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Vision and Mission

Vision:
Organic. Creative. Professional. Engaging. Accessible.

Mission:
Leadership and Research in Education: The Journal of the OCPEA offers an academic forum for scholarly discussions of education, curriculum and pedagogy, leadership theory, and policy studies in order to elucidate effective practices for classrooms, schools, and communities.

The mission of the OCPEA journal is to not only publish high quality manuscripts on various political, societal, and policy-based issues in the field of education, but also to provide our authors with opportunities for growth through our extensive peer review process. We encourage graduate students, practitioners, and early career scholars to submit manuscripts, as well as senior faculty and administrators. We accept quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and action research based approaches as well as non-traditional and creative approaches to educational research and policy analysis, including the application of educational practices.

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Leadership and Research in Education: The Journal of the OCPEA accepts original manuscripts detailing issues facing teachers, administrators, and schools, including empirically based pieces, policy analysis, and theoretical contributions.

Submissions must include a one-hundred-word abstract and five keywords. Send one electronic copy of the manuscript to the editor using MS Word as well as a signed letter by the author(s) authorizing permission to publish the manuscript. Additionally, a separate cover page must be included containing the article title, author name(s), professional title(s), highest degree(s) obtained, institutional affiliation(s), email address(es), telephone and FAX numbers. Only the article title should appear on the subsequent pages to facilitate a triple-blind reviewing of the manuscript. Submissions should be approximately 15-20 pages including references. Submissions must align to the standards of the APA Manual (6th ed.). Submissions must be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font with one inch margins on all sides, each page numbered.

To submit materials for consideration, send one electronic copy of the manuscript and additional requested information to:

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The members of OCPEA are interested in pursuing various research paradigms and methodologies, ways to integrate scholarly research into classrooms, ways to support student research and participatory action research, and how to use educational research to influence public policy.

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Educational Administration

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A Note from the Editors

Kathy Crates, Co-editor
The University of Findlay

Welcome to the Special issue of Volume 4 of *Leadership and Research in Education: The Journal of the Ohio Council of Professors of Educational Administration* (OCPEA). *Leadership and Research in Education* is peer reviewed by members of the Ohio Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (OCPEA) and their colleagues.

OCPEA is honored to bring forth this important and timely publication and hope not only to inform readers with our work, but also to inspire practitioners, graduate students, novice and seasoned faculty members to write for our journal. Part of our mission is to mentor beginning scholars through the writing and publishing process. We would appreciate if our readers would pass on our mission, vision, and call for papers to graduate students and junior faculty, as well as to colleagues who are already experts in their fields.

OCPEA is pleased to present an eclectic mix of research and theoretical articles in this issue that are both timely and thought provoking for scholars and practitioners alike in the fields of education, curriculum and instruction, and educational leadership. The manuscripts in this special issue detail many of the current controversies faced by women in educational leadership, as we currently experience them.

Even though women have made great strides in recent years within the educational leadership arena, there are still inequities. In reality, the strides women have made in recent years have, in some ways, been a detriment to the progress of women in leadership. It is all too easy to simply say, "look how far they have come" and overlook the work still to be done.

This perspective is especially true for the highest of glass ceilings, such as school superintendents and university presidents. For those women who wish to move up the educational ladder to the highest levels, they must attain mentors and use every tool at their fingertips in order to succeed. It is our hope this special issue will serve as a piece of that professional development.

As always, we would like to acknowledge the many who have helped to shepherd *Leadership and Research in Education: The Journal of the Ohio Council of Professors of*

The Experiences of Women in Higher Education: Who Knew There Wasn't a Sisterhood?

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Abstract

The relationship challenges faced by women in leadership ranks within the academy are rarely researched. There is a dearth of research that explores the relationships between women in higher education settings and their colleagues, along with their ability to ascend to roles of leadership. Women have become well prepared to compete in the academy. However, many women in leadership roles in academia are not prepared for the lack of support and comradery from female colleagues. Using the personal stories of 34 female academic leaders, this research explores common experiences of relational aggression, perceived causes of these episodes, along with their perceptions of relationships with female colleagues in their respective institutions.

Keywords: relational aggression, higher education, queen bees, mean girls, sisterhood

INTRODUCTION

The number of women in the academy is on the rise. According to the *2010 Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession* published by the American Association of University Professors [AAUP], there is an increase of women who are tenured or on tenure track in higher education. Despite the increase, Williams (2004) documents the lack of progress they make once in higher education. A commonly noted roadblock to the upper ranks of leadership in higher education administration is the inability to shatter the glass ceiling (Washington, 2010). As the old male-dominated workplace has slowly begun to transform, Fortune 500 companies and government agencies had hoped that the rise of female leaders would create a gentler kind of office, based on communication, team building and personal development. But instead, some women are finding their professional lives dominated by high school "mean girls"–women with something to prove and a precarious sense of security–often leaving aspiring women leaders asking themselves, "Where is the sisterhood?"

To this end, using the theoretical framework of relational aggression (RA), the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore episodes of relational aggression, to understand the perceived causes of these episodes, and to examine the perceptions of relationships between female colleagues in their respective institutions. Moreover, our research questions were twofold: (1) How often are women in North Carolina colleges/universities experiencing relational aggression? and (2) How did the victims respond to the episodes of RA?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although more women are attending college and earning terminal degrees (West & Curtis, 2006), they are not attaining full professorships or upper administrative positions nearly as often as men. In 2008-09 women for the first time were awarded a greater percentage of doctoral degrees (50.4%) than men (Bell, 2010; NCES, 2016). Despite this increase, university faculty and administrators still do not reflect America's gender, racial, and class diversity (Funk, 2004). As reported by NCES (2016), in 2013 women composed 41% of all assistant, associate, and full professors in higher education institutions. Despite these encouraging numbers, women are not attaining full professorships or upper administrative position, such as president, as often as their male counterparts (Touchton, 2008).

With so few women at the highest university settings, why is it difficult for women who hold leadership positions to develop meaningful relationships with their female counterparts, and why is there not a sense of urgency to cultivate and maintain sisterhood amongst other females with similar leadership aspirations? Moreover, how can women who hold similar leadership aspirations diminish competitiveness or aggression and support their female counterparts? By drawing on Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers's (2015) research on the "queen bee" phenomena and Funk's 2000 relational aggression study, the review of literature contends women in leadership positions in the academy demonstrate behaviors that prevent the development of a sisterhood of comradery and support where all women can advance the leadership ladder in the academy.

The queen bee syndrome, first coined in the 1970s by researchers Staines, Tavris, and Jayaratne (1974), refers to the apparent tendency of token women in senior organizational positions to dissociate from members of their own gender and block other women's ascension in organizations. Derks et al. furthered the Staines et al. 1970 assertion by indicating (1) the queen bee behavior is a response to the discrimination and social identity threat that women may experience in male-dominated organizations, and (2) queen bee behavior is not a typically feminine response but part of a general self-group distancing response also found in other marginalized groups.

Despite this early research, the queen bee syndrome still thrives four decades later, continuing to be problematic for the women who aspire to academic leadership positions. This new generation of queen bees is no less determined to secure and maintain their hard-won places as alpha females. Nevertheless, further investigations of RA may yield a better assessment of whether the types of difficulties often associated with women by the media and popular culture are a more general fact of life faced by women in various organizational contexts (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013).

Far from nurturing the growth of younger female talent, queen bees push aside possible competitors by chipping away at their self-confidence or undermining their professional standing (Derks et al., 2011). It is a trend undergirded by irony: the very women who have complained for decades about unequal treatment from men now perpetuate many of the same problems by turning on other female colleagues. Findings from the *2014 Workplace Bully Institute Survey* (Namie, 2014) demonstrate that while there are fewer female perpetrators (females engaged in bullying behaviors) than male perpetuators (males engaged in bullying behaviors), female perpetuators target their female counterparts more: at a rate of 68% (Table 1). Table 1 provides the rate of male versus female perpetrators and the rate each gender group targets males and females.

Table 1: *Gender and the Bullying Experience in 2014*

Male Perpetrators	59 %
Male Perpetrators: Female Targets	57 %
Male Perpetrators: Male Targets	43 %
Female Perpetrators	31 %
Female Perpetrators: Female Targets	68 %
Female Perpetrators: Male Targets	32 %
Female Targets	60 %
Male Targets	40 %

Understanding Relational Aggression

Described as any behavior intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating relationships with others (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996), relational aggression or relational aggressive behaviors can be seen in female power struggles and encompass a range of emotionally hurtful behaviors (Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo, 2009). Theorists have argued that relational aggression is more prevalent in girls because they place a high value on friendships and mutually shared qualities (Apter & Josselson, 1998). Nilan (1991) describes girls' same-sex friendships as requiring a collectively agreed-upon moral order that includes caring, trust, and loyalty; girls who do not exhibit such qualities are at risk of exclusion from the group. When girls do not conform to the moral order, socially aggressive behaviors such as gossiping (Laird, 2003), social exclusion, social isolation, social alienation, and stealing friends or romantic partners often ensue (Crothers et al., 2009). These adolescent behavioral patterns often continue into adulthood (Sprecher, 2008).

Unlike other types of bullying, relational aggression is not as overt or noticeable as physical aggression. However, the effects can be long lasting. Namie's (2014) research, conducted at the Workplace Bullying Institute, indicates that women bullies choose women targets 68% of the time. Namie's study further revealed that 56% of perpetrators of relational aggressive behaviors were bosses; while 33% were peers or same level associates.

Both boys and girls intend to inflict harm, but there are differences in how they express these feelings (Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). Females tend to use more covert forms of aggression to express their anger (Arora & Stanley, 1998). The use of

confrontational strategies to achieve interpersonal damage, including deliberately ignoring someone, threatening to withdraw emotional support or friendship, and excluding someone from a group by informing her that she is not welcome are classic examples of covert forms of aggression (Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002). A few examples prominent in higher education settings are: blaming others for their problems rather than taking responsibility for actions, manipulating email communications to make oneself look good, taking credit for work completed by colleagues or students, dominating discussions within departmental or faculty meetings. (Thayer-Bacon, 2011).

Women in higher education, although increasing in numbers, experience difficulties in building and maintaining positive relationships with female colleagues. Experiences of RA or professional hazing serve as an underlying factor of this difficulty. Current literature does not include personal stories of women leaders in the academy who have experienced relational aggressive behaviors by their female counterparts and coping mechanisms employed. This study adds to the current body of knowledge by examining the relationships among women in the academy and providing a venue for RA victims to share their experiences.

