since the ability to hold a charge is the crucial, requisite energy when one needs to recover from obstacles. The three main components of capacitance are illustrated via a sequence through which a “spark” ignites, uses “fuel” to keep flame burning, and then transforms the fuel into “regulated energy and motion”. It is helpful to visualize this as a spinning turbine:

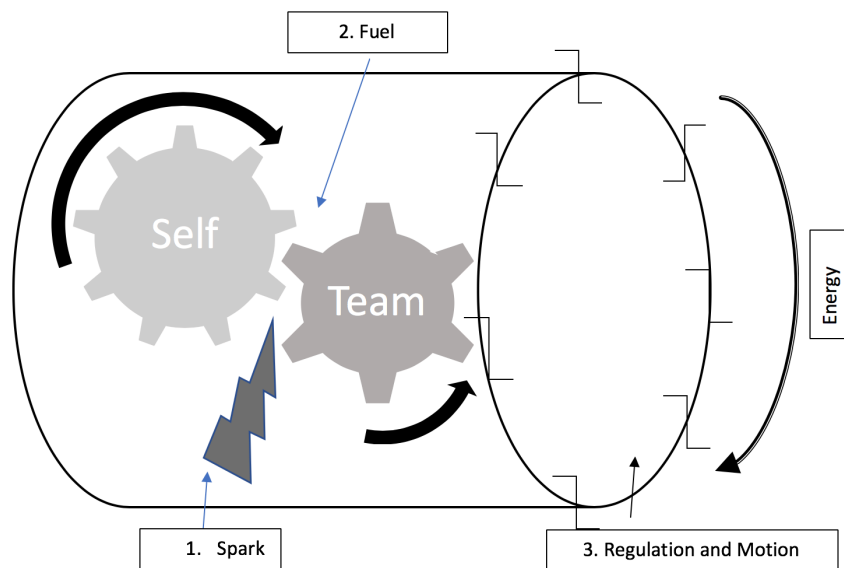


Figure 5: The Capacitance Model

Spark.

The first component, the spark, is made up of two key concepts: mission and mettle. Mission represents the passion for the education of children, and mettle represents the inner and individual strength brought to the position. These two concepts ignite—and continually

reignite—when challenges present themselves. It is an iterative process drawn upon with each need for resilience.

Fuel.

Referring specifically to resilience—the ability to bounce back from difficult times—the two cogs represent the concept of “mutual capacitance.” Mutual capacitance, in simplified terms, signifies that the charge, or *fuel* in this case, comes from more than one source, in this case “self” and “team,” where the current, or charge, runs through both sources to create capacitance. *Self* and *Team* collaborate to provide the support/fuel that fosters the creation and renewal of energy. These are clearly the mindsets, strategies, and tools these women superintendents use to overcome resilience by building capacitance. While both self and team are necessary sources, and one was never mentioned without the other, self is depicted as the larger cog in this model, as participants indicated the need for self-support slightly above and beyond that of team. The most significant factors offered for cultivating self support were: self-care, self-talk, self-efficacy, situational adaptation, and self-reflection. Bridging self and team was the category of mentoring, playing a role in both self and team. The most significant factors offered for cultivating team support were: establishing trust; building relationships with a variety of people and groups, including the board/board chair, community, administrative team, and professional colleagues; and support from family and friends.

Regulation and motion.

The spark and fuel together maintain the charge, represented by the turning of the turbine as a whole; regulation and motion are the work of the superintendent to create, regenerate, and utilize energy. The model holistically represents the process of continually building resilience, referred to in this model as capacitance, and it is this capacitance—the ability to hold a charge—

that illustrates the resilience necessary to achieve and serve in the role of superintendent. Model 2 serves to put this concept in the larger context of the superintendency, where working with other energies (primarily those of children and community) and dealing with obstacles both become part of the need for a resilience process. For this purpose, please view the circle in Model 2 as the capacitance model (the cylinder or “turbine”) turned to its side.

Model 2: Capacitance in context.

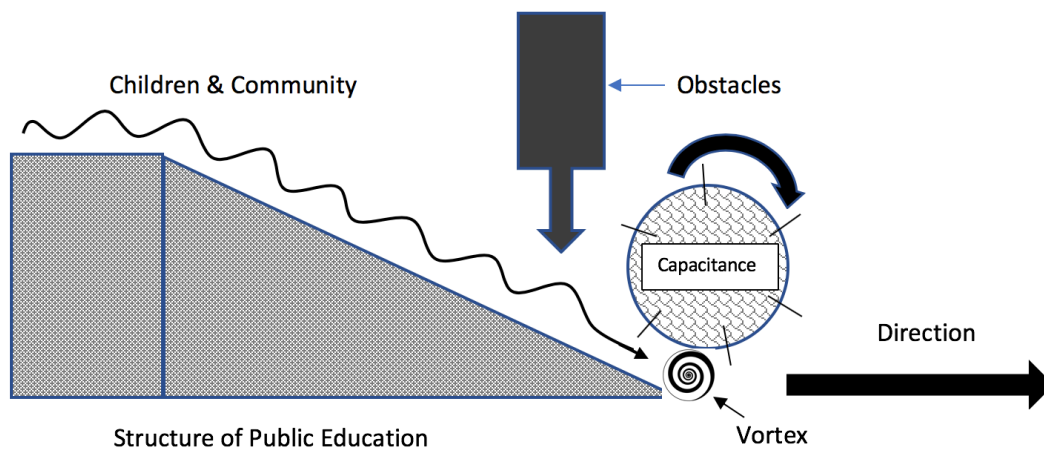


Figure 6: The Capacitance model in context.

Model 2 depicts a more circumspect view of the superintendency in relationship to the structures and influential factors that necessitate building resilience, or capacitance, within the larger context of public education. In Model 2, the superintendent is placed in the role of—consistent with the analogy of energy—a water turbine. View the above as a dam with hydroelectric power, with each section playing a significant role in understanding the resilience process of the women superintendents studied.

Children and community.

The children and the community are represented by the natural flow of water; in any culture, as long as the population continues, there will naturally be children and a community.

Structure of public education.

The structure of public education is the social construction in the United States designed to channel the natural “flow” of the community’s children to help them learn; this is represented by the manmade dam, or, in this analogy, the public school system, which is structured to channel the natural flow of children. In this model, as with any dam, the concept is to not simply channel the natural flow but to also capitalize on its inherent energy to help power the system and structure as a whole.

Turbine.

The turbine or “capacitor” here is the superintendent, displaying a side view of Model 1, representing capacitance. This turbine has energy on its own, but also generates energy from working in concert with the flowing water (e.g., children, community). Bringing those energies together and using its own motion to regulate itself and the flow of water can make the system run smoothly, until obstacles present themselves.

Obstacles.

Obstacles are those things that get in the way of the natural flow of the water and/or the turbine itself, impeding motion. Should the obstacles become too large, or “lodged” in the space between the capacitor and dam, or in other ways stop the positive motion of the turbine, then there is strain on the capacitance of the superintendent. This strain will either stop forward motion; cause the flow to slow or even move counterclockwise; or result in an obstacle getting stuck in the vortex. This represents struggle and the need for resilience. As an example, an obstacle may get caught spinning constantly with no forward motion; in the dam analogy, this is

known as the vortex, or the place at which endless spinning (and drowning) takes place. Should the capacitor start to turn backward, Model 1 would be in reverse and then a loss of motion/regulation, loss of capacitance, and an extinguishing of the spark is a possibility. It is important to note the vortex, while a place to get stuck, is also an integral source to the overall energy created by the dam. This is when the superintendent would think of conflict as opportunities.

The participant responses result in two main categories of obstacles, one general category and one specific to gender obstacles. The general category comprises handling the hardest times, navigating politics, working with press/media, and weighing difficult decisions. Obstacles that participants suggest have a connection to gender comprise a general awareness of gender, belief/disbelief in gender differences, overt sexism, navigating the gatekeepers, perceptions of job responsibilities, and handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment.

Direction.

The channeled flow of the water is a metaphor for a strategic direction for learning in the community.

