

PERKINS, TIFFANY A, Ed.D. *The Gendering of Educational Leadership Styles: Mentoring and the Deconstruction of Binaries that Influence Women's Access to the Superintendency*. (2014)

Directed by Drs. Kimberly K. Hewitt and Rick Reitzug. 192 pp.

At the onset of this research, approximately 24.1% of superintendents in the United States and 15.7% of superintendents in North Carolina were women. These statistics indicate a national gap of 51.9 percentage points and a 68.6 percentage point gap in North Carolina for gender representation in the superintendency. To better understand the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, I studied the experiences of how female superintendents in North Carolina were/are being mentored, as well as how they have/are mentoring others. This study explored the mentoring experiences of seven female superintendents in North Carolina to determine the impact such experiences play in reproducing the gendering of leadership roles. The impact of mentoring experiences on subjectivity, agency, and women's access to the superintendency was also explored. Poststructural feminism served as the theoretical lens to inquire about practices that reinforce socially constructed beliefs which associate leadership styles with gender and the extent to which these may impact access for women to the superintendency. The results of the study not only contribute to recommendations for improving mentoring experiences and opportunities for women aspiring to the superintendency, but also identify ways that mentoring can support the work of both men and women in creating a more equitable system. The findings of the research suggest that current superintendents have immense power in women's access to the superintendency. As mentors, they can provide protégés with authentic job opportunities,

model a variety of effective leadership practices and provide reflective and supportive discourse with and about protégés. Using these strategies positively impact the protégés subjectivity within educational leadership. The results also indicate that socially constructed patriarchal assumptions about leadership and gender are still deeply embedded and more work is needed to deconstruct these assumptions as they complicate women's access to and work within the superintendency.

THE GENDERING OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLES: MENTORING
AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF BINARIES THAT INFLUENCE
WOMEN'S ACCESS TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro
2014

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I dedicate this to my mother, Chris Austin, and maternal grandmother, Minnie Ulrich.

I treasured your voices, even when it felt as if no one else was listening.

APPROVAL PAGE

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March 3, 2014
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the past six years I have been encouraged and supported by many people. My husband, Charles and son, Jake teamed up to support me through the endless hours of coursework, research, and writing. My extended family, close friends and colleagues provided me with prayers and words of encouragement. I would like to thank my dissertation committee of Kim K. Hewitt, Rick Reitzug, Silvia Bettez, and P. Holt Wilson for their guidance and support over the past two years. Dr. Hewitt spent many hours mentoring me through the dissertation process, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to learn from her. I would like to thank the seven women who participated in this research. They are inspiring, dedicated leaders and our state is fortunate to have them serving as superintendents. I want to end by thanking God for the experiences that have impassioned me to listen to and learn from others' voices and for allowing me the opportunity to share those voices with the world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My experiences in educational leadership have heavily influenced my identity and understanding of how gender impacts others' perceptions and expectations of me. Specifically, these experiences have enlightened me to the discursive practices that limit opportunities for women in leadership based upon normative, gender-based assumptions. I remember a very impressionable conversation with one of the superintendents with whom I have worked. Each time I walked into his office, I noticed a picture of the Superintendent and his young son walking across one of the district's high school football fields. It was prominently taped to his office door. He always beamed with pride when he would share stories about his two young sons. After we had worked together for some time and developed a mentoring relationship, I asked him to tell me a little bit about that picture I had passed many times on his door. With delight, he proceeded to share their experience together:

Yes, that is me and Adam at Forest Lawn High School a few seasons ago. He was about 3 or 4. He loves to go to the football games with me for father/son time. That particular night, I went out at halftime to lead the ceremony for the John Stevens Award. Someone got a snapshot of us walking off the field after the ceremony and emailed it to me. It is one of my favorite pictures.

As I listened to his story, I wondered how the perception of stakeholders might differ between a male and female superintendent leading a half-time ceremony at a high school

football game with their young child by their side. I asked him if he thought it might be perceived differently if I were the superintendent and my young son Jake had accompanied me to that same event. My recollection of his response was:

Well, I am not sure I ever thought about that, but now that you ask. I don't think they would be perceived the same way at all. I probably came across as a caring, involved father who is giving my son valuable experiences he will later need. If you were out there with Jake in tow, you could possibly be perceived as having distractions from work and not able to separate your personal and professional responsibilities.

He communicated that he wished this were not the case, but that many people still have traditional expectations for men and women that would change their perceptions. He had never considered how the differences in others' perceptions of female and male superintendents impacted women in the superintendency. Once he reflected on my question, he recognized that there are different conflicts for female leaders that are perpetuated by gender-based assumptions. This conversation was one of the first that sparked my interest in how gender perceptions and expectations impact both men and women as they pursue the superintendency.

The lens by which one views the world depends upon her/his subjectivity. Subjectivity can be viewed as the complex exchange of "conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, which can account for the relationship between the individual and the social" (Weedon, 1997, p. 3). Viewing my experiences in educational leadership through a poststructural feminist lens has been especially relevant and enlightening. This is not to say that poststructural feminism is the only theory by which every woman or every female educational leader's experience can best be viewed. However, this theory

provides a structure for critiquing dominant discourses. The purpose of analyzing these discourses is to uncover structures that genderize leadership styles and other practices that create obstacles for women in accessing the highest levels of leadership in education.

I have become much more aware of the performative nature of my subjectivity as a district level director. In other words, I recognize that in writing and rewriting reality through discourse, I have influence over the exchanges of the individual and social in a way that can impact mine and others' realities. I am able "to turn a reflexive gaze on discourse and able to work on discourse itself in order to reconstitute the world in less oppressive ways" (Davies et al., 2005, p. 89). It is difficult to describe, but as my role within the educational environment has changed over time, I have become more aware of how dialogue and performance reveal and constitute normative assumptions and expectations of gender roles and how these have affected the access that women have to higher-level leadership positions. While this study focuses on gender, it is important to acknowledge that there are implications of the intersectionality of gender, race, socio-economic status, sexuality and other marginalities on issues of equity.

I often reflect upon my experiences as a female leader. One poignant experience occurred in my first year as a district level leader during a meeting with two co-directors and our supervisor, a female assistant superintendent whom I considered a mentor. We had just finished up a lengthy planning discussion on the contents of an upcoming professional development session for our K-12 administrators. The assistant superintendent turned to the only male director, laid her hand on his arm and said, "Thank you so much for your patience. I know you are so glad to go home and not have

to listen to us anymore.” Needless to say I was shocked. I am reflective enough to recognize that some people are more verbal than others in meetings. My perception had been that we shared ideas openly when we planned together. However, the potential underlying assumption in the comment she made to him was troubling to me. Was she categorizing the three women as too talkative? Was she suggesting we were difficult to work with and that *his* less vocal style was preferable? Was she suggesting that we should adjust our styles to adapt to his in the future? This experience influenced me to look critically at how discourse within a mentor/mentee relationship may serve to reify feminine/masculine stereotypes. In addition, these relationships have a significant impact on women’s subjectivities, access to higher levels of leadership and their deconstruction or reproduction of gender-based discourse. Benson (as cited in Davies, 1991) suggests that

by seeing how agency is constituted, marginal members of society can cease blaming themselves for not being agentic and can challenge the dominant discourses that constitute them as non-agentic through such processes as consciousness raising in which they can develop a critical awareness of “normative domains.” (p. 44)

This study will analyze data from current female superintendents in North Carolina regarding their experiences being mentored to the superintendency. While there is available research regarding the obstacles faced by women in accessing the superintendency, little current research exists regarding the dynamics of mentoring relationships and how they may sustain or disrupt a privileged, patriarchal system. The presentation of this research is organized into the following chapters: Introduction,

Literature Review, Methodology, Results and Discussion, and Implications and Conclusion.

Problem Statement

Alarming Statistics

Recent statistics show that 75% of teachers in the United States are women (Kober & Usher, 2012). However, according to a 2009 AASA study of superintendents, only 24.1% of those responding to the study were female (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). This is a significant gap in representation from the classroom to the executive office. It is also essential to note that this statistic reflects the percent of female superintendents who responded to the study and is not necessarily a direct correlation to the percentage of women superintendents in the United States. There are estimated to be 12,600 superintendents in the United States, and only 1,867 responded to the study. This is approximately a 14.8% participation rate. In addition to a low rate of participation, only males were used in the pilot study and as members of the panel of experts who addressed content validity in this study. Although the national percentage of female superintendents increased from 13.2% in 2000, there is still a disturbing gender gap in the superintendency (Kowalski et al., 2011). In North Carolina, an even larger gap exists, as only 15.7% of current superintendents are female (NC Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2012).

The Power of Language

Viewing the world from a feminist lens has a significant impact upon my leadership practices. For example, I often observe, and am careful not to participate in,

dialogue that genderizes leadership styles. Such dialogue reifies the very binaries that perpetuate subordination and reproduce power structures. It is important to recognize that

statistics regarding women in educational leadership, as well as women participants' own descriptions of their experiences, remind us that educational administration is still a male-dominated field, and school-leadership is currently constructed in ways more consonant with traditionally held views of masculinity. (Brady & Hammett, 1999, p. 43)

As a woman who has been promoted to increasingly higher levels of leadership in education, I have become interested in women's experiences in seeking the superintendency. Research on this topic highlights themes regarding deeply embedded social structures that impact equitable opportunities for women (Grogan, 1999). These themes include, but are not limited to, social perceptions regarding gender, gender stereotyping in leadership roles, and mentoring experiences (Alston, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Grogan, 1996, 1999, 2008; Kamler, 2006; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007; Tallerico, 2000; Wallin & Crippen, 2007). The literature on these topics will be explored in Chapter II. Little research exists, however, that examines the mentoring experiences, relationships, and discourse female superintendents experienced as they ascended to the superintendency; how those experiences influenced their subjectivity and agency; and how they subsequently mentored other aspiring leaders.

Gender discourses that secure patriarchy are deeply embedded in our culture. A poststructural feminist lens can be used to analyze and deconstruct discourses and power relations that “have reproduced patterns of domination and subordination [of] women and others similarly situated on the fringes of power” (Grogan, 1999, p. 200).

Poststructuralism provides a useful lens to critique language, how knowledge is produced and accessed, and dominant discourses related to power relationships (Grogan, 1996; Weedon, 1997). Conversation is a critical component of mentoring, and by studying the discourses that occur within those relationships, much may be revealed about the influence these experiences may have on genderizing leadership and women’s access to the superintendency.

If we wish to change the deeply rooted bias that exists in educational practices today, we need mentors for aspiring superintendents who understand and are committed to changing the discourse and social structures that create obstacles for women in the superintendency. Mullen (2005) refers to mentors who provide this level of support as alternative mentors or those who “eagerly pursue or attract creative attempts at reinvention” (p. 37). Koenig and colleagues (2011), in a meta-analysis of gender stereotyping in leadership styles, suggest that “empirical research thus has demonstrated that an increase in the number of women leaders can produce a more androgynous concept of leadership and thereby reduce bias toward current and potential women leaders” (p. 618). Nonetheless, the solution is not simply to increase the number of female superintendents as “this perpetuates the myth that the issue lies in the racialized or genderized embodiment of individuals or a particular social group, rather than in the

structures, cultures and mythologies constituting dominant institutional and populist notions of leadership” (Blackmore, 2010, p. 50). However, by not recognizing the disparity of representation of women in higher-level leadership positions and actively deconstructing the socially constructed stereotypes that exist as obstacles, we stymie progress in changing a patriarchal system that perpetuates inequality.

Focus of the Study

The proposed study will explore the mentoring experiences of female superintendents in order to determine the impact such experiences play in disrupting or reproducing the gendering of leadership roles and the impact this has on subjectivity and women’s access to the superintendency. Not only did I explore the experiences of how these superintendents were/are being mentored, but also how they have/are mentoring others. Researching the lived realities for female superintendents through a poststructural feminist lens may reveal practices that disrupt or continue to reinforce socially constructed beliefs that associate leadership styles with gender and may provide insight into the impact these practices have on limiting access for women to the superintendency. The intent of the study is to make recommendations for improving mentoring experiences and opportunities not only for women aspiring to the superintendency, but also to identify ways that mentoring can support the work of both men and women in creating a more equitable system.

Research Questions

The proposed study will explore the following research questions:

- What have been the mentoring experiences of female superintendents as they aspired to the superintendency?
- What role has language and discourse played in mentoring relationships to disrupt or reproduce gender norms?
- How have mentoring relationships impacted study participants' understandings of subjectivity and agency?
- How do female superintendents employ their concept of subjectivity and agency as they mentor other aspiring superintendents?

Significance of the Study

This research is primarily designed to benefit society. It is the exploration of “an alternative view of the self-located historically in language, produced in everyday gendered and cultural experiences, and expressed in writing and speaking” (Bloom, 2002, p. 291) that may increase understanding of how mentoring experiences for women can be established and/or improved to increase access to the superintendency. It is through this access that the gap between men and women’s representation and their voices in positions of power can be narrowed. While filling that gap is not in and of itself the solution to disrupting the binaries of gender roles, Weedon (1997) acknowledges “the degree to which marginal discourses can increase their social power is governed by the wider context of social interests and power within which challenges to the dominant are made” (p. 108). It is necessary for the improvement of society that the voices being

silenced, in larger numbers, have access to positions where they can influence dominant, patriarchal discourse and privilege. Johnson (2006) suggests that “privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they’ve done or failed to do” (p. 21).

Some may be skeptical that the gender gap in the superintendency is the result of white, middle/upper class male privilege, especially as the number of women in the profession is increasing. The results of the study can provide insight into the experiences of those women who have accessed the superintendency and how these women may be influencing the opportunities of others.

Theoretical Framework

This is a qualitative, poststructural feminist study of female superintendents regarding their experiences being mentored to the superintendency, how these experiences influence their subjectivity and agency, as well as how they mentor others who are pursuing higher level leadership positions. A hallmark of post-structural feminism is “to create a theory of knowledge that is more inclusive of the full range of human experience” (Jones, 1989, p. 141).

Each decade, the *Study of the American School Superintendent* is sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). The publication authored by Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) provides an in-depth look at the demographics of school superintendents across the nation at the turn of the century. Brunner (2008) critically analyzed her own involvement in the analysis of the data presented in the 2000 publication and warns that “decisions about the use of data are critical and can result in

discourse that is inaccurate about and unsupportive of women and persons of color” (p. 661). In this same study, Brunner notes that “women’s and persons’ of color disaggregated data were not published” (p. 665) in certain reporting areas, rendering their voices unheard. I bring up this point because I believe it is crucial not only to be cautious in analyzing quantitative data such as that presented by AASA, but to include qualitative data, especially data that involves the voices of the minority in the superintendency. As Brunner indicates, “all of us continue to reify the constructions of norms that support and enable exclusionary practices, in particular as they relate to the superintendency” (p. 662). We must also recognize the intersectionality of gender and race and the implication this has on how normative assumptions are assigned. As researchers, we have the power to influence a new discourse that can create a new set of values more inclusive of women in leadership positions.

Poststructuralism can provide a useful lens for identifying inequity in educational leadership. This theoretical framework provides a critique of language, how knowledge is produced and accessed, as well as dominant discourses that stabilize power relationships (Grogan, 1996; Weedon, 1997). Weedon (1997) creates a working understanding of components of poststructuralism—including language, subjectivity, and discourse—that can be used to analyze current practices that complicate and/or facilitate equity through mentoring relationships:

For poststructural theory, the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness is *language*. Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is

also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*. (p. 21)

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. A poststructuralist might say our words are priceless. Collective words make up the language and meanings that produce dominant discourses that continue to oppress women, as well as alternative discourses that contest dominant discourses. We must recognize the power of our words to construct “reality” in order to change a course of dialogue that controls a system of opportunities for women:

‘Subjectivity’ is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, [one’s] sense of [self] and [one’s] ways of understanding [one’s] relation to the world. . . . poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak. (Weeden, 1997, p. 32)

Poststructuralism views the self as fluid. It ebbs and flows based upon the discourses in which we find ourselves and is influenced by our position within that discourse as well.

For example, my subjectivity changes between the discourses in my professional and personal life. As an example, I will use the discourses I experience in relation to my knowledge and skill in education with those I work with juxtaposed to my family members. As I engage in conversations with others in the district office about education, I view myself as a novice. In the beginning I would share my frustrations with others at work regarding the reactionary approach I observed being used to solve problems and how we might be more proactive rather than reactive to problems in the organization. I found that sharing my frustrations and suggestions for improvement were viewed as

being “too pushy,” and I have since become hesitant about sharing these ideas. I recognize the level of agency others have at work, how my subjectivity is impacted by the language and power of others, and that I need to be viewed as confident and professional. The white, patriarchal system dictates that I enact certain behaviors that lend to that image, such as being less vocal or unemotional, and in order to be viewed in a positive light, I find that I inadvertently contribute to the hegemonic discourse by self-silencing in order to be perceived as less “feminine.”

My subjectivity with my family is very different. My sister is a teacher and will often call me to share her concerns at work. I feel very confident that my ideas and thoughts are valued as a leader and that my passion is shared. Both of my sisters often ask me for advice regarding their children’s education. My approach to their requests is usually to suggest that they gather more information as well as suggestions on how to do that, rather than placing judgment on how they may have approached a situation. This discourse, and my position in it, creates a very different subjectivity and sense of self than I experience at work. I am able to share my own frustrations with them about my situation at home or work without feeling as though I am seen as emotional or less able to manage all of the complexity of life. Self-silencing is not necessary as my display of normative white, middle class feminine qualities is not viewed as problematic by my family as it is in the professional realm.

Social structures and processes are organized through institutions and practices such as . . . the education system . . . which is located in and structured by a particular *discursive field* . . . Discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes . . . not all discourses carry equal weight or power. Some will account for and

justify the appropriateness of the status quo. Others will give rise to challenge to existing practices from within or will contest the very basis of current organization and the selective interests which it represents. (Weedon, 1997, p. 34)

By analyzing language, subjectivity, and discourse within mentoring relationships through a poststructural feminist lens, one is better able to see the power structures that exist and can be shifted as a result of those relationships. That exploration may also provide insight into how, within the discourse they find themselves, women are developing an understanding of themselves and the influence they may have in a variety of circumstances. A study of women's mentoring experiences and how these experiences influence the normative discourses that may create barriers for women aspiring to the superintendency is critical to poststructural feminist research. More details on how this lens was used to collect, analyze, and share data will be explained in Chapter III.

Defined Terms

Binary Oppositions—For the purpose of this research, these are concepts or ideas located within discourse that hold opposite meanings. In their use, they create a superordination of the masculine and subordination of the feminine

Deconstruction—This term refers to a process of taking apart and examining assumptions in order to redefine them. Derrida and Caputo (1997) reference deconstruction as understanding that “what is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come” (p. 31). This is an empowering concept as it suggests normative expectations can be rewritten in a way that removes obstacles faced by marginalized groups.

Discourse—This study applies Weedon’s (1997) concept of discourse, strongly influenced by Foucault’s development of discourse, as “ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them” (p. 105).) .

Hegemony—This term refers to the complex process of maintaining a dominant set of values/beliefs/ideals within a culture, reinforced and reified by the complicity of the subjects being dominated by the discourse.

Mentor—There are a variety of definitions and types of mentors. In the context of this research, mentor will be defined as someone in the protégé’s professional realm who has influenced her professional development and advancement as she has ascended into higher levels of educational leadership. The mentor may be formal (assigned) or informal (spontaneous) (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006; Mullen, 2005; Washington, 2011).

Protégé—In simplest of terms, protégé refers to the person being mentored.

Subjectivity—This term refers to the identity of the individual within a certain context. Subjectivity is fluid and can change with the discourse in which the individual finds herself and can change over time (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Weedon, 1997).

Organization of the Study

This study set out to explore the mentoring experiences of female superintendents in order to determine the impact such experiences play in reproducing the gendering of leadership roles and the impact this has on subjectivity and women’s access to the superintendency. Chapter II, the Literature Review, will illustrate the gap in the research

on the impact of mentoring for female superintendents. The purpose of this study was achieved by collecting and analyzing qualitative data from female superintendents in North Carolina about their experiences being mentored as well as how they have/are mentoring others. Each of the seven women interviewed for this project have had unique and equally relevant experiences prior to and during their appointment to the superintendency. At the onset of the research, only 18 out of 115 superintendents in North Carolina were women. The presentation of the data is a delicate process as every effort is being made to protect the identity of the seven participants. More details on the Methodology will be discussed in Chapter III.

Researching the lived realities for female superintendents through a feminist poststructuralist lens provides insight into practices that disrupt or continue to reinforce socially constructed beliefs that associate leadership styles with gender and may provide insight into the impact these practices have on limiting access for women to the superintendency. The analysis of the data will be presented in the Results and Discussion in Chapter IV. Based upon the analysis and discussion, recommendations for practice and consideration for future research are presented in the Implications and Conclusion section in Chapter V.

Summary

This study included the unique experiences of seven current female superintendents to better understand the impact that mentoring has had on reproducing the gendering of leadership roles and the impact this has on subjectivity and women's access to the superintendency. There exists a significant gap in the representation of

women as superintendents in North Carolina. Therefore, those women who have accessed this role were of special interest. The research provided an opportunity to learn more about their experiences being mentored as well as how they have/are mentoring others. Using a feminist poststructuralist lens gives special focus to practices that disrupt or continue to reinforce socially constructed beliefs that associate leadership styles with gender and may provide insight into the impact these practices have on limiting access for women to the superintendency.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

The Superintendency as A Man's World—An Historical and Socially Constructed Perspective

Introduction

The superintendency is a position that originated in American education in the mid-19th century. It has evolved as a result of social, political and cultural influences since that time. Historically, white men have had the most power and influence over organizational structures, including education (Dobie & Hummell, 2001; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; McDonough & Nunez, 2007). As a result, the superintendency has been socially constructed as a man's world. This chapter will review literature associated with the social construction of the superintendency from the inception of the role to the present. The chapter is broken into the historical evolution of the superintendency and women in the superintendency. The first section will begin with an overview of two perspectives of how the role of superintendent has evolved and increased in complexity over time. A second sub-section will present a discussion on what two studies sponsored by the same organization, yet separated by four decades, reveals about the evolution of research on the superintendency. The historical overview will set the stage for the second section which focuses on two aspects specific to women in the superintendency: obstacles to accessing the superintendency and the impact

mentoring can have for female aspirants. Collectively, a discussion of the literature on how language, gender and mentoring impact women's access to the superintendency will be presented. The final section will provide a summary of the void in research that can be addressed through this research study.

Historical Evolution of the Superintendency

Roles and responsibilities. The first superintendent was appointed in the late 1830s (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Kowalski, 2005). The superintendency is a socially constructed role and expectations for the role have evolved and increased in complexity since the 1830s (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Getzels, Lipham, & Campbell, 1968; Knezevich, 1971; McFadden & Smith, 2004; Young, Crow, Murphy & Ogawa, 2009). There is not a neat historical perspective of the superintendency. Different approaches to researching the superintendency have created various perspectives on how it has changed over time. This section uses two literature perspectives to provide an overview of the development of the superintendency. The first perspective is primarily attributed to Carter and Cunningham (1997) and the second to Kowalski (2005). Using two perspectives demonstrates the complexity associated with the conceptualization of the superintendency, yet still supports how it has been socially constructed by hegemonic discourses.

Prior to the Civil War, the administrative duties now assigned to principals and superintendents were once the responsibility of the teacher at a school and “the three or so trustees of the local school community” (Young et al., 2009, p. 320). The main factor that contributed to the introduction of administrative positions such as principal and

superintendent was the increase in population growth requiring more classrooms in one school and multiple schools in a district (McFadden & Smith, 2004; Young et al., 2009). At that time, “superintendents were expected to fill a philosopher-scholar-statesmen role . . . [and] . . . typically served as clerk of the school board” (Young et al., 2009, p. 320).

Carter and Cunningham (1997) describe the evolution of the superintendency over the last 175 years from the role of *clerk of the board* to the role of *chief executive officer for the board*. Kowalski (2005) also provides an historical perspective on how the superintendency has evolved through an analysis of research on the superintendency. Both perspectives on the role conceptualizations are heavily influenced by social and political influences. The terms used by Kowalski to describe the evolution of roles for the superintendent are: *teacher-scholar*, *manager*, *democratic leader*, *applied social scientist* and *communicator*. Although Carter and Cunningham (1997) and Kowalski (2005) frame shifts in the superintendency differently, their conceptualizations parallel one another and are presented here juxtaposed to one another.

During the initial inception of the superintendency, the board simply wanted her/him to oversee the day-to-day school details. However, within a decade this evolved into a focus on ensuring children who had access to schools received a common education. Kowalski (2005) shares a perspective of this era:

The *common school movement* was intended to assimilate students into American culture by having public schools deliver a set of uniform subjects and courses—a strategy that required centralized control and standardization. (p. 3)

The superintendent was appointed to oversee the institutionalization of dominant discourse that privileged white, wealthy males. The new role of *master educator* required more expertise in curriculum and instruction (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The superintendent was expected to provide direction on teaching and learning as well as continue to oversee the operations of schools. In some larger districts, there may have even been two superintendents, one overseeing curriculum and instruction, while the other was responsible for the business components of the school district (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Kowalski (2005) describes the superintendent during this time as *teacher-scholar*. This period in educational history focused on assimilation and standardization as a part of the “*common school movement*” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 3). The superintendent was expected to direct implementation of the state’s learning standards as well as supervise and evaluate teachers. Kowalski (2005) describes this first stage as lasting from the inception of the superintendency through the early 1900s. While the role of the superintendent would eventually merge into that of *manager* in the early 20th century, the relevance of being a *teacher-scholar* holds true still today (Bjork, Glass, & Brunner, 2005; Kowalski, 2005).

American education was not exempt from, and heavily influenced by the Industrial Revolution and the emphasis on effective and efficient management, thus emerged the role of the superintendent as *manager*. Perceived success of the managerial practices used during the Industrial Revolution (Kowalski, 2005) influenced a push for “hierarchical bureaucracy and scientific management [and] caused the superintendent to be viewed as the *expert manager*” (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 23). Carter and

Cunningham (1997) describe this era as “the four Bs: bonds, buses, budgets, and buildings” (p. 23). As more and more Americans were being educated, efficiency became an emphasis on the use of resources and educating as many children as possible. However, as Kowalski (2005) describes,

the great economic stock market crash and subsequent depression tarnished much of the glitter that the captains of industry had acquired [and]...some prominent superintendents who were previously praised for emulating industrial managers were now being disparaged. (pp. 6–7)

By the mid-1900s, a new conceptualization of the superintendency emerged. Heavily influenced by the Soviet Union’s launch of Sputnik in 1957, education became a national focus for change. Leaders in the United States felt threatened that another nation had been first to launch a satellite into space and attributed the “failure” of the United States in space exploration to a “failure” of the educational system. American education reforms were in the forefront of political agendas, driven by ethnocentricity and nationalism. With declining economic and social conditions, superintendents found themselves politically engaged to lobby for resources, leading to the superintendent’s role to be viewed more as *democratic leader* (Kowalski, 2005). The role of *democratic leader* enabled superintendents to lead districts and schools by listening to and engaging the community in a way they would support educational initiatives. The factors that influenced the next role of the superintendent as *applied social scientist* included, but were not limited to, research findings in education and “rapid development of the social sciences” (Kowalski, 2005, p. 9) as well as increasing dissatisfaction with public education in mid-20th century. As an *applied social scientist*, superintendents were

“expected to conduct and utilize research in dealing with [increasingly complex] social issues” (p. 11) such as “poverty, racism, gender discrimination, crime, and violence” (pp. 10-11) that impacted education.