METHODS

Study Sample

The overarching goal of this study was to characterize how women in college/university settings respond to episodes of RA when encountered. Females employed either in private or public 4-year colleges/universities at the ranks of assistant, associate, professor, mid-level administration (program directors and department chairs), or in administration completed a cross-sectional survey and participated in semi-structured interviews. A convenience sample of women participating in a leadership development program in North Carolina was used to generate 51 women who completed questionnaires. Thirty-four respondents (approximately 67%) expressed having experienced relational aggressive behavior toward them. These 34 respondents were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with the researchers. Nineteen of the 34 respondents agreed to be interviewed. Of the 34 respondents, 62% (n=21) had greater than 10 years of experience in higher education. The sample's racial composition was inclusive of 53% African Americans (n=18), 38% Caucasians (n=13), 3% Latino (n=1), and 3% Asian (n=1), while 3% (n=1) did not indicate race. Table 2 provides the range of ages for the study's

participants; Table 3 indicates the years of service at the subjects' respective institution along with their university responsibilities.

Table 2: *Participants' Ages*

Range of Ages	Percentages	Number of Participants (n=34)
> 50	21 %	7
41-50	47 %	16
30-40	24 %	8
Did Not Indicate	9 %	3

Table 3: *Years of Service and University Responsibilities*

University Responsibilities	Percentages	Number	Years of Service	Percentages	Number
Faculty	50	17	0-5	30	10
Department Chair	15	5	6-10	32	11
Program/Project Director	26	9	> 10	35	12
Deans/Asst. Dean	6	2	Did Not Indicate	3	1
Assistant Vice Chancellor or Vice Chancellor	3	1			
	N=100	N=34		N=100	N=34

Research Protocols

This study was conducted in two phases: Phase 1, questionnaire deployment and Phase 2, semi-structured interviews.

Phase 1: Questionnaires

During Phase 1, all participants (n=51) were asked to complete a 34-item questionnaire. The first 12 questions–provided in multiple choice format–requested demographic information from each participant. The remaining 22 open-ended questions queried participants on the following categories: institutional relationships, addressed in six

questions (e.g., describe relationships between your male and female colleagues and describe the relationship with your supervisor); institutional experiences, discussed in six questions (e.g., reception upon joining your institution or departmental orientation); while professional development and leadership style were the core of the remaining 10 questions. Participants were not constrained to the space on their questionnaires for their open-ended responses. Specifically, participants' responses pertaining to institutional experiences took precedence for this study.

Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews

The authors carried out semi-structured interviews either by telephone or face-to-face. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then entered into the MaxQDA software for coding and analysis. The specific interview questions used to examine participants' episodes of RA are displayed in Table 4. Study participants were asked: "Did you experience a 'hazing process' when you began your current position? If so, what did you experience and how did you handle it?" In practice, the characterizations of respondents as having experienced RA was not based on a single yes-or-no response to this question because the interviewers probed further for whether the respondent reported being hazed. Participants were not given a definition of RA prior to completing the questionnaire nor during the semi-structured interviews, but were encouraged to describe their experiences with extensive details.

Table 4: *Semi-Structured Interview Guide Questions*

1.	Did you experience a "hazing process" when you began your current position? If so, what did you experience and how did you handle it?
2.	What were the behaviors demonstrated toward you and what were your responses?
3.	Who were the aggressors?
4.	Why do you believe they were aggressive toward you?

Analytic Strategy

In this phase, we used the constant comparative method, moving iteratively between codes and text to derive themes related to episodes of hazing and the participant's response. A qualitative data analyses search was conducted to describe general statements about relationships and themes present in the data. Our goal was to triangulate the relationships between episodes of RA, to examine how these episodes were handled, and what, if any, was the impact of the on the relationship between the aggressor and the participant.

Originally developed for use in the grounded theory method of Strauss & Corbin (1998), this strategy involves taking one piece of data (e.g., one theme) and comparing it with all others that may be similar or different to develop conceptualizations of the possible relations between various pieces of data. During the process of developing themes, we focused our attention on responses to interview questions related to discussing Experiences at their Institution (Table 4). We then related themes to personal characteristics and whether the respondent described experiencing a "hazing process" and their response to the experience.

The researchers first analyzed the data through initial coding. This type of coding was chosen to examine, compare, and search for similarities and differences throughout the data, and as Charmaz (2006) contextualized, "to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data" (p. 46). The second-level coding was pattern coding. Pattern coding gave the researchers the basis to explain major themes beneath the segments of the data: patterns in human relationships, the search for causes and explanations to the possible phenomenon, and finally, the platform to construct frameworks and processes. To conclude, a triangulation of the patterns and themes created new levels for understanding the existing knowledge by reviewing the interviews in a comparative analysis with the previous two levels of coding (Saldaña, 2009).

Measures

Those women who affirmed that they had experienced aggressive treatment were asked to write a brief personal account describing an incident in which they experienced relational aggression. Furthermore, participants were asked to describe a time in the past year or two when a colleague or supervisor "hurt you by either sabotaging your project, excluding you from meetings or discussion, gossiping about, saying something mean behind your back, did anything" that demonstrated behaviors of relational aggressive behaviors. Participants were also asked to include the gender of the perpetrator and the relationship to the individual. To capture their coping strategies, the researchers also asked participants to explain how they handled it and what happened after the incident. The personal narratives that the participants noted provided the data used to analyze the relationships among women in leadership in the academy.

The information provided on the written portion of the questionnaire about the episodes of aggression were coded deductively using strategies listed in the item stem as potential codes. Categories for coding included: Exclusion/Ignoring; Gossiping/Spreading Rumors; Professional Sabotage; and Taking Credit for Others' Work. In addition to

deductive coding, the researchers allowed for inductive sub-coding and maintained a codebook to keep definitions consistent. These deductive codes were derived based upon empirical evidence that these are the most frequent forms of relational aggression in higher education settings (Galen & Underwood, 1997; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Merten, 1997). Both researchers coded all the narratives and identified four overarching themes that manifested as patterns of responses to RA: Avoidance or Kept to myself; Focusing on the goal; Retaliation or Defiance; and Self-blame. The following findings pertain to the patterns of the participants' responses in relation to RA and not to the nature of RA itself.

FINDINGS

After careful review of the interview transcripts, several reasons related to respondents' perceptions of why the RA behavior was directed toward them were revealed. This data is noted in Table 5.

Table 5: *RA Behaviors Demonstrated by Perpetrator*

Behaviors Demonstrated by Perpetrator	Number of Respondents (n=34)
Take over your meeting/projects; exclude from meetings, projects	4
Harassment, and personal attacks on character	5
Undermine or challenge my authority	8
Backstabbing to stop progress; providing erroneous information	5
Yelling, body language, talking down to you	9
Bullying, rude, not responding until you do something their way	3

Themes That Emerged from Semi-Structured Interviews

Several themes emerged from careful review of the transcripts. The researchers describe four major themes selected for clinical importance. The themes relate to the participants' responses to episodes of RA. Table 6 also shows the breakdown of respondents from the interviews (n=19) related to how they responded to the RA behaviors.

Table 6: *Response to RA Behavior*

Respondents' Actions	Number of Respondents (n=19)
Avoidance or Kept to Myself	6
Focusing on the Goal	6
Retaliation or Defiance	5
Self-Blame	2

Avoidance or kept to myself

Overwhelmingly, 30% of the participants acknowledged their feelings of avoidance toward the aggressor or the desire to keep to oneself in response to their episodes of relational aggression. For instance, one faculty member reported, "I had to learn things on my own...no one gave me a heads up on anything. Once I learned, then I just played the hand I was dealt, by myself." Another faculty member opined, "Quickly, I accepted I was never going to be a part of the clique and made the best of my situation." Another female lamented, "I didn't have anyone who I felt comfortable in sharing my experiences, so I never told anyone." A female leader likened her experience as, "Working here is a constant hazing process...sometimes the whole thing feels like hell. My involvement with campus and the department is limited." Another proclaimed, "The system here is set up such that you don't get in good with people until you do things their way. I had to learn everyone's system to get things done." These comments and other similar comments were the most common sentiments from participants.

Focusing on the goal

Several participants indicated their current employment situation was a means or a "stop along the way" for their next position or promotion, as explained in the response, "My purpose was planned prior to my getting to this university, so I have to remain focused." Another faculty member contended, "Hazing or not, I've got to remain focused and let my publications be the voice that I've been denied." Yet another explained, "This experience has helped me hone my skills and is preparing me for my next position." Focusing on the overall goal resonated with about 15% of the participants.

Retaliation or defiance

Some participants disclosed their use of defiance or retaliation as the response to RA experiences. This was evidenced by the response, "I got angry and told some people off, and I let my work speak for me." A similar comment was "No one in the department was getting articles published as quickly as me, so let them say what they want." An

assistant vice chancellor spoke of "Being in a meeting and being told 'You are new and you don't know what to do. So, let me tell you.' I addressed it, and I didn't have to deal with things like that again." A program coordinator made it known, "I hazed right back to let them know I could not be intimidated." Participants demonstrating retaliation as a coping mechanism was reported by faculty members, mid-level administrators, and senior-level administrators.

Self-blame

Three participants responded to their experience with self-blame. The personal narratives included comments such as, "I get in my car and unload to myself or on the phone to a trusted friend (not affiliated with the university) about how I could have handled the situation differently," and "I believe my steps are ordered, despite being in the situation, I just need to learn how to be more of a team player." These were the most common responses of participants who blamed themselves. One participant indicated not working to her true potential as an answer to end the aggressor's actions.

DISCUSSION

Although there is a dearth of research examining women in higher educations' experiences with RA, professional sabotage, and the lack of support from other women, our data suggest that these are important areas of exploration. Despite an increase in women as leaders in the higher education sector, women are still a minority in the academy and hold significantly fewer higher-level leadership positions. Even so, many women still see each other as competitors and may not celebrate the accomplishments of their sisters. These sentiments were echoed by the study's participants. Surprisingly, the researchers were not expecting the reluctance of some participants to share their experiences. Concerns of reprisal were noted as the cause of such reluctance.