Key Concepts

Spark: Mission and Mettle

The *spark*, as it is referred to in Model 1, represents the two key motivating factors for women to achieve and serve in the role of superintendent: *mission* and *mettle*. Participants clearly and emphatically stated that for them, the spark derived from their passion about the work they do for children (mission), and there was also a resolve (mettle) within them that gave them innate strength to willingly take on these challenges. This study adds to current literature in two

important constructs, specifically that mission is not just an initial spark but one that continually gets reignited through the process of building resilience, and that mettle suggests there is something in the nature of these women leaders that gives them the inner strength required to willingly take on repeated trials.

Mission.

Participants indicated it was a return to their mission-driven purpose that gave them the drive to build resilience and move forward for the benefit of children. Purpose is also suggested as a key factor in the work of Ibarra et al. (2013) and Patterson (2000), as the superintendency allows the “opportunity to do difficult but valuable work” (Ibarra et al., p. 23); more specifically, Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) cited mission and purpose as one of the two key differences between the process men and women go through to build resilience (the other, discussed later in this discussion, is connection to others). In this sense, the spark was again defined as not a single incident but an iterative ignition that continually energizes these leaders to re-motivate themselves with each successive challenge. Participants were first asked to describe the “darkest moments” of their careers, where they thought they had hit the most challenging times they can recall; after describing these incidents, they were next asked what gave them the ability to bounce back. Their responses reiterated that their mission and purpose was the source of their recurring energy. As Alice stated, “Why do I keep coming in? I really believe in public education to the core of my very being, to the tips of my toes.” Joy added, “It was all about doing what I could do for kids.” When specifically considering leaving at some of these dark times, Helen stated, “This work is about making things better for kids, putting systems in place that will support youngsters. So that's really what drives me. ‘How can I make that better?’ And superintendents can make it better. Leaders can make it better.” Nancy offered, “The reason why

I'm still here and I'm still battling in those two situations is because I can put things in place to look at what we're doing. I know I can put things in place to make something happen for kids.” It was evident that mission not only inspired these women to become superintendents, but it is also something regularly revisited when resilience is essential to continue moving forward.

Mission, meaning, and purpose have been identified through previous research; however, the concept of iterative ignition of the *spark* is one that will add to the current literature. The resilience model from Richardson (2013, see Figure 1) does not contain the equivalent to a *mission*, though one of the five dimensions of centered leadership (see Figure 2) for women, does. The Richardson model illustrates the series of factors for building resilience yet omits the inner purpose, or the “why,” of needing resilience at all. In the second framework from Barsh et al. (2008), the area of *meaning* closely relates to the capacitance model’s (Model 1) key concept of mission. In the *Five Dimensions of Centered Leadership*, meaning is defined as “finding your strengths and putting them to work in the service of an inspiring purpose; meaning makes it easier to take risks and accept the consequences when you’re working for a greater good” (Barsh et al., 2008, p. 36). In this sense, there is a correlation to the intents of meaning and mission, though again the difference lies in this study’s emphasis on the mission needing to be a repeated element of building resilience. What may be seen in other literature as an initial calling is actually a living, breathing flame that follows a looping cycle that revisits its original purpose to in times of distress. In a similar vein, the second key category of the spark is mettle, similarly called upon during times when resilience is needed.

Mettle.

During initial and focused coding, the category of mettle emerged from participant data and held the same critical characteristic as mission, namely that it required continual revisiting

when challenges became difficult and resilience was essential. Thus, it took its place in the overarching major category of spark. Ten of 12 participants stated they have something in their nature—outside the superintendency—that gives them the inner strength to rebound and move forward. Of the two participants who did not offer this, one stated she was not sure if mettle was there before or not; the other stated she had it now, but it was acquired through her work as a superintendent. From the other participants, it was clear there was something in them as individuals that gave them strength. Helen summed this up when she stated, “If somebody tells me I can't do something? Oh, now I'm in 110%. That may have played a part in it, as well. Go ahead and tell me I can't do something.” Joy described this through her feeling that people may have had lower expectations for her as a woman in this position. She offered, “I didn't want to prove them wrong; I wanted to blow them out of the water.” Another superintendent described this strength as a work ethic she would have no matter what she did for work, and yet another thought this strength is in her family and in her blood, as she referred to having a lot of very strong women in her family who have inspired her. In that case, she said she has inner strength derived from a desire for gender equity.

The concept of mettle, often referred to as strength or fortitude in leadership, can be identified in the literature and is also sometimes examined in terms of nature vs. nurture—that is, are leaders born or made? (Goleman, 2017). Fullan (2005) and Patterson and Kelleher (2005) suggested strength in the resilience of leaders is much like weathering a storm. Applying that concept to the capacitance model suggests there is not just one initial storm, and strength needs to be revisited with each successive event. Findings in this study suggest there is a nature component to building resilience. If the inner toughness participants described pertains to other events in these women's lives prior to their work as superintendents, that is unknown at this

point; however, for the purpose of creating a spark that both starts and continues to inspire and give strength to women superintendents, the participants' responses would indicate a leaning toward nature. There was something there before they began their work as superintendents, and that something is relied upon during times of distress.

Fuel

The fuel required to maintain capacitance was divided into two main categories of support strategies: *cultivating the self* and *cultivating the team*. In no case did any participant discuss one without the other, suggesting both are necessary for the process of building resilience. The participant data and member checking, however, suggested cultivating the self is slightly more critical than cultivating the team in terms of support. Sankey (2004) and Patterson (2010) suggest that the ability to remain strong amid ambiguity and change, or resilience, is a skill that can be developed, honed, and cultivated by building up specific resilience skills and strategies. This section on fuel identifies the participant responses for skills and strategies that make capacitance possible.

Cultivating the self.

Cultivating the self emerged from the data as a major category, as multiple focused categories concentrated on the need to support one's own self in the superintendency, sometimes pertaining to gender and other times just serving in the difficult role of superintendent in general. This key category comprises the focused properties of self-care , self-talk, self-efficacy, situational adaptation, and self-reflection.

Self-Care. Only two of the 12 participants reported they regularly took care of themselves, physically and mentally, and the majority of participants stated if they could do things over again, this would be at the top of the list of things they would change. The lack of

self-care was mainly attributed to the demands of the job and trying to balance personal and professional responsibilities, reinforcing the findings of Robinson (2013), who researched women superintendents who had left the field entirely. As expressed by Alice, “It’s like the last person I give time to is me.” Helen also very earnestly stated, “There is no balance. I’m going to be completely honest with you. There is no balance.” This often resulted in participants’ inability to maintain physical health as evidenced by weight fluctuations, stress indicators, and, for some, damaged mental health to a potentially dangerous level. Many participants suggested learning to compartmentalize as a successful strategy for self-care, and this may be a way to approach the “having it all” impossibility proposed by Hewitt (2002). The complexities of these finding also directly relate to Noddings’ (1992) work when considering the feminist ethic of care and the concept of burnout from caring for others without getting sustenance in return.

Data analysis of cultivating the self as a whole revealed an undeniable sense of the ultimate isolation in the role of superintendent. Amy stated, “You’re so isolated here in the day;” Dorothy stated, “It’s a lonely job.” During member checking, I asked participants if they believed self-support was so important because, at the end of the day, it is just you. All who responded emphatically agreed with that statement. Though all participants attested to the fact they seek team support, when times are murky, it is really just the superintendent alone who has to bolster herself up. Barsh et al. (2008), in the *Five Dimensions of Centered Leadership* framework, supported that “work-life balance is a myth” (p. 40) but emphasized the need for women leaders to balance their energy output. This study suggests this is an area calling for continued study for practical implications.

Self-Talk. The category of self-talk began emerging from the data during the third interview, where Mary openly discussed her practice of self-talk:

You know, we have to—as women—as just human beings—if you're going to be resilient you have to self-talk. You know, 'I can do this. This is going to be a great day. You know we're right in this,' and that's what I try to do for myself and my team. And I keep telling myself, you know, 'It's always darkest before dawn, and the sun comes up every morning, right? So today is a new day. And you know we're good--let's see what today brings.' I'm going to keep telling myself that, and I tell my team that every day, you know, and sun IS going to come up again today.