Globalization and increasing access to information has heavily influenced the current role conceptualization of the superintendent that Kowalski (2005) describes as *communicator*. Kowalski closely aligns the role of *communicator* with culture. As *communicator*, the superintendent must be able to create a common vision by hearing the voices that are affected by the organization and “communication is the process through which organizational members express their collective inclination to coordinate beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. In schools, communication gives meaning to work and forges perceptions of reality” (p. 13). Those perceptions of reality are, in turn, the culture of that organization. Reality is molded through discourse, heavily influenced by the superintendent. With men holding the position of superintendent most often, they have continued to have significant control over the discourse surrounding education, perpetuating hegemonic, patriarchal organization.

Cunningham and Carter (1997) describe the complex expectations of the contemporary superintendent:

The call for American education [is] for leadership, political savvy, reform, community responsiveness, and improved education. It ushered in the fourth and current view of the superintendency, that of *chief executive officer for the board*. As a result, the superintendent serves as the professional advisor to the board, leader of reforms, manager of resources, and communicator to the public. (p. 24)

Furthermore, Kowalski et al. (2011) propose:

As a change agent, the contemporary superintendent is expected to determine shared beliefs and their influence on school effectiveness. And if these beliefs are found to be negative, a superintendent needs to demonstrate why they are harmful and engage in cultural reconstruction. (p. 7)

A critical piece of the *communicator* role for superintendents who desire to be true change agents is recognizing how hegemonic discourse perpetuates oppressive organizational practices and their role in reproducing or deconstructing these discourses.

Qualified candidates for such a complex role were and still are difficult to find and consistent standards for the superintendency have only recently been developed (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Young et al., 2009). Kowalski et al. (2011) caution that “generalizations about the superintendency and about superintendents can be deceptive” (p. 6). The profession has been dominated by mostly white men, leaving out the voices of women and people of color in how the superintendency has been constructed over time. Language and gender-based expectations have been critical factors in that absence of women’s voices.

A tale of two studies. Since 1923, AASA has coordinated a study about the superintendency approximately every 10 years. Kowalski et al. (2011) explain that each study “focused [on] issues relative to certain time periods” (p. 11). I was born in 1973 and wanted to examine how, over the course of my lifetime, the superintendency has evolved, with an emphasis on how the role has been perpetuated as a man’s world. A comparison of the Knezevich (1971) study to the Kowalski et al. (2011) study, both sponsored by AASA, reveals interesting differences in how the role of the superintendent

might be perceived in response to social expectations and hegemonic influences.

Kowalski et al. (2011) explains that “the 1971 study included approximately one hundred questions about aspects of the position, the persons in the position, and the school districts employing them. This format has recurred in all subsequent studies” (p. 11).

While the participants in both studies were current superintendents, the Knezevich (1971) study recruited only 1,128 (740 responded) participants out of the 14,848 superintendents serving at the time and the Kowalski et al. (2011) study offered all 12,600 current superintendents the opportunity to participate, of whom 1,838 responded. There was a decline in seated superintendents between the two studies as many smaller districts consolidated to larger systems by the end of the 20th century.

The 1971 study participants were identified from one of four categories based upon the size of the districts they served. Group A had 25,000 or more students, Group B had between 3,000 and 24,999 students, Group C had 300–2,999 students and Group D had less than 300 students. One critique of the 1971 study is the selection of participants from each Group. All superintendents in Group A were invited to participate, yet represented only 1.2% of the total number of superintendents at that time. In contrast, Group C represented 59.8% of superintendents, yet only 4.1% from Group C received the survey. I was not able to identify how the number of participants within each group was determined. This provided a disproportional influence by larger, more urban districts in the profile of the superintendent. In contrast, the 2011 survey provided all superintendents in the United States with the opportunity to participate and influence the

perception of the superintendency, opening the study to include more voices than the 1971 study.

There are several distinct differences in the profile of the contemporary superintendent as compared to superintendents 4 decades ago. The most notable demographic change is the distribution of age when the superintendent was first appointed. Where most superintendents (67.8%) in the 1971 study were appointed prior to age 40, the majority (72.2%) in the 2011 study were not appointed until after turning 50. The development of standards and licensure requirements for the superintendency in the late 20th century may have contributed to this change. The value of experience in education as a teacher and district leader has increased over time as well. While not all superintendents follow the path through the educational ranks, many now do. In the 1971 study, “the position held prior to appointment to the present superintendency was most likely to be the principalship” (Knezevich, 1971, p. 34). The study noted that 48.3% of participants came from the principalship directly to the superintendency while only 17.7% came from a district level position (director, assistant superintendent, etc.). The 2011 study does not identify the position just prior to the superintendency, but it does indicate that 44.9% of participants have served as a district level director/coordinator and 37.9% as an assistant/associate/deputy superintendent prior to ascending to the superintendency. This data, in comparison to the 1971 profile of the superintendent, indicates that experience at the district level is more common with the contemporary superintendent. This added experience may also contribute to the age difference as the years served at an additional level will increase the age upon entering the

superintendency. Table I provides a comparison of key findings from the 1971 and 2011 studies.

Table 1

Comparison of the 1971 and 2011 American School Superintendent Studies

Responses	1971 Study	2011 Study
Gender		
Male	98.70%	75.90%
Female	1.30%	24.10%
Age at Appointment to First Superintendency		
Under 20 years - 34; Under 36	44.30%	1.20%
35-39; 36-40	23.50%	4.00%
40-49; 41-50	28.20%	22.50%
50+; 51+	4.00%	72.20%
Last Position Prior to Superintendency		
Principalship	48.30%	
Director, Supervisor, Consultant	3.50%	
Assistant or Associate Superintendent	14.20%	
Most Frequently Held Positions Held Prior to the Superintendency		
Elementary Principal		40%
Junior High/Middle School Principal		38.30%
High School Principal		47.60%
District Level Director/Coordinator		44.90%
Assistant/Associate/Deputy Superintendent		37.90%

Another demographic shift over time has been the increase in the percentage of women superintendents. While only 1.3% of respondents to the 1973 study were women, this percentage increased to 24.1% in the 2011 study. While this is a substantive increase, it still reflects a wide gender gap in the superintendency. In addition to the

demographic differences, there are also differences in the conceptualization of the superintendent's role separated by gender. Absent from the 1971 study is information regarding female perceptions of the superintendency, as well as the relationship between the Superintendent and Board of Education. Kowalski (2005) notes that "because most superintendents are employed by school boards . . . their perception of board members is clearly important" (p. 46). In the 2011 survey, the relationship between school boards and superintendents is heavily represented. Tables 2–4 display a summary of the data from this study for three of the more than ten school board related topics. Table 2 highlights the search process used by school boards, Table 3 displays the primary reasons why school boards employed the superintendent, and Table 4 provides a summary of the various roles of the superintendent that are emphasized by school boards.

These data demonstrate a gatekeeping role played by boards of education. Specifically, 46.2% of boards of education led the process for hiring the superintendent, determining who will and will not have access to the position. It was also interesting that superintendents' perceptions of the primary reason for hiring differ between men and women. Men most often perceived personal characteristics as the primary reason for being hired by boards of education. Women most often perceived instructional leadership as the primary reason school boards hired them. Hegemonic discourse around leadership strengths in men and women assign instructional leadership as a feminine characteristic. Based on this, women may more often associate with it as a strength and desirable quality.

Table 2

Search Process Used by School Boards (Kowalski et al., 2011)

Response Options	Total %
School board acted independently	46.2
Private search firm involved	24.1
State school board association	21.9
Other (other consultants, professors)	7.8

Table 3

Superintendent Perceptions of Primary Reason Hired by School Board (Kowalski et al., 2011)

Response Options	Male %	Female %	Total %
Personal characteristics	36.7	22.1	33.5
Potential to be a change agent	24.1	28.3	24.9
Ability to be an instructional leader	15.7	32.9	20
Ability to communicate with stakeholders	6.9	7.4	6.9
Ability to manage fiscal resources	7.1	3.1	6.3
Uncertain	7.0	4.8	6.3
Uncertain	7.0	4.8	6.3
Ability to maintain status quo	1.7	1.4	1.6
Having leadership/managerial experience outside of education	0.8	0	0.5

Table 4

Superintendent Perceptions of School Board Emphasis on Various Superintendent Roles

(Kowalski et al., 2011)

Response Options	Moderate to Substantial Emphasis			Low to No Emphasis		
	Male %	Female %	Total %	Male %	Female %	Total %
Effective Communicator	99.3	98.4	99.1	0.7	1.6	0.9
Manager	98.6	98.1	98.5	1.4	1.9	1.5
Instructional Leader	93.9	96.5	94.6	6.1	3.5	5.4
Statesman, political leader	91.3	87.8	90.6	8.7	12.2	9.4
Applied Social Scientist	56.6	57.3	56.9	43.4	42.7	43.1

An interesting conflict between the primary reasons for hiring and the emphasized roles by boards of education is observable in the data. As perceived by superintendents, the emphasized roles for superintendents by boards of education include effective communicator (99.1%), manager (98.5%), instructional leader (94.6%) and statesmen/political leader (90.6%). Yet 36.7% of male superintendents noted that personal characteristics superseded any of these specific skills as the reason they were hired. Based on the study data provided in Table 3, men seldom reported that they were hired based on their ability to communicate with stakeholders (6.9%), yet perceived that boards of education most emphasized the role of communicator (99.3%) in Table 4. This conflict introduces an area for further exploration to better understand why superintendents are hired in contrast with the roles they are responsible for performing.

Including board of education perceptions are critical to more deeply analyze the discrepancy in the data.

It was apparent from language used in the written report that the superintendency was accepted in 1971 as a position most appropriate for men. The study frequently used the pronouns him and he when referring to the superintendent. In the Forward, the editor notably quoted Ellwood Cubberly:

The opportunities offered in this new profession (school administration) to *men* [emphasis added] of strong character, broad sympathies, high purposes, fine culture, courage, exact training and executive skill, who are willing to take the time and spend the energy necessary to prepare themselves for large service, are today not excelled in any of the professions, learned or otherwise. (as cited in Knezevich, 1971, p. 5)

There are multiple examples of the consistent use of the male gendered nouns and pronouns throughout the study including, but not limited to: “What manner of *man* [emphasis added] is attracted to the superintendency?” (p. 5); “a typical superintendent in 1969–70 had a master’s degree as *his* [emphasis added] highest earned academic achievement” (p. 12); “Although it can be said that the districts in the strata with the smaller pupil enrollments tended, on the average, to employ younger *men* [emphasis added] as superintendents, all age ranges were found in each” (p. 20); “But there is evidence suggesting that the superintendent practicing in 1969–70 began *his* [emphasis added] career later in life than did *his* counterpart about a decade earlier” (p. 24); and notably a chapter titled “The Superintendent at Work and the Issues That Concern Him” (p. 54). There are many more occurrences of male gender based language dominating the publication. Knezevich includes the realization that “the superintendency is a man’s

world” (p. 21) in the studies’ findings, but the editor’s choice of language used throughout the publication reflects and reifies the social construction of the superintendency as a male profession. That is not to say that it was purposefully excluding women from the superintendency, but the consistent use of male gendered pronouns used in these examples and throughout the publication could influence how individuals perceive their own and others’ access to the profession. Kowalski et al. (2011) were more successful in removing gender-based language from the most recent superintendent study publication by AASA. Rather than using gender-based pronouns such as she, he, his or her, the authors of the 2011 study used “the superintendent,” “they,” and “their” when referencing participants of the study. The word choice precludes visualizing the superintendency as a role served specifically by males or females, leaving open the possibility for women to access the position.

Women in the Superintendency—Disrupting a Man’s World

There is and has always been a troubling discrepancy in the representation of men and women in the superintendency. The representation of women in the superintendency waned from the early to late 20th century. Literature and research indicate that while 8.9% of superintendents were female in 1910, representation declined to only 1.2% in 1982 (Kowalski et al., 2011). According to the AASA 2010 American School Superintendent study, 24.1% of superintendents in the United States are women (Kowalski et al., 2011). While this may seem like a substantial increase over a 30-year period, there still exists a significant gap in female representation in teaching versus female representation in the superintendency. This lack of representation in the highest

level of leadership has muted the voices of women in shaping the conceptualization of the superintendency, perpetuating a patriarchal, hegemonic system that favors men. This section will provide a discussion of literature on women in the superintendency and the challenges they face with accessing and navigating the superintendency as it has been socially constructed as a man's world. In addition, a discussion on the power of mentoring in deconstructing women's troubling reality in accessing the superintendency will be provided.

The trouble with reality. An increase in research that troubles the superintendency as a socially constructed male profession can contribute to positive changes in how the role is perceived in our society. McFadden and Smith (2004) studied superintendents in the Appalachian South. Their research acknowledges that "the reality that language perpetuates is socially constructed" (McFadden & Smith, 2004, p. 24). In other words, the perception shared about a particular concept has been institutionalized by the repetition of "the agreed upon description of how things are" (McFadden & Smith, 2004, p. 24) and those agreed upon descriptors are most often influenced by those in power. Thus, the historically masculinized ideals of the superintendency have been socially constructed as a result of discourse over time, especially among the majority represented in the superintendency and university programs. Through a complex process,

experts determine the language that frames practice. Expectations govern the credentialing process through establishment and enforcement of licensure and accreditation standards. Those standards shape the content (sometimes even the delivery) of formal preparation programs. They define practice that is professional and distinguish it from practice that is bogus, serving the gatekeeping function. (McFadden & Smith, 2004, p. 78)

The study conducted by McFadden and Smith (2004) included 12 female, senior-level administrators in Southern Appalachia. The researchers wanted to explore how regional culture influenced how minorities were accessing administrative positions in education. The study had four phases: (a) identification of 12 female participants and collection of their autobiographical data; (b) identification of 12 male participants and collection of their autobiographical data; (c) participants from phases 1 and 2 identified senior-level administrators they worked with and this created a pool of participants who were provided with a survey about their perceptions of “qualities necessary for effective leadership” (p. 123); and (d) a survey was sent to board members from the districts represented in phases 1 and 2 to determine “the relative importance they attached to certain skills and attributes in choosing a senior educational leader for their district” (p. 123). The study participants were originally going to be female superintendents, but a lack of representation influenced the researchers to use other senior-level administrators as well.

One significant finding in the study is the difference in the reality faced by the male and female participants in this North Carolina region in accessing higher levels of leadership. The responses from men were absent of any gender-based perceptions about any obstacles they had faced. Some examples provided were “certification issues” and “political climate.” Several of the male participants could not recall having experienced any obstacles as they climbed the leadership ladder. In contrast, the women not only noted gender-based obstacles, but were hesitant to even discuss this topic. The researchers perceived this to be a protective response as “these administrators had spent

years and much hard work finally proving themselves and wanted to risk nothing to jeopardize it” (McFadden & Smith, 2004, p. 152). Being female, having young children at home, and the inability to move their family for a new job were mentioned as obstacles by female participants. Male participants reported how others’ perceptions of gender hindered them in hiring females for positions in his district:

Two of the men described the ceilings they encountered when they tried to hire women leaders. One hired the first female administrator in his county on a split vote of the board. “It was not without a fight.” Another faced criticism as a high school principal where he had one female assistant principal and hired another. “The public in general thinks you need two big strapping men to go in there and kind of take charge.” (p. 162)

The homogeneity of the Southern superintendent was an institutionalized phenomenon until well into the 1900s “because of a past relatively untroubled by outsiders, a persistent homogeneity reinforced by geographic isolation, and national norms about race and gender that were not successfully challenged until recently” (McFadden & Smith, 2004, p. 75). While women were represented in the superintendency as early as the 19th century, they “only occasionally gained access to formal preparation through avenues available to White male superintendents and principals” (Young et al., 2009, p. 321). In addition, the creation and communication of professional standards were problematic for women as “education administration programs were largely comprised of White, male faculty who were former practitioners” (Young et al., 2009). Inability to access the educational requirements to prepare for higher-level leadership is only one factor that limited women’s opportunities for the superintendency.

Additional research supports the reality that women face many barriers to attaining the superintendency. Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer (2006) explored market constraints faced by women in attaining the superintendency. They analyzed a body of literature that explored the representation of women as well as economic and societal factors influencing that representation. In their analysis, they found that women often encounter three specific barriers to the superintendency: the time demands associated with the job, the norm of the ideal worker who can provide the demanded face-time, and employers' decisions on hiring based on the previous two factors. All three of these barriers are interconnected, and until socially constructed normative values can be rewritten, women will continue to face "institutionalized practices [that] benefit men" (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006, p. 499). Essentially, the norms of our society define women as a less desirable worker than a male counterpart with comparable leadership skills. Women are assumed to be the primary caretakers, and this can be perceived as a distraction to fulfilling the responsibilities of the superintendency. Deconstructing these discursive practices is difficult and can be emotionally draining. Men do not experience this conflict in the same way as women. That is not to say that they do not assist with the domestic responsibilities of family life; however, it is not a stereotypically embedded expectation.

Women and people of color are assigned a variety of normative expectations based on the intersectionality of gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. White, middle/upper class men are seen as professionals first and therefore as a more desirable candidate in a demanding position such as the superintendency.

The superintendency has historically been constructed as a masculine profession. The discourse surrounding the superintendency has therefore created a binary of female and male styles that serves to reify the superordination of men as leaders and sustains the subordination of women (Koenig et al., 2011; Mann & Huffman, 2005; Tallerico & Blunt, 2004). Even as women may hold other educational leadership positions, they often face a greater amount of criticism than men (Gardiner et al., 2000). Grogan (1996) studied 27 aspiring female superintendents in the northwestern United States. The purpose of her study was to find out more about the reality for women in educational administration. Her research revealed that “although most participants felt that they were first and foremost educational administrators, few denied, particularly in the context of aspiring to the superintendency, that they were judged as women administrators rather than simply administrators” (p. 82). Male leaders are perceived by others as leaders first and asserting their authority is readily accepted as doing their job. Female leaders who use an assertive style of leadership contradicts the norms associated with being female and these women may be criticized for using a style that their male counterparts can apply without hesitation. This incurs a harsher judgment by those in the organization who are not able to see the woman as a leader first and attribute the behaviors with gender instead of leadership practices.

Koenig et al. (2011) performed a meta-analysis on the gender stereotypes associated with leadership roles. The researchers considered the conflict between masculine leadership qualities of being assertive and competitive with stereotypical female qualities such as being nice and compassionate. This analysis comes from

recognition that “stereotypes often are a potent barrier to women’s advancement to positions of leadership” (p. 616). The meta-analysis suggested that while there was an increase in a demand for more stereotypically feminine leadership traits, there was little indication that a decline in traditionally masculine traits (strong, powerful, dominant, assertive, focused, direct, etc.) of leadership existed. Koenig et al. suggest that “women leaders would be well advised to retain elements of a masculine leadership style to avoid mismatch with leader roles, even if they now have greater flexibility to incorporate elements of a feminine leadership style” (p. 635). However, displaying attributes of culturally defined masculine leadership styles contradicts the socially constructed characteristics of gender and will continue to “contribute to the labyrinthine challenges that women encounter in attaining roles that yield substantial power and authority” (p. 637).

Gatekeepers are also a critical obstacle women face in acquiring the superintendency. Brunner (1999) conducted a qualitative research study on the power influences surrounding one female’s experience in being hired for a superintendent position. This single-case study examined the power structures within a community that opened access to the position for the participant, Dr. Osburn, in the early 1990s. The ethnography included interviews of the female aspirant, two groups of community “power wielders” and more than 30 of the female aspirant’s circle of professional colleagues. Analysis of the results yields evidence of how binary opposites continue to be leveraged by gatekeepers and in this case to the benefit of the aspirant. Brunner stated that,

The findings made evident that the New View's male power network had different definitions and uses of power than New View's female power network. . . . while I was surprised to find this dramatic division along gender lines, a similar division can be found in the philosophical literature on power. (p. 71)

In her research, Brunner found that the female concept of power was in getting things accomplished, mostly through a collaborative approach. In binary contrast, the men defined power as influencing others to do what needed to be done with little emphasis on collaborative thought. Brunner also indicates that the philosophical continuum of power superordinates the male participants' perceptions and subordinates the female participant's perceptions of power. Dr. Osburn was hired to fill the superintendency and it appeared that the tipping point was the communities' desire for a change in leadership style. Her predecessor was perceived to use a dominant style of leadership and Dr. Osburn demonstrated a more collaborative approach. Interestingly, her predecessor advocated for her to acquire the position which speaks to the power that supportive discourse by sitting superintendents has on women's access. Ironically, the sitting superintendent served as a gatekeeper even as the community sought a different type of leadership style.

It troubles me that this study, if read without a critical eye, will continue to perpetuate a "his versus hers" style of leadership. A poststructural feminist lens drives the desire to deconstruct the normative assumptions about what is feminine and what is masculine. Although it was a study from 20 years ago, the discourse surrounding assumptions about gender and leadership style still exists among gatekeepers and researchers. This study highlights a larger problem with rewriting the gender-based

expectations for leaders. It is not only the discourse in education that must change, but the discursive practices around broader constructs such as power that must be deconstructed and de-gendered over time. While it was to the advantage of Dr. Osburn in this study, binary opposites continue to limit general access and create a complex dynamic for women who aspire to be and who access the superintendency.

It is also noted in research around women in leadership that to be taken seriously, women adopt a “genderless” style of communication. Scott (2003) studied two female superintendents in order to better understand the influence that gender and language have on their experiences in the superintendency. In her study, she found that these women used “purposeful adoption of genderless discourse, the removal of emotional speech, and the relegation of those conventions indexed to the female to the private sphere” (p. 91). These women attempted to neutralize their gendered identities to access discourse-bound opportunities. As Scott notes in her study, two sets of communication styles, one for the private and one for the professional world, “coexisted, but not peacefully” (p. 96). The continuous tension between personal and professional worlds is a conflict that is particular to women in leadership and creates a problematic reality in accessing the superintendency (Gardiner et al., 2000; Scott, 2003). There are both men and women who develop and demonstrate the critical leadership skills needed to effectively lead school districts. However, research supports that women face many barriers not experienced by men. These barriers are a result of hegemonic discourses about what is male and what is female. Mentoring relationships have the potential to provide women with strategies to navigate these tensions and even deconstruct their existence.

Mentors can open doors. Research supports that hegemonic values place the primary caretaking role for children, elderly parents, and domestic responsibilities on women (Koenig et al., 2011). As a result, women may find themselves navigating these dominant discourses about responsibilities as a mother, wife, partner, etc. and how these “conflict” with the time required for increasingly complex leadership responsibilities.

Butler (1993) proposes that

to install the principle of intelligibility in the very development of a body is precisely the strategy of a natural teleology that accounts for female development through the rationale of biology. On this basis, it has been argued that women ought to perform certain social functions and not others, indeed, women ought to be fully restricted to the reproductive domain. (p. 33)

This restrictive and unique dynamic women face can also influence who they may seek out or view as an effective mentor. Some female administrators may feel that other women will be a more effective mentor based on their experiences in navigating these normative assumptions as professionals.

More than 13 years ago, Polleys (1999) researched ways that female superintendents had navigated “systemic barriers” (p. 5) that impact women’s attainment of the superintendency. The study emphasized the importance of mentoring and interestingly found varying experiences among female superintendents. One female superintendent participant felt that a female mentor was more effective because female mentors are “more aware of discrimination toward women in general,” while another “credits her success to the continuous support she received . . . from powerful men” (p. 11). The study also revealed that women tended to work harder and put in more hours to

overcome gender stereotypes that limited their access to top-level positions. In addition, participants felt it was important to keep “negative emotions under control when encountering glass walls” (p. 13) and were even encouraged by partners to “carefully avoid any actions that threaten powerful men’s claims to dominance” (p. 14) as this might threaten the participant’s future opportunities. Given that Polley’s research was done over 13 years ago, and the percentage of female superintendents in the United States has purportedly doubled, I am interested to see if there have been changes in these mentoring and coping strategies for women ascending to the superintendency, specifically in North Carolina where only 15.7% of sitting superintendents are women. In addition, Polley’s research did not address the implications that the intersectionality of race, gender, socio-economic status, sexuality or other marginalities may have had among the participants in the study.

It is well established that “mentorship has been credited for nurturing career advancement” (Kamler, 2006, p. 308), yet in a patriarchal society that privileges white, upper class men, mentoring can be limited to those that are in our circle of sameness (Beekley, 1999; Johnson, 2006). That is not to say that men cannot be effective mentors for women who are aspiring to the superintendency. However, Johnson (2006) suggests that there is resistance to crossing lines of difference in mentoring situations. If there is hesitancy, whether conscious or subconscious, and/or there is not an understanding of what is needed for a productive mentoring relationship, women continue to stay at a clear disadvantage in accessing the superintendency. Promisee-Bynum (2010) conducted research on females in educational leadership positions in Alabama to assess their

mentoring experiences and the impact on their mobility. The research included 28 female superintendents/assistant superintendents who reported being mentored out of 47 who returned the survey data. This statistic in itself is concerning as only 60% of respondents reported having a mentor/mentee relationship. Based on the analysis of the data collected from the surveys, findings from this research indicate “mentoring relationships have the potential for individuals to make successful transitions for career advancement” (p. 73). With relatively few women in higher-level leadership positions to serve as mentors, more men must be willing and able to provide effective mentorships and sponsorships for female leaders.

Gardiner et al. (2000) did an extensive study on mentoring of women in educational leadership. The researchers used a feminist poststructural framework to “question the very assumptions of mentoring which has tended to ground traditional leadership notions of power and authority” (p. 3). The study included 27 mentor and protégé pairs from Washington, Virginia, and Maryland. The protégés were women in educational leadership positions and were paired with someone they perceived as a salient mentor. The researchers individually interviewed the participants regarding their perceptions about the mentoring relationship. Gardiner et al. (2000) found in their study that women have difficulty accessing female mentors in positions higher than the ones they hold due to the low percentage of women in higher levels of leadership. The study also revealed that there was a great deal of reluctance among women to pursue the superintendency. Their hesitation stemmed from the traditional demands of the superintendency, such as “politics or management of such matters as facilities, finance,

personnel, legal issues” (p. 106) that they perceived required approaches counter to their belief in “ethical, reflective leadership that focuses on curriculum and instruction” (p. 106). These women often felt they had more of an influence and impact on what was most important to them by remaining in lower levels of leadership. Hegemonic notions of female strengths may have more impact on women’s subjectivity than they realize, influencing the impact they may perceive themselves to have in the superintendency.

Similarly, Gardiner et al. (2000) found that women had less comfort with the aspects of leadership traditionally associated with being a man’s role. The mentor/mentee relationship can provide experiences that build their confidence in all aspects of leadership, providing women with capital to counter gender-based assumptions regarding what women are able to contribute across the continuum of demands in the superintendency. McDonough and Nunez (2007) discuss the reproduction of “social and economic hierarchies” through “access to privileged information, participation in social networks, manners in social interactions, presentation of the self to others, use of certain kinds of language or discourse, and appreciation of art and culture” (p. 144). This proposition suggests that in order to access the superintendency, women must follow the hidden and unhidden rules already set in a patriarchal society for filling the superintendency. In addition, socially constructed heteronormativity sexualizes female/male relationships. Therefore, the opportunity to develop the necessary capital between a male mentor and female mentee can become complex in the workplace. This dynamic is troubling as it continues to perpetuate the “male-dominated, male-centered, male-identified nature of society” (Johnson, 2006, p. 111). It is necessary to deconstruct

these gender-based assumptions if effective and productive mentoring relationships are to be developed, relationships that avoid “reinforcing the status quo and making desirable change very difficult to undertake” (Mullen, 2005, p. 35). While this study focuses on gender issues, it is not the intention to oversimplify the complexity of mentoring relationships and how class, race, ethnicity, heteronormativity, etc. contribute to the dynamics of mentoring relationships.