Results from the study support several findings of past research. The most frequently occurring behaviors identified by participants as aggressive actions parallel those defined by Funk (2000) as *horizontal violence*, often synonymously used with RA. Many of Funk's respondents indicated that they were victims because the aggressor was threatened by their abilities or because the victim was promoted to a position that she and the aggressor were competing for. More importantly, many believed that the aggressor saw the victim as having not "paid her dues" or earned the position. The explanation of this rationale for the behavior further supports Funk's (2004) notion that such that females and other minority groups

become angered because of their lack of power and take out their discontent on other oppressed women.

Another common reason our study participants cited for the behavior exhibited by aggressors involve the aggressor's lack of self-confidence in her abilities and job performance. This finding coincides with Dettinger and Hart's (2007) notion that aggressive behaviors by women toward other women strongly correlate with issues of self-esteem or self-worth. Our results indicate that despite experiencing episodes of RA, many participants experienced job satisfaction and maintained high ratings in the area of self-confidence in their overall job performance. This outcome, fortunately, is in direct contradiction to Dettinger and Hart's (2007) study concluding that the behaviors associated with indirect aggression often have negative ramifications on the self-confidence of the victims.

The subjects' responses offered when asked to identify the primary aggressor strongly align with Dellasega's (2005) study, in that the primary aggressors were females. Interestingly, for those who identified women as the aggressors, many participants elected to still describe their relationships with women as being collegial or situational. But the high percentage of those being hazed indicates a contradiction to the actual existence of collegial relationships with female counterparts. Participants recognized that they had experienced inappropriate behaviors, however; it can be hypothesized that their experiences were not deemed blatant enough to be categorized as extreme experiences of relational aggression. The researchers also hypothesized that participants developed social avoidance as a coping strategy and the ability to code switch when in situations of "collegial" relationships. Enduring the aggressive behaviors of female colleagues can be characterized as one of the hurdles to be crossed if the goal was to work and experience success in a predominately-male environment.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the occurrence of and responses to relational aggression for women working in higher education. The results from this study indicate that women—particularly African American women—are highly susceptible to episodes of aggression at the hands of other females. This result aligns with Easterly & Richard's (2011) assertion that unconscious bias and, at times, aggression may be attributed to why women leave the Ivory Tower. The perpetrators of these episodes vary from female colleagues to female supervisors, using a myriad of aggressive behaviors.

This study further purported to define relational aggression by indicating specific behaviors exhibited by the oppressors or aggressors, along with discussing the onset of these behaviors for women in the academia. From this study, the most commonly exhibited behaviors during episodes of RA include: attempts to sabotage professional work, the consistent undermining or challenging of authority, personal verbal attacks, negative and/or overt body language, and ongoing challenges of authority.

This research offers a reflective perspective of how RA impacts the professional relationships of women. While using the research of Laird's 2003 study as the guiding premise for how the concept of befriending may help promote collegial relationships and camaraderie, the results of this study did not corroborate that employing the befriending concepts assisted with the improvement of professional relationships with fellow female colleagues. Understandably, the study's limitation is the use of convenience sampling and the geographic location of the research; however, this study holds significance for women who aspire to ascend to leadership roles in higher education. More importantly, these women must understand that someone of the same gender does not necessarily equate to someone being an advocate.

Next, current higher education administrators (e.g. deans, associate deans and department chairs) can ascertain the importance of mentorship or support groups, as this study also confirms the need for greater explorations by feminists or women advocacy groups whose focal point is women in higher education. Moreover, more research is warranted to examine which of the themes—avoidance, focusing on the goal, retaliation or defiance, or self-blame—is the most productive and which one could be most detrimental to the successful professional trajectory of women aspiring to or currently working in higher education. Further research should also include an examination of the use of mentors for women working in the higher education arena and continued research on self-confidence and pertinent skills necessary for promotion to upper level administrative positions. Additional attention should be given to the leadership styles of women in higher education and those styles that assist women to be successful in higher education.

In sum, it is important to reexamine our assumptions and tread carefully so as not to create or exacerbate the very problem being addressed in this research. The perception that women have difficulties working with one another, regardless of whether based on fact or fiction, could have negative work-related consequences for women. For example, an administrator who subscribes to this notion—and who finds support from academic discussions on the subject—might decide against selecting a woman for a coveted project or position in a work group if there is already a female member in the group for fear that

the cohesion of the group will decline as a result. For these reasons, an examination of the available evidence and a discussion of future directions are long overdue. Only then can women aspiring to leadership and full professorships recognize the benefits of having positive professional relationships with other female colleagues.

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Gendered Microaggressions in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

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Abstract

Women remain underrepresented in both science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce and academia. In this quantitative study, we focused on female faculty across STEM disciplines and their experiences in higher educational institutions through the lens of microaggressions theory. Two questions were addressed: (a) whether and to what degree female faculty in STEM fields experience various types of gendered microaggressions and (b) whether such experience differ based on participants' position rankings. Data were collected from tenured (including tenure-track) and non-tenure-track female instructional and clinical faculty in a broad range of STEM disciplines at a large Midwestern land grant research university (N=102), using two adapted instruments. The results revealed that female faculty participants experienced four different types of gendered microaggressions: sexual objectification, being silenced and marginalized, strong woman, and workplace microaggressions. Multivariate analysis further showed that position ranking did not statistically predict faculty experiences with gendered microaggressions, indicating that gendered microaggressions were experienced by women faculty regardless of the stages of their faculty career. Implications and the need for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: women, faculty, gendered microaggressions, STEM career, higher education

Female faculty in American colleges and universities experience environmental, interpersonal, and systemic barriers to their participation, academic success, and professional advancement over the course of their careers (National Science Foundation, 2013). Frequently, these occupational, environmental, and interpersonal barriers take the form of gender bias. Bias begins as preconceptions about women as faculty members and their capacity to engage in research and to perform other academic duties of the academy. Such perceptions, and their resultant offensive and oppressive behaviors, impact how women are hired, retained, and promoted. Gender bias adds an additional barrier to those academic areas where the representation of women is low, such as most science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009; Preston, 2004; Rosser, 2006).

Complicating these systemic barriers are significant disparities for female students completing both undergraduate and graduate degrees in STEM areas (National Science Foundation, 2013). While women are earning college degrees in higher percentages than ever, a decline in the percentage of women earning degrees in STEM fields still exists (National Science Foundation, 2013). Such disparity persists after degree completion. Recent data show that women are underrepresented in both the STEM workforce and academia (Nelson & Brammer, 2010; Valantine & Collins, 2015). While some engineering and biological science disciplines show increased numbers of women among assistant professors (Yoder, 2014), fewer women are reaching full professor positions (Nelson & Brammer, 2010). For example, data have shown that in the top 100 departments of science disciplines, the female assistant professors in chemistry and earth sciences are 21.2% and 28.2% respectively; whereas, the female full professors in these two fields are only 13.7% and 16.5% respectively (Nelson & Brammer, 2010). Remediating these systemic barriers for women in STEM fields are of the upmost importance as the problem speaks directly to the creation of future scholars and leaders who can drive national economic growth in the years ahead (Agénor & Canuto, 2013).

This study focuses on female faculty across STEM disciplines and their experiences in higher educational institutions through the lens of microaggressions theory. According to this theory, underrepresented groups, such as women in traditionally male-dominant STEM disciplines, are most likely to experience subtle bias and discrimination based on their identities as women (Sue, 2010). This study examines (a) whether and to what degree female faculty in STEM fields experience various types of gendered microaggressions, and (b) whether such experiences differ based on participants' position rankings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gendered Microaggressions

While systemic sexism has become less frequent in U.S. society, subtle biases still exist and remain stubbornly so. A growing body of research has identified such subtle discrimination as *microaggressions*, which are nuanced forms of insulting, disrespectful communications that occur during everyday exchanges (Sue & Sue, 2008). Microaggressions are actions directed at individuals from various identity groups who are underrepresented or marginalized including race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or persons with disability (Nadal, 2011; Sue et al., 2008).

Over the last fifteen years, researchers have reframed and extended microaggressions theory to examine subtle sexism and sex-based discrimination against women (Alexander & Hermann, 2016; Capodilupo, et al., 2010; Nadal, 2009). *Gendered microaggressions* are nuanced and brief everyday exchanges that communicate sexist denigration and slights toward women (Nadal, 2010) and are conveyed verbally and/or nonverbally through facial expression, gaze, and other gestures. They are subtle, often expressed unconsciously, and can cause psychological harm or discomfort toward women (Capodilupo, et al., 2010).

Theorists have proposed gendered microaggressions as a multiple-dimensional construct. For example, Nadal (2010) categorize gendered microaggressions into three forms: (a) gender micro-assaults (e.g., blatant sexist slur or catcalling); (b) gender micro-insults (e.g., subtle negative communication about women); and (c) gender micro-invalidations (e.g., subtle communication that dismisses or devalue women's thoughts or feelings). These three forms vary in their degree of subtlety, with gender micro-assaults being the least subtle, and in their level of harm, with gender micro-invalidations most harmful.

Sue and Capodilupo (2008) propose a six-dimensional gendered microaggressions model to explain the various ways that women experience such harmful, gender-biased communication. These dimensions include: (a) sexually objectifying women, (b) second-class citizen, (c) assumptions of inferiority, (d) denial of the reality of sexism, (e) assumptions of traditional gender roles, and (f) use of sexist language (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008; Capodilupo et al., 2010). Taken together, these models suggest that gendered microaggressions encompass a range of manifestations or offenses with a variety of severity and ambiguity.

A growing body of research has examined women students' and faculty members' encounters with gendered microaggressions in educational settings (Congleton, 2013;

Moors, Malley, & Stewart, 2014; Riffle et al., 2013). These studies show that gendered microaggressions cause detrimental consequences to women's psychological and behavioral health, as well as to their careers (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Crosby & Sprock, 2004). Additionally, research in clinical settings has shown that therapists' gendered microaggressions have negative influences on female clients' well-being (Owen, Tao, & Rodolfa, 2010).

Research on Gender-Based Discrimination in STEM

Researchers have examined gender-based discrimination in STEM fields using different theoretical frameworks. The most well-known theory is implicit gender bias, which is based on the assumption that women are less capable than men in math and science fields (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Meadows, 2013; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Implicit gender bias has been repeatedly shown to negatively influences women's: (a) intent and motivation to pursue education and careers in STEM fields, (b) employment in STEM fields, and (c) performance evaluations and career advancement in STEM fields (Beddoes, Schimpf, & Pawley, 2015; Boring, Ottoboni, & Stark, 2016; Constant & Bird, 2009; Eccles, 1987; Meadows, 2013; Steele, 1998). For example, in a randomized double-blind study, researchers found that female applicants for a science laboratory manager position were evaluated to be less qualified and hirable than when the identical application materials were submitted under a male name (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). Furthermore, the selected male applicants were offered a higher starting salary and more mentoring than the selected female applicants (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012).