At this point, I returned to the two interviews prior and found other evidence that was clearly self-talk, though I had not recognized it as such. From this point forward, self-talk became a significant and consistent finding in the data. When completing theoretical sampling, I asked more explicitly about self-talk, and participants readily agreed this was an important coping mechanism and a helpful strategy.

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy emerged strongly as a major component of building resilience and, in many respects, follows a similar cycle of resilience. Self-efficacy is a recursive process, whereby, with each successive positive outcome, the sense of having a future positive outcome becomes increasingly solidified (Bandura, 1997). According to Schwartz and Warner (2012), “This ‘can do’-cognition reflects a sense of control over one’s environment and an optimistic belief of being able to alter challenging environmental demands by means of one’s own behavior” (p. 139). All participants referred to self-efficacy in various ways, reinforcing its connection to resilience, from Dorothy’s familiar mantra, “What doesn't kill you makes you stronger,” to Mary’s more reflective statement on self-efficacy:

I think it's experiencing, you know, the bumps in the road, right? So, you just don't wake up with resilience. I just . . . I mean . . . I don't . . . I don't know of, you know, some

magic pill that you can swallow down and all of a sudden you're a resilient person. I think each experience that I've had where I've needed to sort of develop the skin in order to do this job has helped me in the next scenario.

Thus, resilience and self-efficacy follow a similar pattern and reinforce each other. The sense of resilience gained through self-efficacy is drawn upon by the participants to move forward, adding one more component to the process. According to Patterson et al. (2009), resilience-thinking and capacity-building skills are necessary, but not sufficient, to sustain resilience. Resilience action skills are crucial. One needs to take deliberate actions to apply resilience-thinking and capacity-building skills to develop resilience, implying an element of self-efficacy in the development of resilience. This is consistent with this study's findings.

Situational Adaptation. It was difficult to find the appropriate place for the category of situational adaptation. I ultimately placed it in the cultivating the self concept since it involves personal identity. Christman and McClellan (2005) and Zheng et al. (2018) suggest that women have better skills in situational leadership because, by nature and throughout history, women have always had to learn to adapt to find their place, making their skills continually fluid. Participants offered examples of this both unsolicited and when directly asked about it in successive interviews. As Amy reflected:

There's probably some times when I'm male, you know, they're looking at you and talking to you a little bit differently than they would a guy and I can probably say that I probably played up on that. And then people say, "lady," oh, so you know he's treating me like a daughter and I'm so cute, so I can do that. I can play that. Yes, I'm so sweet and cute and get what I want. Yeah, no problem. And I just feel like, I gotta do what I gotta do.

Brenda stated:

I frequently shifted my approach based on who I was dealing with, what the situation was, what the parameters were, and of course what information I had, because that can change as you know at any given moment. I definitely felt that my style was very fluid based on all of those factors.

Joy, reflecting on multiple construction projects felt, “with all those building projects, I felt that I had to be one of the guys.” Situational adaptation potentially plays a role not just in leadership ability but for this study’s purposes in the process of building resilience. I suspect situational adaptation is necessary at times to come back from hard times; however, this thread warrants further study and more exhaustive research.

Self-Reflection. Similar to self-talk, the practice of self-reflection was a significant finding in the data. As Julie stated:

I became a much better listener. I think in order to be flexible, adaptable, and to be able to rebound, you have to be able to look at a situation and say, ‘Why did that not go like I expected?’ And so, I became much more reflective. And I am a better listener. I think these are parts of resilience.

Other participants described various methods for self-reflection, including how they process situations after the fact; Julie described this process as completing a sort of “autopsy” of the issue in her head. These responses resonated with Brown’s (2007) work on critical awareness and vulnerability; in addition, Karumanchery and Portelli (2005) called this reflective foundation the “soulwork” that requires leaders to know themselves and reflect on how they construct their identities, build resilience, and develop themselves as leaders.

Cultivating team support.

A significant number of research studies support the premise that women leaders are more collaborative in nature (Brunner & Duncan, 1994; Brunner & Shumacher, 1998; Gupta, 2004; Derrington & Sherratt, 2009; Chin, 2011; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Martineau, 2018; Palladino, 2016; Wallace, 2014). Though cultivating the self emerged clearly and strongly in the participant data, cultivating the team was also prevalent, reinforcing an almost inherent need for women to work in partnership with others. Being collaborative by nature can also bridge self and team, wherein knowing yourself means knowing that you need a team.

Creating trust served as the foundation for these team relationships, and the participants described the various, multiple teams they rely on for support when difficult times happen, as they inevitably do. Support from these diverse teams makes up the second key category in the fuel of the resilience process. These teams comprise building relationships with boards, administrative teams, community members, and professional colleagues (i.e., other superintendents); outside work teams, and the support of family and friends.

Trust emerged as a foundation for team building and support, which has been examined through continued research, including that of Agote, Arambu, and Lines (2015), Herron (2009), Lau and Liden (2008), and McCabe (2017). Outside of the trust expected of a superintendent, participants noted they had a need to trust those on the teams around them; this was expressed through confirmation and disconfirmation of trusting relationships. “Trust is a complex construct, yet it is basic to our very existence... We understand that trust comes from positive relationships and that relationships take time to build, nurture, and maintain (McCabe, 2017, p. 45). Julie commented on trusting another by stating, “You should reflect unto thyself first, and then with the person with whom you have built trust and is, like, your confidant.” Nancy added, “So, surround yourself with support systems, whatever that might look like. Good friends,

partners, husbands, colleagues, people that you can trust.” Specifically, in terms of resilience, Joy noted:

I can do my best work when I've had a chance to build a relationship with a group or a person over time. And then when we get to a hot spot—being able to pull on the trust and the knowledge that they have that I do care about the kids, or I do care about the staff or the community, and that I'm going to do my best to look after them.

At times participants noted that the disconfirmation of trust in teams is detrimental, emphasizing the importance of having trust as a foundation. When asked about something she would do over if she could, Alice stated, “I don't think I would've been as trusting with some of my colleagues as I have been. I would've probably held back a little more.”

Participants espoused on their need for team support and solid relationships with other individuals and/or groups, resonating with the “connection” realm of the *Five Dimensions of Centered Leadership Model* (Barsh et al., 2008); the work of Gu and Day (2007); the “mutually empathic relationships” of Brown’s (2007) shame resilience theory; and the collaboration theories of Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014). Strategies identified in the research findings comprise building relationships with board and/or the board chair, the community, their administrative teams, and their professional colleagues/other superintendents. Specific examples of how these relationships encourage the process of building resilience include Mary, who stated, “You have to have a board behind you. I mean, I know many boards would have thrown in the towel with this, but this board believes in the strategic plan—they believe in this work.” Reflecting on a particularly dark time, Julie stated she relied on her relationship with the community: “I learned if you can build these relationships, if you do get into dire straits or in trouble, they will help you.” When asked about her main source of support, Helen commented, “I

think my work family is.” She followed up by again emphasizing her self-reliance but also confirmed that having people to reach out to is crucial.

A majority of responses about outside support revealed a reliance on other superintendents and the larger team of the statewide network. As Nancy summarized, “My colleagues were of help . . . and I think that helps people gain that ability to come back from bad, difficult situations, because one, you recognize that somebody else has had terrible situations. Right?” Empathy from others in the same position was critical; especially when considering the isolation of the position, inter-district support gained heightened importance. When asked if support from male or female colleagues was more helpful, the majority of respondents stated having others who share your lived experiences is more important than gender. This suggests a different perspective on acceptance from male colleagues than Bernal et al. (2017), who cited lack of support from male colleagues was a barrier to entering the superintendency overall. While several participants contemplated the prospects and benefits of having all-women support groups, this did not trump the benefits of connecting with likeminded others, both men and women.

Outside of school networks, family support was clearly an important factor for all participants, contradicting Kowalski and Souder’s (1999) study, which indicated lack of family support was one of the five main factors barring women from the superintendency. All participants in this study gave responses attributing family support, especially that of a spouse, to their ability to build resilience and stay successful in the role. With the exception of one superintendent, Lilly, who stated, in retrospect, she had more time with her children, no participants suggested children were an obstacle to the superintendency, and, even for Lilly, wanting to spend more time with them would not have prevented her from taking on the role.