Void in the Research

There is significant value in analyzing and communicating what has proven to be successful leadership in the past. However, a feminist poststructuralist lens welcomes the opportunity to have collaborative dialogue that can change the discourse in practices that are driven by “power in a society where patriarchal relations inform the very production and regulation of female and male subjects” (Weedon, 1997, p. 108).

It is clear that in order to make lasting changes to what an organization does, both formal rules and informal norms need to change. Leaders who aim to bring about social transformation in line with feminist goals must provide the vision to challenge these institutional principles, and recognize their manifestation in organizations. Part of this process is to challenge hierarchical power as well as change the discourse within the structures that exist. (Rao & Kelleher, 2000, p. 75)

From a feminist poststructuralist view, it is also of interest to study the dynamics of the mentoring relationships of female superintendents to determine the impact these relationships have had on their understanding of subjectivity and access to the superintendency for other women. There exists little research in the 21st century that examines the evolving experiences of mentoring relationships and discourses among

current superintendents as they ascended to the superintendency; how those experiences influenced their subjectivity; and, how they subsequently mentored other aspiring leaders. While research supports an increase in the percentage of women in the United States serving as superintendents, little is written about whether or not the gender based assumptions about leadership are changing and at what level are mentors taking an alternative approach to traditional mentoring and challenging the status quo. Mullen (2005) reminds us that

alternative mentors are critical democratic leaders. Their thoughts and actions intersect with social justice concepts and sociopolitical activism. Corresponding mentoring agendas focus on transforming archaic relationship and organizational structures and on creating full equality for traditionally disenfranchised individuals and groups. (p. 38)

More research is needed to examine how mentoring experiences inform female superintendents' abilities to navigate changes that have the potential to influence a patriarchal system of privilege. Further exploration of the "beliefs about and norms governing who holds leadership positions, what qualities they are expected to have, and how they will 'lead'" (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006, p. 503) is needed in order to provide more opportunities for those who do not fit patriarchal assumptions about what is normal. Furthermore, an exploration of gender-related notions and the obstacles they create for women is necessary to provide equitable access to the positions for which women are highly qualified and in which they can provide effective leadership. Butler (1990) cautions that

It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of “women,” the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.

This study will utilize a critical lens to potentially expose the normative assumptions of feminine/masculine as a tool to further deconstruct the limitations for women created by the discursive practices influenced by those assumptions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY: A QUALITATIVE AND POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINIST APPROACH

This chapter will provide details on the research study's methodology. The qualitative study is grounded in, designed for, and analyzed through the lens of poststructural feminist theory. This chapter will begin with a deeper discussion of the theoretical framework of poststructural feminism, followed by a description of the qualitative research methods that were used. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research methodology.

Theoretical Framework

The framework used in this research is influenced by feminist theory, and more specifically, grounded in poststructural feminism. These theories have the potential to guide research and practice for changing the landscape of educational leadership. A variety of aspects of education can be viewed through a feminist lens to reveal the discursive practices that continue to create inequity for women. Exposing these dominant discourses and working to change them can improve the outcomes for not only women, but for a variety of marginalized groups. Weedon (1997) offers an explanation of the complexity of discourse

Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subject which they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside of their discursive articulation, but

the ways in which discourses constitute the minds and bodies of individuals is always a part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional basis. (p. 105).

This section will provide a reflexive overview of my own subjectivity within feminist theory, the history of feminist ideology, and how feminist poststructuralist theory is used to critique how language and discourse affect the education and career opportunities of women as well as the leadership practices that are impacted by gender stereotypes. This is not to say that other ideologies cannot be used to analyze the current reality for female educational leaders; however, as St. Pierre (2000) suggests, grappling with all of the “schizophrenia of language,” will allow us to “move resolutely toward faint intelligibilities [that] will enhance the lives of women” (p. 479).

Looking Within to Make Sense of the World

A hallmark of present day feminist practice, often referred to as “third-wave” feminism, is “to create a theory of knowledge that is more inclusive of the full range of human experience” (Jones, 1989, p. 141). Therefore, it is apropos for me to begin with a reflexive understanding of how my own experiences have influenced the use of ideological theory, specifically a poststructural feminist lens. This lens not only impacts my personal life, but also my research to promote changes that will increase equity for women.

I grew up in a tumultuous home as a young girl. I saw my mother struggle to raise three girls alone, even during the time she and my father were still legally married. We always had food on the table, clothes on our back, and a roof over our head, even if it meant we moved in with other family members during long periods after she and my

father divorced. While our extended family made needed resources available, I vividly recall the sadness in my mother's eyes when she had to reach out to her overbearing father to borrow money for the necessities or brought a bag of hand-me-downs for me and my sisters to rummage through when the seasons changed. I also observed the harsh warnings and criticism my maternal grandfather blasted at the women and female children in the family if they spoke their opinions out of turn or exerted "too much" independence.

This highly militaristic and patriarchal environment always made me uncomfortable. My mother was often admonished not only for marrying outside of the family's Catholic faith, but also for "failing" to keep her marriage together. I could not seem to reconcile the power and authority I perceived the men in my life to have with the uneasiness, dependence, and muted voices that the women experienced. That is not to say these experiences alone drove me to view things from a feminist perspective. However, they set up a vantage point that "the full potential of women and the equality of the sexes" (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 147) was not fully being realized in my world. My entire life my mother reiterated the importance of our education as a tool to be independent, both in intellect and finances. While not articulated as such, she seemed to work under the postfeminist fallacy that "one need only be autonomous and responsible to stave off victimization and oppression" (Kinser, 2004, p. 149). I have learned throughout life that this is necessary, but certainly not sufficient, to realize positions of power necessary to influence systemic change for not only women but for other historically marginalized groups.

I grew up most of my life, including my years as an adult, hearing judgments upon single mothers and how the failure of the two-parent family was an abomination to God and the demise of our country. However, if our society were to have a more accurate view of the realities for women and how the structures in society are not set up to support equitable resources for women, then the fabric of our nation could be strengthened. Promoting “public policy [that] regulate[s] family behavior, providing disincentives for less worthy lifestyles and actions, and incentives for the more worthy” only promotes “patriarchal tradition which denies women, and in particular mothers, full citizenship” (Young, 1997, p. 121). Hegemonic assumptions and expectations of women impact their access to opportunities traditionally available to white, middle/upper class men.

I enrolled in college and, at least figuratively, escaped this religious, conservative and patriarchal environment at the age of 18, believing that I would be entering an environment where others were more likely to also question socially constructed assumptions “that women are weak, irrational, incapable of rigorous scholarship or effective leadership, etc.” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 499). At that time, I blamed individuals for the way women were treated. For example, I would resent the individual, whether it was my grandfather, the calculus professor, or male acquaintance that silenced me or another female based upon his position of power. I was, and still am, very passionate about being heard and the value all women have in our society beyond the traditional, essentialist view which will be addressed in the history of feminism. In my youth, I had a very limited understanding of patriarchy and feminism, including the complex structures

that create inequity for women and other marginalized groups. Kinser (2004) describes this ideology as “false feminism . . . the failure to address adequately the complex relationship between patriarchy and social structure” (p. 143). My experiences and opportunities have brought me into the ranks of educational leadership at the district level where I find myself face to face with what Sears (1998) describes as:

The social construction of gender and sexuality (i.e., the transference of biological divisions of maleness and femaleness into social categories), the delegation of human roles and traits according to conceptions of femininity and masculinity, and the proscription of certain sexual activities rationalize a particular way of organizing society—patriarchy. (p. 218)

Through my leadership experiences and intellectual development, I have come face to face with the harmful effects of the binaries of gender norms as well as the socially constructed feminine and masculine leadership characteristics that dominate the discourse. These discursive practices continue to privilege white, middle class men and place obstacles for women ascending to roles in prominent leadership positions such as the superintendency. These binaries also enable oppressive structures in what could otherwise be a more inclusive, democratic and collaborative educational system.

Overview of Feminist Theory

There are a variety of overly simplistic ways to define feminist theory, yet feminism is complex in that it encompasses a variety of ideologies. Weedon (1997) suggests it “implies a particular way of understanding patriarchy and the possibilities of change” (p. 4), while Jones (1989) describes it as “the philosophical analysis of the concept of gender and the meaning of sexual difference” (p. 139). Many theorists frame

the history of feminism in waves. Mann and Huffman (2005) point out that “wave approaches too often downplay the importance of individual and small-scale collective action, as well as indirect and covert acts” (p. 58). However, using the wave approach of describing the evolution of feminist theory over time can assist when there is limited background knowledge on the subject. As a relative infant of feminist theory myself, waves provide a metaphor for describing “historical eras where feminism had a mass base” (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 58) but by no means are inclusive of all feminist history. Even within each of the three waves of feminism there exists a variety of feminist ideologies, and to describe them all in detail is not the purpose of this section. However, by providing an overview of the broad and underlying themes within each wave, it is my hope to demonstrate an evolution of thought that has influenced my interest and passion in ensuring that women’s “differences and unique perspectives and situations are not only acceptable, but sought after and valued in educational leadership” (Gardiner et al., 2000, p. 104). The importance of “difference” heavily influences my overall leadership philosophies, and I believe is essential to improving democratic practices in education.

Women’s inalienable rights—The “first wave.” While certainly not the official birth of feminist thinking, the Seneca Falls Convention of July 1848 is a key early collective feminist act in American history. The Women’s Rights Convention was spawned by the discontent of the female delegates who attended and were not allowed to participate in the 1840 Anti-slavery convention in London. During the Seneca Falls Convention, a refinement of the Declaration of Sentiments was completed (Stanton,

2000). The passion of these women in accessing their rights is undeniable in the final words of the document:

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country. (Stanton, 2000, p. 208)

There could have been greater strength in the collective action of everyone who felt oppression by white males, including women of color and women of all classes. However, history fails to identify the contributions of women of color prior to the convention, reinforcing the marginalization and exclusion of their voices in early feminism (Kinsler, 2004). Unfortunately, the division of efforts tightly secured white male power and privilege. Finally, two years after the end of World War I, women were “afforded” the right to vote after a great deal of activism.

Women confirmed the significant influence they had upon the nation’s economy following World War II. During World War II, millions of jobs were vacated due to military deployments. Women were left to fill these jobs, demonstrating their ability to hold their families together while simultaneously contributing to the nation’s economy. This large-scale shift in social efficacy foreshadowed the “second-wave” of feminism. It

is ironic that women would later be problematized and blamed for various social ills and the “decline” of the traditional family by continuing to fill multiple roles such as partner, mother, worker, etc. Yet they were honored for balancing these multiple roles when it served patriarchal interests.

Essentialism—The “second wave.” In general, the “first-wave” of feminism provided a dialogue and activism regarding the basic tenets that women should have the same inalienable rights as men. As the “second-wave” emerges—more formally in the 1960s, there continued to be a political emphasis on changes in “social policy (including equal pay for equal work, legalization of abortion, improved child care facilities, and so on)” (Zimmerman, 1997, p. 148). In addition, there was an emphasis on changing the discourse as to the way society viewed women. Mack-Canty (2004) summarize that within the “second-wave”

liberal and socialist feminists, in making the argument that women needed to be accorded the same legal or economic treatment in society that men are accorded, were arguing that there is no difference between women and men, other than the superficial one of having been treated differently. Radical feminists, seeing women's nature as different from (and usually better than) men's, argued that women are essentially different from men and that women's differences needed to be accommodated in society just as men's had been. Nevertheless, in both of these arguments, the notion of a unified subject is implicit: in the first as a universal human nature and in the second as a universal female nature. (pp. 157–158)

Essentialism of a unified subject would become a key element of debate in the “third-wave” of feminism. However, one can recognize a political usefulness for white, middle-class women of a unified subjectivity to some degree in the “second-wave” of feminism. As a collective group, women could gain a sense of power and value that they may not

have otherwise experienced. In reflecting back to the adult women in my life as I grew up as a child in the 70s and 80s, I remember their sense of economic and emotional dependence upon the men in their lives and the hegemonic discourse they heard from these same men. I would often tell my Grandmother to share what she was thinking each time she was hushed by my Grandfather during a conversation. I can hear her words today, “Oh, it does not matter what we say dear, the men are the experts.” A woman’s “place” was clearly set in her mind years prior to my coming along and while I did not have the power to constitute her subjectivity, nor did she feel she had the power to change it, I tried to make space for her voice. I was determined not to be constituted by the discourse in the same way that she was.

While essentialism may have served some political purpose of collective action, it can also be dangerous as it removes the unique experiences of women, especially those of varying races, classes and other intersectionalities. By presenting all women as having the same identity, it perpetuates a binary status of female/male where one is subordinate to the other. This exclusion of unique identities and binary power relations are major driving forces behind the “third-wave” of feminism.

Postfeminism—A fallacy revealed. New softball fields have just been built so girls can have equitable athletic facilities to the boys in our school district. There are female directors and assistant superintendents in leadership positions at the district office, female high school principals, and women in high profile medical and legal professions right here in our community. As a matter of fact, one male colleague pointed out that there are more women in leadership positions in our rural district than men, so inequity

does not exist for women here. Feminists' work is done and we can move on to a new agenda. Based on postfeminist rhetoric, gender equity has been accomplished and therefore, feminism is no longer needed. These are dangerous assumptions that abound in our society. Kinser (2004) proposes that "given the proliferation of these claims, it is easy for young women to conclude that gender equality is the norm, and that, therefore, feminists who are for it are simply unnecessary" (p. 134). Culver and Burge (2004) analyzed federal involvement in promoting gender equity and insist that "gender continues to dramatically shape educational experiences for workforce preparation in the United States" (p. 189). The accomplishments of "second-wave" feminists have certainly improved the opportunities of women over the last four decades and should not be overlooked by any means (I.M. Young, 1997). However, based on the exclusion of relevant voices in the "second-wave," as well as the continuation of male privilege that abounds within the dominant structures of society, "third-wave" feminism provides an avenue for the exploration of knowledge, power and subjectivity in ways that can disrupt these structures (Jones, 1989; Kinser, 2004; Mack-Canty, 2004; Mann & Huffman, 2005; Zimmerman, 1997).

Rocking the boat—The "third-wave." There are a range of feminist ideologies and an ongoing battle as to the establishment of a "third-wave" of feminism. Much controversy exists over many of the philosophies that have evolved in feminist theory and there are those who even espouse that some current feminist ideology should be labeled as anti-feminist. This segment will not serve to sort out all of the controversy, but rather highlight some of the themes that lie within the "third-wave" of feminism.

“Second-wave” theories “treat[ed] the concept of patriarchy with greater historical rigor, claiming that patriarchy [is] not a universal, unchanging phenomenon but had a history and a material foundation that empirical analysis could uncover” (Jones, 1989, p. 141). Current feminist theories analyze “the nature of sexual differences and the role they play in defining gender” (Jones, 1989, p. 141) as central to maintaining or deconstructing the discursive practices that maintain patriarchy. In addition to the analysis of gender roles, women’s individual experiences have been taken as paramount in this deconstruction process. Missing in the “second-wave” feminist movement were voices that were not included in the white, middle and upper-class experiences of earlier feminism (Kinser, 2004; Mack-Canty, 2004; Mann & Huffman, 2005).

Identity has been the center of the most recent feminist ideologies, specifically poststructural, whether through intersectionality theory or the deconstruction of identity and performative theory. Intersectionality theory recognizes multiple oppressions such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, etc. and the complex ways in which they intersect. Collins, bell hooks and Anzaldua have contributed to the epistemology of intersectionality (Mack-Canty, 2004; Mann & Huffman, 2005). S. Young (1997) reminds us that

These writings are part of a feminist strategy of discursive struggle; their authors publish their work in an effort to bring their insights to bear on other women’s lives, and on the women’s movement’s analyses and agendas. Consequently, a reading of these texts yields a tremendous amount of information not about “gender” as a universal construct, but about the different forms that gender inducements and constraints take, given the interaction of multiple variables, including a woman’s race, class status, sexuality, and ethnicity. (pp. 13-14)

In other words, gender cannot be isolated as what consistently influences how masculinity and femininity are named within hegemonic discourse. Gender is viewed alongside and never in isolation of race, class, etc. Different normative assumptions exist for black females and white females; lesbian and straight women; black males and white males; poor white women and wealthy white women; poor women of color and wealthy women of color, etc. In addition, these normative assumptions become even more complex when taking the cultural context of where those norms are discursively established and played out.

Butler, in Butler & Salih (2004), provides an excellent example of the cultural context of normativity and the complexity of subjugation.

Once I gave a talk in Germany and it was reported in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that as I stood at the podium explaining the differences between masculine and feminine, I looked like a young Italian man. They said that I used my hands to gesture in certain ways and that I had a manly haircut. In Paris my haircut probably would not look manly but would look like any other woman's short haircut, and it would even function within a certain conception of femininity; but in Frankfurt, for whatever reason, it looked masculine....This....might have been understood as something like the effect of various cultural norms as they produce something like the readability of a person. And I think this happens again and again: performativity – gender performativity, in particular – produces hermeneutic rifts, questions of whether a common understanding is even possible. It can actually lead to massive cultural misunderstanding, to real dissonant meanings and interpretations. (p. 345)

In contrast to intersectionality, many postmodern feminists have overtly resisted notions of identity and categorization and eschewed identity politics. Opponents to identity politics feel the categorization of identities serves only to further marginalize women as it supports discursive practices (Foucault, Birken, & Shaffer, 1978). Performativity of

gender is a relevant concept to consider in the influence of discursive practice on normativity. Butler's (2009) concept of performativity revolves around norms having influenced our subjectivity without our even realizing their effects and further perpetuating discursive practice.

Norms act on us, work upon us, and this kind of 'being worked on' makes its way into our own action. By mistake, we sometimes announce that we are the sovereign ground of our action, but this is only because we fail to account for the ways in which we are in the process of being made. (Butler, 2009, p. xi)

Gender performativity is essentially an explanation of how the normativity of gender roles is continuously reproduced through repetition by the subject. We can disrupt this repetition "and refashion alternative ways of being that revise accepted, common-sense truths" (A. Y. Jackson, 2004, p. 685) and subjectivities that are constituted through categorical assumptions. Many critics of postmodern feminism believe that opening feminism to pluralistic thinking weakens the political power that it once had in essentialized, collective action. Butler (1990) argues that

apart from the foundationalist fictions that support the notions of the subject, however, there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term *women* denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety. . . . As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (p. 3)

It is clear "to be a subject at all requires first complying with certain norms that govern recognition—that make a person recognizable" (Butler, 2009, p. iv). We must question

the power behind the construction of these norms and recognize differences as valid ways of being for women in the serial sense (I.M. Young, 1997).

Seriality is a way to resolve the essential and problematic category of “women.” Iris Marion Young (1997) has conceptualized the term women to be a “serial collective defined neither by any common identity nor by a common set of attributes that all the individuals in the series share, but rather names a set of structural constraints and relations . . . that condition action and its meaning” (p. 36). Each woman within this serial reference has unique experiences, and her subjectivity is constituted depending upon her relative position within a given discourse and the intersectionality of identity.

Poststructural Feminism

Poststructural feminism provides an especially useful lens in educational leadership with a critique of language, how knowledge is produced and accessed as well as dominant discourses that perpetuate patriarchal practices (Grogan, 1996; Mann & Huffman, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Theory is complex in nature and poststructural feminism is no different. Influenced by myriad theories, including Marxist theory and Foucault’s theory of power and discourse, Weedon (1997) creates a working understanding that

feminist poststructuralism, then, is a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change. Through a concept of discourse, which is seen as a structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity, feminist poststructuralism is able, in detailed, historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it. It is a theory which decentres the rational, self-present subject of humanism, seeing subjectivity and

consciousness as socially produced in language, as sites of struggle and potential change. (p. 40)

Poststructural feminism provides a critical lens to the current power structures, how those structures were developed over time through language and discourse and how these can be disrupted. Disruption of the dominant discourses is considered necessary because hegemony, which is grounded in dominant discourses, marginalizes non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual groups. Changing the oppressive reality for these groups will only take place when the language and discourse around normalcy and truth are challenged. It does not mean redefining what is normal or what is truth, it means disrupting these concepts altogether, including the category women. Butler (1993) reminds us that

the category of women does not become useless through deconstruction, but becomes one whose uses are no longer reified as “referents,” and which stand a chance of being opened up, indeed, of coming to signify in ways that none of us can predict in advance. Surely, it must be possible both to use the term, use it tactically even as one is, as it were, used and positioned by it, and also to subject the term to a critique which interrogates the exclusionary operations and differential power-relations that construct and delimit feminist invocations of “women.” This is...the critique of something useful, the critique of something we cannot do without. Indeed, I would argue that it is a critique without which feminism loses its democratizing potential through refusing to engage – take stock of, and become transformed by-the exclusions which put it into play. (p. 29)

In other words, it becomes a process of critiquing the patriarchal and privileged notions of what defines the hegemonic category of “women” and opening spaces for other ways of being.

My perception and understanding of language and power have been shaped by my experiences throughout my personal and professional life. I use poststructural feminism to make sense of how discourse has constituted submissive subjectivities of the women in my family. The women in my early childhood were told that their ideas were not valued and I often heard discourse surrounding the “place” women had in society, perpetuating a discourse that men’s intellect is valued over women’s. I continue to experience such discourse in the leadership role I have today, even if it is in less obvious ways. This evokes personal memories for me and makes me more determined to work in whatever ways possible to make spaces for the contributions of women in the intellectual, political and leadership fields. There are pockets of male colleagues who value my and other women’s intellect and leadership contributions, but there are subversive practices that continue to undermine the influence that I and other female leaders have upon the system. The idea that we must question our relative position in the discourses within which we find ourselves seems intuitive to me, even if the result is not immediate change. If only in my mind, I have done this ever since I was a child by speaking up at times I feel voices that should be heard are being muted and critiquing the assignment and my own repetition of gender-based normative discourse. Choosing to question what is being said, the language and messages that are being conveyed and what systemic inequality is being supported by this discursive language is essential to this feminist ideology. Change will only occur through repeated questioning and examination of language and discourse that have for far too long been taken for granted as “having no substance themselves but

are simply conveyors of meaning” (Grogan, 1999, p. 201). My poststructural feminist ideology lays a foundation for a broader, social justice activism.

Like Grogan (1999),

I do not argue that feminist poststructuralism provides the final word. Rather, the theory suggests that we avoid all efforts to discover the final word. Instead, its usefulness is in its provision of a temporary handle on what is going on so that we can bring about changes to the current way of doing things. (p. 202)

Similar to Gardiner et al.’s (2000) approach to their research on mentoring educational leaders, a critical lens is being used in this research as well. They poignantly describe how

socially constructed meanings through language, [suggest] ways in which competing language patterns might produce current notions of gender. Scrutinizing these established meanings is key to the transformative process as it interrogates the familiar, and questions the premises upon which the meanings are based. (pp. 30–31)

By studying the mentoring experiences of current female superintendents, this study serves to expose structures that support or disrupt the patriarchal, socially constructed ideals of the superintendency. Blackmore (1993) suggests “in organizations are subtle innuendos, images, valuing, and language that exclude many women, such as dominant ‘masculine’ images of leadership and administration” (p. 29). Language is a critical component of poststructural feminism as it “is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (Weedon, 1997, p. 21). Over time, how our subjectivity is constructed can

serve to rewrite others' perceptions of how leadership practices are associated with gender. Weedon (1997) describes this process as significant because "social meanings are produced within social institutions and practices in which individuals, who are shaped by these institutions, are agents of change, rather than its authors, change which may either serve hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations" (p. 25).

Furthermore, Weedon proposes that

how women understand the sexual division of labour, for example, whether in the home or in paid work, is crucial to its maintenance or transformation. Discourses of femininity and masculinity bear centrally on this understanding, and it is in this sense that language in the form of various discourses is . . . the place in which we represent ourselves. (pp. 25–26)

Grundy (1993) promotes the value of feminist discourse as a method for exposing and "challenging the 'taken-for-granted' world" (p. 165) and how these assumptions have served an "anti-democratic nature of so many of our social institutions, educational institutions among them" (p. 165). Strozier (2002) presents a critical poststructural feminist assumption that "there is no 'nature' and no subject prior to discourse, so the archive can never be identified as a natural, polymorphous potential of human beings that has been circumscribed and repressed by culture and that can now break free" (p. 88). Essentially, the subject is constituted by the discourse and therefore, reality can shift as a result of a change in the discursive practices that define the subject. That is not to say that the subject does not influence her subjectivity and positionality in the discourse, however, the subject must be aware of how she is constituted by and also influences the discourse and how that can be used to shift the culture.

A poststructural feminist lens serves to identify what discourse is impacting the culture and ways to disrupt discourse that may serve to oppress those who do not fit into the patriarchal assumptions of what is normal. . Scott's (2003) study of the experiences of two female superintendents held similar assumptions on the influence that language and discourse have on subjectivity. This research shares the theoretical framework used in Scott's research on female superintendents:

Women enter the superintendency not merely as women but as subjects in an institutional world that is ordered, shaped, and regulated by a set of practices, or discursive fields, that define notions of what is expected and normal. These discursive fields are revealed in a number of ways, including the language superintendents use (and do not use) when talking about their identity as professionals and as women. (pp. 85–86)

My research is conducted with the assumption that “the dominant perspective in educational administration has been androcentric or male-based, and that the contradictions arising from this bias are best exposed by utilizing” (Gardiner et al., 2000, p. 30) a poststructural feminist framework. Poststructural feminism deconstructs the positivist notion of any unitary set of characteristics assigned by the hegemonic categorization of the female subject. By analyzing how language, subjectivity and discourse are experienced by current female superintendents, we can gain insight into how reality for women in the superintendency is being influenced today by patriarchal notions of leadership and can be influenced differently in the future.

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research design supports poststructural feminist tenets of exposing and deconstructing the nuances of discourse. Merriam (2002) notes that the “key to

understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). This chapter includes details on the research design for this study. My selection of research setting, potential participants and the use of face-to-face interviews were designed to better understand the reality experienced by female superintendents in North Carolina as protégés and mentors. Deep analysis of the language and discourse shared by the participants revealed themes that will be discussed in Chapter IV.

Research Setting

As presented in Chapter II, research supports a clear and discernable difference in the percentage of male and female superintendents (Brunner, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2011). In addition to a 51.8 percentage point gap in representation for women in the superintendency nationwide, in North Carolina, an even larger gap of 68.6 percentage points exists (NCDPI, 2012). The barriers faced by women in accessing the superintendency have been well-documented (Alston, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Grogan, 1996, 1999, 2008; Kamler, 2006; Koenig et al., 2011; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Tallerico, 2000; Wallin & Crippen, 2007). Including participants from a state that falls below the national average may provide a productive lens to women’s experiences in ascending to the superintendency.

Research Participants

Research participants were from the pool of female superintendents in North Carolina. At the onset of this research in 2012, 18 out of 115 (15.7%) of North Carolina superintendents were female (NCDPI, 2012). The national average of female

superintendents is 8.4 percentage points higher than the percentage of female superintendents currently in North Carolina (Kowalski et al., 2011; NCDPI, 2012). Being a district leader in North Carolina also increased my interest in the experiences of female superintendents in this state and how their experiences may inform my understanding of mentoring in the context of improving accessibility to the superintendency for women in North Carolina. This section discusses the IRB challenges and recruitment process used to identify participants for the study.