At the systematic level, researchers have looked at gender bias in the institutional environment or climate. It has been suggested that the chilly climate within a STEM work environment pushes women away from STEM fields or interferes with their thriving in these fields (Hall & Sandler, 1982). Studies find that women are seen as untrustworthy STEM experts, do not fit the STEM environment, and are either marginalized or excluded from STEM networks (Beddoes, K., & Pawley, 2013; Colyar, 2008; Hitchcock, Bland, Hekelman, & Blumenthal, 1995).

Social role theory (Eagly, 1987), as well as a number of other theories (e.g., Beach, 1990; Diekman & Steinberg, 2013; Gottfredson, 1981; Mahalik, Perry, Coonerty-Femiano, Catraio, & Land, 2006), examine gender-based discrimination from a sociological perspective. Social role theorists propose that each social position or role (e.g., mother, women) is defined by a set of expectations, norms, and behaviors. When individuals violate

social norms associated with a role, certain costs or social punishment will likely incur (Diekman & Steinberg, 2013; Eagly, 1987).

Women are expected to be nurturing, supportive, people oriented, and communal, according to social gender roles. Thus, they should be drawn to disciplines that are consistent with these gender roles, such as teaching and nursing (Diekman & Eagly, 2011; Diekman & Steinberg, 2013). By contrast, STEM fields are associated with masculine social norms such as being competitive, decisive, ambitious, risk-taking, and agentic (Yang & Barth, 2015). Thus when women enter STEM fields, they often experience contradictory expectations carried out by the scientist role (competitive and agentic) and the typical feminine gender roles (nurturing and communal), known as role conflict (Diekman & Steinberg, 2013; Yang & Barth, 2015). In other words, women who choose STEM fields are punished by violating social gender norms. This explanation has been used to explain why post-baccalaureate women leave the STEM workforce, as well as why women leaders are being evaluated less favorably than men in leadership positions (Ceci et al., 2009; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013).

Gendered microaggressions is a relative new theory, but hardly a new occurrence in higher education. Not surprisingly, there are limited studies using microaggressions theory to examine gender-based discrimination in STEM fields, with only a few exceptions. Several studies have examined the experiences of women in STEM disciplines, including students and professionals in STEM careers, and found that women in general and women of color especially experience a certain type of gendered microaggressions, specifically, feeling unwelcome or excluded in STEM spaces across life stages (Faulkner, 2009; Thomas et al., 2016).

McLoughlin uses the concept *spotlighting* to understand various types of gender bias in engineering fields. Spotlighting is the act of "singling out of women by gender in ways that make them uncomfortable" (McLoughlin, 2005, p. 1). Similar to gendered microaggressions, spotlighting is multi-dimensional. Three types of spotlighting or microaggressions were found against female students in engineering. The first type is sexual objectification or overtly sexist comments that are intended to make women uncomfortable. The second type is singling out women with neutral intention, such as using the pronoun "he" generically when referring to engineers or scientists, an action that makes women feel left out or unwelcomed. The third type is singling out women with the intention to help them, a practice that infers that women are less capable, thus need additional help (McLoughlin, 2005).

Microaggressions targeted toward women occur with similar frequency and occurrence. Faculty women in colleges and universities are hardly immune to such victimization. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine gendered microaggressions among a group of female faculty across STEM fields at a Midwestern research university.

METHOD

Participants

Data were collected from women representing tenured, untenured tenure-track, and non-tenure track instructional and clinical faculty in a broad range of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines at a large Midwestern land grant research university. STEM discipines were chosen since most of these disciplines (except biology-based fields) are male-dominant, and female faculty in these disciplines, as an underrepresented group, are most likely to experience and/or witness subtle microaggression and gender-based discrmination (Sue, 2010). The chosen STEM disciplines were defined by the National Science Foundation (NSF, 2012) and included Aerospace Studies, Agriculture, Architecture, Aviation Technology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics, Biology, Chemistry, Economics. Engineering, Geography, Geology, Kinesiology, Mathematics, Physics, Statistics, and Veterinary Medicine. A total of 259 female faculty across mutiple campuses at the institution were recruited to participate in this study.

Procedure

With Institutional Review Board approval, we acquired email addresses of potential participants from the university's planning and analysis office. An internet survey procedure was utilized (Dillman, 2000). Participants were recruited by an introductory e-mail correspondence that invited their participation. This was followed days later by the electronic survey email, a follow-up e-mail, and a final debriefing correspondence.

The data were gathered using a Qualtrics online questionnaire. On the first page of the Qualtrics questionnaire the researchers provided the consent information in written form including the purpose of the study, risks and benefits of participation, their rights as participants, and contact information should they have any questions or concerns. Faculty wishing to participate in the study continued to fill out the questionniare at their own pace. Most participants took about 15 minutes to complete it. Upon their completion, the participants were immediately shown debriefing statements with detailed explanation of the study. Participants' responses remained confidential and anonymous.

Instruments

Our goal was to utilize existing instruments that captured the multi-dimensional nature of gendered microaggressions. While several quantitative measurements have been established to gauge individuals' perceptions of racial/ethnic microaggressions (Nadal, 2011; Sue et al., 2008), few assess women's perceptions of gendered microaggressions with the exception of Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (GRMS; Lewis & Neville, 2015) and Microaggressions Against Women Scale (MAWS; Owen et al., 2010). MAWS is a unidimensional scale created exclusively for therapists and counselors in counseling settings, and thus did not lend itself for use in non-clinical settings. The former GRMS is most appropriate and, therefore, was adapted for the current study.

The Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (GRMS) was developed to evaluate the gendered and racial microaggressions experiences of African-American women exclusively (Lewis & Neville, 2015). The 25-item instrument yields four independent factors: (a) sexual objectification (Cronbach's α = .85), representing assumptions and stereotypes of physical attractiveness; (b) silenced and marginalized (Cronbach's α = .88), referring to being silenced and marginalized in various settings; (c) strong woman (Cronbach's α = .74), referring to being considered too independent and assertive; and (d) angry Black woman (Cronbach's α = .79), representing the stereotype of an angry Black woman. GRMS has shown strong reliability and validity evidences (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Since the purpose of the current study is to examine women of all ethnic groups, we used only the first three factors: (a) sexual objectification, including seven items, (b) silenced and marginalized, including seven items, and (c) strong woman, including four items.

We recognize that the GRMS instrument does not include one dimension of microaggression that is critical to the setting of our particular study, given the socio-cultural beliefs about women in STEM disciplines, namely *workplace microaggressions*. To address this, we included another well-established instrument, Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS; Nadal, 2011). REMS measures the microaggressions that people of color experience in their everyday lives and includes six independent factors: (a) assumptions of inferiority (Cronbach's α = .89); (b) second-class citizen and assumptions of criminality (Cronbach's α = .88); (c) microinvalidations (Cronbach's α = .89); (d) exoticization/assumptions of similarity (Cronbach's α = .85); (e) environmental microaggressions (Cronbach's α = .85); and (f) workplace microaggressions (Cronbach's α = .85). The reliability and validity of REMS has been well documented (Nadal, 2011; Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014), and for the purposes of the current study, items

related to race were adapted to apply to the experiences of women. For example, "An employer was unfriendly toward me because of my race," was reworded to, "An employer was unfriendly toward me because of my gender."

Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with each statement regarding gender-based microaggression events on a 7-point scale (1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree). The score on each type of gendered microaggressions was calculated by averaging all items in a particular factor. It ranged between 1~7, with a higher score indicating a higher level of agreement with the experiences being addressed. Additionally, participants were asked to identify their position ranking (e.g., assistant professor, instructor, etc.).

RESULTS

Experiences of Various Types of Gendered Microaggressions

We first examined whether, and to what degree, female faculty in STEM fields experienced four types of gendered microaggressions: (a) sexual objectification, (b) silenced and marginalized, (c) strong woman, and (d) workplace microaggressions. Out of the 102 participants who completed the survey, nine participants had missing data and thus were excluded from the data analyses. Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliability Coefficient Alpha for Four Types of Gendered Microaggressions*

Type of Microaggressions	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Sexual objectification	3.24	1.98	.91
Silenced and marginalized	3.74	2.07	.95
Strong woman	4.16	1.71	.88
Workplace microaggressions	3.71	2.14	.95

There are 7 items in the construct "sexual objectification;" each item is one form of sexual objectification. On *sexual objectification*, 31% of the respondents reported they had been objectified on their physical appearance or experienced stereotypes of women (had an average of 4 on all 7 items combined). In addition, 73% of women in the sample reported

experiencing at least one form of sexual objectification (e.g., a value greater than 4 on at least one item).

On *silenced and marginalized*, 76.3% of women had a confirmatory answer (a value greater than 4) on at least one of the 7 items, indicating that they had experienced at least one form of being silenced and/or marginalized (e.g., "Someone has tried to 'put me in my place' in a professional setting"). Nearly half (47%) of the respondents had an average of 4 on all 7 items combined, indicating that they had been ignored in a professional setting or challenged regarding their authority.

On *strong woman,* 40% of the participants reported being told she was too independent or too sassy. Additionally, 76.3% of women in the sample reported experiencing at least one comment that fits the strong-woman microaggression type (e.g., "I have been told that I am too assertive as a woman"). On *workplace microaggressions,* 44% of the respondents reported being treated unfairly at work. In addition, 68.8% of women in the sample reported experiencing at least one form of workplace microaggressions (e.g., "Someone assumed my work would be inferior to men's work").