Two participants (Amy and Julie) offered that they felt our culture was getting more accustomed to working mothers and/or women choosing not to have children at all—and having that be acceptable. This suggests evidence of gender progress when compared to prior studies such as those of Skrla et al. (2000) and corroborates trends noted in more recent studies where children are less of a factor, such as that of Askren-Edgehouse (2008).

Mentoring.

The role of mentoring did not clearly fit in the self or team support realms exclusively—it bridged them. In this sense, I perceive mentoring as the intersection of a Venn diagram between the two, where it involves outreach with another person but is simultaneously a deeply personal and individually reflective relationship. The majority of participants discussed the importance of having a mentor; in most cases, that mentor was male. Several participants noted this was largely due to the fact there were not enough available women superintendents to draw upon for mentoring. Joy summarized the importance of a mentor:

So, having a mentor just for you, having people who have their feet/their ears to the ground and who you can trust to give you information that maybe isn't easy—like what you said didn't play very well, and here's why . . . that kind of thing. So that was really important support.

This type of relationship is corroborated through the work of Lee (2000) and Copeland and Calhoun (2014). Nancy brought up an intriguing thought about mentoring in light of gender. As she stated, having a mentor should be a requirement for all superintendents; however, this may add a layer of vulnerability onto women. She speculated, “Now, talk about women, and you're trying to show that you have leadership skills and that you have confidence in your work, and the first thing you asked for is help [through the need of a mentor].” This dilemma feeds into the role

congruity theory and double bind of Carly and Eagly (2007) once again, where anything that resonates of the stereotypically feminine is a threat to women superintendents. The lack of female mentors and/or the self-preservation through denying the assistance of a mentor could potentially be an obstacle to the resilience building process.

Obstacles

“In examining differences between how men and women lead, it is often less what they do than in the different experience they face when they lead” (Chin, 2011, p. 1). This statement from Chin’s research on women and leadership is accurate summary of the findings from participants on the obstacles they uniquely face in their experiences as a woman superintendent. This key concept emerged from data regarding these obstacles encountered by the participants on their way into and then in the superintendency. While there are undoubtedly obstacles all superintendents face regardless of gender, this study suggests that certain identified obstacles pertain specifically to gender. Thus, a critical difference lies in the process of building resilience and the process of building resilience for women, the latter requiring an additional layer.

Common obstacles regardless of gender comprise handling the hardest times; navigating politics; working with press/media; and weighing difficult decisions. Obstacles identified with specific reference to gender include a general awareness of gender; belief/disbelief in gender differences; overt sexism; navigating the gatekeepers; perceptions of job responsibilities; and handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment.

Obstacles relating to gender were offered by participants with varying degrees of effect on their need for resilience. Current literature pertaining to compensation (Harris et al., 2004; Superville, 2016) and career paths (Bjork, 2000; Glass, 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Kowalski, 1999) were reviewed in light of the information discussed by several participants, but the data

collected suggests these issues were of minor concern. Three of the participants had negotiated for their salaries at one point, while the remaining nine participants did not, even though this group acknowledged they had likely accepted much less than their male predecessors. As Lilly remembered:

When I assumed this role, I assumed it forty thousand dollars less than the former superintendent. Now granted, he had a lot more experience than I did and he had been here for, I think, [number] years by the time he left. So... But, I do think... and when I was told my salary, the school board chair said, 'Is that is that OK with you? And I was not going to start out on a footing with the school board where I started wrangling about salary. I just didn't think that was a good idea.

Joy recounted this and her acceptance of \$15,000 less than her predecessor as stating that "we[women] tend to think of other things." In similar fashion, though the research on career paths was extensive in current literature (Bjork, 2000; Glass, 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Kowalski, 1999; Uzzo-Farulo, 2013) this concept was only brought up by several participants. Interestingly, three participants who brought it up all reported it was their route through special education that helped them to build the resilience needed for the position of superintendent (Lilly, Barbara, and Amy). To summarize, each offered statements that working in special education afforded them the opportunity to learn how to balance multiple, conflicting interests. One other statement pertaining to career paths was made by Alice, as she very reflectively stated, "I didn't know there was a glass ceiling until my head hit it." Her disappointment at this experience mirrors other studies about the glass ceiling, such as Brescoll, 2010; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; and Meyer & Fletcher, 2000. Further research on career paths as a factor may

best be pursued through a comprehensive quantitative instrument for all superintendents in the state, asking participants to list, in order, their positions on the way to the superintendency.

The pertinent juncture of obstacles and gender presented itself primarily through concepts involving perception and implicit bias. When asked about gender in the superintendency in general, participants first relayed their experiences regarding having a general awareness of gender. Three participants communicated their awareness at the national superintendent of the year celebrations, in which only five to eight of the fifty recipients were women; on top of that, it was not lost on these women that the gift received for this honor is a blue blazer, bearing connotation as a stereotypical symbol of the traditional male leader. Three other participants conveyed their awareness of a rise and then fall in the number of women superintendents at their regional meetings, and Nancy described her experience of looking geographically at a state district map, noticing that going down the line each district around her had male superintendents except two—and they were both leaving. What these data suggest is that gender is something that is noticed, even when people are not explicitly looking for it.

Before moving into the discussion on implicit bias, there were several examples of remaining overt sexism. The participant who conveyed the feelings she experienced about the blue blazer considered this gift to be an example of overt sexism. In addition, Amy recalled the experience of winning an award for her district; when the government official presenting the award walked up to her, and she was standing next to her tall, male principal, the official immediately reached out for his hand instead of hers. Joy recalled a board member who regularly sent her “blonde” and “hooters” jokes, and Nancy relayed her anger when she attended a local organization’s meeting to foster relations with the community and they voted to not allow women. Four participants conveyed their experiences of being called a “bitch,” which they also

felt is an indication many people feel it is still acceptable to say that to a woman regardless of her position.

During member checking on differences in experience and gender, Lilly summed up the difference between overt sexism and implicit bias by stating, “The blatant gender issues are rare, but what that means is that the real gender bias has just gone underground.” The “underground” issues, as she calls them, are prominent in the data through analysis of the perceptions of belief and disbelief in gender differences; navigating gatekeepers; perception of job responsibilities; and handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment.

Navigating the gatekeepers.

Gatekeepers, namely school boards, search consultants, state organizations, and search committees, continue to play an integral role in women’s access to the superintendency. Studies from Brunner and Grogan (2007), Gipson (2017), Ryan and Haslam (2005), and Young and McLeod (2001) reinforce the potential bias and influence of gender perception in various selection processes. Helen stated something has to be “egregious” before she will turn to gender bias as an explanation; in her experience, this presented itself with a search committee when she was applying for her first superintendent position:

There were questions about, ‘Are you sure you're ready to take this on? Do you understand the dynamics that happen between the board and the town? You're going to have to mitigate some of this. Are you up for that kind of a challenge?’ It wasn't overt, but it felt a little bit like, ‘Can you really handle this?’ It felt that way, ‘Can you really handle this?’ As I said, it clearly was not stated, but can you . . . I'm not sure, had I been male, if that question would have even come up. I just felt that way.

Felicity recalled her final interview and clear evidence of gender “testing” regarding the following Q&A with one of the board members:

Board Member: I don't see a woman being able to do this job. How can you convince me that you—as a woman—and you're a young woman—how can you convince me that you could do this job? This is a tough job.

Felicity: I think you've probably been told that that's not a good question to be asking.

Board Member: No shit, but I still want to know, do you have the balls?

Felicity: Yes, oh yes, I have the balls, and I have a firm grasp of other people's balls when I need to. I'm not afraid to squeeze.

Board Member: No shit!