IRB challenges. I submitted a request for approval to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in April, 2013. I submitted my initial IRB with the protocol that I would use the directory of superintendents available on the NC Department of Public Instruction's website to identify potential participants. It was my intention to use the contact information also available on the directory to invite the female superintendents to participate in the study. The IRB returned my application, unapproved, stating that I needed written permission to use the "listserv." However, the directory was public information and I resubmitted the IRB explaining that I was not accessing a private listserv, the female superintendent's email addresses are public record, requiring no institutional permission to contact the superintendents via email for the study. The IRB application was denied and returned a second time stating that I needed to get each individual district's permission to conduct the research in that district. This was and continues to be a major concern for me for four reasons: (a) Requiring districts to approve the research in their Local Educational Agency (LEA) compromised confidentiality since there are so few female superintendents and as

such could potentially have dissuaded superintendents from participating in the study; (b) Based on the contact information I had, I would initially contact the superintendent for each LEA to get information about that district's research approval process prior to inviting them to participate in the study, adding an additional layer of bureaucratic surveillance and an additional step for superintendents for whom time is at an absolute premium; (c) The added time in navigating the district approval process for 18 districts was exorbitant and took away time that could have been used to increase prolonged engagement with participants; and (d) Requiring district approval to recruit a superintendent when only the superintendent-and not the district- was directly impacted by the research strikes me as an antidemocratic and patriarchal form of control. I consulted with the chair of my committee and called the IRB office to discuss my concerns. I was still required by IRB to get the individual district approval for the research before I could invite the potential participant. I continue to view this research as that of an individual's professional experiences leading up to her current position versus being research done in and about a school district. I did what was required and it took months to navigate this process; a couple of superintendents seemed confused by this additional process. In two cases, I believe the additional time in providing documentation of LEA approval and the involvement of other district personnel for the approval process influenced superintendents' decision not to participate.

Recruitment. Once IRB verbally confirmed that I would need to acquire individual LEA approval, I contacted each LEA in North Carolina that employed a female superintendent. The female superintendent was the primary contact for the initial

email as each district has its own research approval process unknown to the researcher. The original email, located in Appendix A, was sent to each female superintendent and was generic in nature so as not to appear as an invitation to them directly as a potential participant. Of the 18 districts contacted, five provided the contact information for the LEA's designee for research approval and/or forwarded the email to the designee, four indicated that they, the superintendent, approved any research requests, and nine did not respond to the initial email.

I sent IRB approved documents and a template that could be used to submit district approval to the nine districts which confirmed who in the district approves research (see Appendix B). Of these nine districts, six approved the request, two denied the request and one district never responded. I sent a follow-up request for information on how to have research approved in their district to the nine districts that did not respond to the original email (see Appendix A). In this follow-up email, I included more details of the research and template for approval from the district for convenience. Of those nine, two districts responded with approval while seven did not respond. By June, 2013, eight districts had approved for me to proceed with this research in their district.

Once I obtained the documented district approval, I sent a formal invitation (see Appendix C) to participate via email to the female superintendent working in that district. I scheduled interviews with all eight of the participants over the course of five months, traveling approximately 2,000 miles from the coastal to the mountain regions for interviews. It was important to me to meet personally with the participants. I felt this would provide a more personable experience and increase their comfort in sharing with

me their experiences. In advance of the interview, I sent the participants the interview protocol and consent form for their review (see Appendix D). The seven participants represent approximately 39% of female superintendents in NC at the onset of the project. The participants represent districts in all 3 NC regions: Coastal, Piedmont and Mountain. The number from each region is not included in an effort to maintain confidentiality of participation.

Benefits and Risks of the Study

The participants in the study have already attained the highest level of responsibility in their organization. Their participation in this study, on the surface, was not viewed as beneficial to removing obstacles to their access to the superintendency. However, within that position, they have experienced the effects of discourse associated with gender norms that may continue to impact their practice as a superintendent. The study has the potential to, on a broader social level, help to deconstruct those norms.

There were minimal risks to the participant. The participant may have been concerned about the political implications of sharing personal or professional experiences related to her current position, though none shared that with me openly. One participant was reluctant to share a significant experience that was impacted by her gender in the superintendency during the audio recording. Once the recording stopped, she did share the details and out of respect to her, it was not included in the study. To minimize any risk to any participants, the data remained confidential, pseudonyms were used, and data was stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. All computers, email accounts, or any other electronic methods of communication or storage were and remain password

protected. A secure network was used at all times and updated security software was maintained. Data will be kept for one year after closure of the project. At that time, the data will be shredded and/or destroyed. The researcher will be the only one with access to the identifiable data. All information obtained in this study remains strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were derived from the intersection of my personal and professional experiences; the review of literature on the superintendency, mentoring and female educational leaders; and poststructural feminist theory. Table 5 presents a brief explanation for the rationale of each research question. These questions were used to guide the development of the semi-structured interview protocol provided in the data collection section.

Table 5

Research Question Rationale

Research Question	Rationale
What have been the mentoring experiences of female superintendents as they aspired to the superintendency?	Past research supports the importance of mentoring for educational leaders. There were significant studies by Grogan (1996), Brunner (1999) and Gardiner et al (2000) that include the impact of mentoring specifically for female educational leaders. Over a decade later, I wanted to find out the current reality for female superintendents, specifically in a state with a markedly low representation of female superintendents.

Table 5

(Cont.)

Research Question	Rationale
<p>What role has language and discourse played in mentoring relationships to disrupt or reproduce gender norms?</p>	<p>My personal and professional experiences, as well as literature, support the existence of normative gender assumptions and how these are perpetuated by hegemonic discourse. I considered how often mentors and protégés find themselves engaged in salient dialogue around leadership. My poststructural feminist ideology guided me in wondering how the language and discourse between mentors and protégés may deconstruct or perpetuate gender norms.</p>
<p>How have mentoring relationships impacted study participants' understandings of subjectivity and agency?</p>	<p>My poststructural feminist lens views subjectivity as fluid and complex based upon the discourse in which we are immersed. The women in this study are among very few who have acquired a position as superintendent in this state. I wanted to explore how, if at all, their mentoring experiences influenced their subjectivity and agency as a woman and leader. I also wanted to explore how, if at all, they viewed their own influence on improving women's access to the superintendency.</p>
<p>How do female superintendents employ their concept of subjectivity and agency as they mentor other aspiring superintendents?</p>	<p>Hegemonic discourse is reproduced, often blindly, by the very people who are subjugated by that discourse. I wanted to explore how, if at all, female superintendents in North Carolina were disrupting or perpetuating patriarchal structures that impact future instructional leaders as they aspire to be a superintendent.</p>

Limitations

The goal of this study was to better understand female superintendents' mentoring experiences as they ascended to the superintendency to determine the impact these

experiences had on their access to the position and the gendering of leadership styles. The time demands of the superintendency limited prolonged engagement with each participant during the course of this research. At the onset of the interview process with participants, one withdrew because of time concerns and the seven that participated expressed a concern as to whether or not they would be able to commit to the maximum amount of time. I had to maintain flexibility as a researcher due to the time demands of their job during the period of time this research was being conducted. Other potential participants who declined the invitation noted that the time needed for interviews as a factor in their decision. To adjust for the lack of prolonged engagement, the questions used in the semi-structured interview included those from the interview protocol, as well as follow up questions to dig deeper and gather richer data. Member checking was also used to counter the lack of prolonged engagement. Member checking is discussed in more detail in the Trustworthiness section of this chapter. Another limitation to the research was the limited pool of potential participants. At the onset of the research, only 18 women in North Carolina were serving in the superintendency. In addition, the participants in the study represent a relatively homogenous group of white women. Only one woman of color participated.

Data Collection

The superintendency is a very demanding position. Scheduling the initial interview presented challenges. However, over a period of six months, I worked with the eight superintendents and/or their assistants to schedule an initial interview. One interview was rescheduled 3 times, one interview began an hour and a half late, and one

interview included the superintendent needing to eat lunch in the late afternoon while the interview was being conducted. The challenges with interviewing these seven women were due to the time demands of the responsibilities of their position and I am grateful that they were willing to set aside time to participate in this study. All eight potential participants gave me their undivided attention once the interview began.

The consent form was reviewed with each candidate prior to beginning the interview. After reviewing the consent form with one participant at the scheduled interview, she decided not to participate due to the time demands of her upcoming transition to retirement. The consent form was included in the formal invitation to participate, but she had not had time to review it prior to my arrival. Seven of the eight female superintendents consented to being interviewed but were hesitant to commit to any additional time for the study. Six of the seven participants were interviewed in their office at work. One interview took place in a hotel where the participant was attending a quarterly meeting for superintendents. The location was convenient as it was only about an hour from my home. Yet, ideally I would have been able to experience the environment in which she worked on a daily basis as I had with the other six participants.

Once the consent form was signed, an initial, semistructured interview was held with each participant. The length of the interviews averaged approximately 75 minutes and data was audio recorded. Table 6 displays the Data Collection Crosswalk that was used to develop the interview protocol. The original protocol was reviewed by my dissertation committee during the proposal defense and adjustments to the questions were made based upon that feedback. The interview protocol was used as a guide for the semi-

structured interview with each participant. In an effort to maximize time and gather richer data from participants during the initial interview, follow-up questions were asked, as needed. To respect the time demands of the superintendents, I provided the participants the opportunity for member checking rather than scheduling follow-up interviews. I provide more details on the member checking process that was used in the section on trustworthiness.

Table 6

Data Collection Crosswalk—Interview Protocol

Research Question	Interview Questions
What have been the mentoring experiences of female superintendents as they aspired to the superintendency?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When did you first think about pursuing the superintendency? What were some of the factors that influenced your choice? 2. What served as obstacles and catalysts on your journey to the superintendency? 3. Who, if anyone, served as a mentor (formal or informal) for you in your journey to the superintendency? 4. Tell me about those mentoring experiences.
What role has language and discourse played in mentoring relationships to deconstruct gender norms?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What conversations with your mentor(s) most influenced you? 2. How did your gender and the gender of your mentor affect the dynamics of the mentoring relationship? 3. In what other ways do you feel gender impacted your experiences during your journey to or your current work as a superintendent? 4. How, if at all, are conversations and interactions between stakeholders and female superintendents different than those between stakeholders and male superintendents? 5. How, if at all, are stakeholder conversations about female superintendents different than those about male superintendents?

Table 6

(Cont.)

Research Question	Interview Questions
<p>How have the mentoring relationships impacted the participants' understanding of subjectivity and agency?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are key roles you have in your life (i.e. superintendent, daughter, mother, etc.)? 2. What are some strategies/approaches you use to influence others in each of these roles? 3. In which roles do you feel you are most influential and why? 4. In what ways, if any, did your mentor(s) impact your development to influence others in these various roles? 5. In what ways, if any, did your mentor(s) influence your understanding of who you are as a woman? 6. In what ways, if any, did your mentor(s) influence your understanding of who you are as a leader? 7. What career obstacles, if any, do you believe your mentor assisted you in overcoming?
<p>How do female superintendents employ their concept of subjectivity and agency as they mentor other aspiring superintendents?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In what ways, if any, have you or do you mentor others during their journey to the superintendency? 2. What influence do you perceive gender to have on others during their journey to the superintendency? 3. What influence do you perceive that you have on those you mentor in accessing the superintendency? 4. In what ways, if any, do you influence your mentee's understanding of who she is as a woman? 5. In what ways, if any, do you influence your mentee's understanding of who she is as a leader? 6. What career obstacles, if any, do you assist your mentee in overcoming?
<p>Trustworthiness</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How has my gender or role in education influenced this interview? 2. What questions do you have for me?

Data Analysis

Poststructural feminism is grounded in the analysis of discourse and dialogue to deconstruct oppressive practices. Therefore, it is apropos to analyze the data collected in this study as a method for exploring how language and discourse may reveal patterns of hegemony in the journey to the superintendency that may be nurtured or deconstructed through the mentoring process. A poststructural feminist lens was used for intensive analysis of the data through coding and identifying patterns, themes and anomalies associated with the research questions. Grogan (2003) proposes that it is useful to

examine the research on educational administration and on the superintendency, in particular, from the point of view that it represents necessarily gendered perspectives: the majority of both practitioners and researchers in the field have been men. This is not to judge such perspectives as good or bad, right or wrong. It is to acknowledge that they are, for the most part, male ones. (p. 17)

Therefore, the analysis was from a perspective that there are gendered expectations and norms that impact experiences of female superintendents in unique ways, yet also carry implications for how women are perceived as suitable for and within the role.

All audio data was transcribed by a contracted third party upon completion of each interview. I listened to the audio recording of data as I read the corresponding transcript. The transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo 10 Qualitative Software. I read each transcript again, creating nodes and assigning data to the containers. Nodes provide a way to organize the data across multiple sources. The nodes that were created were based upon the theoretical framework (subjectivity, agency, gender assumptions, trustworthiness and future studies, etc.) and research questions (mentoring, mentoring

others, relationships, catalysts, etc.). The coding process and node development was also influenced by what research has reported as obstacles faced by women in seeking access to the superintendency (obstacles, coping with obstacles, demands of the superintendency, gender assumptions, mobility, etc.; Gardiner et al., 2000; Lichtman, 2010). There was overlap in the data and some transcript segments were assigned multiple nodes. I used the overlap in coding to assist me with identifying how the data may be collapsed into hierarchies and later into themes. Table 7 displays examples of nodes assigned to raw data, including the overlapping in node assignment.

Table 7

Examples of Assigning Nodes

Node(s)	Sample Data
Mentoring <i>and</i> Relationship	“To be a mentor you have to have a longstanding relationship, it is not like one conversation.” (Dawn Shaw)
Subjectivity <i>and</i> Mentoring	“She taught us you have to know who you are and you have to know what you believe in order to be a leader. And that goes back to that decision-making. You can’t be wishy-washy, I’ve known administrators who—it’s almost like they wake up in the morning and they see which way the wind’s blowing and that’s how they make their decisions.” (Carol Allen)
External Perceptions <i>and</i> Gender Assumptions <i>and</i> Subjectivity	“I was their first female superintendent for this board, and it was—it was—the two areas where they thought that I might have the least experience or might have weaknesses would be in the areas of finance and in the area of working with facilities, and those are—those are not weaknesses.” (Annie Daniels)
Gender Assumptions <i>and</i> Obstacles <i>and</i> Mobility <i>and</i> Subjectivity	“Well, I mean, if most of the school boards in North Carolina are hiring males, I do believe most of the candidates are probably males. I think that a part of what may prevent women from wanting this role are just some logistical issues such as being mobile, being able to pick your husband up and move them across the state or across the country for your job is an issue for a woman.” (Alice Land)

Once all transcripts were coded, I reviewed the collective data for each node and determined that they could be nested based on common coding. I then created a hierarchy of parent nodes with relevant child nodes that contributed to the larger themes. Table 8 presents how the nodes were nested. Nesting the themes provided a collective overview of data from the sub-themes that related to the parent nodes.

I reviewed the collective content of the parent and child nodes and analyzed how the data related to my research questions as a whole. The themes described and discussed in Chapter IV emerged from this analytical and reflective data analysis.

Table 8

Nested Nodes in Data Analysis

Parent Nodes	Child Nodes	Reflection
Subjectivity	External perceptions	An individual's subjectivity is impacted by the discourse in which they find themselves. External perceptions, gender assumptions, relationships, mentoring and agency influenced the discourse experiences by the participants and the subjectivity of these women.
	Gender assumptions	
	Relationships	
	Mentoring	
	Agency	
Mentoring	Catalysts	Mentoring experiences included a variety of strategies and had a variety of outcomes for the participants. The catalysts, opportunities, participant subjectivity and strategies participant's used with protégés were all informed by their mentoring experiences.
	Mentoring	
	Others	
	Opportunities	
	Role Models	
	Strategies	
Subjectivity		

Table 8

(Cont.)

Parent Nodes	Child Nodes		Reflection
Superintendency	Catalysts		The superintendency is a complex role. To better understand the participant's subjectivity within the superintendency, I considered data coded in catalysts, demands of the superintendency, obstacles (influenced by mobility, gender assumptions and how they coped with obstacles), opportunities, reasons for pursuing as well as data specific to subjectivity.
	Demands of the Superintendency		
	Obstacles		
	Opportunities	Gender Assumptions	
	Reason for Pursuing	Mobility	
	Subjectivity		
	Trustworthiness		
Researcher Reflections			In the transcripts, I noted that there were reflections I provided by confirming through restatement what the participant was saying. This was a reminder of what I perceived to be especially pertinent to the research questions at the time of the interviews.
Future Studies			I noted in the transcripts ideas or topics that might inform future research. Also, in some interviews, the participants noted what they thought would be important for future study. I coded these to consider for inclusion in the dissertation.

Research Subjectivities

A post-structural feminist approach serves as the ideological framework through which this research was conducted. Grogan (1996) emphasizes that the feminist inquiry “consider[s] how the established ways of doing and being, which have been valued unquestioned for too long, disadvantage women” (p. 22). Within feminist theory there are numerous ideologies that exist and can be used to guide the researcher’s perspective on interpreting the data. Generally, feminist research is motivated by the desire to eliminate the disparate distribution of power, emphasizing the unique experiences of women, and is “politically motivated and concerned with social inequality” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 86).

My own personal and professional experiences must be acknowledged as having a great deal of influence on me as a researcher. I have already shared some personal and professional experiences that connect me to this study. Postpositivist research would argue that positionality can enrich research, as long as there is strong reflexivity and candor (Lather, 1986).

Trustworthiness

When researchers apply ideological approaches/perspectives to their research, it can muddy the waters, and critics may suggest the data is not reliable (Lather, 1986). Therefore, it was essential to embed processes that strengthen the trustworthiness of the data in order for the work to be taken seriously and inform the profession for which it is meant. As Sandlin (2002) emphasizes, “the defining features [sic] of critical research is that it critiques and challenges unequal distributions of power within social, economic,

and political systems” (p. 371). The personal nature of such research requires that the researcher be careful not to “fit” data into her non-neutral frame of thought. There must be “self-corrective element(s) to prevent phenomena from being forced into preconceived interpretive schemes” (Lather, 1986, p. 65). Ideological qualitative research was, in general, not a well-accepted form of research during the time Lather’s article was written (Lichtman, 2010). Lather’s recommendations for, and own analysis of, “formulat[ing] approaches to empirical research which advance emancipatory theory-building through the development of interactive and action-inspiring research design” (p. 64) were pioneering at the time. Qualitative, and especially feminist research, is still in the infancy stages compared to positivist, quantitative research methodologies. It is essential to maintain integrity in the research practices of openly ideological, qualitative research to ensure that the marked goals of critical research can be valued and accepted as trustworthy. Reflexivity, member checking and peer review have been used to promote trustworthiness of the study.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity is the first strategy that has been applied to increase trustworthiness of the data. It is critical to recognize that “no research is value free and that our viewpoints as researchers hold biases” (Gardiner et al., 2000, p. 47). Reflexivity is that process of self-awareness regarding the influence our experiences and perspectives have upon the lens through which data is collected, analyzed and communicated as a researcher. I have disclosed through discussion in this dissertation that a post-structural feminist lens is being used, included a question for participants regarding how my positionality as a female and/or district level administrator may have influenced the

interview, and consistently reflected on how my own experiences may be impacting my interpretation of the data in this study. I often engaged in dialogue with others, including those with differing views, regarding my experiences and the lens through which I view the topic. Ideological researchers often seek to “formulate an approach to empirical research which both advances emancipatory theory-building and empowers the researched” (Lather, 1986, p. 64). For me, that desire is strongly motivated by my own personal experiences, and I have openly shared that self-awareness throughout this dissertation.

It was also helpful to gather perceptions from the participants during the interview on how my gender and/or role in education may have influenced the interview. The responses ranged from “I don’t think it has” (Alice Land), to

The only influence that your gender has is the fact that I let you come because of your gender. Because I—as I told you earlier, I feel an obligation to help you know, break that glass ceiling, I guess, and provide opportunities. You know, if I had 15 male persons trying to get in I would just have to say no, probably to some, because there’s just not enough time in the day to do that, but as far as my responses are concerned, and the actual time that we’ve been together, I don’t find that your gender had any influence on my responses at all. (Marian Greene)

The primary influence my gender and/or role in education played was in accessing and being trusted by these female superintendents. Additional responses to the question support this assumption:

I think I feel more comfortable having this conversation with you than I would a male, maybe, because I would feel like they really maybe not understand where I’m coming from, or not really listening, or you know. (Carol Allen)

The fact that you are an educator helps a lot because you have a understanding of what we do and I think from some of your body language and the nodding of the head and all that, that you have probably experienced, maybe, some of this, some of the examples and the things that I've given. (Pamela Winters)

I think your role as an educator makes you a trusted colleague, you know what I'm talking—I trust that you know what I am taking about, that I can be very honest and candid with you. And your role as a female, you're a fellow leader, an educational leader, so I felt like I was talking to another leader. (Annie Daniels)

I reflected specifically on Pamela's statement that "I think from some of your body language and the nodding of the head and all that, that you have probably experienced, maybe, some of this, some of the examples." Reflecting on the interview, I recalled wanting to employ active listening and wanting the participant to feel comfortable sharing her experiences with me. When I engage in listening, my nodding is generally a signal that I understand that person's perspective less than it means I agree and/or have experienced similar circumstances. However, in this case, I have had similar experiences and was troubled by some of the ones she shared with me. Other than information about the research shared on the Consent Form, I saved any details to questions that may have been asked of me about my subjectivity and ideology for the end of the interview. In general, these participants communicated a sense of comfort in sharing their experiences with me because part of our identities, whether being female or an educator, overlapped. Dawn Shaw attributed her comfort level to personal characteristics versus gender or professional role:

You as a person are easy to talk to. You seem sincere, dedicated to research, interested in getting a deep understanding, and I think if you were a man and presented those same qualities I would probably relate to you the same way.

She did include in her response that while there may not have been a conscious influence on her,

I will be first to admit there could be an underlying that I don't even know about, it's not a conscious level, it may be easier to talk to you about this because you're a woman. But it—that may be on some subconscious level. But I am thinking of your characteristics and the way you conduct yourself makes it very easy for me to talk to you. Whether a man could have made it as easy or not, I'm not sure.

The participants' responses suggest that the data collection process was not negatively impacted by my subjective position in the research and may have positively impacted by it, in terms of access to participants as well as candor. I also used member checks and peer review to further increase the trustworthiness of data analysis and presentation of results.

Member checks. Using member checks is a strategy that is designed not only to increase trustworthiness of the openly ideological poststructural feminist analysis, but also to work toward the goals of meaningfully reflecting the experiences of the participants. The opportunity for participants to review their data in context of the analysis respects the idea that subjectivity is fluid and influenced by the discourse in which we find ourselves. Bloom (2002) provides a poignant example of this when she provided a participant with the opportunity to member-check, and the participant requested that she be able to provide Bloom with another account, this time with a very different subjectivity.

Each of the seven participants was provided with the opportunity to review the draft of the results/discussion chapter. I sent an email to the participants in January, 2014

inviting them to complete a member check (see Appendix E). I attached a draft of Chapter IV and a brief member check form to the email (see Appendix F). The form offered details on the member checking process and two prompts to respond with feedback: (a) Please provide feedback on the results presented in the draft. What, if any, data may be misrepresented or not captured that you wish to be considered for revision?; and (b) Please provide any general feedback that should be considered regarding the Results Draft for this research study. I provided the participants with two options to be given their pseudonym:

- To receive your pseudonym by email, please send an email request and include the email address you would like it sent to [my email address]
- To receive your pseudonym by phone, please call Tiffany Perkins @ [my phone number] or send an email request to [my email address] with the phone number to contact you

No participant requested her pseudonym. Based on one participant's feedback, it may be that they were able to determine their pseudonym upon reading the initial introduction for each participant. There were some participants who did not participate in the member checking process and as a result did not feel it was necessary to request their pseudonym.

Time constraints for superintendents influenced their participation in the member checking process. Within 24 hours after sending the request for member checks, one participant responded in an email

Very nicely done, Tiffany. Bravo! . . . Congratulations on your work. I love the idea of "No Woman's Land." P.S. I don't need to ask my pseudonym.

This same participant later submitted more formal feedback for consideration:

I think your recordings are very accurate. My only suggestion is to replace verbal grammar errors or words such as “you know” with “. . .” Some participants use “you know” very often and some like myself change thoughts in the middle of a sentence. Although your protocols may call for using the exact words, I think by doing so you may inadvertently contribute to a stereotype of women that we talk too much or are too excitable. Most studies such as yours that are based on oral interviews use “. . .” so as to avoid making the speaker look uneducated or disorganized. I don’t think using “. . .” lessens the authenticity of your work as long as it is not used to change the meaning of a participant’s sentence. Printing the exact words used orally makes us look less distinguished or accomplished as a group.

I think your conclusions and observations are insightful and will make a meaningful contribution to the literature on female superintendents.

This participant’s perspective was a reminder to me that writing can reproduce the very stereotypes that poststructural feminism is setting out to deconstruct. This suggestion also reiterates the influence of external and gender-based perceptions and how female superintendents compensate for them as they occupy a unique space later referenced in Chapter IV as “No Woman’s Land.” By no means were these women too talkative, excitable, disorganized or uneducated. This participant felt that a portion of the participants’ voices needed to be removed in order to avoid hegemonic assumptions that women are talkative, emotional and excitable. I certainly did not want others’ patriarchal assumptions to overshadow the experiences and credibility these women have had, but also struggled with imposing my own idea of what should and should not be included and maintaining the integrity of each participant’s experiences. There existed a balance between writing in a way that made audible their true voice versus writing in a way that perpetuated what hegemonic discourse proposes is the “right way” for a leader to speak.

As a result of the feedback, I reviewed two drafts of Chapter IV side by side. One draft included the exact dialogue from the interview and the second draft included some editing of quotes in response to the member check feedback. I reviewed them both carefully to determine if any of the changes was an interruption of the participant's experiences or perceptions. After much reflection and consideration, I chose to apply this suggestion to the participant's data, and minimally to other participants' data. My decision respected both her perception, the voices of the other six participants and my judgment as researcher.

In addition to the suggestion to address the quoted text, this participant also provided reassuring feedback. She was able to identify herself in the study based upon the description and inclusion of the data. This feedback indicated that at least one participant supported the conceptualization of "No Woman's Land," one of the two large themes supported by the data that will be described in more detail in Chapter IV.

One week from having sent the original request for member checking, I had received a reply from only one participant. As a result, I sent a follow-up reminder of the member checking opportunity to the participants. In response to the reminder, one participant indicated that she would not be completing the member check, two indicated they would do their best to return the form soon, but were not able to as a result of time demands, and one replied in an email,

I do approve of [your] work with regard to my interview. I was fascinated to read your entire work. I cannot complete the form, but you have my "ok."

Only two participants did not respond at all to the original member check request or follow-up email. The member checking process provided participants with the opportunity to confirm that their voice was accurately represented in the results. It also provided the researcher with a reminder of how powerful the written word can be in perpetuating or disrupting dominant discourses. The member checking process increases the trustworthiness of the data. Member checking provides an opportunity to increase the participant's voice in the research rather than it being interrupted by the ideological framework or the voice of the researcher.

Peer review. Peer review is built into the dissertation process as I have stayed in close contact with my chair throughout the research. She has provided on-going feedback regarding the interpretation of the data. She and the entire committee have read and given feedback on the research study and proposal, providing a built in peer review process (Merriam, 2002a). The result of their feedback is folded into the final product. In addition to the dissertation committee, I have also included an additional peer reviewer. A former doctoral candidate who is now a professional colleague provided feedback on Chapters IV and V. I shared Chapter I with her to set the context of the research. I uploaded and shared Chapters IV and V in Google Docs. She shared comments on points for reflection throughout the two chapters. Here are three examples of feedback provided by the peer reviewer:

The concept of No Woman's Land could be deconstructed a little more to better make links [between gender based discourse, Horns and Halo Effect and No Woman's Land]

I think that the sacrifice is a HUGE issue of why some women choose not to access it . . . in Chapter 1 you talked about the man and his son . . . it is a natural link to include it

A piece I feel is missing is the personal aspect of “sacrifice” . . . are these women married? Do they have children? How has that affected them personally?

Each piece of feedback from the peer reviewer was considered for possible revisions.