Position Rankings and Experiences of Gendered Microaggressions

We further examined whether the experience of gendered microaggressions can be attributed to participants' professional position rankings; in other words, whether or not female faculty with different position rankings differ in their experiences of gendered microaggressions. Participants' position rankings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Participants' Position Ranking*

Position Ranking	Instructor	Clinical Professor	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Full Professor	Missing
Frequency	15	7	25	24	15	7
Percentage	16.1%	7.5%	26.9%	25.8%	16.1%	7.5%

All statistical assumptions were checked and have been met. A MANOVA test was then conducted on four types of gendered microaggressions using position ranking as the predictor. Since only seven participants self-identified as clinical professors, we excluded these seven cases from the analysis, given the small sample size of clinical professors. Table 3 presents the average ratings of gendered microaggressions by position rankings. The test was not statistically significant, $F(3, 75) = 1.19$, $p = .29$, Wilk's $\lambda = .826$, $\eta_p^2 = .062$,

indicating position ranking is not a meaningful predictor of gendered microaggressions. In other words, female faculty across different levels of rankings have experienced gendered microaggressions in a similar way.

Table 3. *Means and Standard Deviations on Four Types of Gendered Microaggressions by Position Ranking*

Type of Microaggressions	Instructor	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Full Professor
Sexual objectification	3.08	3.12	3.22	4.32
	(1.89)	(2.05)	(2.08)	(1.77)
Silenced and marginalized	3.11	3.67	3.67	5.10
	(1.92)	(2.14)	(2.15)	(1.72)
Strong woman	4.30	3.98	3.74	4.30
	(2.11)	(1.72)	(2.17)	(1.36)
Workplace microaggressions	3.32	3.46	3.70	4.90
	(2.03)	(2.24)	(2.23)	(1.80)

Note: For each entry, means are presented on top, standard deviations are in parentheses and N is on the bottom. Scores ranged from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating higher interest.

In summary, many female faculty participants in the study reported that they experienced different types of gendered microaggressions. Furthermore, the comparison among faculty of different rankings yielded non-statistically signficant results, indicating that gendered microaggressions were experienced by women faculty regardless of the stages of their faculty career.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide a glimpse into the ways in which female faculty experience gendered microaggressions. Female STEM faculty did experience gendered microaggression comments that fit each of the four types of gendered microaggressions. Despite the small number of participants in this study, the fact remains that STEM faculty women do experience gendered microaggressions in their daily work environments on college campuses. The non-significant finding of using position ranking to predict gendered

microaggressions experiences has practical importance for college administrators. STEM faculty women across different stages of career rankings all experienced gendered microaggressions. This finding suggests a need for colleges and universities to examine and deconstruct the culture in which women faculty experience gendered microaggressions. If gendered microaggressions exist in campus cultures, then college and university administrators must understand how their occurrences change as women move along the professorial ranks.

Additionally, college administrators will want to know how such experiences affect female faculty's well-being and subsequent career advancement. Colleges and universities are hiring faculty in a variety of new positions, including clinical and research appointments, term [non-tenure track] faculty appointments, and adjunct positions (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2015; Selinger, 2016). Given the ways in which faculty positions are being redefined, the need for ongoing research on gendered microaggressions across all types of faculty positions in the academy is amplified.

Future research is needed to understand how faculty position, age, and race intersect to influence the occurrence and type of gendered microaggressions given the growing demographics of female STEM faculty (Nelson & Brammer, 2010; Yoder, 2014). The current study focused largely on faculty position, and the sample size was insufficient to examine other demographic characteristics.

Given the detrimental consequences of gendered microaggressions, educational institutions are increasing their efforts to disrupt the gender inequality within work and learning environments in various ways. Many institutions have institutionalized evidence-based training or workshops for faculty, administrators, and leaders; are offering informal faculty learning communities and networking; and establishing professional career coaching. Others have initiated gender equity practices in recruitment, hiring, and promotion to support and retain women through promotion and tenure process. Research on gendered microaggressions would inform colleges and universities about classroom and campus climate issues that interfere with faculty women's success and productivity. Such research is essential to help college administrators revise conduct policies and inform human capital professionals about ways to manage microaggressions in all forms.

Gendered microaggressions are complex, nuanced, offensive behaviors against female faculty that interfere with their work and create an unproductice and offensive climate. College and universities must recognize these offensive behaviors and find ways to manage their presence and frequency of occurrence so that classrooms, laboratories, and workforces remain open learning spaces for female faculty to thrive and grow.

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Women's Satisfaction in the Superintendency: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of female superintendents as they relate to job satisfaction and retention. State department of education websites were consulted to obtain the number of women superintendents by state for 2015. From the list, 3,364 women superintendents were identified. The women represent 25% of U.S. superintendents. Women superintendents of five states with percentages of women superintendents below the national average were selected for inclusion in the study.

An explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was used that included a survey sent to all 215 PK-12 women public school superintendents in South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and Iowa. Based on the survey findings, the women superintendents reported high levels of job satisfaction. Based on the survey results, 20 women superintendents, who reported high levels of job satisfaction, were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Both the quantitative and qualitative results indicated high levels of satisfaction by the women. Women consistently described the position as being rewarding. Women identified aspects of the position that contributed to their satisfaction: being strategic and creating a vision; instructional leadership; building relationships; developing others; and the variety of tasks.

Keywords: women as superintendents, female superintendent satisfaction, educational leadership, women, superintendency

Education is a female-dominated field. According to the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey, more than 75% of all teachers are women (U.S. Department of Education, 2011-12b). Additionally, slightly more than half of all public school principals are women (U.S. Department of Education, 2011-12a). However, the role of the superintendent continues to be disproportionally held by men. According to the American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study, less than a quarter of superintendents are women (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011).

Previous research on women and the superintendency has largely focused on the challenges and barriers that women face. Little research has explored female superintendents' job satisfaction or why they have chosen to remain in this challenging role. The purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of female superintendents as they relate to job satisfaction and retention. A mixed methods approach was used that included both qualitative and quantitative data collection (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A survey was designed to elicit women superintendents' responses to their satisfaction in their roles. The survey results were further illuminated by follow-up interviews with 20 of the superintendents. The study was focused solely on the issue of satisfaction. This study expands on previous research pertaining to women and the superintendency, as well as adding new voices to the literature.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addressed a number of different research questions.

Quantitative:

- To what extent are female superintendents satisfied with their jobs?
- In what areas do female superintendents find high levels of satisfaction in their jobs?
- In what areas do female superintendents identify low levels of job satisfaction?

Qualitative:

- How do female superintendents describe their level of job satisfaction?
- How do female superintendents with high levels of job satisfaction describe their decisions to stay?
- How do female superintendents deal with the stresses and challenges of the position?

Mixed Methods:

- Do the factors that female superintendents identify as being important to them relate to their overall level of job satisfaction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has examined the barriers that women experience when seeking the position as superintendent (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009; FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Quilantan & Ochoa, 2004 Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004) and the challenges that face women once they obtain the position (Garn & Brown, 2008; Reed & Patterson, 2007; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Polka, Litchka & Davis, 2008; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009). Women who aspire to the superintendency are often confronted with challenges from the start. Research has found that women often lack the social networks that help many men find these positions (Garn & Brown, 2008; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Sharp, Malone, Montz, Mills, Paankake, & Whaley, 2014; Seyfried & Diamantes, 2005; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009; Walter & Supley, 2004) In part because there are fewer women in the field, women who aspire to the superintendency lack role models and mentors as they pursue these positions (Garn & Brown, 2008; Munoz, Mills, Pankake, & Whaley, 2014). Research has also found that women many times follow different career paths than men, often entering administrative positions later in their careers (Fekula & Roberts, 2005; Garn & Brown, 2008; Munoz, Mills, Pankake, & Whaley, 2014).

For those women who do obtain a superintendent's position, they continue to face a number of challenges. Research shows that women are more likely to accept positions in smaller districts and those that have specific kinds of challenges (Montz & Wanat, 2008). These challenges can include financial concerns or troubled boards. Women also are confronted with the stress inherent in the role. Research has documented that increased federal mandates and a push to do more with less has increased the pressure in an already stressful role (Hawk & Martin, 2011; Kolowski, McCord, Petersen, Young & Ellerson, 2011; Reed & Patterson, 2007). Finally, many women report that they are confronted with gender bias and gender stereotypes from both board members and the larger community (Garn & Brown, 2008; Sampson & Davenport, 2010; Seyfried & Diamantes, 2005; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009)

The literature on female superintendents and their satisfaction in their roles is sparse and many are not recent. The literature on women in the superintendency includes a number of studies of the demographics of women in the superintendency and the challenges and barriers they experience. Few studies cite the topic of satisfaction in the role, these studies are not recent. For instance, Wesson and Grady (1994) report a study of urban female superintendents and their satisfaction, personal benefits of the job, self-fulfillment, and

personal strengths. Fusarelli, Cooper, Bruce and Carella (2003) report that women superintendents found career satisfaction in the nation's largest schools.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of female superintendents as they relate to job satisfaction and retention. An explanatory sequential mixed method study design was used to address the purpose of the study.

EXPLANATORY SEQUENTIAL DESIGN

In an explanatory sequential design, there are two distinct phases, an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Since we were concerned with interviewing women who thrive in the position, the initial quantitative results provided a pool from which a purposeful sample of superintendents to be selected.

Quantitative Survey

The first step in determining participants was to examine 2015 national data. The fifty State Departments of Education were contacted in order to obtain a list of all current superintendents. Superintendents of all public districts were included; charter schools were not included. A list of the 13,474 superintendents was created. From the list, the 3,364 female superintendents were identified. In Table 1, the total number of superintendents and the number and percentage of female superintendents by state, based on 2015 data, are presented. At that time, 25% of the superintendents in the United States were women.

When selecting states to include in the study, states with percentages of women superintendents that were less than the national average were considered. Five states were selected for the study (Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, and South Dakota). These states had fewer female superintendents, based on percentages, than the national average (25%). Also, these states were within a geographic region that would allow the researcher to conduct in-depth, in person interviews during the second qualitative phase. Although there are a variety of school district configurations in the US, the superintendents chosen for inclusion in the study led districts that were PK-12 or K-12.

Although there were 235 women superintendents at the time the 2015 national data was examined, at the time of the survey distribution, only 215 women remained in the role of superintendent in the identified five states. The 215 female superintendents in Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, and South Dakota were sent a survey via the internet. The survey was developed based on Fowler's (2014) guidelines. The data collection platform Qualtrics was used for distribution, data collection, and analysis of results. An email to the

female superintendents provided a link to the survey. Of the 215 superintendents contacted, 132 responded, and 131 (61%) completed the survey.

The survey was based on the research literature concerning female superintendents (Polka, Litchka, & Davis, 2008; Sampson & Davenport, 2010; Seyfried & Diamantes, 2005; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004) and the specific topics discussed by Helgesen and Johnson's (2010) in *The Female Vision*. The survey had three sections. The first section solicited demographic information from the superintendents. The second section included questions related to job satisfaction. The third section consisted of statements related to general satisfaction and feelings about the role of the superintendent.