Brenda realized one search revealed gender discrimination in a variation of blatant gender bias: “The district where I ended up working, before I even started there, I actually had a board member talk to our local newspaper and say that she had voted against me because, ‘This girl was not experienced,’ Yeah, ‘this girl.’” She also recalled several searches where less qualified males were given positions over her. Alice echoed this concern, as she revealed sometimes she watches the search processes in other districts and thinks, “Wait, you hired *that* guy over *her*? He doesn’t know jack!” In four of the searches around New Hampshire last year, districts hired men from out of state over internal female candidates. While participants acknowledged there could be other political reasons for this, most confirmed a feeling that gender played some elemental role behind the scenes.

Linn (1998), Kanter (1993), Marietti and Stout (1994), and Tallerico (2000) discuss the concept of cyclical *homosocial reproduction*, through which boards tend to hire people who are most like themselves. While participants certainly conveyed some concerning situations about

the search process, it did not present itself as a complete obstacle—many discussed the process in terms of finding the right fit with the right district. Demographics for school boards indicate a rising number of women on school boards, which—if homosocial reproduction is true—could potentially open the gates for women from this point forward. This concept also warrants further study.

Perception of job responsibilities.

A potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles. When a stereotyped group member and an incongruent social role become joined in the mind of the perceiver, this inconsistency lowers the evaluation of the group member as an actual or potential occupant of the role. In general, prejudice toward female leaders follows from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles. (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574).

Current research on the perception of job responsibilities in the superintendency resonated with the majority of participants' experiences. Much of this perception is corroborated through demographic studies surrounding the types of positions held by men and women in education administration (Grogan & Bruner, 2007; Noel-Batiste, 2009; Trewartha, 2012). Data from this study confirm the stereotypical and implicit distinction between what people believe men and women are capable of doing as originally suggested by the works of Acker (1990), Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), and Kim and Brunner (2010). Julie recalled, "I think it was all right for a woman to be an elementary assistant principal an elementary principal, middle school maybe a question. But the minute I got to central office I was the first. So, I think people

questioned, can she do it?” Felicity reflected, “They didn't expect me to be so strong or to be able to manage something like.... a construction project, or a \$30 million budget. Or negotiating with seven unions.” Amy was concerned having the conversation about gender at all was evidence of a continued concern:

Going through my career you thought of a superintendent as a male and I still to this day have people making comments about the fact that I'm a female. People don't always make derogatory comments, it's just that this is the old boys club and look, this isn't changing; it's just . . . it's still being talked about. Mm hmm. I wish it wasn't, right? It shouldn't be an issue anymore.

Three participants specifically mentioned perception as an issue with public budget committees. Though Dorothy was one to defend the premise that gender does not make a big difference in her experience, she readily stated this about her budget committee: “there's definitely, particularly with that group, with the leadership there, there's definitely a male female issue.” Mary pondered this issue by asking the question, “And again, like, I wonder how that would be perceived if I was...maybe if I came in a different package?” The connection to budget committees and construction projects, groups comprised of general public membership, relates directly to the work of Nam (2015), and Harris et al. (2002), which suggest underlying systemic bias and public perception of male and female roles continues to contribute to the underrepresentation of women in traditionally male-centered positions. Brown (2007) also describes this bias through her shame resilience theory, where she refers to it as a “a layer of conflicting, competing, and unrealistic expectations that are the direct result of rigid socio-cultural norms” (p. 46). These perceptual influences, particularly referred to through this study as the *double bind* or *role congruity theory*, is corroborated through multiple additional research studies (Hewlitt, 2002; Lee, 2000; Skrla et

al., 2000; Spar, 2012; Tannen, 1994). Findings in this study suggest that socio-cultural perceptions hold particular influence on the way women leaders are judged.

Handling mistakes, recovery, and judgment.

Findings from participant data suggest that a significant obstacle at the intersection of perception and gender is the how women leaders 1. handle and recover from mistakes; 2. how they are judged throughout these situations; and 3. how they react when attacked. This phenomenon mirrors the process of building resilience in that mistake recovery requires being pushed down and having to get back up again. The work of Brescoll et al. (2010) is prominent in this area, her research suggesting that women are, indeed, subject to harsher judgement than their male counterparts. It is important to note participants' responses recalled mistakes or difficult decisions/situations that were often not their own, though they still retained final responsibility. Amy considered this difference during her interview:

SL: Do you think that the same kind of personal attacks would have happened if you were a male?

Amy: It's a good question. No. I wonder if I took more than a man would have taken. After several difficult incidents, one of them being publicly judged for firing two male employees who had made and admitted to mistakes, Brenda reflected:

It was very evident on several occasions that my being a woman just was making it harder to do my job. I terminated them, and I actually had a school board member, who considered herself quite a feminist, tell me that that was just emasculating. Well, would you ever say that to a male superintendent who had just terminated [employees]? No, that would have been taking a strong stand. So, it just, like those kinds of things happen all the time.

Again, Dorothy upholds that she usually does not notice gender differences, but when considering mistakes and judgment she had a different perception: “It’s just not . . . it’s like color blind people, I just don’t see the color blue or green. But your question about being judged more harshly for your mistakes? I think that makes sense. It makes sense.” Helen added, “In retrospect, I’m not sure if he [Board Chair] would have done the same thing with a male superintendent.” Mary recalled harsh judgment from the community after a local tragedy, where people started coming after her: “All of that was taken as, ‘How dare she.’ And I have no doubt if I was if I was male and older that wouldn’t have happened. I just don’t believe that it would have been given the same type of visceral reaction.” Nancy reflected on this concept from her many years’ experience:

Nancy: Would it have been different if I were a man? My husband says yes.

SL: Do *you* think so?

Nancy: I think so. Having interviewed, having been around, having seen storms through . . . I don’t know, I think so. I think there’s just enough difference.

This particular category emerged from the data and were reinforced through member checking. When asked to reflect on the concept of harsher judgment, there was general agreement from those respondents that—even if they could not put their finger on how it was occurring—it was, indeed, occurring. I also believe it is significant that three respondents who were most adamant about not bringing gender into the picture unless absolutely necessary all agreed with this one aspect of implicit bias and judgment.

The research on women’s leadership training through Ibarra (2013) and Ely et al. (2011) may be of benefit here, wherein they each suggest women receive leadership training (such as learning how to respond to this type of community pushback and judgment) is specifically

geared towards women's' particular characteristics and styles to "establish credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about whether, when, and how they should exercise authority" (Ibarra et al., 2011, p. 9). Confronting these situations, or being assertive, could simultaneously pose an additional threat to women superintendents. Frye (2001) suggests contradicting norms can lead to further penalty and censure for women, indicating women who assertively fight back against unnecessarily biased judgment may increase their overall vulnerability; this would again add to the need for an increased layer of resilience. Olsen (2007) suggests harsher judgment for mistakes is an obstacle to women entering the superintendency, and Brescoll et al. (2010) describes this phenomenon as the *glass cliff*, illustrating the dangers of outside judgment once the glass ceiling is broken—the harder fall from the higher, precarious position of a woman leader.

Overall, universal obstacles were presented that may affect all superintendents, while a select group are attributed to gender bias, especially implicit, or "underground" bias resulting from larger socio-cultural perceptions. Findings on obstacles serve to help to more readily define the successful strategies women superintendents employ when adding that extra layer of resilience.

Implications for Theory and Research

This study contributes to current literature by presenting a theory and two accompanying models that illustrate the process of building resilience for women superintendents.

Constructivist grounded theory is not intended to be generalizable; however, other researchers will be able to use this model, its key concepts, categories, and properties, to continue eliciting understanding of resilience, gender, and leadership, in the superintendency in particular. These models suggest the recurrent and cyclical process of building resilience; key factors that

contribute to purpose and support; and identification and recognition of potential obstacles unique to women leaders. This information may inform future studies seeking the continued elimination of gender bias and strategies for recruiting all available talent for the superintendency.