The peer reviewer had an early draft of Chapter IV and the first suggestion noted above had already been addressed through other revisions prior to receiving the peer reviewer’s feedback. The second example of peer review feedback was used to integrate the experience described in opening of the dissertation with the conclusion in Chapter IV.

The section on implications for research in Chapter V is influenced by the third example of the peer reviewer’s feedback. The data collected during this research was not sufficient to inform the questions raised in the feedback. The peer review process allowed me to see gaps that may have existed in my data collection, analysis and discussion.

Summary

This research study was framed in poststructural feminist theory. The significance of using this theory lies in the idea that “understanding of and explanation for the perpetuation of male dominance in the superintendency might best be gained from examining underlying normalizations, particularly normalization of femininity and masculinity, that structure the discourses and practice of educational administration” (Young & Skrla, 2003, p. 221). Through semi-structured interviews with seven female superintendents in North Carolina regarding their mentoring experiences, this qualitative

study attempted to uncover gender-based, dominant discourses that may still exist in powerful mentoring relationships. Based upon my own subjectivity in gender-based, hegemonic discourses, I have employed strategies to increase the trustworthiness of this research. Reflexivity, member checks and peer review have been used to minimize my subjective intrusion in the data collection and analysis. The next chapter will present the results from the data analysis as well as a discussion of those results. The final chapter ends with implications for practice and research as well as a conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: INFORMAL MENTORING AND
NO WOMAN'S LAND

Introduction

“Now you know I can’t get my next job without you.” And he would jokingly say like “Yes, I do.” Like, you know, as a joke, “Yes I know that.” . . . He was very cognizant of that, which was very helpful for me. Someone not as cognizant might not have been as helpful. (Marian Greene)

This conversation between a participant and her mentor exemplifies the perceived impact mentoring has on women’s access to the superintendency, including the gatekeeping role. This study explores not only the mentoring experiences of female superintendents, but also the impact such experiences play in reproducing or disrupting the gendering of leadership roles and the impact this has on subjectivity and women’s access to the superintendency. Researching the lived realities for female superintendents through a feminist poststructuralist lens provides insight into practices that disrupt or continue to reinforce socially constructed beliefs that associate leadership styles with gender and may provide insight into the impact these practices have on limiting access for women to the superintendency.

The qualitative data for this project were collected using an informal interview protocol and will be presented and discussed thematically in this chapter. At the onset of the research, only 18 out of 115 superintendents in North Carolina were women. Each of

the seven women interviewed for this project have had unique and compelling experiences prior to and during their appointment to the superintendency. The presentation of the data is a delicate process as every effort is being made to protect the identity of the seven participants. In addition, every effort is made to avoid presenting the data from these women in an “essential and unified form” (Weedon, 1997, p. 176). There are overlapping themes in the discourse these women have found themselves in, yet each woman’s subjectivity is also impacted by differences in her past, present and future experiences. Respecting the unique subjectivity of each participant is also a consideration in the presentation of the data and discussion.

An analysis of the data presented two overarching themes: (a) the role of informal mentoring strategies, including authentic job experiences, modeling leadership practices, and reflection and supportive discourse, have in helping women ascend to the superintendency; and (b) a space I will call “No Woman’s Land” that is perpetuated by gender-based discourse. As the data is analyzed and discussed, it is important to maintain confidentiality because participants are part of such a small pool of only 18 female superintendents in North Carolina. As data are shared, potentially identifiable information such as locations and names of events may have been modified to protect the participant’s identity, while still maintaining the trustworthiness of the data. This chapter will include a section for each of the following: paths and perceptions of each participant and her most salient mentor(s); presentation of the results and discussion for each theme that emerged including informal mentoring strategies and the space I call “No Woman’s Land”; and a summary of the findings.

Paths and Perceptions

Each of the seven participants has had a unique and interesting journey to the superintendency. Each person's path has been constructed by many factors. A snapshot has been written for each participant that attempts to include three factors that have influenced her path to the superintendency: her motivation for pursuing the superintendency, an introduction of her mentor(s) who supported her on her journey, and perceptions that may have influenced her path. This section is designed to allow each participant her unique voice within the research and set the stage for sharing results later in the chapter. Pseudonyms are used for individuals, events, and locations to ensure the participants are not identifiable since they are part of such a small pool of female superintendents in North Carolina. Demographic data such as age, years of experience, and years in current position, etc. are excluded in order to protect the participants' identities.

Alice Land

Superintendent Land's interest in the Superintendency began after she spent several years serving as an assistant superintendent. During that time, she had acquired her superintendent's license and felt a change would challenge her to grow professionally. She exuded a sense of self-assuredness and independence during the interview. She noted that historically,

My entire career I've changed jobs every three to four years. . . . I didn't really just have this one conversation and someone said you should be a superintendent, that never happened to me.

Her desire to seek new professional challenges without having been tapped by others was unique among the participants. Mobility was a factor she had already carefully considered and was not an issue when pursuing new positions. Superintendent Land indicated that she did not mind changing jobs every few years and took the desirability of a location as well as the vision/beliefs of a board of education into consideration when seeking her current superintendent position in North Carolina. She also works to keep her professional and private lives separate and perceives herself to have a fixed identity across those settings. She emphasized that

I try to be myself in all of my roles, and you know do the right thing...I believe that a person's character, it doesn't change whether you're in your personal or your professional life. And I'm very private about my personal life, so I just try to be who I am, you know, not change.

Alice describes her identity or self as one that is fixed rather than fluid and changing as a result of the discourse she finds herself. When discussing mentors who have influenced her, Superintendent Land did not identify any particular mentor. She noted that:

many people that I've worked with have been mentors, positive and negative. I think you learn as much from poor leaders as you do from strong ones, so every one of my roles has helped me in the job that I do now.

She exuded an analytical and reflective style where every experience has collectively and consciously influenced her preparation for and access to the superintendency without any one individual influencing her more than another.

Annie Daniels

Superintendent Daniels was inspired by educators in her family while growing up. She shared always wanting to be an educator, but never really imagined herself being an administrator, per se. She knew how difficult this work was from watching her family members who served as educational leaders for years. However, as she acquired more experience in teaching and learning, she was heavily influenced by both formal and informal networks of educators who shared her passion for curriculum and instruction.

She described one formal network that was developed by a professional organization with an influential female leader in the state at the time:

it was really about preparing females for assistant superintendencies and superintendencies because there weren't very many . . . I think it was very similar today, it was kind of obvious that there wasn't the same representation, and so how might we help. I think her motivation was how can we help people be prepared for that. What kinds of experiences do they need? And she put together a very . . . [good and] different kind of mentoring program. We were colleagues in the group, we supported one another and kept up with one another for quite a long time.

Annie felt a great deal of support through this peer mentoring network. This is an especially valuable opportunity in a state with so few female superintendents available as mentors. It was through that experience that she began deeply reflecting on her future as a superintendent. She remembered,

I began thinking about what [I could bring] to the table, and would I have the fire in [my] belly that you would have to have to take on this role. So I began questioning myself at that time.

In contrast to Superintendent Land, Superintendent Daniels credits a specific individual for serving as a mentor during her career. She had the opportunity to work for many years with a male superintendent that she described with admiration:

he had such a gentle spirit and admired my work, saw the potential and was extremely encouraging . . . in some ways I think with our age differences I was somewhat like a daughter figure.

Her perception that she served somewhat as a desexualized daughter figure shows the depth of trust, care and respect that facilitated his willingness to provide her with experiences she might otherwise not have had. As a superintendent in North Carolina, she continues to use philosophies that have influenced her in her career. She shared her belief that “the core business of schooling is teaching and learning, and I think the CEO should know a lot about the core business.”

Carol Allen

Superintendent Allen reported that she never directly pursued the superintendency. She found herself in various professional roles and opportunities that arose for serving in the next level of leadership. She perceives her ascension to the current superintendency in North Carolina as happening naturally based on her experiences and opportunities that presented at the right time. She especially credits her secondary experience as preparing her for the superintendent role. Superintendent Allen shared:

I think being a high school principal teaches you to be tough in a lot of ways, I had to learn about a lot of things that I didn't know about before like athletics . . . you sort of get that well-rounded experience. . . . I'm not saying you don't in other

principalships, but I think it's much larger than an elementary school as far as the types of experiences you have.

When discussing her mentors, she credits several people in a variety of roles. These mentors include her father, a female university professor, and two female superintendents she served under as a principal. She remembered the earliest influence from her father was a sense that she could do anything she set her mind too. She shared that, "he always told me I could do anything I wanted to do, whenever—gender never was an issue." Her father instilled in her a sense that she could pursue whatever she wanted, even if it was viewed as a man's role.

The female university professor that she credits as a mentor also served as her high school teacher and in an interim superintendent role. The influence of this mentor she most remembered is: "She taught us you have to know who you are and you have to know what you believe in order to be a leader." Superintendent Allen has had the opportunity to work in a variety of places and with two female superintendents in the state that she credits as mentors. Serving as a principal in the district they led at the time, she was able to learn from their styles and receive their support in developing as a leader. She shared that one in particular

always believed in me, she's a great role model as far as professionalism and I see her as the same way. I don't think she makes her decisions based on who the person is or . . . for political reasons. I think she knows what she believes and that's how she operates.

Collectively, her father's influence and being mentored by successful women in leadership positions gave her a perspective of the superintendency that

It was more about moving forward and this is my vision . . . and watching them work really hard and dedicate their lives to what they were doing. I don't know, it just never crossed my mind that I couldn't do it.

Dawn Shaw

Dawn Shaw, who currently serves as a superintendent in North Carolina, describes her motivation to pursue the superintendency as a drive to contribute to a bigger picture and improve things for teachers. Early in her career, she acquired the educational credentials required for serving as superintendent in North Carolina with only a focus at that time of being a principal. She shared that as a teacher, "I generally was well respected by my colleagues and they were open to my ideas." This early influence on others inspired her as well. She shared her perception of organizational practices as she was serving in the teacher leader role:

I felt that there were a lot of bureaucratic things that could have been done better for teachers and for students as well.

She realized that to influence change, she would need to be in leadership roles such as the superintendency.

Superintendent Shaw felt strongly that both role models and mentors impacted her path to the superintendency. She described role models as people that she spent less time with, but who influenced her to pursue her professional career. She first credits a family member as an early role model who influenced her perception of what she could achieve as woman. She respectfully recalled memories of her aunt, an elementary school principal in the 1950s:

I sometimes in the summer would go over to her school because she was there by herself and she would have me straighten up rooms, . . . organize the magic markers. . . . I can't remember [the details], but I was in the school where she was in her principal role and that no doubt made an impression on me.

While the details of what she did during her visits to her aunt's school have been forgotten, the experience of seeing a female in a leadership role was a strong and lasting influence on her own idea of what professional role she could be in one day.

She also remembered a female superintendent in the district from which she graduated high school as serving as a role model. During her K12 education, she noted that

we only had two superintendents, one was a man and one was a woman, and I very naively believed that 50% of superintendents were women.

Seeing both a woman and a man in such an influential role as the superintendency gave her a perception that either a man or a woman can equally access such a position. In addition to these women in leadership, a significant male role model was an assistant superintendent in the district where she taught. She remembered:

I had a great deal of respect for him. I thought he did a very good job, was in the schools a lot, and he influenced me to aspire. That was the first time that I knew that I aspired to something higher than principal, . . . I aspired to do something like he did, assistant superintendent

Once she began pursuing higher levels of leadership, she developed relationships with professionals that served more directly as mentors. These mentors included a male principal she served under as teacher, two male university professors and a male

superintendent for whom she served as both a principal and central office administrator. She credits the male principal with providing her with opportunities as a teacher leader and supporting her internship when she pursued her leadership degrees. There was an interesting dichotomy she experienced with this mentor. She shared that

We spent a lot of time talking about my career aspirations . . . and what it's like. You have to do an internship at your school where you do extra hours [and different things to build leadership experience], but he steered me away from principalship. He said, "Why would you want to have to put up with all the things principals do, and you ought to get you a job at the central office and be a supervisor of this or a supervisor of that." And at some other conversation he told me, "You ought to work for the [leadership organization] down in [Sharpsville] because you are just"—he had a high opinion of me, "you are smart" [and he included other compliments], but he never encouraged me to be a principal. And he never said it, but what he didn't say and what I heard him say was this is a man's job and you will not like it. You would rather, [be a] supervisor at central office [who were mostly women]. And he never said women shouldn't be a principal, he never used those words. The impression I had was he was gender assigning supervisors are women; men are principals.

While this mentor provided her with opportunities to develop her leadership skills within the school setting, she began to sense that her gender may potentially be a perceived barrier. While this dichotomy had the potential to negatively influence her, she soon developed other mentoring relationships where gender was not a perceived barrier to educational leadership roles.

The two male university professors who served as mentors provided short and long-term support in her development as a leader. She remembered that one in particular

was always encouraging me, always had great confidence in me to be a school leader. [He] kept me in his professional network long after I graduated. I was impressed that he tried to keep a lot of the doctoral graduates in touch with each other.

Her most influential mentor was a male superintendent who hired her for her first principalship. They developed a professional mentoring relationship during the 8 years she worked as a principal and central office administrator under his leadership. She recalled that

at the end of that eight years I was a superintendent. So he took me from assistant principal to superintendent in eight years. . . . I would have to say he was my most active [mentor] and he thought of himself as my mentor.

Through this sustained mentoring relationship, she was provided with the focus and support to develop her leadership capacity that allowed her to access the superintendency in a relatively short period of time.

Marian Greene

Superintendent Greene pursued higher levels of leadership in order to have the “opportunity to impact a larger number of [people] in a positive way.” She realized early in her administrative experience that the role of the superintendent provided her with the most influence over positive changes. She views all of her experiences as relevant to serving in her current role as a superintendent in North Carolina, but also shared that she felt moving into higher levels of leadership was delayed by what others perceived as a gap in her experiences at the secondary level. She remembered that

In my personal circumstance . . . at that point in my career I was serving in the capacity as an elementary school principal, even though I’m a high school person initially and had served in the capacity as a high school administrator, . . . at that point I was elementary and I felt like a lot of road blocks were put up . . . People felt like you needed high school to move into that role.

She credits one of her mentors, a male superintendent, with assisting her in overcoming this obstacle. She shared that, “[he] worked with me and believed in my ability.” She had previously worked with this person, and when he moved to be a superintendent, he believed she was the right person for a position at the district level. Mobility was not an obstacle for her at the time, so she moved a significant distance and accepted this new leadership opportunity. She worked closely with this superintendent as a district level leader for almost 7 years. Still today she reaches out for support and has many conversations with her mentor.

In addition to her former superintendent, she describes a mentoring relationship with a female assistant superintendent, now retired. Their relationship began serving as school administrators in the same district and continued to work together in a variety of roles in other districts as well. It is clear that she greatly values the relationship:

also at this point a very, very dear friend who has been very, very, very powerful for me, instrumental in having someone to share with and to get advice from. I was just speaking with her this morning, for example, on the phone. And she has been very influential, powerful, retired at this point, but still . . . working after retirement . . . [She] has served in a multitude of roles in her 30-year career throughout, but she . . . always brings a wealth of information and perspective to any conversation.

Through these two relationships, she has been able to develop her leadership skills and access opportunities that led her to the superintendency.

Pamela Winters

As a superintendent in North Carolina, Superintendent Winters demonstrates a strong sense of intrinsic motivation. In describing her work ethic, she shared

I've always been a hardworking person and I was never satisfied, I'm never satisfied until I get to the top.

This drive could have been slowed by perceptions of race, gender and socioeconomic class. While each participant has had unique experiences, Superintendent Winters shared how her race and gender have had the potential to negatively impact her aspirations:

As a female it's a hard road anyway, but then when you are a black female it just throws another . . . nail in that coffin.

B. L. Jackson (1999) noted that "black women superintendents grew up doubly marginal in society, as females and African-Americans" (p. 141). While she shared that her race and gender are likely perceived obstacles in accessing leadership roles, she did not find that to be the case with those who served as her mentors who provided her with opportunities that built the path to where she is today. She identifies three people as mentors: her mother, a male superintendent and a male assistant superintendent.

Similarly to Superintendent Allen, a parent served as a mentor. In combination with her race and gender, Superintendent Winters's identity is also influenced by her experiences in a single parent home. She shared with me that she often thinks about writing a book about her experiences. In her description of the book, it is clear the adoration she has for the opportunities and support provided to her by her mother:

And the name of my book is "The Day My Mother Put Me on the Bus with the Big Blue Suitcase." My mother didn't have a license and when I got ready to go off to [college] in [another state] . . . I had to go on the bus and she bought me a huge . . . blue . . . suitcase. Pleather I call it . . ., and a black footlocker . . . I put

all my stuff in that suitcase and that footlocker. She took me to [a neighboring town]. She caught . . . a ride. [She] got somebody, paid somebody, to come and get me. [They] took us [to the bus station] and I rode the seashore bus to [one town] and got on a greyhound bus and went to school. So . . . I say my journey started when my mother put me on the bus with the big blue suitcase. And so, I want to write that story. I really do because the odds were totally against me because my mother raised eight children by herself.

She admires the sacrifices her mother made for her. While her mother encouraged her and reiterated that she could do anything she wanted, she also provided opportunities that would give her the capital she needed to access future opportunities leading to higher levels of leadership. Superintendent Winters remembered the encouragement and access to future opportunities that her mother provided further into her career as well:

She, no matter what, she pushed me . . . [she would say] you can do it, you can do it, keep right on. . . . She kept my baby for me to go to college . . . to go to school at night.

In addition to her mother, she noted two other mentors. Dr. Bridges, a former male superintendent and David Peters, a former male assistant superintendent provided guidance and support during the time she was school-based personnel, school-based administrator and later a district office director. She recalled that her race and gender never influenced their relationships in a negative way:

David and Mr. Bridges looked at me as a person. I don't think that they looked at the fact that I was a black female, they looked at me as a professional who was smart and motivated and driven to succeed. . . . So I don't think it impacted . . . in any way. . . . [For] David . . . in our conversations, it didn't matter that I had on a suit or a dress. . . . It was like colleague to colleague. . . . So I don't think that the fact that he was a man and I was a woman and I was black and he was white affected me in any way.

She credits Mr. Bridges with recognizing her leadership ability and encouraging her to pursue the education she would need to access those positions:

He approached me and said, “Have you ever thought about being an administrator?” And I said, “No, sir.” He said, “Well, I think you need to think about it, Pamela, because you really have strong leadership characteristics.”

While Mr. Bridges recognized her capacity as a leader and encouraged her to pursue the academic capital needed to access higher level leadership positions, it was David Peters that she feels most influenced the development of her leadership and problem solving skills. She shared that “I could always depend on David to ask questions, to provide guidance on decisions that had to be made.” She continues to contact David and utilize his support:

I need you to come by . . . I need to talk. I need for you to just listen to my reasoning . . . and help me. . . . Give me some advice on these decisions. . . . And he still will do that for me, he will listen.

Although her race and gender did not negatively impact her mentoring relationships, she feels it may have influenced hiring decisions when pursuing the superintendency. On two occasions she was not hired for a position for which she feels she had equal, if not superior, qualifications than the person who was hired. In one case, she described the support she received from two of the black board members at the time:

And when the vote came out, the black woman and another black male board member voted against the other . . . recommendation because they felt, “Why are we doing all this when we’ve got someone who’s here and qualified?” And so they went through the process but they openly said I don’t agree and I’m [going

to] show you in this vote. And they told [the recommended hire], “I don’t have anything personal against you but . . . we [have] a qualified person here.

The two black board members were not supported by others on the board and the recommendation to hire another candidate was approved. Ironically, she was later asked by that same board to serve as the superintendent when the person they hired suddenly left the district.

Against the perceived odds, she has used her intrinsic motivation, work ethic, confidence, perseverance and the support of her mentors to acquire positions that would provide her with an opportunity to influence change.

Virginia Moore

Superintendent Moore cannot remember ever having the goal of wanting to be a superintendent. However, as she served in the teaching field, she recalled, “I kept thinking I could do this a little bit better.” She shared that her first principal was a good role model and demonstrated strong leadership skills. However, it was the influence of what she perceived as a weak principal that motivated her to pursue school administration. Once she had experience as an assistant principal and principal, she describes that

I [started] looking at decisions made at the district level and . . . [thinking] . . . why are they doing that? . . . I think it was just this big veil of secrecy and there were no women. No women. And I guess I got more out of sort with there not being anybody that looked like me than anything. I worked for a fine group of people, I’ve got no objections to their leadership . . . and the school system has prospered under my predecessors, but I believe that every child, at some point in time, needs to see somebody that looks like them.

Virginia explicitly identified a lack of representation of women as one of the motivating factors for pursuing higher levels of leadership. It is very important to her to positively represent women in leadership, but she also emphasized the importance of dedicating as much time as possible to her family early in her career. She is adamant that the demands of the superintendency can be, at times, overwhelming, but also believes that there must be a balance to how she identifies herself with that role:

That is the biggest mistake I believe men or women make in positions of leadership. [To believe] . . . you're all that and the bag of chips, too, as some people say . . . Position and power are fleeting. . . . It will lull you into the sense that you're important and none of us in the grand scheme of things are any more important than any other of us. And I just try real hard to remember that. . . . The first year was really hard in trying to quit and go home, and if I die today, there will be somebody poking around that desk in the morning, if it waits that long. . . . That was a very freeing thought to me.

In addition to her determination to maintain balance, she also shared “I believe very strongly in my faith,” and that she is able to serve in her current role as a superintendent in North Carolina because she is “the right person for the right time.”

Superintendent Moore's former female middle school teacher eventually became a valued mentor, hiring her for her first teaching position. Not only was she able to see effective leadership skills being modeled, she shared that “she was my hero because she looked like me, you know, female.” It troubled Superintendent Moore to observe her hero hit the glass ceiling at the principal level. Although her mentor applied for higher level positions, she was unable to attain them during her career. However, this did not deter Virginia from envisioning her future in district level leadership roles.

Two male superintendents that she has had the opportunity to work with have also served as mentors. One of the male superintendents hired her as a school administrator and the other relationship developed when they were both principals in the same district. He eventually moved to the district level as an assistant superintendent and later became a superintendent. She remembered some overall advice from one mentor that she continues to use today.

There's one mentor that told me three things . . . it's not rocket science, remember you asked for it, and you cannot make chicken salad out of chicken manure. . . . You wanted the job, suck it up, don't whine, don't complain, you wanted it. It's not rocket science, use common sense. And that is so uncommon. And there are nasty things that happen. Face them squarely, face them head on, and always be legal, moral, and ethical. That's what I live by.

Superintendent Moore is thankful for the opportunity she has had to work with skilled leaders over her career. She feels that decision making and problem solving are the two most valuable things she has learned. Education is inconstant, and superintendents have the challenge of meeting the ever changing demands.

I think every period of time is different and I was talking with both of [my mentors] and things that two superintendents ago had to deal with we've never dealt with before. Things that the last superintendent had to deal with we've never dealt with before. Well, believe me; I'm dealing with things we've never dealt with before.

Indeed, the role of superintendent brings with it many challenges, unique situations and time demands. To manage these many challenges, Superintendent Moore references her favorite quote, “above all else to thine own self be true.”

Summary

The participants in the study have distinctive paths and identities that have been and continue to be influenced by their experiences, including their relationships with mentors. Due to the few number of women represented in North Carolina, it can be difficult to identify a female mentor serving in the superintendency, and every participant but one noted that male mentors have had significant influence on their paths to leadership as a superintendent. This chapter will include a more in depth analysis of these mentoring experiences and what they may reveal about potential obstacles and ways to increase access to the superintendency for women.

Informal Mentoring Strategies

From a poststructural feminist view, mentoring is a critical component of rewriting the expectations and limitations of a masculinized notion of the superintendency. Gardiner et al. (2000) emphasize that “it is in the possibilities of mentoring that pressure for change can be applied. Mentors by virtue of their mode of subjectivity in this discourse, can influence who contributes to the development of educational administration” (p. 198). In the context of this research, mentors are acting as gatekeepers for who has access to the superintendency and how that role becomes defined over time. Mentors have the power to perpetuate or disrupt hegemonic structures. Six of the seven participants in this study expressed how much at least one identified mentor influenced their leadership development and access to the superintendency. One theme that emerged from all seven participants’ stories was the use of informal mentoring strategies by their female and male mentors. These strategies

included authentic job experiences, modeling effective leadership practices and reflection and supportive discourse. This section will provide data that demonstrates how these strategies impacted these women along their path to the superintendency. In addition, data is included that demonstrates how the female participants utilize these same strategies as they mentor others who may one day aspire to be a superintendent. Embedded within the analysis is a discussion of the impact of these strategies on gendering leadership styles and access the superintendency.

Authentic Job Experiences

One mentoring strategy that participants reported often to support their leadership development was authentic job experiences/opportunities delegated to them by their mentors. Delegation can sometimes be used to simply get the work done or be a strategy for someone to avoid the work themselves, but the participants in this study described a type of delegation by their mentor that was purposeful in building their credibility and capacity as an educational leader that would provide them greater access to the superintendency.

Dawn Shaw shared a detailed description of her experiences and emphasized this as an effective strategy at several times during the interview:

And he was very purposeful about his mentoring. . . . He knew I wanted to be a superintendent, and he knew that I would be one. And so he was very purposeful and intentional about his mentoring. . . . He did active mentoring by job assignments and things such as that. . . . He gave me duties that would help me in my quest for superintendent. For example, I perceived that school boards would think women would be lacking in certain areas. For example, budgeting, construction, things that are typically male dominated. And he actually let me present part of the budget one year, not only to the board of ed . . . now just a small portion of it, but that was still for him to let someone else in on his

presentation was big. He also put me totally in charge of all the discipline and expulsion hearings to recommend to the school board, so I would appear in closed session with the school board on a regular basis and I became used to closed session and what that was like [He gave] me assignments that future boards may have considered as things women were weak in, like student discipline, budgeting, and construction planning. So I was able to answer virtually any questions about budgeting, construction planning, and student discipline. . . . I did some personnel investigations for the superintendent that were sensitive, you know, or a student was alleging a teacher had touched him improperly and things like that, so. He gave me experience in virtually all the downsides of being a superintendent . . . He would send me to a meeting to represent him, and I would be there with other superintendents who were representing their districts, so that helped me build a network. . . . [My mentors] gave me hard things to do, important tasks with many steps that might take over a year or two years of time to do.

Dawn Shaw believes that the responsibilities she was given by her mentors provided her with the opportunity to build skills that others may perceive—based on her gender—she did not possess. In order to build her credibility as a female leader, she felt she needed experience with traditionally male associated roles or responsibilities. The reality for her was that while she felt she could be an effective leader overall, others' assumptions about gender-based roles may potentially prevent her from accessing the level of leadership she desired. Her mentor also shared this same concern and provided her with experiences they perceived she would need in order to demonstrate her capacity in those areas.

Mentors also supported other capacity building opportunities. Marian Greene remembered the support she was provided to attend a leadership program her superintendent and mentor at the time had just completed. She remembered the conversation and that he insisted, “‘You’ve got to—you need to do this,’ and sponsored me to do it.” She also shared that she was able to attend superintendent meetings. She recalled,

He would carry me with him, even though I'm not his superintendent. I would go and participate and hear. . . . He would make jokes about the room filled with gray-haired white men in blue suits . . . he was very, very cognizant of the inequitableness of the superintendency in the state.

Annie Daniels also remembered similar opportunities designed to build her understanding of being a superintendent. She shared that her mentor

gave me a lot of opportunities to experience things that I wouldn't normally have gotten to. He opened doors for me to attend things on his behalf, so I got to feel what it was like to sit there representing the superintendent. And he let me accompany him to a lot of things, so he . . . took me along.

Marian and Annie's attendance at these meetings, whether with or without their mentor, provided an opportunity to experience the dialogue and engage with current superintendents.