Once surveys were completed, data was analyzed using the reports feature of Qualtrics. Descriptive statistics, based on the survey responses, were collected. Mean, median, and standard deviations were calculated. The overall level of job satisfaction for the respondents as well as a frequency analysis of individual items was collected.

Table 1: *Female Superintendents by State*

State	Female Superintendents	Total Superintendents	Percentage of Female Superintendents
Connecticut	63	165	38%
Maryland	9	24	38%
Rhode Island	13	34	38%
Delaware	7	19	37%
New Hampshire	36	97	37%
West Virginia	21	57	37%
California	374	1028	36%
Arizona	76	217	35%
Vermont	21	60	35%
New York	243	719	34%
Hawaii	5	15	33%
New Jersey	193	592	33%
Georgia	53	180	29%
South Carolina	25	86	29%
Massachusetts	115	408	28%
Pennsylvania	138	500	28%
Washington	84	297	28%
Florida	18	67	27%
Tennessee	40	146	27%
Virginia	35	131	27%
New Mexico	23	89	26%
Wisconsin	109	424	26%
Illinois	212	856	25%
Michigan	151	597	25%
Mississippi	38	155	25%
Alabama	32	135	24%
Alaska	13	54	24%
Colorado	42	178	24%
Maine	56	242	23%
Minnesota	77	328	23%

State	Female Superintendents	Total Superintendents	Percentage of Female Superintendents
North Carolina	26	115	23%
Oregon	45	197	23%
Texas	278	1198	23%
Indiana	64	297	22%
Louisiana	15	69	22%
Arkansas	51	257	20%
Idaho	23	115	20%
Kentucky	34	173	20%
Montana	32	157	20%
Oklahoma	96	518	19%
Missouri	96	532	18%
North Dakota	30	176	17%
South Dakota	25	150	17%
Wyoming	8	48	17%
Ohio	99	613	16%
Kansas	44	293	15%
Iowa	44	363	12%
Nevada	2	17	12%
Nebraska	26	245	11%
Utah	4	41	10%
National Totals	3364	13474	25%

Note. Data obtained from each state's department of education website. Websites were consulted in July 2015. All information was current at that time.

Survey Results

Surveys were emailed to 215 female superintendents. One hundred and thirty-one superintendents completed the survey. Of the respondents, the average tenure as a superintendent was seven years, with a range of one to 24 years. The average number of years in their current district was five years. Sixty-three superintendents (48%) led districts with fewer than 500 students. Sixty-two (47%) led districts with 501-5000 students. Six superintendents (4%) led districts of 5001 or more students.Fifty-two superintendents

(40%) held a doctoral degree. Prior to becoming superintendent, 47 (36%) held a district level position, 71 (54%) were principals, the remaining 13 (10%) held a variety of other roles.

Table 2: *Satisfaction (n=131)*

Questions	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with...		
Your current position (overall)?	126 (97%)	4 (3%)
Your level of autonomy?	127 (97%)	4 (3%)
Your ability to make a difference?	127 (97%)	4 (3%)
Your ability to grow professionally?	124 (95%)	7 (5%)
The feedback you receive from your board?	109 (83%)	22 (17%)
The relationships you have with others in your district?	127 (97%)	4 (3%)
Your salary?	101 (77%)	30 (23%)
Your benefits package?	103 (79%)	28 (21%)

Superintendents responded to questions about their job satisfaction. Eight questions were posed. A Likert format for responses with a four-category continuum ranging from Very Satisfied (4), Satisfied (3), Dissatisfied (2), to Very Dissatisfied (1) was used. The first question was about overall satisfaction in the position. The remaining seven questions were about satisfaction in particular aspects of the job. The mean scores on all of the areas was 3.0 or above, indicating that the average score for each was at the satisfied level or above. The area with the highest reported level of satisfaction (3.6) was satisfaction with relationships they have with others in their districts. The frequency of responses to the questions about satisfaction are presented as Table 2.

The third section of the survey consisted of statements derived from literature on the challenges of the superintendency related to general satisfaction and feelings about the job. Superintendents were asked to respond to these statements using a four-category Likert scale consisting of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The four-point scale was selected because it forces participants to select either an indicator of satisfaction or dissatisfaction as opposed to offering a neutral option. The responses to these statements are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *Responses to Statements About the Superintendency (n=131)*

Prompt	Agree	Disagree
Being a superintendent is challenging	131 (100%)	-
Being a superintendent impacts my personal and professional relationships	131 (100%)	-
My work is meaningful	130 (99%)	1 (1%)
I make a difference	130 (99%)	1 (1%)
I am proud to be the superintendent of my district	130 (99%)	1 (1%)
I positively impact people in my school community	128 (98%)	3 (2%)
Being a superintendent is rewarding	126 (97%)	4 (3%)
I am happy in my current job	125 (95%)	6 (5%)
I have open lines of communication with my board	124 (95%)	7 (5%)
I feel supported in the decisions I make	123 (94%)	8 (6%)
I feel supported in my professional growth	119 (91%)	12 (8%)
I feel appreciated in my current position	117 (89%)	14 (11%)

Qualitative Procedure

The second phase of the study consisted of one-on-one interviews with superintendents to identify the facets of the superintendency that led to high levels of satisfaction and influenced their decisions to remain in the role of superintendent. A participant selection variant of the explanatory sequential model was selected to identify interview participants. Individuals were selected based on two criteria drawn from the survey responses. First, only individuals with high levels of job satisfaction, as measured by the initial survey, were considered for inclusion in the interviews. The composite score from the satisfaction scale had a range of lowest (8) to highest (32). Individuals who had a composite score of very satisfied (25 or above) on the satisfaction scale were considered. Second, individuals who indicated a willingness to participate in an interview as part of their survey responses were considered for inclusion in the interviews. Sixty-six individuals met the criteria for inclusion in the interview process. Twenty superintendents were selected based on geographic proximity to each other in the five states.

Interviews took place during the spring of 2016. Twenty interviews were conducted, 19 were face-to-face and one was via telephone. Thirteen of the interviews were conducted in the office of the superintendent being interviewed. Six interviews were conducted at a conference. The interview locations were based upon the preferences of the participants.

All interviews were digitally recorded with permission of the participants. Recordings were then transcribed and participants were provided with the opportunity to review their transcripts.

An interview guide was developed for the study. Interview questions were open-ended. A narrative approach to the interview was used. "The purpose of the interview in qualitative inquiry is to create a conversation that invites the telling of narrative accounts that will inform the research question" (Josselson, 2013, p.4). The mixed methods design included qualitative and quantitative components that allowed trainagulation of results. (Patton, 2001).

Interview (Qualitative) Data

The 20 superintendents interviewed were satisfied or very satisfied with their work. They consistently used the word "rewarding" to describe their work. Their comments were all similar to these

> *"It's very, very rewarding. I know that even in good times and bad times, I am making a difference in communities."*

> *"Well, overall I would describe it as being very satisfying, very rewarding. I've been very lucky in that I've had a career that I could really enjoy."*

One superintendent described the experience as,

> *It's a fun job. It is hard; but, it's great fun, I worry that people don't go or try for this position because they've heard too much negative; or, they worry they won't be successful. And, the work is, at times, very intense. In every decision you make, you know that it impacts teachers and kids; but, it's not as hard and as difficult as people think it is. It's just not. It's a lot more fun than people think it is.*

The women shared a love of what they do. Their comments included, "I just love the gig, I love the people and the kids. It doesn't feel like a job most days." One superintendent acknowledged the stress and challenge but said, "It's very grueling. It is very hard. It's very high stress and you can never leave it. But it is worth it, if you truly love it." Two superintendents nearing retirement reflected on the love they have for what they do. One said, "It's going to be hard for me to walk away from this district; but, here's the way I figure, if I was 70, it'd still be hard to walk away from this district." Another said,

> *I love this job. I mean the hardest part is going to be walking away....we've just had so many wonderful things; and, it is going to be hard whenever I walk away. But, I love it. I do love this job, even on the bad days. I love this job.*

<center>**They Enjoy…**</center>

The superintendents described specific aspects of the position that they enjoyed. Five themes emerged within this topic: being strategic and creating a vision; instructional leadership; building relationships; developing others; and the variety of tasks.

Figure 1 displays the themes as they relate to the women superintendents' job satisfaction.
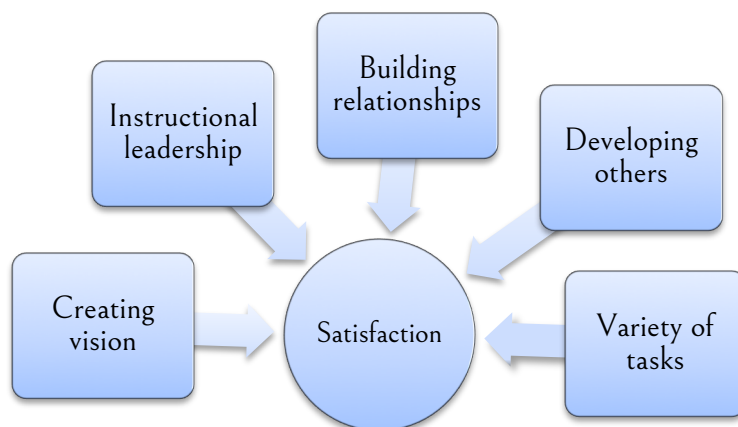
<center>
Instructional leadership — Building relationships — Developing others

Creating vision — Satisfaction — Variety of tasks
</center>

Figure 1. Themes within the topic of job satisfaction

Being strategic and creating a vision

The superintendents noted their satisfaction in being able to make their vision a reality in the districts where they worked. One superintendent said,

> *I really like that I can take ideas that I've always had and put them into action. I have to convince my board; but, I found them to be a lot easier to convince than when I was a teacher and had to convince a principal.*

A superintendent who had a background in technology instruction said, "I've always been big on technology; so, it's nice being able to budget for that, and knowing your commitments and what you're committed to, and being able to fund it."

Two superintendents discussed creating a vision for their districts. One said, "I like being the person that can see the big picture and share that. The strategic planning is huge, and just setting the direction for the district, and really communicating with our constituents and promoting that." Another individual shared a similar sentiment, "I enjoy planning out things that we want to accomplish. I was just in the strength finders thing, and futuristic is one of my strengths. So, I really enjoy that."