Implications for Practice

Constructivist grounded theory, though not intended to be generalizable, nevertheless upholds its roots in pragmatism. From the data collected and analyzed, the following implications for practice should be developed and nurtured to approach innovative strategies to promote gender equity in the superintendency:

1. Recognition and awareness that aspiring and acting women superintendents require a multilayered process of building resilience on top of that already required for the position. This concept should be overtly explored in mentoring relationships, higher education administrative certification programs, state and national professional development opportunities, and alternative pathways to the superintendency.
2. Aspiring and acting women superintendents should refer to the capacitance models to check for and reflect upon their spark, fuel, and obstacles, including all sub-categories. This may help women leaders to recognize areas where they are in deficit and seek out opportunities to fill those needs.
3. Professional and community development should be designed, organized, and delivered to assist committees, boards, and hiring groups to recognize and break down perceived and real obstacles for women and implicit gender bias (Also suggested by Ibarra et al., 2013; Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013; Irby & Brown, 2013).

This work can be done with school board associations, state-level superintendent organizations, and education departments in higher education institutions.

4. Based on several participants' feedback, current women superintendents have a responsibility to alter their language to promote a more positive message about the superintendency to open the doors to more talent. They should also actively pursue opportunities to mentor and encourage talented women leaders in education.
5. State-required mentoring all new superintendents would be a way to allow women to have a mentor without concern of a stigma of appearing "weak" while simultaneously strengthening the profession as a whole.
6. Examine the recommendations for further research to continue the work toward increasing resilience and eliminating gender bias for women in the superintendency.

Limitations of the Study

1. Generalizability: Since this research follows constructivist grounded theory, generalizability is not an expectation; analysis and modeling offered through this theory is for the purpose of creating the theory and model along, not extrapolating the data to make general assumptions. Twelve participants would also never be a sufficient sample for generalizing information.
2. Gender: Participants in this study were all women, and much of the information gained from this data and analysis may also apply to men.
3. Assumption about Resilience: This research assumes the process of building resilience contributes to a higher rate of women in the superintendency. There are potentially other contributing factors to this ratio that are external or in other ways not associated with individuals or this group and the study did not suggest otherwise.

4. Location: This study is place-based bound in New Hampshire (NH) alone, and while a substantive theory may suggest what factors can contribute to closing the gender gap, there is no guarantee that these are transferable to any other state.
5. Positionality: As a female superintendent in her first five years in New Hampshire, I recognize my position in the data may potentially be perceived as bias; careful data collection, memo writing, and member checking were strategies used to prevent bias, though I believe with co-constructed knowledge there is no expectation of complete objectivity.
6. Race: As the female superintendents in New Hampshire are majority White, this study does not approach the added dimension of race to the data, which is an even more critical factor in the concerns over women in the superintendency.
7. Trust: While I took careful measures to create a safe and comfortable space for the participants to speak openly, there may possibly have been hesitation since I am a colleague.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. The capacitance and capacitance model in context should be researched with male superintendents and superintendents of color to identify if/where there are universal processes for building resilience.
2. The capacitance and capacitance in context models may be researched for crossover applications to leadership in other professions.
3. The capacitance and capacitance in context models should be researched in other states with both similar and differing demographics, cultures, and histories.

4. The capacitance model should be extended in its study to include the three effects of capacitance, which would likely offer insights on how superintendents regulate their own energy and that around them. Each of the three effects of capacitance can be explored for its correlation to leadership:
 - a. resistance: in this effect, the capacitor resists a change in voltage, thereby storing a charge to release into the system; this could potentially relate to studies on how superintendents manage and regulate the change process;
 - b. frequency filtering: in this effect, the capacitor filters out the higher frequency inputs and lets them pass right through the system in order to keep the charge steady; this could potentially relate to studies on how superintendents manage the “noise” and “bandwagon” approaches of the superintendency; and
 - c. phase shifting: in this effect, the capacitor shifts to put the current ahead of the voltage, which maximizes energy; this could potentially relate to studies on how superintendents use proactive methods such as short- and long-term strategic planning maximize the energy going into providing the district with direction.
5. Other methodologies, such as quantitative, case study, narrative, and phenomenology may offer additional perspectives and information on building resilience for women superintendents.
6. The ability for situational adaptation should be further researched to see if this skill and the paradox mindset transfers to uniquely valuable leadership skills for women superintendents.
7. Changing school board demographics show an increase of women, does this effect open up gatekeeping aspects to more women leaders?

8. Further research on harsher judgment for mistakes and the resulting response from women leaders is needed. Does this phenomenon hold the potential for breaking the vicious cycle of implicit bias?
9. A comprehensive quantitative instrument may be offered to see the effect of career paths on reaching the superintendency.
10. Self-talk emerged as a key concept but is sparse in literature pertaining to women, leadership, and resilience. Research targeting this cross-section and resulting strategies may offer practical implications for women in leadership.
11. During the data collection, analysis, and member checking on findings, there was significant disparity and agitation pertaining to women admitting and/or not admitting to gender difference in leadership experiences. If some women no longer feel comfortable openly discussing differences, this is a sign of silenced voices; this should be studied further to gauge the breadth and depth of this issue.

Conclusion

Our nation's schools need strong, resilient superintendents, and until gender equity is no longer an issue, we will suffer the consequences of lost talent for these critical positions. This constructivist grounded theory study presents two models that illustrate the process of building resilience experienced by women superintendents in the state of New Hampshire. They are *the capacitance model* and the *capacitance in context model*. Key concepts for the process of building resilience were identified and situated in leadership as well as leadership in context, and findings suggest that an auxiliary layer of resilience is required for women on top of a base layer for superintendents overall. Research revealed that participants are aware of the fact they are women superintendents, not just superintendents, and that gender bias remains an issue in

accessing and serving in this position through the emergence of several identified obstacles, mainly attributed to socio-cultural perceptions.

As Derrington and Sherratt (2008) assert, the identification and recognition of barriers is the first step to overcoming them. This study identifies various obstacles to the superintendency, primarily categorized as implicit gender bias; however, the resulting models do not approach this phenomenon through the deficit perspective often tied to research on gender barriers. The models presented were developed through an appreciative lens, simultaneously depicting the strategies that overcome obstacles, providing examples of what is currently working, and illustrating how these strategies bolster the process of building resilience. Through this perspective, it is the intention of this study to offer new outlooks on gender equity in school leadership and how more women can build the multilayered resilience necessary to become superintendents. Ultimately, an increase in women as top-level school leaders will offer more to the education profession; to all women leaders regardless of profession; and to the others who aspire to follow in their paths. Eliminating the gender gap “matters not only because the familiar glass ceiling is unfair, but also because the world has an increasingly urgent need for more leaders. All men and women with the brains, the desire, and the perseverance to lead should be encouraged to fulfill their potential and leave their mark” (Barsh et al., 2008. p. 35).

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APPENDIX A

IRB Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

Part I: Information Sheet

Name(s) of Principal Investigator(s)

Sydney D. Leggett

Title of Study

Women in the Superintendency in New Hampshire: A Grounded Theory Study of Resilience

Recipients

IRB, Participants, Dr. Matthew Moehle, Chair; Dr. Christine Rath, Committee Member; Dr. Lyonel Tracy, Committee Member,

Introduction

I am Sydney Leggett, a doctoral student at the Southern New Hampshire University Department of Education. I am doing research on the process of building resilience in female superintendents in New Hampshire. I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research.

Purpose of the Research

I am doing this research in order to study the process of how women build resilience as they gain access and opportunity for the traditionally male role of superintendent. As you may know, there is currently a shortage of superintendents, and increasing gender equity can help open up the talent pool. By investigating the process that women have gone through to build resilience and achieve this role, this research may suggest strategies, programs, or other factors that could help future developing female education leaders. I would like to learn about your journey into the superintendency and how you developed resilience along the way.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in a 1:1 interview that will last approximately one hour.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to partake in this research because you are or have been a female superintendent in the state of New Hampshire and will contribute much to the understanding of this experience.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not.

Procedures

If you accept the invitation to be a part of this research, you will be asked to set aside one hour for an interview at a location of your choosing. I will be recording the interview, but no one else will have access to the recording at any time. I will assure your anonymity and confidentiality by assigning you a pseudonym as well as a numerical code for the data; in addition, any other identifiable information that may arise--such as district name or location--will be identified through pseudonyms. All data collected will be stored in a digital format in an online location that is password protected. I am the only person who will have this password.