They were able to observe the written and unwritten rules among the group as well. Accessing these meetings also reinforced the reality of the superintendency as a male-dominated profession in our state. The phrase "opened doors for me" represents the power and influence Annie perceived her mentor to have in providing access to these experiences and future access to the superintendency. The impact of authentic job opportunities on their path to the superintendency has influenced how they are providing their protégés with these experiences as well.

Annie Daniels feels it is important to provide any protégés new areas of responsibility, new areas of leadership to learn and grow.

When we work on our annual goals connected to our strategic plan, I've gotten to the point where they're actually assigned to certain individuals and some of those

are meant to stretch people and give them the opportunity . . . find some new places to put themselves. . . . [I] try not to let people get comfortable, I mean everybody's got to keep growing.

Annie views herself as a mentor to both men and women who serve on her cabinet level staff. She believes it is important to challenge her staff to develop leadership skills that may not be perceived as strengths and that may provide them with access to new roles. She reiterates the impact that mentors can have on disrupting gender-based obstacles by assigning authentic job experiences.

People . . . may be mentoring female or male leaders and inadvertently limiting their experiences because they don't really feel like that's something a woman should be doing. . . . therefore they are not getting those experiences and that could be creating obstacles to them accessing higher levels of leadership because of how others perceive you.

Annie believes that mentors have the power to influence the experience and credibility for both female and male aspirants. That influence comes with the responsibility to recognize how normative gender expectations may limit how those responsibilities are assigned and as a result limit future access to the superintendency.

The participants in the study were provided with and took advantage of opportunities they and their mentors perceived they needed to build their leadership capacity and credibility. Many of the opportunities were underscored with the belief that as a woman they needed to have specific experiences to build skills that others would not perceive them to have based on assumptions about being female. Therefore, they must prove themselves through successful experiences specific to discursively male associated responsibilities such as finance, construction, etc. One strategy used to support the

leadership development of these women was purposeful experiences/opportunities. Through delegation of job responsibilities, attending meetings with the mentor and supporting individual participation in leadership programs, mentors helped to build the participant's credibility and capacity as an educational leader.

Providing purposeful experiences/opportunities is a critical mentoring strategy that provides women access to capital needed to be perceived as qualified for the superintendency. Providing these women with these opportunities based on gender norms is not in and of itself problematic. However, the social expectations and assumptions that drive those decisions continue to perpetuate a notion that certain gender-associated traits and experiences are more valued than others. McDonough and Nunez (2007) caution that access to such capital may serve more to reproduce the patriarchal status quo than to inspire changing social norms that negatively impact women's access to positions of influence. However, there is value to women using this capital to gain access to an agentic position that they can then use to influence change. As current mentors, the participants have the opportunity to further disrupt the normative gender-based expectations. Deconstructing patriarchal, hegemonic assumptions is a critical component of changing how traits displayed by a female or male are read differently as a function of her/his gender.

Gardiner et al.'s (2000) study focused on the impact that gender had on the mentoring experience. While my study does not focus on this concept, what is supported by Gardiner et al.'s research is that mentoring "offers women access to a different kind of subject position in the discourse" (p. 192). The participants shared how important they

felt these opportunities were and how it gave them knowledge, experiences and skills that influenced their credibility and position in the discourse to influence change.

Grogan's (1996) research supports the power mentors have for enabling critical experiences that will build their capacity to access the superintendency. In her research, she found

for some of the superintendents under whom these women did their internships, it was important *not* to create authentic opportunities to experience the superintendency. Whether they were conscious of marginalizing the internship activities or not, in effect, they had the power to deny an intern the kind of engagement in social situations that could contribute to a redefinition of her subjectivity. (p. 56)

In other words, some participants in Grogan's research study experienced mentoring relationships where the mentors were reluctant to relinquish their own control in order for the protégés to learn from critical experiences. One participant's experience was "framed by a reluctant superior in whose power she must remain while working on the credential" (pp. 56–57). The participants in the current study were able to experience a different subjectivity through authentic job experiences and opportunities. Their mentors provided these opportunities, influencing who has access to changing the discourse. In addition, the protégés were able

to demonstrate competencies and establish those credentials then, many aspirants strive to highlight certain job responsibilities they have had within the dominant discourse which will strengthen their qualifications to be superintendent. (Grogan, 1996, p. 63)

The contrast between the experiences of Grogan's participant and those in this study is important. Mentors must recognize the power they have in broadening or limiting the opportunities of protégés, which serves an informal gatekeeping role. Mentors who recognize the significance of and are willing to provide authentic job opportunities are creating a system where others may be more likely to do the same as they mentor future leaders. Providing authentic job opportunities is only one way mentors model effective strategies that support aspirants in preparing for the superintendency.

Modeling

The participants in this study not only credited their mentors with providing important opportunities, but also for modeling what they believed to be desirable leadership practices. Annie Daniels recalled learning to collect a variety of information by her mentor's advice that "if you only have half the information, you're only going to be half right." And I use that a lot around here." She also remembers that

some of his key qualities were that he was a great listener and so he certainly helped me get better at that. I think he also helped me see that it's not always personal. It is not about you.

Annie perceived that her mentor's listening skills and his practice of not internalizing situations had a positive impact on his effectiveness as a leader, and she focused on developing these strategies as well.

Marian Greene remembered learning the importance of collaboration by watching her male mentor. She shared that through her observation of her mentor's style she learned that

we're not islands unto ourselves in this business. . . . I know I can always do a better job, but to remember to be collaborative, to include all stakeholders in everything . . . sometimes it's easier just to launch off and try to do it yourself, but then, . . . if nobody's following then you're not leading, as the saying goes.

Marian's experiences in observing her mentor develop a collaborative environment gave her a perspective that decision-making should be informed by many voices. In her role of superintendent, she strives to use an inclusive approach when making decisions.

Pamela Winters also learned what she considers a valuable leadership lesson from observing her mentor:

It's got to be even, you've got to make these people feel and understand that they are valued . . . I learned that, I learned that from him and that was his style and that's the style I . . . use today.

Valuing other people in the organization is a leadership trait that Pamela learned from her mentor. She observed his interactions with others and ways that he was able to display that belief. She, in turn, has incorporated that strategy into her own practice.

The participants also recognized that neither they nor their mentors could be perfect at every component of leadership. Virginia Moore recalled that:

I was able to watch him, and I think he was a master in every area but one. And that one is just so fraught with land mines. And it's the political. And that's no man's land. I'm not sure Jesus Himself could make—well I know He didn't. He didn't make 12 people happy, so how's he going to make everybody else happy, but you watch and you learn.

Virginia's observation of the political aspects of the superintendency and how her male mentor struggled with these developed a perception that it can never be mastered by

anyone. Her analogy of Jesus and the 12 apostles demonstrates her belief that there is not a way to please everyone and peace may be unattainable.

Ironically, the traits the participants observed their mentors using to lead effectively are traditionally perceived as being innately feminine qualities: being a good listener, facilitating a collaborative environment, valuing other people and maintaining peace. These women observed how these traits impacted their mentors' influence and effectiveness within the superintendent role and felt they were desirable leadership qualities to emulate. This may be explained by the idea that effective leadership traits are neither inherently male nor female, yet are generally perceived differently in men and women. Socially constructed assumptions that assign uniform characteristics to what is feminine and what is masculine perpetuate how these traits may be perceived differently based on gender. The participants may have gravitated toward these strategies as a result of being disciplined toward "feminine" leadership practices. These are qualities that, if desired and provide positive outcomes for the organization, need to be developed regardless of gender. The opportunity to learn from the practices modeled by their mentors is an important strategy that not only allows us to learn from positive outcomes, but also from the mistakes of others.

In isolation, modeling as a mentoring strategy can contribute to the hegemony in a patriarchal society. Mentors who engage in leadership practices that dismiss marginalized voices and perpetuate dominant discourses influence protégés to use these same leadership strategies. A mentor who uses this as a sole strategy is in a place of power that assumes her or his voice is the most relevant. However, Johnson (2006)

speaks to how modeling the use of power for positive change can inspire others to do so in a way that respects their individuality, yet deconstructs hegemonic privilege.

The simple fact is that we affect one another all the time without knowing it. . . . This suggests that the simplest way to help others make different choices is to make them myself, and to do it openly. As I shift patterns of my own participation in systems of privilege, I make it easier for others to do so as well, and harder for them not to. Simply by setting an example-rather than trying to change them-I create the possibility of their participating in change in their own time and in their own way. (p. 134)

When modeling is paired with authentic opportunities and reflective and supportive discourse, the strategy can provide protégés with the opportunity to analyze strategies that produce desirable outcomes that may further rewrite the reality of marginalized groups. However, there still exists the reality that certain acts are viewed differently, depending upon the body that enacts them, and this notion is examined more deeply in the section on No Woman's Land. Gardiner et al. (2000) emphasize that good mentors "move protégés beyond their comfort zone, explaining and modeling" (p. 64) practices that will lead to a desirable outcome. Explaining is less about an expert who shared his/her knowledge with the learner, but a reflective conversation that provides an avenue for learning and solving problems. A critical component of learning from others' and our experiences is the opportunity to reflect through supportive discourse.

Reflection and Supportive Discourse

The use of reflection and supportive discourse by their mentors was the most frequent experience shared by the participants. These two strategies are paired as they encompass the impact that language had on their subjectivity in educational leadership.

This section will explore the impact that reflective conversations and supportive discourse have had on the participant's subjectivity and access to the superintendency.

This section will also present how the participants served as mentors and used these same strategies with their protégés.

Reflection. Reflective conversations with their mentors surrounding leadership strategies, decision-making and experiences were critical to the participants' sense of self as a leader. Alice Land shared how this mentoring strategy impacted her:

I think about in the past going through situations with a mentor, and as we talk it through it always helps you think . . . [you reflect] on yourself and how you are making decisions. So . . . we may be discussing a certain issue and me hearing their perspective will make me realize wow, I'm not really taking that into account, I really need to think about it more.

Alice feels that the reflective conversations gave her not only additional perspectives on situations at hand, but also the opportunity to examine her own thought process when making decisions. Through these reflective conversations, she is able to refine her strategies and develop as a leader.

Marian Greene shared similar experiences regarding the impact of reflective conversations with her mentor. The

really reflective conversation about what would you do, ultimately in that circumstance. The decision was going to be up to that superintendent, not up to me, but it was valuable in that we got to talk about it and a lot of times the ultimate decision did have the influence from our conversation . . . I mean that's a very strong technique, I think, to causing you to think through . . . the situations.

Marian appreciated the time her mentors spent in these reflective conversations to develop problem-solving skills. Her confidence was also increased by having her voice be relevant in possible solutions. She perceives this to be an effective method for supporting leadership development. Participants also expressed that they still depend on reflective conversations with their mentors. Pamela Winters calls on her mentor regularly. She admits that, “I still do that to this day. I can call him. When I have to make those hard decisions.” Marian Greene expresses a continued relationship with her mentor as well:

Speed dial . . . [to ask] questions, “What are you doing about this?,” “What are you doing about that?” . . . That is a continued relationship that I’ve been fortunate to have that’s been . . . very powerful for me.

The participants continue to look to their mentors in their current role as superintendents. They value this long-term relationship with their mentors. In addition, they employ reflective conversations as they mentor others who now aspire to the superintendency.

Annie Daniels has one male protégé on her cabinet that she has encouraged to participate in a leadership development program. She shared that her protégé is

an aspiring superintendent on my team right now that’s participating with a new program, they are really enjoying that, and then I kind of debrief with him.

Similarly, Dawn Shaw feels it is important to use reflective conversations to support protégés. Dawn has mentored many people in her career. She committed to herself many years ago to be an active mentor. Dawn shared how she identifies protégés:

When I became a superintendent I decided that I was going to find out who wanted to be a superintendent and I was going to mentor them.

Dawn's strategy for mentoring those who have an aspiration for the superintendency disrupts the notion that one has to be tapped for leadership positions.

I try to recognize their accomplishments . . . in terms of outcomes or [how] they handle the project well or their presentation was really good. And if I think it wasn't, then I would tell them tactfully here is how I think you could have made your presentation better or here is how you could have handled that parent differently. But I try to do it without crushing their spirit or interfering with their confidence. I'm trying to build the confidence of anyone that I'm trying to mentor. They need to be confident and not afraid to make mistakes.

Dawn's approach also represents a constructivist ideal that one can develop the knowledge and strategies needed to be an effective leader. Dawn utilizes reflective conversations to help aspirants develop leadership skills based upon their individual needs.

Alice Land finds that she has the opportunity to engage in many reflective conversations with aspirants not only in her district, but also across the state.

I talk to people across the state [that]are in top level leadership roles who want to be superintendent . . . a lot of people could talk to me about it.

If there is an aspirant in her district who seeks her input, she employs reflective conversations to support her/his development.

I often talk to them about . . . their decisions that they are making and what exposure they've had to certain areas of a school system and where they may want to get more experience. I also try to help them understand why I may do

some things the way I do them and why I wouldn't, depending on the situation that we are in here.

Annie, Dawn and Alice take the time to engage in these conversations with aspirants because they believe the opportunity for deep reflection strengthens leadership capacity. They also believe these conversations are critical for their protégé to access future opportunities.

Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2005) reinforce reflection as a critical mentoring strategy:

Effective mentors must be available to provide constructive guidance, be willing to engage in reflective dialogue, and be able to communicate honestly and openly about their expectations and their actions. (p. 95)

The superintendency is a position that requires a high capacity to analyze and solve problems. Reflective conversations offered not only the mentor with support in making decisions that included a variety of perspectives, but also assisted in developing problem-solving skills in the protégé. The reflective discourse the participants found themselves in both as protégés and as mentors “augmented learning and skill-transference to practice” (Bjork, Kowalski, et al., 2005, p. 95). By engaging in reflective discourse, protégés engaged directly in refining problem-solving strategies. Based on data analysis, the reflective conversations were used frequently to provide feedback as well as address problems faced by the mentor and/or protégé. This process not only allows for developing a problem solving-process, but “encourages the protégé to also be reflective” (Gardiner et al., 2000, p. 56) as they move forward in their own practice.

Gardiner et al. (2000) found that mentors who used reflective discourse with their protégés to be effective in building leadership capacity and as having the potential to transform “images of administration by their mentoring and leadership” (p. 26). Not only was it important for the protégé to reflect with the mentor, but also for the protégé to observe the mentor’s reflective processes. The participants in my study reported a similar symbiotic dialogue as those in Gardiner et al. (2000). The reflective discourse described by the participants with both female and male mentors suggested that these women were given an opportunity to explore their own unique leadership styles and the freedom to apply what they believed to be effective strategies versus being bound to what their mentor would do. As both protégés and as mentors, these women experienced discourse that instilled trust and confidence in the capacity to make decisions and lead discourse that would positively impact the organization. The encouragement the participants experienced through supportive discourse positively influenced their subjectivity in leadership roles.

Supportive discourse. Participants felt that supportive discourse with their mentor helped develop their sense of confidence and ability to visualize themselves in the role of superintendent. In addition, participants perceived that supportive discourse about them by their mentors with boards of education heavily influenced the board’s confidence in their ability as an educational leader. In that respect both the mentor and board of education served as gatekeepers to the superintendency. This section will analyze data regarding two types of supportive discourse: between the mentor and the protégé and from the mentor about the protégé.

Supportive discourse with the protégé. Annie Daniels shared that during a time of reflection with her mentor, “the comment was something along the lines of ‘you have good judgment, I know you’ll do the right thing.’” For Annie, this created a sense of

reassurance that you—you’re not off base. You have good judgment; you’re going to make the right decision for the right reasons.

These words from her mentor instilled a level of confidence in Annie that she was able to make decisions based upon sound judgment. Dawn Shaw remembered similar dialogue with her mentor. She shared a particularly stressful event that happened while the superintendent was out of the district at the time and his reaction to how she handled the situation:

he said, “you really handled that so well by sending [the right people], . . . working with the fire marshal and the statement that you released.” He said, “I’m kind of glad I was gone today because you really handled it very well.” So things like that . . . happen, but he would praise me for the way that I handled things.

Dawn’s mentor was pleased with the way she addressed the situation, to the extent that he may have thought she managed it better than he would have. This assurance of trust and belief in her ability to address complex situations increased her confidence.

Pamela Winters was heavily influenced by the supportive discourse from her mentors, both professionally and personally. She recalled that many times that her mentor would tell her “I know you can do it.” She shared that “he provided, guided, support[ed], you know, to help me get my confidence level to where, you know, I could just do this.” Her mother also provided critical support. She remembered that “no matter

what, she pushed me, ‘you can do it, you can do it.’” The supportive discourse that Pamela heard from her mentors helped develop a confidence in her ability as a leader.

In addition, mentors used language and discourse that helped participants visualize themselves as a superintendent. Marian Greene remembered that her mentor “would always say, ‘well, you’re going to be a superintendent one day, what would you do with this?’” Marian’s mentor helped her visualize herself in that role by stating his confidence in her one day being a superintendent.

Dawn Shaw recalled conversations with a university professor who served as a mentor for her. The conversation supported not only his confidence in her leadership potential, but also her ability to see herself in the position of superintendent. In his office he kept a map of North Carolina and on the map were red tack pins. She remembered that one day she was looking at it and he said,

“You know what those pins are?” I said, “No sir.” He said, “That’s where [one of our program’s] graduate[s] is a superintendent.” I said, “Oh, really?” And he was keeping the little pins there, and he said, “I think we are going to have a pin for you one day.” I said, “Well, that would be nice, I certainly hope you’re right.” . . . That was a small but powerful statement. Now remember, I am still a classroom teacher. Remember, I can’t even make it to assistant principal.

Dawn’s early experience in this discourse gave her a visual image that she could one day occupy space among those who had acquired a position as superintendent. Her mentor’s confidence that she would one day represent another graduate of their program serving as a superintendent strongly and positively influenced her confidence in spite of not yet attaining a building level administrative position. While she did not initially perceive

herself as one day being in that level of leadership, the language and discourse reshaped how and where she saw herself in the future.

Participants also shared how they use supportive discourse as mentors. Marian Green did not share details about a particular protégé, but when someone shared their aspirations with her and she felt they had the capacity to one day serve in the role of superintendent she remembered having

a multitude of conversations and try[ing] to build their confidence in the fact that yes, you could do this when you're ready if that's what you want to do . . . when you decide you're ready.

Marian provided similar supportive discourse that she experienced to influence others' beliefs in their capacity to achieve their goals. She did this while still respecting the aspirant's voice in her/his own sense of readiness for the position.

While Dawn and Marian tended to mentor individuals who have communicated a desire to pursue the next phase in their career, Pamela Winters shared that she provided mentorship to a variety of individuals in her district from classified school personnel to district level staff. While her mentoring was not necessarily directed toward aspirants to the superintendency, Pamela Winters believed that positive discourse provided encouragement and she wanted to

help people and influence people to do better because walking down the hall that day many, many years ago, Mr. Bridges didn't have to stop me. He stopped me and asked me that question. And told me, "I see it in you," so I want to just pass that on . . . I've done that for a lot of [people]. . . . I want people to see their potential. And a lot of times it just takes one person saying to you, "You can do this, I know you can." . . . And I feel like because I'm so thankful that Mr.

Bridges said that to me, I just want to pay it forward, I just want to keep passing it on.

Pamela enthusiastically felt that it is her responsibility in an influential position to recognize potential in others and use that influence to provide support and encouragement. She believed that had her mentor not done that for her, she may have traveled a different path.

Participants have had a variety of experiences with supportive discourse with their mentors as well as their protégés. Whether they seek to provide this discourse with those who identify themselves as aspirants or they seek individuals who have the perceived potential to advance their career, the supportive discourse influences subjectivity. The discourse molds the subject's concept of self as it relates to her/his capacity for certain roles. The more the subject finds her/himself in supportive, positive discourse, the more likely her/his sense of self will be shaped as confident in fulfilling that role successfully.

Supportive discourse about the protégé. Supportive discourse about the protégé by the mentor exemplifies the influence and gatekeeping of the mentor to the role of superintendent. The presence of the discourse has been just as powerful as its absence in accessing the superintendency.

Annie Daniels felt that supportive discourse about her by her mentor with the board of education had a significant influence over their perceptions of her leadership capacity. She emphasized that

I think his role in expressing his pleasure with my work to the board made a difference as well . . . that he thought I was a top notch person, and we were lucky to have her, and . . . those kinds of statements.

She partially credited her access to the superintendency with her mentor's endorsement of her leadership skills with the board of education. The absence of supportive discourse can be equally as powerful in limiting access to the superintendency. Had her mentor omitted this supportive discourse from his conversations about Annie, others may have perceived that her mentor did not have confidence in her capacity as a leader. Pamela Winters shared an experience that demonstrated how the absence of supportive discourse about the protégé may have influenced her access to the superintendency:

One of the things that bothered me the most is that the superintendent who had told me all you need to do [is] get your doctorate degree and when I leave, they can't turn you down. . . . He did not go to the board and recommend me.

Pamela perceived that supportive discourse about her to the board of education was critical to being considered for the superintendency in that district, but she did not receive that from her mentor at that time. He communicated his confidence in her capacity directly, but chose not to share those same sentiments to the gatekeepers of the role. She was not recommended for the position and often wonders how that may have been different had he endorsed her as a candidate.

Annie's and Pamela's experiences demonstrate the power that female and male mentors have as gatekeepers to the superintendency. Brunner (1999) found this to be the case in her research on how one woman, Dr. Osburn, accessed the superintendency. In her study, the out-going and well-respected male superintendent, Mr. Hamilton, advocated for Dr. Osburn. Mr. Hamilton's advocacy of a candidate was trusted by the male power network that Brunner had identified in the study. This is a powerful

influence that female and male superintendents serving as mentors must recognize in order to provide greater access for women who aspire to be, and are qualified to serve as, superintendents.

Summary

Gardiner et al. (2000) emphasize the transformative nature that effective mentoring can have. In their study, they emphasized the importance of “seeking leadership in individuals who might be different from themselves and to engage in mentoring that values and does not annihilate difference . . . [and] to recognize the potential for leadership in others who may not imagine themselves as future leaders” (p. 198). These participants were fortunate to have both female and male mentors who were committed to mentoring them by providing authentic job responsibilities, modeling and providing reflective and supportive discourse to support their ascension to the superintendency, regardless of their individual differences.

Authentic job opportunities provided the participants with the opportunity to develop and provide evidence of skills that others may not perceive them to have based on normative gender assumptions. Participants also learned the effectiveness of leadership characteristics such as active listening, collaborative decision-making and valuing individuals in the organization by observing their mentors model the use of these in their own leadership practice. Reflection and supportive discourse have been paired as they both emphasize the use of language and dialogue that works to influence the protégés subjectivity in the leadership discourse. This strategy was the most frequently noted in the data.

Language has impacted both the participants' subjectivity as leaders as well as their perceived access to the superintendency. All participants experienced reflective conversations and supportive discourse with their mentors that instilled in them a sense of confidence in their leadership capacity. The discourse, whether with or about the protégé, had a perceived impact on their belief that they would be an effective superintendent.

In light of the influence that reflective dialogue and supportive discourse have on the protégé, it is important to also recognize how this same process, while purported to be essential for effective mentoring, can also perpetuate the discursive practices that make the superintendency less accessible and more difficult for women to navigate. It is well-documented in the literature that the "superintendency, as overwhelmingly populated by white males, is associated with a number of 'desirable' leadership descriptors that are [normatively] identified as masculine: powerful, authoritative, decisive, politically astute, and competent" (Scott, 2003, p. 83). Women aspirants who find themselves in discourse that perpetuates notions of leadership as either masculine or feminine and for whom the feminine do not align with their subjectivity, "are surely to see failure to achieve what [they] have set out to achieve as personal inadequacy rather than as socially constituted" (Grogan, 1996, p. 37). The participants in this research provide evidence that the normative, masculinized notions of leadership are evolving. However, I would argue that more work needs to be done to deconstruct the idea that notions are either feminine or masculine. This can open space for leaders to display characteristics without being problematized based on the conflict between a gendered notion and their subjectivity.

Great care must be taken in the language that is used in these discourses in order to change the discursive practices that superordinate masculinized notions of leadership. Another dynamic that is unique to women in leadership is the contradiction of the patriarchal view of leadership and normative expectations for women. This second theme, referred to as No Woman's Land, is a space occupied by female leaders when they do not fit neatly in the masculinized notions of leadership style nor the hegemonic notions of being a woman. This concept is presented in the next section.

No Woman's Land

One theme that emerged from the data was a space that is created by gender assumptions, the frequency and impact of gender-based discourse and the resistance to disrupting that discourse. I call this space "No Woman's Land" as a comparison to No Man's Land in war. I am purposeful in selecting a masculinized term associated with the masculine context of war. It is my hope to intentionally disrupt the dominant discourse in counter-hegemonic ways. Historically, No Man's Land was a width of land that separated the two opposing sides.

If the area had seen a lot of action No Man's Land would be full of broken and abandoned military equipment. After an attack, No Man's Land would also contain a large number of bodies. Advances across No Man's Land [were] always very difficult. Not only did the soldiers have to avoid being shot or blown-up, they also had to cope with barbed-wire and water-filled, shell-holes. (Simkin, 1997, para. 3)

In this analogy, I consider the patriarchal, masculinized notions of leadership and the hegemonic assumptions and subordination of female characteristics to be the opposing sides. Scott (2003) lends to the understanding of the space of No Woman's Land:

Gender polarization bifurcates the population into two genders and imposes culturally based, oppositional definitions of gender appropriateness that are associated with males and females. These lenses of gender polarization are internalized from birth by the developing child, who is predisposed to construct an identity that is consistent with them. However, because society adopts an androcentric lens as well, the individual becomes more than a carrier of gender polarization; rather, the internalization of androcentrism makes the individual an unwitting collaborator in the social reproduction of patriarchy, which is in turn reinforced by existing cultural discourse and practices. (p. 84)

Women who have accessed the superintendency are occupying a space that contradicts the hegemonic masculinity of the role. Specific to the superintendency, these women weave in and out of discourses, navigating the reality that “traditional public perceptions of femininity and of women’s ability to be an effective leader are often in conflict” (Harris, 2004, p. 7). To navigate that space, some women employ discourse that dismisses gender as influencing subjectivity as a superintendent, yet at the same time, discourse that emphasizes the need to exhibit certain masculine qualities. This is a messy space and experienced in different ways by the participants. To explore this theme, there are three sub-sections that will be presented: Writing is on the Wall will explore gender-based discourse in the data, followed by the Horns and Halo Effects of that discourse, and participants’ reactions to occupying space in No Woman’s Land.

The Writing is on the Wall

I often think of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s (1899) *The Yellow Wall-Paper* when considering the influence hegemonic discourses have on women’s subjectivity and subsequently future opportunities they may wish to pursue. Just prior to the turn of the 20th century, Gilman authored a poignant story based on her own experiences of being a woman who struggled with her reality and being controlled by the dominant discourses of

her husband and other male physicians. The main character in the story is taken to a large estate by her husband in an effort to redefine her mental state through rest and relaxation. As a wife and new mother uncomfortable in her current reality, her husband, John, and other physicians are insistent that the emotional and mental issues she faces are in her own mind and of no real cause. She loves to write, yet she is strongly discouraged from doing so by her husband as it may tire a woman's mind and perpetuate the problems she is experiencing. However, she repeatedly suggests to the reader that her state of mind would improve should she be able to engage with others and allowed to write without hiding it, rather than follow the controlling expectations of her husband and physicians. In another breath, she internalizes her anger and impatience with her husband as her own lack of self-control, based upon the discourse she engages in with him. As she spends more and more time in isolation, in the room with the yellow wallpaper, she secretly writes when her husband is not around to express her frustrations and guilt of being a burden to him and not caring for her own child. Most of her time and what she writes about is focused on the imperfections in the wallpaper. The wallpaper begins to take shape of someone trying to get out from behind the wall. She attempts to share her increased anxiety and concern with her husband, but he continues to insist that she is in control and it is up to her when she will feel better. He often speaks to her as if she were a child: calling her little girl, insisting that she not do too much or she will easily tire, and making her nap for an hour after meals. Over time, she begins to see a clearer image of what is behind the paper and determines it is a woman struggling to break free. The

figure behind the wallpaper tries to escape the confines of the decorative shroud until the main character tears the paper off the wall to set her free.