Instructional leadership

Another aspect of the job that the superintendents enjoyed was being an instructional leader. Six of the superintendents came from curriculum backgrounds and said that was something they could bring to the position. One superintendent discussed being hired as a superintendent in her current district,

I think why they hired me is they wanted somebody with a curriculum background. I think there's a wave of change coming across [the state]. I think they always wanted the big financial person and that was your stereotypical male who taught business. I think schools now are looking more for a curriculum person and that's what they wanted.

One superintendent reported looking for a smaller district where she could be involved in curriculum and instruction. "It's an environment that I wanted, so I could be close to instruction. My curriculum background really probably shines through here. I wanted to be part of the professional growth of teachers."

Another superintendent said, "I've enjoyed the superintendency more than I thought I would. I'm not a managerial person; but we're not managers. Superintendents are called upon these days to be instructional leaders, more than they ever were."

One individual said, "The piece I'm really excited about is next year getting to be more of an instructional leader, because that's where you really effect change. It is when you can improve student achievement."

Building relationships

The superintendents discussed the need to communicate and build relationships as a superintendent. Some superintendents focused on formal structures that they put into place in order to assist in developing these relationships. One individual described working with the district's advisory group,

I love working with our School Improvement Advisory Committee. We meet periodically throughout the year. We've got students, and staff, and faculty, and community all together. That night is more structured, we have a plan versus a forum. Just getting people to communicate, helping them feel ownership in what we do, because you can just feel that in the room when people start to melt a little bit.

One superintendent described building relationships and communicating with community members while working on a bond issue, "I loved the tax levy, the PR part of

running a tax levy, the coming up with how to advertise, and doing the town hall meetings and getting information out; that part was super fun for me."

One individual commented on the importance of building relationships with all of the different groups you work with as superintendent, "The relationship with your board of education is of utmost importance, and then I still try to work hard with the teachers. The relationship with your administrators is very, very important too."

One superintendent noted how working in a small district assisted in creating relationships,

> Being in a small district, I'm able to go through the classrooms. I'm able to talk to the kids. I'm able to see the teachers on a daily basis. Just to have those relationships with people that I think you probably miss out on in a larger district.

The superintendents recognized the importance of being a skilled communicator. They saw value in building relationships with their constituents and found that was a part of the job they enjoyed.

Developing others

The superintendents described the importance of developing others as one of the roles they enjoyed the most. One superintendent said, "In my position, it's more about developing the leadership and the teachers and how that trickles down to the kids."
Another superintendent described her approach for developing the team of administrators she works with.

> I said to each one of them, "So where do you want to be in three years and five years from now?" And some of them said, "You know what? I love being a principal. And I hope I'm still here and I hope I'm in this building." And hurray, that's awesome. Some said they didn't know. My offer to them was, "When you know what you want and what you need, tell me. I'm more than happy to help."

One superintendent described working with a principal who shared his aspiration to the superintendency.

> We mapped out a plan. And he's done some board meetings. He's been in charge when I've been gone. There have been a lot of things over the last three years that when I start doing something I go, "Oh, he probably needs to be in on this." He's done fantastic. In fact, he is coming over as assistant superintendent starting in June.

One superintendent noted the most important aspect of developing others is

Developing leadership, that applies to developing the leadership with the board members that serve, and the building administrators, or all the directors and administrators. I mean buildings and grounds, food services, everybody. Also, making sure that you're growing the capacity to develop leaders in all positions. So what's the building principal doing to nurture and grow teacher-leaders? What's the bus driver doing? What's the Director of Transportation doing to develop leaders on his team? I don't develop all those leaders; but, I need to make sure I'm developing the leader to develop the leaders.

Another superintendent spoke about developing others in the context of working with the school board. She discussed this as being an important role as well as one that she found satisfying.

I think my role is to help them learn their role. Most people don't [understand the role of school board member]. They have no prior experience. They don't go to school to be a school board member. It's the only elected position in [the state] that's unpaid. How do you do that? Work with the board president. Having a good board president is key. I've had so many different board presidents; and, they've all had different strengths and they're all important.

Variety of tasks

Sharp and Walter (2004) describe the superintendent as a "generalist" who is concerned with a variety of tasks within the district. The superintendents who were interviewed spoke to this and described this as being an attractive component of the job.

One superintendent said, "I love that it's never the same thing two days in a row or even two hours in a row. I love the novelty and variety." Another superintendent shared similar thoughts about the variety of tasks,

Every day's different. You get up and you go to work and you're like, "I wonder what's going to happen today?" There's never been two days that are the same. So it's totally a learn-as-you-go position. You also just have to tell yourself that if you don't know the answer to something, you'll be able to find it.

One individual described enjoyment in the complex nature of being a superintendent.

I truly love problem-solving. So here's a challenge, how are we going to get through it? As much as I enjoyed it and loved it, going back to doing curriculum all the time would not be enough. This position has helped me see a bigger picture and how all the different pieces work together.

The superintendents found satisfaction in many facets of the position. They were attracted to the superintendency because they had a desire to work at the system level and enjoyed creating a vision for that system. The superintendents enjoyed developing relationships and developing others. Finally, they enjoyed being a generalist and the variety of different tasks that made up their days.

Dissatisfaction

When talking to the superintendents about the parts of the job they were less satisfied with, three themes emerged: finances, facilities, and dealing with difficult people and situations. The superintendents noted that these issues took time away from their number one priority, the students. One superintendent noted that the other things really can constitute a significant portion of the job. "Honestly, I am amazed at how much of the superintendent's job is not about teaching and learning." Figure 2 displays how these themes related to dissatisfaction.
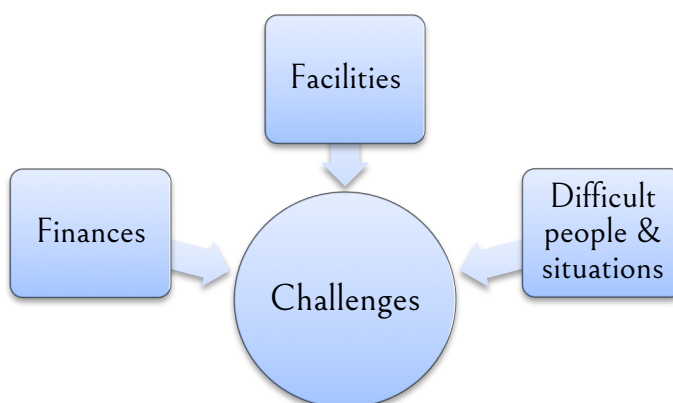
Figure 2. Themes of dissatisfaction in the superintendency

School Finance

Eight of the superintendents talked about school finance. Their dissatisfaction did not stem from budgeting or running a district's finances, instead the superintendents expressed frustration with the lack of state funding and the push to do more with less. This theme also encompassed the political aspect of the position and working with local and state government. When asked what parts of the job were less satisfying another superintendent responded,

> *The finance side of things; I mean, I can do it. But, for years, you heard the budget this and the budget that. Well, it takes a month to do, and it's done. Then all you have to do is watch the bottom line and make sure you're not overspending. But,*

we've lost a lot of state aid, over the years, and valuation has gone up. So we're putting more pressure on local people, and so it's answering to that. Most of the people understand. Our valuation has gone up. So, whenever valuation goes up, state aid goes down. And, that's just the way it is.

Another superintendent talked about how the cut in state aid has impacted her district,

We are significantly underfunded as a state and so it's tough. I had a strong staffing proposal before my board, and they accepted it. The next day the state contacted me and said they made an error and we were losing nearly two million in funding. I had to go back to the board and explain that we could no longer afford to do that.

The superintendent described the staff proposal that addressed documented needs of students in the district, providing additional support to help the students succeed. Unfortunately, due to funding they will have to find alternate ways to meet those needs with the resources they already have.

One superintendent raised an issue related to school funding, the regulation aspect, which caused her frustration,

The finance is something you have to do; but I don't love it. I don't like the regulations associated with finance; you're answering to the federal government, the state government, the local board; making that all compatible, and making sure you're in compliance, and some of the rules [are challenging]. For instance, I wanted to do some training in June, for Pathways to Reading, for next school year. I wouldn't pay for it until July, but the training would occur in June. I can't pay for it out of next year's Title 1 funds. You can't do things like that. Instead we'll have five days of subs, for 10 teachers. How is that good for student achievement?

One individual was frustrated because of the time spent focused on politics instead of on students,

When I have to get further away from the focus of what we're here for, that's where it gets to be a little [difficult]. When you're dealing with all the legislative stuff, or the politics between the city sometimes, that's the part where you go, "Yuck," but it's part of the job and you just have to do it.

For the superintendents, their frustration with finance stemmed from the impact it had on students and communities. With cuts in state aid and increased regulation, the superintendents indicated that the focus was not on what was best for kids.

Facilities

For other superintendents, facilities were the area they found the least satisfaction. A superintendent said,

> I hate dealing with facilities. I'm just not interested in people telling me that their phone doesn't work, or it's too cold in their room, or that the roof is leaking. I just, I don't care, and I have to.

Another superintendent echoed frustration with facilities,

> I guess I will tell you that building and grounds is the area that I like the least, because I don't have any experience with putting on a roof. We pour concrete. I look at drains. We put in new bleachers. It's stuff I don't know anything about. So, I have to spend a lot of time learning about these things. I had to buy a bus. So, what's the best bus to buy? Who do you buy it from? Is it a diesel? Is it a gas? Those types of things.

Another superintendent mentioned roofs,

> And then roofs. Somewhere there's always going to be a leak. When you have these massive roofs, you're just going to have problems with them. My first year here, we replaced two substantially-sized buildings, their roofs. Just monitoring that has been a big issue. We're doing another one this summer.

Dealing with difficult people and situations

The final theme was dealing with difficult people and situations. The theme encompassed a variety of circumstances that superintendents reported. One talked about dealing with difficult parents,

> I think what frustrates me sometimes, it has to do mostly with sports or something like that and parents want to come in and fire this coach and they want to fire that coach. That just really frustrates me. They don't want to talk about test scores that have continually gone up for five years. They don't want to talk about programs that we're now offering that we didn't offer before. They don't want to talk about what we're trying to do facility-wise. They want to talk about who should be the basketball coach.