During the interview, I will ask you questions about your journey into the superintendency, your process of building resilience along the way, and strategies that you have found successful in your role. You will not be asked to share any information you choose not to, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time.

Duration

This interview will take an estimated one hour. It is likely that I will need clarification and/or confirmation of information after this interview as the research progresses; for this, I will reach out to you in the way you feel is best (in person, phone, email, etc.)

Risks

There are minimal risks to this research; at any point, you may choose to share or not share any information you feel is too personal or that makes you uncomfortable.

Benefits

The benefit to participating in this research is to be a part of increasing access and opportunity for women to enter the superintendency. Sharing your experiences can help a future generation of women in school leadership.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms, assigned numerical codes in the data, and by choosing an interview location that is best for you where you feel comfortable meeting. All data collected is password protected, and besides me (the researcher) no one will know at any time who any of the participants are in this study.

Sharing the Results

The knowledge that I get from this research will be shared with you and the other participants before it is presented at the dissertation defense. Each participant will receive a summary of the results. The research may also be submitted for publication in an article in the future.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. You may stop participating in the interview at any time that you wish. I will give you an opportunity after the interview to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

Who to Contact

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the SNHU IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact irb@snhu.edu or 603-645-9695.

Part II: Certificate of Consent

Women in the Superintendency in New Hampshire: A Grounded Theory Study of Resilience
Sydney D. Leggett, Researcher: Southern New Hampshire University

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent:

Sydney D. Leggett

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

The following questions represent a sampling of those that may be asked during the course of research. As grounded theory interviews seek the elicitation of a theory, it is expected that these questions will change with each interview.

Basic Demographic Questions

1. Number of years in the superintendency
2. List of positions prior to the superintendency
3. How many superintendencies have you had?
4. In each case, did you replace a woman or a man in your position(s)?
5. Were they all in New Hampshire or also in other states?

Interview Questions:

Lead question for all:

When you think of your journey into the superintendency, a traditionally male-dominated role, the biggest things that come to mind are.....

1. Motivation and Resilience:
 - a. Lead question: *My research is based on the premise that building resilience is a process. What can you tell me about the process you went through to build resilience?*
 - b. Follow-up Question:
Think back to the beginning of your superintendency, how did you start to build resilience?and then a few years in?and where are you now?
 - c. Potential Sub questions:
 - *What motivated you to be a superintendent?*
 - *Did you always feel capable or when/how did that occur?*
 - *Were there specific ways you had to build resilience as a woman in this field?*
 - *What sped up, slowed, or impeded the process of developing resiliency?*
 - *Do you feel your growth/change was influenced by navigating gender? If yes, how?*
 - *In times of major adversity, how do you manage to have the resilience to pull through? Does this have anything to do with gender?*
2. Gender and the Role
 - a. Lead question: *Tell me about any unique advantages or disadvantages that being a woman had on your path to the superintendency.*

- b. Follow-up Question: *How conscious are you of your gender in your role?*
 - c. Potential Sub-Questions:
 - *Do you feel as if there are major differences between male and women superintendents?*
 - *Does your gender influence any of your actions? For example, are there instances in which you specifically think about your presentation or actions due to your gender?*
 - *Given equal circumstances, women superintendents still earn less than men. Does money matter?*
3. Public Perception
 - a. Lead Question: *As a women leader, how might public perception influence you in your work?*
 - b. Follow-up Question: *Are there any specific examples you can think of where you are more or less accepted by the public due to your gender? How do you approach scenarios where you feel you are less accepted?*
 - c. Potential Sub-Questions:
 - *Has Board perception as a women leader influenced you in your work?*
 - *Please reflect on the search process, do you feel that gender played a part in your ability to attain the position? Was it different in different districts?*
 - *As a women leader, have you ever experienced times when you're subject to more criticism than males in the role?*
 - *Do you find any differences between male and women followers in terms of your work as a women leader?*
4. Personal
 - a. Lead Question: *What are the most significant ways you've needed to balance your personal and professional life?*
 - b. Follow-up Question: *Has this helped or hindered your ability to build resilience?*
 - c. Potential Sub-Questions:
 - *Do you take care of yourself personally? Does that have an effect on your ability to stay resilient?*
 - *Do you ever feel as if your role as a woman/mother/wife/partner is in conflict with your role as a superintendent?*
 - *Are there ways in which you've had to adapt your personal life to meet the demands of your job?*
5. Supports:
 - a. Lead Question: *What supports work best for you?*
 - b. Potential Sub-Questions:
 - *As a women leader, what positives offset the negatives?*
 - *Who did you have for support as you were on the path to superintendent?*
 - *Do you believe meeting with a group of women like you would make a difference?*

- *Are you able to make connections with other women superintendents at meetings or conferences?*
- *Do you feel that superintendent meetings are gender neutral?*
- *Have you had a mentor – either officially or unofficially – and did that person have a major influence on your ability to be a resilient leader?*
- *When/how/where do you feel the strongest sense of belonging as a superintendent?*
- *What's most important to you in your work? Where do you find the "courage in your conviction"?*

Closing Questions:

- *What advice would you give a young women administrator about going into the superintendency?*
- *How would you advise them to face adverse situations? Build resilience?*
- *What are your thoughts about the future of women in the superintendency overall?*

APPENDIX C

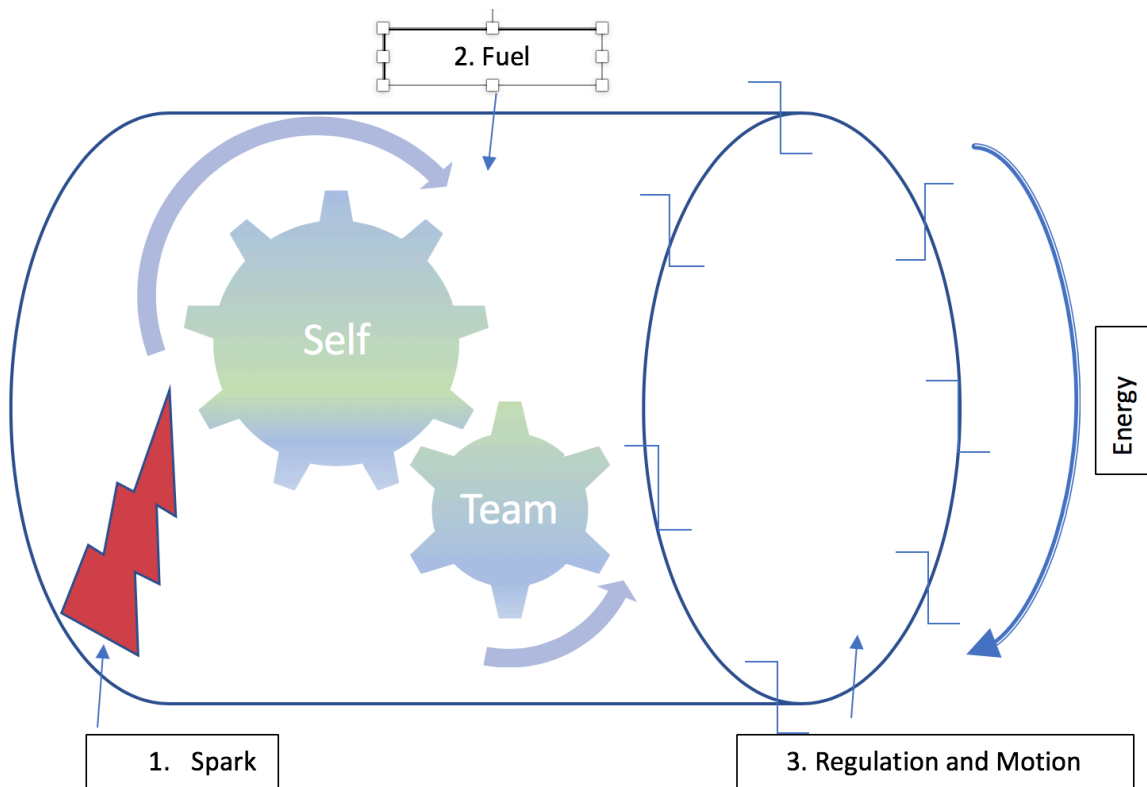
Member Checking

The goal of my research was to develop a theory and model that represents how women superintendents in New Hampshire build the resilience they need to do the job. Thanks to all of you, I believe I've arrived at a model based on your responses. I'll walk you through the model itself as well as some unanswered questions; what I'd like to know is if this model resonates with your experience. There are a few questions at the end, and I welcome any feedback at all you can give me.