In the end, the reader may imagine a wealthy, white woman, unsatisfied with her own life, who has gone mad by being secluded and obsessed with her mental illness. From a poststructural feminist lens, Gilman portrays how patriarchal and hegemonic discourses discounted white, middle/upper class women's voices and the influence this can have on her subjectivity. Her husband was clearly the gatekeeper of her intellectual, emotional, and social life, and the discourse she found herself in contradicted what she perceived her reality to be. While not to the degree experienced by Gilman, these discursive practices still exist today. As women seek to have a place in the leadership discourse traditionally held by only men, it can be a struggle to be taken seriously, being perceived as weak, emotional, and more suitable for domestic responsibilities based upon gender assumptions. Gilman's story also demonstrates that raced and classed gender assumptions harmful for women are by no means unique to education. They are deeply embedded in the personal and professional expectations that society has and continues to some degree to place upon women.

Gender-based discourse and expectations have impacted the experiences of the participants in this study. These experiences influenced and molded their perception of themselves as leaders. Binary oppositions are perpetuated by the discourse, creating a space where women do not fit neatly into the hegemonic notions of leadership and femininity. Carol Allen shared an historical perspective that

back in the day . . . your route to the principalship was a PE coach—PE teacher, coach, teacher, principal, superintendent, and so I think men sort of still think that way, and I may be wrong, but that's been my experience.

Carol describes her perception of who had access to higher levels of leadership.

Historically the initial position of PE coach or PE teacher that most often led to the principalship and superintendency in NC were traditionally held by men. Dawn Shaw shared a poignant experience early in her career with perceived gender-based expectations as a leader. She shared a conversation with a male teacher about her coursework and that she had

decided to take a few more courses so that I would have my superintendent's license. And he looked at me, and he said, "Do you think you're ever really going to need that?" And I paused and said, "Yes, I do."

While he did not say it directly, she perceived that the colleague did not see the superintendency as something a woman would be suitable for or even want to do. Upon completing the coursework, she had been pursuing an assistant principal position for some time and

it seemed to be at that time a patronage job for coaches, and the coach didn't even need to be started on his administrative degree as long as he started taking courses after he got the job, but there were a number of women who had their licensure, degrees, and so forth, and so that was very frustrating to me.

Dawn observed a different level of access to leadership positions for men and women.

Men did not seem to require the same credentials prior to attaining a position that women may have been expected to have because it was assumed if you were male, you already

had the qualities needed for administration. As a result of her frustration, she turned to her mentor for advice. She recalled a conversation with her principal, who she viewed as a mentor, about why she had not yet acquired a position.

I was very disappointed to hear him explain to me, “If you are an assistant principal, a woman, you wouldn’t be given keys to the school.” And I asked him to explain to me why, and he said, “It’s for your own safety because think how terrible we would feel if you were at the school working by yourself and you were raped or something.”

Her mentor’s admission that she was seen as a sexualized being first, rather than a leader first, was disturbing to Dawn. She did not have any concerns about her safety and quickly shared with him that she felt that should not be an issue. Hegemonic notions that women must be protected by men negatively impacted others’ perceptions that she, a female, would be desirable for an administrative role. As Marian Green reflected on her experiences, she shared a similar perception of gender-based expectations,

People in general still believe that men are supposed to have the top roles, and women are supposed to be more docile . . . the female shoulder to cry on, so to speak. . . . When you are an assertive female, you know what that gets you, usually versus by way of comparison to an assertive male, that he’s just doing what he’s supposed to be doing. That has been a very difficult thing to see—come into play for me.

Marian feels that a common trait demonstrated by both a female and male leader is perceived by others very differently. A male leader who is direct and communicates high expectations is seen as being an effective leader. A female leader who is direct and communicates high expectations contradicts the gender-based essentialist view that women are passively supportive. This perceived contradiction in how a woman *should*

lead based on her gender versus how she *is* leading troubles Marian and illustrates an example of how the space called No Woman's Land is perpetuated by binary oppositions, such as passive/assertive, associated with gender.

Virginia Moore has also experienced discourse that assumes different expectations for women in leadership.

A reporter asked me . . . [in]first few weeks on the job, how if I felt . . . that basic question [being a female superintendent] and I said that's never entered into it. It's been work, it's been about children, it's been about doing the right things. . . . For me that has not been an issue whatsoever.

Virginia's choice to "ignore" gender is an example of how the subject can also be complicit in her own subjugation and in the reproduction of oppressive hegemonic discourse. Men would not typically receive that same question. The questions a reporter might ask a male superintendent would likely be based on the work being done in that role versus his gender and how that influences how he performs that role. This demonstrates how acts are perceived differently by others, depending upon the body that enacts them. Virginia communicated that her leadership and work for children should be the focus. She also shared that there exists gender-based assumptions about who is more desirable for certain roles:

you look at the number of female superintendents in the state and you tell me if you don't think we're in the spotlight. When I go to meetings, several times I'm the only female in the room unless they have their assistants in the back taking notes, and every one of them is a woman.

Virginia expressed how much this troubled her to see male superintendents bring their female assistants to these meetings. She felt it perpetuates the oppressive idea that leadership is a male role and women are there only for support. The complexity of how experiences are impacted by the bodies that enact them is further demonstrated by Virginia's experience in this situation. Her attendance at the meeting is being used to increase her understanding of and participation in superintendent-like activities. Another female, present as an assistant to a male superintendent, does not benefit from the experience in the same privileged manner as Virginia.

Discourse that influences access to the superintendency is perpetuated through gender-based networking as well. Pamela Winters describes that

There is a huge network of white, male superintendents and they just have a network . . . I'm not saying that negatively, but they have a network . . . if you watch . . . 'Tim' will leave [a]small district, next thing you know, he's in a medium-sized, then the next thing you know, this medium-sized person has left and he's gone on to a big one, then the small one jumps into this one . . . it's like a paving [of] the way.

Pamela has observed how some male superintendents have accessed positions in larger districts through what is perceived to be a gender-based network. Grogan (1996) describes how sponsorship and networking can serve to secure

the patriarchal structure which holds in place existing power relations. Not only are women subjected to this form of control, but so, too, are those men who are lower down on the hierarchy. Both are at the mercy of the decision-makers, those influential superintendents and consultants who dominate the discourse. (p. 73)

Both men and women often use professional networks to develop leadership skills and access opportunities. The example Pamela shared is especially troubling for female aspirants in North Carolina. With so few women in the superintendency in the state, gender-based networks advantage men and disadvantage women's access to these positions. Exclusionary practices perpetuated by gender-based networking needs to be more deeply explored and deconstructed through additional research.

Pamela Winters described how she experiences gender- and race-based perceptions in discourse.

When you're out with those communities, stakeholders and particularly the ones who politically have a big influence, sometimes you [get] a feeling of just tolerating this. You know? But if . . . it gets me something for the children, it's fine, just tolerate me. You know? Just listen to what I have to say. But it is a different conversation, it really is, it's different.

Pamela has experienced feelings of being "tolerated" during discourse with stakeholders and feels this may be influenced by their assumptions about her serving in a role that is perceived as one for white men. During these conversations, she focuses upon the outcome for children she may need their support to accomplish. In B. L. Jackson's (1999) research on African-American female superintendents, she found that "the idea of power was not foreign or uncomfortable. Those who mentioned the idea specifically saw 'politics' as a way to achieve more for children. . . . They were not hesitant to make their voices heard" (p. 152). Pamela seems to carry that same confidence in managing the political by focusing on the outcomes for students rather than internalizing the

misconceptions others may have of her based upon their gender- and/or race-based assumptions.

Despite their consternation about gender-based treatment they have received, participants themselves used gender-based discourse in describing their leadership styles.

Carol Allen shared her perception of herself as a leader:

I think I'm a nurturer by nature, and I think I'm really good at listening and trying to communicate and bringing people together and helping them feel good about what they're doing. . . . I think that comes from being a woman, I think that's part of being a woman.

Carol communicated a perception that traits she perceived as strengths are a direct result of being female. Virginia Moore used gender-based discourse and binary opposites in describing her logical versus emotional approach to solving problems.

Now I have always felt like I act more like a man than a girl, and I'm not talking about with sexuality. I'm just talking about . . . sometimes girls cry, and get emotional and get upset . . . I do occasionally, but most [of the time] . . . give me the facts, let's take the facts, let's make a decision, let's seek input if it's appropriate, and let's roll on. . . . And even those closest to me, my predecessor told me, he said, "You know, you don't act like a girl." And he did not mean that in a negative manner and I thought to myself, not sure I would phrase it like that, but that was a compliment, and he was talking about girl in the sense of falling apart and that kind of thing, and so.

Virginia perceives that women are typically viewed as emotional and that this may have a negative impact on their ability to make decisions. She does not feel she possesses this trait and her perceptions were reinforced by her mentor. She expressed pride in being assigned the typically masculine trait of logical versus emotional reasoning.

A poststructural feminist lens views this discourse as contributing to the binary oppositions that subordinates characteristics typically associated with being female. Furthermore, it suggests that the assignment of traits as masculine and feminine be deconstructed altogether. Both Carol and Virginia provide examples of how gender-based expectations and assumptions exist within the participants' own discourse, even as they have experienced the problematic effects of these discursive practices. This discourse perpetuates rather than deconstructs normative expectations of women and introduces a troubling dynamic called the Horns and Halo Effect, further complicating a female leader's space in No Woman's Land.

Horns and Halo Effect

Gender-based discourse contributes to the complexity of how women may be perceived as desirable candidates for the superintendency. Whether it is in discourse with one's mentor, external stakeholders, or from the participants themselves, there seems to be a theme that these discursive practices perpetuate a troubling concept known as the Horns and Halo Effect. When this mental model is used, it perpetuates No Woman's Land. Kennon (2011) describes the Horns and Halo Effect as "a cognitive bias that causes you to allow one trait, either good (halo) or bad (horns), to overshadow other traits, behaviors, actions, or beliefs" (para. 2) about someone. The gender-based discourse evidenced in this study demonstrates that leadership qualities traditionally associated as masculine creates a halo effect for men. However, these same traits may create a horns effect for women. Discursive assumptions made about what qualities one has based upon gender fuels the negative impact of this model.

Virginia Moore shared her perspective on how others' assumptions based on gender have a conflicting effect:

But I do think that people judge females in this job more harshly than they do men. Much more harshly . . . I follow sort of Covey's thoughts of seek first to understand then be understood. Some [people] give me a chance because I'm female to engage in— . . . tell me exactly where you're coming from, you know, that kind of thing. But the flip side of that is I think some folks walk in here and think well that's a woman, I can get [my way]. I think that was more prevalent in the past than it is now. But on any given day it can work both ways . . . sometimes I think my gender helps me, sometimes I think my gender hurts me, most times I just don't think about my gender.

Virginia describes times that others have made assumptions about her style based solely on her gender. She feels that others might perceive her to be a good listener yet at the same time easily manipulated because she is a woman. The bias that comes with gender-based assumptions has influenced the assignment of traits as negative or positive, perpetuating a Horns or Halo Effect for female leaders.

The Horns and Halo Effect can further be demonstrated by considering what Carol Allen describes as a critical trait one needs to be a superintendent.

You don't learn it in a classroom, you know, you learn it by reflection and *toughening* [emphasis added] up that *tough* [emphasis added] skin and being able to have candid conversations with people and being able to accept feedback from people. So I think all those things help in the superintendency.

When asked to clarify what she meant by needing to be *tough*, Carol said:

I make the best decision I can with the information I have. That's what I tell people when they call up mad because I've called off school because of the weather . . . I have to make the best decisions . . . I can with the information I have.

Carol communicated that one has to *toughen up* to make it as a superintendent. She describes being tough as being direct, when needed, and being able to make difficult decisions that not everyone will like.

I found Carol's choice of words interesting and worth exploration. The term *tough* is stereotypically associated as a masculine trait and is in binary opposition with the term flexible or soft. Perhaps she felt it was necessary to express her capacity to be *tough* to meet the masculinized assumptions of the superintendency. The use of the term can be problematic as it unintentionally perpetuates the assumption that female leaders must be willing to display traits that represent patriarchal notions of leadership. At any given time a male superintendent can demonstrate this quality and be viewed as an effective leader because *toughness* is a trait normatively associated with maleness, thus the Halo Effect. However, being direct and decisive can be assigned as a negative trait for a woman, as it contradicts normative assumptions that in comparison to men, women are expected to be flexible and passive. Thus, it may have the Horns Effect for women, positioning them in No Woman's Land. If being direct and decisive are assumed to be desirable qualities of a superintendent and women are not assumed to be *tough*, they are less likely to be viewed as viable candidates. Gendered discourse about the superintendency perpetuates it as a role more suitable for men based upon hegemonic assumptions, thus limiting access for women.

Dawn Shaw shared a poignant experience with how the Horns and Halo Effect impacted her access to a leadership position early in her career.

I made a terrible mistake in an interview once in the county where I was a teacher. I think I had an assistant principal job wrapped up, but I do think that this is probably important enough to repeat because it helped me never make this mistake again. Things were going very, very well in the interview. And I knew the assistant principal who was leaving because he had just been hired by his former boss to go down to work [in the district he had just moved to], and the assistant principal who was leaving, he and I went to graduate school together. We . . . rode over to [graduate classes] and back. And I had heard him discuss that on Friday nights the football gate or the money from [the high school] where . . . football was king. He said “Wow, there’s so much money, and I have to get the deputy take me to the bank because you know, I could be robbed. It’s that much money.” I was at the interview, things had gone wonderfully well, and this principal said, “Well you know, if we get this job, if you get this job we’re going to change some of the duties.” And I said, “Oh, really? What are some of the duties you will have to change?” He said, “Well, right now we have the assistant principal takes the football money to the bank. You can’t do that.” Well, you know what I said? I said, “Well excuse me, doesn’t the deputy ride with the assistant principal to take the money to the bank?” He paused, and he said, “Yes.” I said, “I can ride to the bank with the deputy as well as anyone else can.” And I learned don’t ever take the bait on gender ever again. So I got that out of my system. It made me feel better but I didn’t get that job. I wonder why, I was sarcastic. I should have never said that. But that’s when I was a little hotheaded about gender.

One of the assumptions made by the principal interviewing Dawn was that because she was female she would not be able to fulfill the duties currently assigned to that position. Her gender was seen as an obstacle to meeting the responsibilities of the job. Dawn felt confident that she could fulfill those responsibilities and was direct in sharing that. So, she entered No Woman’s Land, a space where she contradicted discursive assumptions about being female. And there were consequences for entering that space. Dawn felt that her direct approach in assuring the principal that she could perform the same duties as the previous assistant principal was seen as a negative trait, thus the Horns Effect. She viewed her response as a mistake, yet it was the gender-based assumptions about

leadership and women of those interviewing her that created the obstacle rather than her display of confidence and assertiveness.

Dawn indicated that her later reaction to gender-based discourse was heavily influenced by that experience. She shared another story that reflects how normative assumptions perpetuate the Horns and Halo Effect.

The school board chairman recommended to me that I apply to be in [a local civic organization] and she did too. And amazingly, I was shocked. We were rejected for the sole purpose of we were women. And the National Charter for [the organization] does not say that . . . but this local chapter did, and I was . . . very surprised.

Well, within a day after this, the local newspaper called, said “I understand you were turned down for [membership].” And I said, “This is just not a newsworthy story. We just don’t need to go there.” He said, “Were you or were you not?” And I said, “Oh, come on, Paul, why do you want to write about that?” and so he said, “Well, why did you even want to apply for that, anyway?” Which then I thought, oh, he’s got a different angle than I thought he did. I thought he was trying to make the [civic organization] look bad, now he’s trying to make me look bad. I said, “Paul, I’ve always heard, as you know, I’m a first-year superintendent new to the community, and I’ve always heard it’s always good practice to join a local civic club and be a good practicing contributing member, and you get to meet people in the community that way, and that was my sole motivation.” He said, “You weren’t trying to be the first woman member?” I said, “Oh, Paul, no. To be honest, I’m not even sure that I knew that they didn’t have other women.”

Dawn and the Board of Education chair, also female, were attempting to employ a leadership practice of building relationships within the community by being active in civic organizations that serve the community. The organization they attempted to join did not have a national reputation for being exclusively for men. However, the assumption was that Dawn and the board chair were challenging a local organization for not including women. Challenging the status quo was viewed negatively, thus the Horns

Effect. Dawn was placed in No Woman's Land by this reporter's gender-based assumptions and expectations of her as a female superintendent. Dawn seems to have disciplined herself to navigate around topics that are generated by a conflict in gender-based assumptions. This self-discipline stems from what she felt was detrimental in asserting that she could perform the same responsibilities as any male candidate in her first interview for an assistant principalship. The reality for women in leadership is that there is risk in bringing attention, whether directly or indirectly, to gender-based discourse and of transgressing by disrupting patriarchal assumptions around leadership or being female. As Dawn learned early in her career, such transgressions can have serious consequences. As such, she has disciplined herself not to be "hotheaded" about gender. In doing so, however, she has disciplined herself to avoid vocally disrupting gender-based constructions, and in doing so, silences herself. The experiences of the participants exemplify the notion that

the performance of gender is also compelled by norms that I do not choose. I work within the norms that constitute me. I do something with them. Those norms are the condition of my agency, and they also limit my agency; they are that limit *and* that condition at the same time. What I can do is, to a certain extent, conditioned by what is available for me to do within the culture and by what other practices are and by what practices are legitimating. (Butler in Butler & Salih, 2004, p. 345)

These experiences speak to the complexity of deconstructing notions of femininity and masculinity based on deeply embedded and socially constructed gender norms. In addition, the subject unknowingly contributes to hegemonic discourse by being complicit in the performance of these norms. If issues associated with gender are ignored by

mentors, it reproduces systems of oppression. Female and male mentors have a responsibility to better understand how normative assumptions associated with gender are problematic, perpetuate inequality and reproduce hegemony. Mentors who acknowledge the impact of patriarchal assumptions can then begin to actively deconstruct them and contribute to a more equitable system.

Occupying and Deconstructing the Space

Gender-based discourse has been a reality for these participants. Through this discourse, they experienced the impact of the Horns and Halo Effect. As these women engaged in and through the discourse, they found themselves in a space I refer to as No Woman's Land, where the hegemonic assumptions based upon gender and how those assumptions masculinize the superintendency are challenged. It is important to consider that

Although the discursive alignment of leadership style and attributes with masculine stereotypes may be a conscious strategy by women superintendents, the narrow range of options available defines that particular choice...these orderings are based on an institutional knowledge constituted by patriarchal assumptions, language, and patterns of relating that reproduce and reinforce gender polarization, and hence, inequality. (Scott, 2003, p. 86)

Female superintendents do not fit neatly into the hegemonic ideals of what is feminine or masculine and are in the spotlight as they serve in the highest level of leadership.

Virginia Moore reflected on her position in this space:

So I think . . . to everything there is a season, and you've got to be secure in yourself for it to work, and maybe more so with women because . . . the society has taught us . . . to be young and thin and no wrinkles and whatever, and that's not reality. I can walk outside and that's not reality. And then in addition to that,

we wear the mantle [of being responsible for] multiple, multiple, multiple thousand children and employees and there's just not room for worrying about that kind of stuff.

Discursive practices in our society currently reinforce heteronormative, gender and race-based assumptions. The subject may expect negative responses from others when she/he does not perform as expected based upon normative assumptions of gender. Virginia felt that self-assuredness and a focus on the work at hand is critical to countering gender-based normative expectations. Annie Daniels also shared a similar position on countering the effects of being in a space that troubles others' assumptions about leadership and gender.

There was this big deal about [being] the first female drum major and here is this first female flag corps. [They had] never had that before either. But to me it was just about, it's the job of drum major, either boys or girls can do this, it's not about being a girl, it's the job of being the drum major and I knew I could do that, so that—I guess . . . the gender thing has not been . . . this cloud thing. It's always been about the work.

It is troubling that Annie seems comfortable dismissing the existence of gender and the influence that gender had on others' perceptions of her accomplishment. Alice Land situated gender-based expectations and discourse in a similar way. Regardless of expectations others may have for her because she is a woman, she reported focusing her leadership decisions in a strong set of beliefs of what is right for the students in her district.

I have a hard time saying that I did or didn't get a job because I'm a female or that I do believe I'm perceived in different ways because I'm a female. But I think you need to talk to other people. I'm here to do my job, and I don't feel like I

need to think about that every day just as I don't feel like an African American should have to think about it. They're here to do a job . . . I do think . . . some females . . . overcompensate and maybe try to be more tough or less lenient or maybe more stubborn to make up for the fact that they are not a male, where I refuse to do that. I'm going to do what's right for children.

Alice communicated a perception that her time is better spent focusing on doing what is right for children rather than on how others perceive her based upon gender. The participants reported that their subjectivity within the superintendency is more influenced by the impact of their work as leaders and less by their gender. Virginia, Annie and Alice illustrated a concept that Scott (2003) reminds us "is not new: androgyny theory notes that successful female leaders often display a task orientation" (p. 98) and the avoidance of gender is "borne out by the reluctance of people in the school districts and communities to acknowledge gender issues" (p. 98). I have found myself engaged in discourse with male colleagues and strongly discouraged from discussing how gender may have influenced an interaction and/or decision in the professional realm. I have been reminded on numerous occasions that any mention of concerns involving gender issues will be negatively perceived and could impact future opportunities. That is not to say I agree nor consistently comply with these warnings. To do so would be complicit in my own subjugation. The participants in this study may also be influenced by what Skrla (2003) describes as "self-silencing behavior on the part of women superintendents and other female administrators as a by-product of the male-dominated culture of educational administration in which women learn that they are out of place and should keep quiet" (p. 106). While invisible to most people, it is a troubling reality for women in leadership who may recognize the detrimental effects of hegemonic discourses, yet feel they cannot

openly call it out without experiencing obstacles in their career advancement. For others, it may still be invisible altogether. Ignoring gender issues serves only to perpetuate the system of oppression that is fueled by these discursive practices.

The participants recognized that they have a certain level of influence on how others' gender-based expectations may impact protégés' aspirations. Dawn Shaw is

very passionate about . . . help[ing] women because nobody tried to help me, not to get a job as an assistant principal, I didn't think anybody helped me try . . . not the kind of help that I was talking about. So I became very passionate about that.

I tell women that they are going to think you don't know as much about budget and construction and finance and things like that, so make sure you know all your stuff. I tell men they may think you don't know as much about instruction . . . rightly or wrongly, because I know a lot of men superintendents that know a whole lot more about instruction than I do. So you can get the halo effect just as much as you can get the horns effect.

Dawn's experiences have influenced her to support other female aspirants. The language she chose when she said "I tell women that they are going to think you don't know as much" is important. She did not carry that assumption, yet realized that if others have it and there is not a way to dispel that assumption, it may limit opportunities. Carol Allen has situated these experiences in a similar way. Her strong belief in learning and gaining credibility through experiences builds her influence in areas she may once have been perceived as lacking in knowledge or experience.

When I became a principal—high school principal—I did not have an athletic background. I was never an athlete, I was never a coach, so I made it my business to get to know as much as I could know about the athletic side of things. I went to conference meetings, I became a conference [leader], got involved with the athletic association, then . . . worked myself up [to a leadership role]. So I think sometimes maybe women have to . . . go in knowing that there are some things

you may have to do a little differently because you didn't have some of those experiences or to be credible.

Carol emphasized that others' perceptions of a leader based upon gender can be countered by recognizing what those assumptions may be and what can be done to develop knowledge and skills in those areas. Pamela Winters believed that going above and beyond others' expectations was critical to maintaining her credibility based upon discursive gender- and race-based assumptions. She shared that

I always tell [my daughter], and my strategy is as a black woman, I have to be twice as good and that's what I always tell her. You have to be twice as good. [You] can't be mediocre. [You] always have to be twice as good to get to the top of where you want to be.

Pamela's mindset that she must work harder than if she was male or white also appeared as a theme in Gardiner et al.'s (2000) research. It is important to consider how the intersectionality of race and gender influence Pamela's experiences. Assumptions may be made that women of color are promoted because of their minority status, but African-American women may feel that they must work harder to build credibility to overcome any false perceptions associated with ethnicity.

In their current role as female superintendents, these participants have an opportunity to lead the discourse and can heavily influence the deconstruction of No Woman's Land. Alice Land shared how she is positioned in a way to influence others:

almost all the time I'm influencing a decision, and so being really aware of how much influence you have, you have to be careful with that because a lot of times people just do what you say and I don't want them to do that. And I also think that since I do have . . . [limited] time . . . in front of people to talk . . . so I need to

make sure that what I say is important . . . because I could say anything, and so it needs to be what I think they need to hear.

The opportunity to lead the discourse is an avenue through which gender-based discursive practices can be disrupted. Alice recognizes the influence she has and how important it is for her to be mindful of what message she is sending. Marian Greene shared a personal conversation that demonstrates the influence she has in disrupting gender-based, normative expectations for women:

My son told me once, he says, “Momma, you know, you’re a role model for girls in this community.” And I never really thought about that, but that was one of the most powerful things that anyone had ever said to me. And so just as a woman, period . . . breaking that glass ceiling I guess makes me influential in a way.

The participants have an opportunity through their leadership roles to influence how they and others engage in discursive practices that reproduce gender-based expectations and assumptions. While almost all of them have communicated that their gender does not influence how they make decisions as a leader, their gender is significant in that they are women who have accessed powerful positions in a patriarchal context. Rather than ignore one’s gender, just as we cannot ignore any other facet of our identity, leaders can better serve to influence change by analyzing with a critical lens how discourse may perpetuate gender division. As noted by Gardiner et al. (2000), “more important now is that women’s entry and continuing presence in administration offer women the possibility to renegotiate the terms under which women are subjectified as administrators. This is how mentoring can transform educational leadership” (p. 192). Women in

educational leadership have an opportunity to contribute to deconstructing hegemonic expectations for leaders that have promoted binary oppositions.

Summary

Female leaders navigate within and through No Woman's Land, the conflict between patriarchal assumptions of leadership and the hegemonic assumptions and subordination of being female. Gender-based discourse influences how others perceive leadership traits differently when used by female and male leaders. Female and male mentors of aspiring superintendents have a critical role in deconstructing hegemonic practices that disadvantage women. Women cannot fight the battle of hegemonic discourse and binary oppositions alone. The space of No Woman's Land is a space that both women and men who believe in the power of equity must occupy together. Recognizing and naming this embattled space is the first step.

Conclusion

This research study set out to analyze a sample of female superintendents' mentoring experiences in North Carolina, how these experiences impacted their subjectivity, and how these experiences may serve to disrupt or perpetuate discursive practices that genderize leadership. Through this research, two critical themes emerged. These themes were the informal mentoring strategies that were used to support these women as they aspired to the superintendency and a space that is created through discursive practice that I call "No Woman's Land."

The participants had mentoring experiences that provided them with authentic job experiences, observation of effective leadership styles, and reflective and supportive

discourse. They attribute their acquisition of capital needed to access the superintendency to their mentors' use of these strategies and continue to employ them as they mentor others who aspire to the superintendency.

Through analysis of the data, a second theme emerged that revealed a space these women occupy and have the potential to deconstruct. I call this space "No Woman's Land." This space is created by binary oppositions that have been assigned to the masculinized notions of leadership and the hegemonic assumptions about women. These binary oppositions are being disrupted by these women as they demonstrate qualities or traits that contradict those typically assigned to women, but in men are viewed as being effective in leadership practice. As a result, traits that have a Halo Effect, or viewed positively, for male leaders may have the Horns Effect, or viewed negatively when employed by female leaders. When women display leadership characteristics that are associated with the superintendency, yet contradict normative assumptions about how women should be, they occupy space in No Woman's Land. The more women who enter No Woman's Land and begin to unravel and problematize hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity, the potential for a more inclusive representation of voices in leadership can be realized. The discourse can move from how men and women lead to language that focuses on a more inclusive representation of leadership as a practice that is fluid and flexible rather than fixed and gendered.

Nearly 20 years ago Grogan (1996) researched the experiences of female superintendents and argued for the deconstruction of discursive practices that limit

women's access to the superintendency. My research study supports what Grogan proposed nearly 20 years ago:

If we could deconstruct the binary opposition of aggressive/conciliatory or directive/collaborative implied in administrative styles which are also associated with the male/female dualism, we could "create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms which transcends binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms . . . if administrative styles are seen as adaptable and complex, each person having the capacity to adopt one of the other, then the original binary terms have no meaning." (p. 90)

The data from this study suggests we have not yet experienced Grogan's vision for deconstructing the binary oppositions that mold leadership discourse and limit women's access to the superintendency. The experience described in the opening of the dissertation of the male superintendent and his son at a local high school football game is a prime example. He agreed that as a male superintendent he is better able to overlap his professional life and his responsibilities as a parent. However, socially constructed assumptions about women do not provide space for female superintendents to do the same. Therefore, there is an ongoing assumption that women must sacrifice one to have the other and will be judged no matter which "choice" they make. It appears that both women and men have more work to do to rewrite hegemonic, patriarchal notions of leadership and gender.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Rewriting the Superintendency as a Leader's World

This research study reiterates the power of mentoring experiences for aspiring female superintendents. Past research, coupled with the results of this study, support the use of authentic opportunities and reflective, supportive dialogue as critical components of meaningful mentoring for superintendents. These are especially important for providing capital and a relevant place in the leadership discourse for women as patriarchal influences continue to perpetuate inequities for female educational leaders. The vision for leadership is for it to be defined as a leader's world, rather than a man's world. This chapter draws from the literature reviewed, the theoretical framework and limitations, and the results of this study to present recommendations for practice, recommendations for additional research, and concluding thoughts regarding the deconstruction of educational leadership as a man's world.

Implications for Practice

The results of the research depict a stark reality that gender-based assumptions continue to create binary opposites that impact women's access to the superintendency. Language is powerful, and there is comfort in knowing that the discourse can change, thus shifting the reality women may experience based upon hegemonic expectations of gender and the superintendency. Aspiring superintendents and their mentors must be

consciously aware of how the discourse they are leading or finding themselves in may serve to deconstruct or reproduce the gender-based assumptions that have limited access for women to higher levels of leadership. The dominant discourse will change only when those in positions of power, such as the superintendency, recognize the need for change and commit to a role that disrupts the structures that subordinate women. This path, under construction by agents of change, can be built more quickly if contemporary superintendents and aspirants commit to real improvement for women's access to and influence on educational leadership and organizational equity. If built successfully, this path leads to more equitable opportunities for historically marginalized groups. That is not to say it will disadvantage the now dominant group, although I believe that is a fear that often drives resistance to change influenced by social justice.

“The Mentor,” a poem written by Jeff Bresee and inspired by Robert Frost, will be used to further demonstrate the implications of this research in practice. The research is underpinned in poststructural feminist theory and as a result, language and the deconstruction of dominant discourse are a focus of the study. Poetry is being used to present implications for practice for two reasons (a) as an alternative to the hegemonic expectations for presenting dissertation work, and (b)

poetry is a discourse practiced in symbols, and differs from prose because prose explains while poetry merely suggests. . . . Discourse in poetry does not exclude the new and the creative imagination, for it is not a repeat of what was said before, but an enlargement by the contribution of what was not said. (Smalling, n.d., para. 1)

Furthermore,

The imagination that produces the enlargement is like a seed, which draws physical sustenance from its environment to reveal its character as a tree. Every poem is a special tree, and bears fruits according to the suggestions it makes to those who interact with it. And all its fruits convey the same nutrients and the same specialness of taste. (Smalling, n.d., para. 2)

I interpret “The Mentor” to depict a protégé who observes her mentor considering which of two paths to take, the worn or the less traveled. The mentor takes the less traveled path, but out of fear of the unknown, the protégé moves along the worn path. Over time, the protégé relocates the mentor and with the mentor’s support, the protégé joins him again. Bresee’s poem can be used as a seed from which a tree of ideas can grow when viewed in juxtaposition of the results of this research study. Whether or not fruit is bared from the tree depends upon the paths taken by mentors and protégés in the future. I have chosen to leave the reference of a male mentor in the poem. Two factors influence this choice: (a) Males represent 84% of superintendents in North Carolina and serve a substantial role in mentoring aspirants; and (b) Male superintendents were noted by many of the participants as salient mentors. Although male superintendents are the overwhelming majority, female superintendents are also in a critical position to influence the deconstruction of the patriarchal notions of the superintendency.

The Path Less Traveled

I paused to stand and watch a man who had come to the road’s divide.
My wonder soared as I watched his stare slowly shift from side to side.
He stood as if not noticing that many passed him by.
They moved without a second glance down the road most traveled by.

Then as I watched he stepped full stride toward the path of lesser wear,
And soon he vanished from my view round a bend into the snare.
I soon, like him, stood center road, faced with that daunting choice.
My gaze down his road, causing fear, I quenched my inner voice.
(Bresee, 2008, lines 1–8)

For this illustration, I assume that mentor and protégé recognize and acknowledge that patriarchy and dominant discourse negatively impact marginalized groups and their access to the same opportunities as white men. The diverging paths represent choices made by these leaders, who hold position of power, to deconstruct or further institutionalize hegemonic discourse. Some choices may include: advocating inclusive networking over gender based networking; leading for social justice over leading to maintain the status quo; mentoring through authentic leadership challenges over mentoring through superficial opportunities, etc. Collectively, the foundation of these divergent paths is the choice to deconstruct versus contribute to the dominant leadership discourse. Without deeper discussion, it appears that I am advocating the use of binary opposites when binaries are the very concept that perpetuates subordinate and superordinate pairs, reifying hegemony. Binary opposites only consist of two, hierarchal terms. I argue that the conflicting paths or choices in this analogy do not qualify as binary opposites for two reasons: (a) They do not have a hierarchical order; they are two choices that have different outcomes for marginalized groups; and (b) There are more than two paths that can be taken by mentors and/or protégés. Some will continue blindly down a third path that does not acknowledge the existence of oppressive influences of hegemonic discourse.

It is not my intention to oversimplify the complexity of deconstructing dominant discourse; however, I do believe that if women's reality in educational leadership is to significantly change, we need superintendents and aspirants who are willing to commit to the road less traveled. It is essential that anyone in a position of power recognize that inequity exists and how s/he contributes to the deconstruction or perpetuation of hegemonic assumptions around gender and leadership.

In Bresee's poem, the mentor chooses the more difficult, less traveled path and is closely observed by the protégé in doing so. While the protégé did not initially make the same choice, the mentor's courage to challenge the discourse heavily influences the protégé. It is especially important for men to recognize this power as they are mentoring both women and men who aspire to be a superintendent. By choosing and staying on the path less worn, the mentor can begin to institutionalize changes in how the superintendency is perceived as a leadership role versus a masculinized role. If male mentors acknowledge the negative impact of gender-based normative assumptions, yet model the choice to take the path of least resistance (Johnson, 2006) in dominant discourses, this will continue to perpetuate the obstacles faced by women in educational leadership.

Challenging with Authenticity

For miles I walked the crowded road breathing dust from others feet,
Until in despair I stopped and stood, my heart and soul deplete.
I gazed about still holding hope, the other path I'd see.
On yonder hill I saw him there, the man who mentored me.

The path between us steep and rough, un-forged with dangers there,
Yet still I left my path of friends, ignoring their bewares.
I pressed through hardship, pain and fear o'er rocks jagged and bent.
In time I crashed limp on that path, my every resource spent.
(Bresee, 2008, lines 9–16)

When reading Bresee's words, I remember that the participants from my research study insisted that they were challenged by their mentor in ways that were not always comfortable, but valued those experiences in preparing them to access future opportunities. In addition, participants observed their mentors and later modeled those mentoring strategies that created positive results within the organization. The protégé in "The Mentor" is influenced by the mentor's courage and persistence. Superintendents may not realize the impact they have on aspiring superintendents, but should be reminded that they are affecting them through every choice they make in their powerful, leadership role. Whether the protégé is impacted by observing the mentor or by the mentor's assignment of challenging opportunities, there is a significant responsibility on the mentor to recognize and use this influence wisely.

Authentic opportunities are critical to effective mentoring (Gardiner et al., 2000; Bjork, Kowalski, et al., 2005). These opportunities are not only "a part of the learning process, they are also valuable in helping to cement the relationship" (Gardiner et al., 2000, p. 61) between the mentor and protégé. In addition, these experiences serve to "offer concrete job experience to offset any stereotypical assumptions a hiring board might have" (Grogan, 1996, p. 62). The participants in this study reiterated how the purposeful experiences offered to them by their mentor heavily influenced their development as a leader and access to the superintendency. Any female or male mentor

needs to make a concerted effort to identify areas most in need of development for the protégé and offer opportunities that will build her/his perceived capacity in those areas. Protégés must also remember that taking the road less traveled is not promised to be an easy choice. It takes courage, persistence and support to influence change.

Supportive Discourse

But then a warming touch I felt, a friendly voice I heard.
It said, get up and tread this path. I rose without a word.
And as I looked, I saw him there, he continued on his way.
His only words as he walked on . . . “you’re on the path, now stay.”
(Bresee, 2008, lines 17–20)

Mentors have a significant impact on the success of their protégés, and supportive discourse instills a sense of confidence and energy. The protégé in Bresee’s poem is energized by the encouraging acts of the mentor, whether through a caring touch or words of encouragement. Participants in the study recall most often the encouragement and positive discourse regarding the mentors’ confidence in their leadership. It takes time and sincerity, but superintendents have an opportunity to instill in their protégés an assurance that they can continue down the path that leads to both change and potential access to the superintendency. This study supports the significant influence that supportive discourse has for female protégés, as the superintendency has been socially constructed as a man’s world and women may have a more difficult time envisioning themselves in that role.

Reflection and Subjectivity

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I chose in err.
 But looking back, perhaps as well . . . all memories now seem fair.
 Much time I spent on the beaten path, and what I learned, immense.
 But I reached, at last, the other path, and it has still made all of the difference.
 (Bresee, 2008, lines 21–24)

Protégés have a personal responsibility to choose their paths wisely. While mentors provide a critical role in developing and providing access to future superintendents, aspirants must be purposeful in developing their capacity as an educational leader. The protégé in the poem reflects upon her/his choices, realizing that while the initial decision was not the wisest, s/he has been molded by those experiences. Rather than discrediting experiences that may not result in the most desirable outcomes, all of the discourse in which we find ourselves are a part of who we are as leaders. Mentors provide a critical service to protégés by reflecting on their choices and finding a lesson that can be learned in that process. This was also a critical piece of leadership development for the participants in the study.

Reflective and supportive discourse was a strategy used consistently by both the participants as mentors and by their own mentors. Bjork, Kowalski, et al. (2005) describe a “reflective thinking process” (p. 97) similar to participant’s descriptions. Through dialogue, the mentor and protégé are able to

1) describe a problem faced by superintendents, 2) reflect on how they view the problem, 3) propose alternative solutions and delineate possible consequences, 4) list criteria for satisfactory resolution, 5) articulate the reasons for choosing the alternative solution, and 6) think about what was learned from this particular problem solving activity. (p. 97)

The most challenging aspect of the superintendency that influences their capacity to mentor others is the time demanded to fill the many roles associated with the position. However, the time invested in the reflection process not only develops the protégé's leadership capacity, but also supports the superintendent in processing experiences and/or making decisions that include multiple voices.

Summary

Superintendents who serve as mentors have a tremendous amount of power. That power can be used to disrupt the normative expectations of leadership and gender-based assumptions that create obstacles for marginalized subjects who aspire to the superintendency. The strategies that substantially improved opportunities for the women in this study were: (a) Providing authentic job opportunities; (b) Modeling leadership qualities that include and consider a variety of voices in organizational decisions; and (c) Using reflection and supportive discourse with the protégé and about the protégé. These three mentoring strategies positively influenced the participants' subjectivities within educational leadership and should be considered by superintendent mentors for current and future aspirants. As Grogan (2003) reminds us that "we learn that superintendents have been encouraged to think and behave in ways that have been dictated by a white, male-dominated discourse shaped by a different age" (p. 21). Male superintendents, often serving as formal or informal mentors, have a significant responsibility to contribute to equity by actively deconstructing images of women as inferior leaders and to further deconstruct any essentialist view of others and the categories in which they are placed, such as "women."

Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendations for future research are based upon the literature reviewed for the study presented in Chapter II, the limitations discussed in Chapter III, and the results and data analysis of the study presented in Chapter IV. This section includes potential expansion to this study, as well as additional studies to be considered.

Extending the Research Study

Time constraints of both the superintendents and the timeline of this research study may have influenced the richness of data that were collected. More in-depth interviews of the participants, in addition to including more female superintendents in North Carolina, may reveal additional data that impacts the transferability of the results. The peer review process also brought to light that the concept of sacrifice can be explored to more deeply understand the complexity of how these women accessed the superintendency. It would also strengthen the transferability of the data to study mentoring experiences of women in other states with relatively low percentages of women in the superintendency as well as states with relatively higher percentages of women in the superintendency. Juxtaposing the results may reveal additional implications for improving women's access to the superintendency.

This research study included a relatively homogenous group of white participants. Including a variety of intersectionalities will also strengthen the transferability of the data. Only one participant out of the seven was a woman of color. Including more diverse participants may reveal meaningful differences in the discourse around leadership. A study that includes the mentoring experiences of female and male

superintendents in North Carolina could be compared to further explore the existence of hegemonic discourse surrounding leadership and gender in mentoring relationships.

Research studies that take the limitations of this research into consideration can provide more insight into women's experiences and ways to deconstruct hegemonic discourses that impact women's accessibility to the superintendency.

Accessing the Network

One phenomenon in North Carolina that needs further exploration is that of gender-based networking and the impact this has on the lack of representation of women in the superintendency. Male networking in the superintendency was mentioned by several participants. Little research exists specific to that phenomenon, nor was there time to explore it more deeply with participants in this study.

The Layering of Hegemony

Deconstructing dominant discourses at the educational leadership level is going to be a difficult and long-term process. A greater systemic effort to improve equitable professional opportunities for women begins with troubling socially constructed gender-based messages that we experience from birth. A recent article by Wallace (2014) focused on the dominant discourses and hegemonic marketing to children. Her article highlights a book recently written by Melissa Atkins Wardy titled "Redefining Girly" designed to communicate the damaging effects and recommended deconstruction of the hegemonic stereotypes of being a girl. In the article, Wardy argues that the messages sent through marketing and merchandise perpetuates a prescriptive definition of what being a girl and being a boy entails. Wallace quotes Wardy,

“It teaches children there is only one way to be a girl and one way to be a boy,” she said. “When you have a little girl like mine who is obsessed with the ocean and giant squids and insect infestations in homes, she’s considered weird or odd or a tomboy when in fact, science and things like that should be considered girly.” (as cited in Wallace, 2014, para. 12)

Nor should distinct leadership characteristics be viewed as feminine versus masculine. More research on how these messages are being perpetuated and/or deconstructed can provide more parents and educators with ways they can reduce the negative impact these normative messages have on women’s access to leadership and professional roles in the future. That is not to say that entering the professional world should be superordinate to other life choices available to women. That would be creating a different and just as damaging binary based upon career choices. However, there needs to be equity in the choices women have to contribute to society versus an on-going hegemonic notion that women are not cut out for the professional world and are more suitable to be the caretakers of the children and elderly.

Participants in this research study used discourse that was influenced by the assignment of gender-based “ways to be.” The hegemonic messages that are communicated in society are often internalized and perpetuated by the very people who are negatively impacted by normative assumptions about gender. This process reifies the subject’s own oppression. Knowledge of how discourse influences one’s own, as well as others’ opportunities, is critical in changing the course for females who aspire to the superintendency. Some participants in this study unknowingly contribute to the reification of gendered notions of leadership without recognizing their complicit role in the hegemonic process. The contribution comes in different forms: rejecting gender as

relevant in the discourse; self-silencing when gender-based assumptions trouble her; and placing on a pedestal the notion of rejecting normative, feminine qualities as a leader,

Conclusion

The Gendering of Educational Leadership Styles—Mentoring and the Deconstruction of Binaries that Influence Women’s Access to the Superintendency revealed salient strategies for mentoring women who aspire to the superintendency and the complexity of gender-based discourse for female superintendents. The qualitative research design was inspired by a poststructural feminist lens. Poststructural feminism assumes that knowledge is produced through dominant discourses and these discourses can be disrupted and rewritten to change hegemonic assumptions that negatively impact equitable opportunities for women. A semi-structured interview was conducted with female superintendents in North Carolina to reveal and explore the discourses that have influenced their access to the superintendency. The results of the study showed that normative gender-based discourse continues to perpetuate the binaries associated with both gender and leadership styles. The superintendency continues to be a man’s world and it is through the power of mentoring experiences that it can be rewritten as a role that benefits from a more inclusive representation of identities rather than a role more suitable for white, middle/upper class men. Current superintendents and others serving as mentors to both women and men who aspire to be educational leaders have a responsibility to recognize the power and influence they have for changing the dominant discourse and others’ access to the superintendency.

Language and discourse are critical components of mentoring. The participants in the study noted that reflective and supportive discourse had a meaningful impact on their leadership development and access to the role of superintendent. Mentors can use these strategies to change the hegemonic notions of leadership and gender. Focusing on each protégé as an individual and providing authentic job experiences that develop their capacity and credibility as a future superintendent is critical to accessing the position, regardless of gender. That is not to say that the experiences will be enough to deconstruct how others will perceive the performance of those skills differently based on the body that enacts them. However, it can begin to be deconstructed by mentors who model inclusive discourse and are careful to eliminate language that problematizes leadership qualities that are demonstrated by either women and/or men based upon normative gender-expectations. Deconstructing and eliminating binary language, that language that assigns masculine and feminine as well as the superordination of the masculine and subordination of the feminine, from discourse is part of a critical approach to deconstructing the normative assumptions about leadership and gender that are deeply embedded in our society. Protégés also have a responsibility to be mindful of their own choices as they too are being observed by others who may choose to follow their path.

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APPENDIX A**REQUEST FOR LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY APPROVAL AND
FOLLOW-UP****ORIGINAL EMAIL**

Superintendent _____,

Good evening. I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am interested in research that may include an employee(s) in your district. As a part of the research approval process, I am required to contact districts regarding their protocol for research approval in their district. I know how very busy you are, but appreciate your guidance in who I should contact in your district regarding approval for dissertation research. Sharing this information with me will not commit anyone in your district for participation in the research, but is required prior to contacting potential participants. I am happy to provide any information at your request. Thank you for your time.

Tiffany Perkins
Professional Title
Professional Address
Phone Number

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL FOR NO RESPONSE TO ORIGINAL

Superintendent _____,

Good afternoon. I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to follow-up with you on a request for a letter of support from your LEA for a research project titled *The Gendering of Educational Leadership Styles: Mentoring and the Deconstruction of Binaries that Influence Women's Access to the Superintendency*. I have attached more information regarding the research. Before I can formally invite the eligible participant (female superintendent), I am required to have a letter of support from the LEA. I have also attached a template you may find helpful should your LEA agree to support this research project. Providing me with a letter of support does not obligate anyone to participate, but allows me to move forward with formal invitation to the potential participant. If you need any additional information to process this request, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Thank you very much for your time.

Tiffany Perkins
Professional Title
Professional Address
Phone Number

APPENDIX B
TEMPLATE FOR LEA APPROVAL LETTER

LEA Letterhead
[Date]

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves as support for Tiffany Perkins to contact the potential research participant in [Name of LEA] for the study titled The Gendering of Educational Leadership Styles : Mentoring and the Deconstruction of Binaries that Influence Women’s Access to the Superintendency. [Name of LEA] understands that this letter of support in no way obligates the potential research participant in participating in the research. It serves as permission for Tiffany Perkins to contact the potential participant and proceed with the research protocol as outlined in IRB application number 13-0128.

[LEA Contact for Research Approval]
Signature

APPENDIX C

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Invitation to Participate

Dear _____ (Female Superintendent)

My name is Tiffany Perkins, and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. I am conducting research on the mentoring experiences of female superintendents in North Carolina during their journey to the superintendency. In addition, my research will include how female superintendents mentor others interested in the superintendency.

Research supports a clear and discernable difference in the percentage of male and female superintendents. In addition to a 51.8% gap in representation for women in the superintendency nationwide, in North Carolina, an even larger gap of 68.6% exists. As one of eighteen female superintendents in North Carolina, I am writing to ask you to take part in this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the mentoring experiences of female superintendents in order to determine the impact such experiences play in reproducing the gendering of leadership roles. Through interviews with female superintendents, the impact of mentoring experiences on subjectivity, agency, and women's access to the superintendency will also be explored. If you decide to participate, you will be one of approximately 10 female superintendents in this research study.

If you take part in this study, I will conduct an initial interview that will last 75 minutes to 2 hours. You can talk as much or as little as you like in response to my questions. I will also record observational notes during the interview. If needed, the opportunity will be provided for you to respond to any follow-up questions electronically, in a phone interview or with another face-to-face interview. The need for follow-up questions will be determined by the richness of data collected in the initial interview and questions arising from initial data analysis. A follow-up interview may not be needed for every participant. I will make all arrangements for interviews at your convenience. The individual interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. I have attached a copy of the consent form and interview protocol.

As the researcher, I will follow protocol to provide confidentiality to all participants. I ask that all participants agree to be audio-taped. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed. However, in an effort to protect your privacy, I will secure the audiotapes in a locked file cabinet in my home and all electronic data will be password protected. In addition, names will be changed to pseudonyms in the transcript and when I use any quotation in my reports or presentations and no personally identifiable information will be shared. Pseudonyms will also be used for each school district.

You should report any problems to the Faculty Advisor. Study participation is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study at any time or stopping early will not result in any negative consequences for individuals.

All participants will be asked to sign a "Consent to act as a human participant" form at the time of the first interview. I have attached a copy of it to this email for you to see in advance. Please review these materials carefully and then e-mail me to let me know whether you are interested in learning more and possibly participating. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Tiffany Perkins
 Doctoral Candidate-UNC Greensboro

APPROVED IRB

MAY 24 2013

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: The Gendering of Educational Leadership Styles - Mentoring and the Deconstruction of Binaries that Influence Women's Access to the Superintendency

Project Director: Tiffany Perkins

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

This is a research project. The research will explore the mentoring experiences of female superintendents in order to determine the impact such experiences play in reproducing the gendering of leadership roles and the impact this has on subjectivity, agency, and women's access to the superintendency. Not only will I explore the experiences of how female superintendents were/are being mentored, but also how they have/are mentoring others. Your participation is voluntary.

Why are you asking me?

You are a female superintendent in North Carolina.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

The researcher will request that you participate in an initial, semi-structured interview that will last 75 minutes to 2 hours. The interview will be audio-recorded. Observational notes will be taken by the researcher during the interview as well. If needed, the opportunity will be provided for you to respond to any follow-up questions electronically, in a phone interview or with another face-to-face interview. The need for follow-up questions will be determined by the richness of data collected in the initial interview and questions arising from initial data analysis. A follow-up interview may not be required for every participant.

Is there any audio/video recording?

The interviews will be audio-recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below in the section: **How will you keep my information confidential?**

APPROVED IRB

MAY 24 2013

What are the dangers to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Based upon the topic, there may be a slight risk regarding political implications of sharing personal or professional experiences related to your current position. To minimize this risk, the data will remain confidential

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Tiffany Perkins who may be reached at (336) 635-7142 or taperkin@uncg.edu or Kim Hewitt who may be reached at (336) 334-3738 or kkehewitt@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

The participants in the study have already attained the highest level of responsibility in their organization. Their participation in this study, on the surface, will not be seen as beneficial to removing obstacles to their access to the superintendency. The study has the potential to, on a broader social level, help to deconstruct those norms. In addition, it may inform how mentoring experiences for women can be established and/or improved to increase access to the superintendency.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

This study has no direct benefits for you.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used and data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. Transcriptions of interviews will be stored electronically and will be password-protected. These will be kept for 1 year after closure of the project. At that time, the data will be shredded and/or deleted. The researcher will be the only one with access to the identifiable data. For peer review, raw data provided will not be identifiable. All information obtained in this study during the initial phase of data collection is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Participants who are requested to provide answers in a follow-up interview may choose to use email to respond to follow-up questions. Please be aware that absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

APPROVED IRB

MAY 24 2013

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Tiffany Perkins.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPROVED IRB

MAY 24 2013

APPENDIX E**MEMBER CHECK REQUEST EMAIL**

Superintendent _____,

Good evening. Thank you for your participation in my research study.

Project Title: The Gendering of Educational Leadership Styles – Mentoring and the Deconstruction of Binaries that Influence Women’s Access to the Superintendency

Project Director: Tiffany Perkins, [my email address], [my phone number]

To improve trustworthiness of the data, I will use Member Checking as a part of the methodology. I am interested in your feedback specific to the Results Draft. I have included the Results Draft as an attachment to this email for your convenience. If you prefer a hard copy, please reply to this email with the address you would like it sent. If you are willing to participate in the Member Checking process, please review the information below and complete the attached form and return it by Friday, January 31. If you are not interested in providing a Member Check, please respond to this email that you will not be providing one.

Pseudonym

- To receive your pseudonym by email, please send an email request and include the email address you would like it sent to [my email address]
- To receive your pseudonym by phone, please call Tiffany Perkins @ [my phone number] or send an email request to [my email address] with the phone number to contact you

Returning the Member Check Form (attached)

- To return the form electronically, please email completed form to [my email address] by Friday, January 31.
- To return the form via postal mail, please request a self-addressed stamped envelope by contacting me via email or phone and include the address you wish it to be sent.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. Thank you again for your invaluable participation. Have a wonderful evening.

Respectfully,

Tiffany A. Perkins

APPENDIX F

MEMBER CHECK FORM

Project Title: The Gendering of Educational Leadership Styles – Mentoring and the Deconstruction of Binaries that Influence Women’s Access to the Superintendency

Project Director: Tiffany Perkins, [my email address], [my phone number]

Member Check Overview

- Reviewing and providing feedback of the Results Draft is voluntary for participants
- An electronic version of the draft has been sent via email
- If a hard copy of the Results Draft is preferred, please send the mailing address you would like it sent to [my email address]
- Complete the Member Check Form and return to Tiffany Perkins by Friday, January 31, 2014 (optional)

Pseudonym

- To receive your pseudonym by email, please send request to [my email address] and specify the email address you would like it to be sent
- To receive your pseudonym by phone, please call Tiffany Perkins @ [my phone number] or send an email request to [my email address] with the phone number to contact you

Member Check Form (optional)

- To return the form electronically, please email completed form to [my email address] by Friday, January 31.
- To return via postal mail, please send a request for a self-addressed stamped envelope to [my email address] with the mailing address you would like it sent.

Date: _____

1. Please provide feedback on the results presented in the draft. What, if any, data may be misrepresented or not captured that you wish to be considered for revision?
2. Please provide any general feedback that should be considered regarding the Results Draft for the research study.