Resulting Theory and Models

In **Model 1**, I'd like you to imagine that you're a turbine engine (I know this might not be too difficult, since you may feel that way already). For this engine, you need a spark and then fuel to generate energy, and in this case, energy is referred to as "capacitance." While there is often research on leadership "capacity," meaning the ability to have a charge, "*capacitance*" is *the ability to hold a charge*. I've found this to be the best way to depict the specific type of energy required for resilience. Your responses suggest that *capacitance* is gained as follows:

Model 1: The Superintendent as a Turbine



The three main components illustrate part of a sequence through which a spark ignites, utilizes fuel to keep it burning, which is then regulated and transformed into energy. This turbine holistically represents you and the energy you're able to hold.

Spark: In the first component, the spark, your responses suggest two main factors. First, the spark comes from purpose; across the board all of you brought your passion for education forward and this mission-driven initiative literally serves to ignite. Second, each of you mentioned something about your nature, or internal “mettle,” that gives you the fortitude to take on this or other difficult jobs. Together, these two things are what brought you to challenging work, and they're also much of what guides your decision making in hard times.

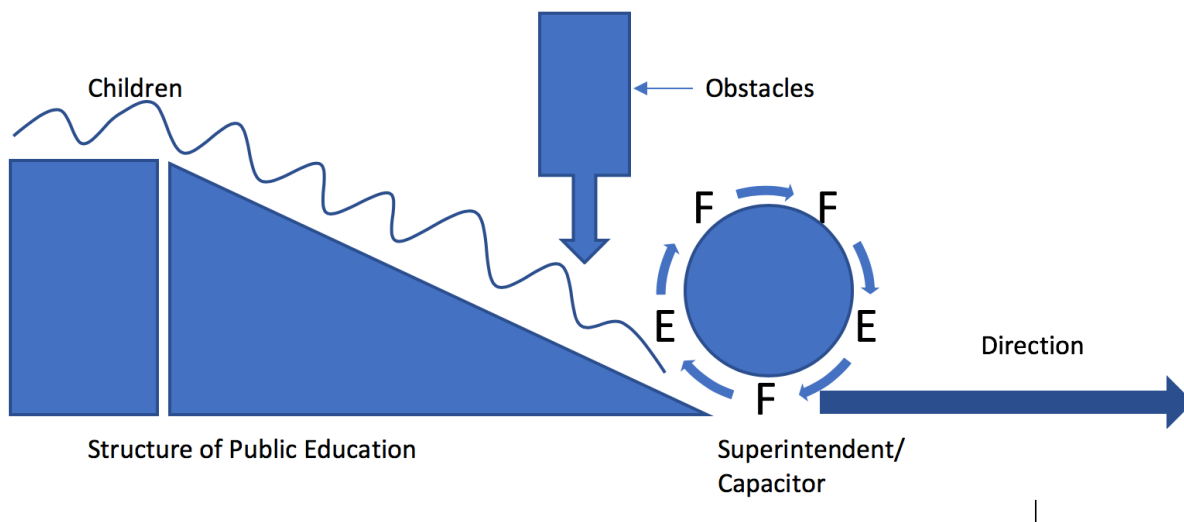
Fuel: Speaking specifically about resilience—the ability to bounce back from difficult times—the two cogs represent “mutual capacitance.” *Cultivating the Self* and *Cultivating the Team* provide the support/fuel that fosters the creation and renewal of energy. It's important to note that your responses suggest that “self” is the first step towards mutual capacitance, thereby making it the first and larger of the two cogs. None of you mentioned that there was only self-support or only team-support, suggesting that they may both be necessary for resilience.

- The biggest factors offered for “self-support” were: self-talk, self-reflection, self-efficacy, and self-care (though this last one was the one everyone wanted and few actually had).
- The biggest factors offered for “team support” were: creating trust; and building relationships, specifically with your boards, administrative teams, community members, and professional colleagues, i.e., other supers.
- Mentors were in both self and team – responses showed how mentors develop both realms of support.

Motion/Regulation: Capacitance keeps continual energy created, which is represented by the turning of the cylinder, the engine, as a whole; this in turn creates energy, and this aspect becomes clearer when viewed through Model 2. The circle below is the side view of the turbine.

**Model 2 serves to put Model 1 into context.*

Model 2: The Superintendent (turbine) in System Context



In Model 2, the superintendent is placed in the role of—keeping consistency with the analogy of energy—a water turbine. The model represents a situation that takes the resilience of the superintendency into account within the larger picture of public education. If you view the above as a dam with hydroelectric power, each section plays a significant role in understanding the resilience of the women superintendents studied:

- **Children:** The children are represented by the natural flow of water; in any culture, as long as the population continues, there will naturally be children.
- **Structure of Public Education:** The structure of public education is the social construction in the United States designed to channel the natural “flow” of children in order to help them learn; this is represented by the man-made dam—or in this analogy, the public school system, which is designed to channel the natural flow of children, and in this case to not only channel and direct that flow, but to also use its natural power for energy.
- **Turbine:** The turbine or “capacitor” here is the superintendent, displaying a side-view of Model 1. This capacitor has energy on its own, but also generates energy from the flowing water (children, community, etc.). Bringing those dimensions in concert and using the flaps (F) and energy (E) (picture them as water wheel paddles) to regulate itself and the flow of water is what can make the system successful; this, however, requires the inner resilience of the superintendent as suggested in Model 1.

- **Obstacles:** Obstacles are those things which get in the way of the natural flow of the water and/or the turbine, impeding motion. Should the obstacles become too large, “lodged” in the space between the capacitor and dam, or in other ways stop the positive motion of the turbine, then the capacitor will either stop forward motion or in some cases move counterclockwise. This represents the loss of resilience. As an example, an obstacle may get caught spinning constantly with no forward motion down the river; in the dam analogy, this is known as the vortex, the place at which endless spinning takes place. Should the capacitor start to turn backwards, Model 1 would be in reverse and then a loss of motion/regulation, loss of capacitance, and then an extinguishing of the spark is a possibility. It is important to note that the vortex, while a place to get stuck, is also an integral source to the overall energy created by the dam.
- **Direction:** The channeled flow of the water, a strategic direction for learning.

From your responses, you’ve all experienced obstacles, though very different in nature. Some common barriers were: politics, press/social media, and making difficult decisions. Some specific to gender in many cases were: public perceptions of gender and job responsibilities; being more open to attack than your male counterparts; and navigating the “gatekeepers” to the role, specifically boards and search consultants. There were a few examples of overt sexism, but it appears that perception and implicit gender bias are more prevalent than any readily identified gender discrimination.

Almost all of you, at one point or another, relayed an experience where an obstacle caused you to be stuck in the vortex. What I was most interested in was how you got out, which is, essentially, your resilience.

General:

Please respond to any thoughts at all about the models. Please let me know what works for you and what doesn’t. Also, I have some general follow-up questions left unanswered by the research – feel free to tackle any or all if you’d like to offer your input!

1. Do you think the responses for “self” support were more prevalent because, at the end of the day, it’s an isolated position? Or do you believe there are other reasons for this?
2. The responses regarding whether or not there are different experiences for male and women superintendents were the most mixed. They fell into three categories:
 - a. There are very clearly differences.
 - b. There are very clearly differences, and those who state that there are no differences just don’t want to say there are differences because it makes them seem vulnerable themselves.
 - c. There are no differences.
 What are your thoughts on this?

3. The following speculation was raised in just about every interview: *I just don't think I would have been treated that way if I were a man.* (Sometimes about yourselves and sometimes about a women colleague's experience). If we accept that this is a shared experience, please let me know more about why you think it happens.