Another individual talked about dealing with parents and community members,

> There's times you deal with individuals and parents and adults that just aren't rational. It's time consuming. It's taxing. Sometimes there's resolution and sometimes there's not.

One superintendent had a slightly different perspective on these situations. For her, they were still opportunities to make a difference, even though they were difficult situations at the time,

> *I can't think of anything that I don't like about my job really. But sometimes, when you have to step in and do some of those tough things—we've had some crisis situations, every district does. Those probably, I wish I dealt with those a little bit better. I can't say that I hate them, but they get pretty emotional. But, it is part of what we do. I can't say that I hate that part because again, it's an opportunity for impact.*

The superintendents indicated high levels of overall job satisfaction; however, there were facets of the job which some superintendents found frustrating and unsatisfying. A common thread in these components is that they took the focus off of students and student achievement. However, facilities, finances, and dealing with difficult situations are all part of what a superintendent deals with each day.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of female superintendents as they relate to job satisfaction and retention. To achieve the purpose of the study the following research questions were developed.

Quantitative

To what extent are female superintendents satisfied with their jobs?

Previous research has found that superintendents report high levels of satisfaction in their job (Kolalski, et al., 2011; Sharp, Malone, Walter, Supley, 2004; Sampson & Davenport, 2010). The data from this study supports our findings. The female superintendents surveyed consistently indicated high levels of job satisfaction, with 126 (96%) superintendents reporting that they were either satisfied or highly satisfied with their job.

In what areas do female superintendents find high levels of satisfaction in their jobs?

The superintendents who responded to the survey indicated satisfaction with all of the aspects of the job that were addressed. The mean score for all areas was at least 3.0 on a 4-point scale with: 1 as very dissatisfied, 2 as dissatisfied, 3 as satisfied, and 4 as very satisfied. The following four questions demonstrated the highest level of satisfaction with a mean score of 3.47 or above.

- How satisfied are you with the relationships you have with others in your district? 3.57
- How satisfied are you with your level of autonomy? 3.53
- How satisfied are you with your ability to make a difference? 3.49
- How satisfied are you with your ability to grow professionally? 3.47

In what areas do female superintendents identify low levels of job satisfaction?

All responses to the survey questions had a mean satisfaction score of 3.0 or above. A 3.0 was equal to satisfied on the scale provided, and a 4.0 was equal to very satisfied.

Qualitative

How do female superintendents describe their level of job satisfaction?

The superintendents interviewed indicated high levels of job satisfaction during the initial survey. When these superintendents were interviewed, they continued to indicate high levels of job satisfaction. They described the position as being rewarding and having impact in their work. They indicated that there were a variety of different aspects to the job that they found fulfilling. Five areas of satisfaction emerged from the analysis of the interviews:

- Creating a Vision
- Instructional Leadership
- Building Relationships
- Developing Others
- Variety of Tasks

How do female superintendents with high levels of job satisfaction describe their decisions to stay?

The female superintendents acknowledged that the superintendent's position is challenging. However, only two superintendents discussed considering leaving the position. Five discussed that they had considered moving to a different superintendency at some point; but only one actually talked about leaving the position all together.

The women superintendents had a firm vision that led their actions. They focused on the ability they had to have an impact on students. They discussed their love of students and their desire to create better schools and districts for them. Their love of the students motivated them to do the job.

How do female superintendents deal with the stresses and challenges of the position?

From the information collected during the 20 interviews, two themes arose related to this question. First, superintendents spoke about a variety of different support structures that they rely on to help them cope with the challenges of the job. The superintendents indicated that fellow superintendents, other educational professionals, and family and friends served as supports for them.

The superintendents also spoke about the importance of finding ways to balance the demands of the job. The women discussed a variety of ways that they find balance including setting boundaries and finding time for themselves. Finding balance was important for the superintendents in order to guard against burnout and allow them to decompress from the constant demands of the job.

Mixed Methods

Do the factors that female superintendents identify as being important to them relate to their overall level of job satisfaction?

The information collected during the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase of the study revealed similarities. Items that received high satisfaction scores during the quantitative phase became themes in the qualitative phase. For example, the superintendents indicated strong satisfaction with the relationships they have with others in the district. During the interviews, the superintendents spoke about the importance of building relationships as a superintendent, but also the satisfaction they found in that aspect of the job.

Implications for Practice

The women interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with the position. Eight of the superintendents noted their experiences of being the only female superintendent in a room; the women discussed the importance of attracting more women to the position. One superintendent said, "We need to tell them it's worth it!" Current superintendents, professional organizations, and higher education institutions have the opportunity to actively encourage women to consider the superintendency.

Based on the findings of the study, there are ways that women can be attracted to and retained in the superintendency. One way to do this may be to encourage networking opportunities for current superintendents with women who currently hold other administrative positions or aspire to the superintendency. Providing opportunities for

current superintendents to tell their stories will allow them to share their experiences and the rewards of being a superintendent.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to examine the experiences of female superintendents as they relate to job satisfaction and retention. The study was limited to five states: Iowa, Missouri, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Future research based on the topic of this study should be expanded to a larger geographic area. Through these studies, a more in-depth understanding of women's satisfaction in the role of superintendent could be developed.

One topic that emerged during the interviews was how board relations can impact a female superintendent's satisfaction with the role. All 20 women reported strong, positive relationships with boards. However, there was mention of other superintendents' negative experiences with boards and their members. An exploration of the impact of the board of education on the superintendent's satisfaction would be an additional useful line of inquiry.

Based on the finding of this study, we offer the following propositions:

- If women assume superintendencies, then they may experience satisfaction in their work as they create a vision for a district, act as instructional leaders, build relationships, develop the skills of others, and engage in a variety of tasks.
- If women assume superintendencies, then they may choose to stay in the position because of the impact they may have through their work, and the love they feel for their students.

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Asian American Female School Administrators' Self-Concept and Expectations for Students' Educational Success

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Abstract

Historically, Asian American school administrators' experiences leading the K-12 educational system have been under-researched and under-theorized. Today, as the fastest growing population in the United States, Asian American educators' experiences and contributions can no longer be ignored in educational policy and research. Drawing on the traditions of critical race theory in education, this qualitative study underscores the leadership experiences of four Asian American women school administrators in one Southern U.S. state and seeks to identify their self-concept and expectations as school administrators. This vantage point provides the basis for investigation into their sense of responsibility for equity and leadership practices in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: critical race theory in education, intersectionality, race-gender epistemology, school leadership, principal expectation

INTRODUCTION

Asian Americans are now the fastest growing population in the United States (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014; United State Census Bureau [USCB], 2011). Despite the call to diversify the teaching profession (Howard, 2007), Asian American educators continue to represent a small segment of the teaching force, unable to keep pace with the growing rates of Asian American students in the K-12 educational pipeline (Chong, 2002). Historically, Asian Americans have not been central to policy discussions to diversify the teaching force. Additionally, Rong and Preissle (1997) discovered that the declining number of Asian American teachers was largely due to a variety of historical, political, and economic factors that excluded them from the teaching pipeline and from the necessary recruitment, preparation, and retention efforts that could contribute to addressing the overall shortage of teachers of color (Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, & Woo, 2006). In 2012, Asian Americans accounted for 2% of all K-12 public school teachers, comparing to their African American colleagues at 6%, Latina/os at 8%, Native Americans at less than 1%, and Whites at 83% (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2012). In contrast, Asian American students accounted for 5% of all K-12 public school students (NCES, 2013). This percentage will increase as the general Asian American population is expected to grow by over 200% by the year 2050 (USCB, 2011).

The racial disparities between the teaching force and the Asian American student population creates a new set of concerns for the school principalship pipeline. The first concern is the fact that the academic achievement of Asian Americans is still much debated and misunderstood in the field of education (Covarrubias & Liou, 2014). The image of Asian American students is often depicted as the model minority, a racial group that is immune to racism in the educational system (Lee, 2015; Tuan, 2001). Such a stereotype minimizes their history with racism and conflates the experiences of Asian American students with those of Whites, where they are often positioned by the dominant discourse as a threat to white entitlement and an alienated group in the civil rights struggle for race and economic justice in schools and communities (Chou & Feagin, 2015). Goodwin, Genishi, Asher, and Woo (2006) illuminate that school reform efforts and classroom curriculum are often irrelevant and disconnected from the life experiences of Asian American students. Part of this concern is school principals' inability to engage in curricular reform and instructional expertise that are inclusive of Asian Americans and to create conditions to support Asian American teachers in their instructional effectiveness, career advancement, and promotion to principalship (Goodwin et al., 2006).

These school-level conditions lead to the second concern, which is the role of Asian American educators in leading for social justice, given their perceived ambiguous political position in the U.S. civil rights discourse and the continual pressure for them to prove and disprove their minoritized status. The pressure of proving and disproving their experiences living with racism often implicate their ability to build coalitions with other communities of color to address educational justice (Liou, 2016). Together, the educational system needs to recognize the extent to which the absence of Asian American educators further reinforces the model minority thesis in K-12 classrooms. The perspectives of Asian Americans are especially important, given their unique position in race relations and experiences in the school system. Potentially, Asian American educators' life experiences can help to complicate and surface the diverse learning needs and aspirations of Asian American students, particularly those of low-income, immigrant, undocumented, or refugee backgrounds (Liou, 2016; Chu, 2016; Lee, 2015).

Our final concern is the fact that women are severely underrepresented in school administration[1] (Shakeshaft, 1986; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008), which further necessitates an intersectional analysis of female Asian American school administrators' current realities of leading schools. These historical and contextual factors have led us to examine how female Asian American school administrators view themselves in relation to their social justice work in the school and how their self-concepts mediate their expectations and practices in a system that has largely minimized their existence and contributions to the educational achievement of the students they serve.

To bring these concerns to the forefront, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Asian American women school administrators define their expectations for school leadership?
2. How do Asian American women school administrators act upon their expectations of themselves as a method to foster conditions of high expectations for their students?

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[1] For the purpose of this article, educational administration and educational leadership are interchangeable.

ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

There have been no Asian American female educators admitted into the cohort-based leadership preparation programs at the universities where we have served as faculty in the last four years. The expectations of Asian American women school administrators have not previously been documented. With the exception of a few dissertations (Fong, 1984; Lee, 1998; Pacis, 2005), the experiences of female Asian American school administrators have been under-researched and under-theorized. The few studies available indicate that female Asian American school administrators encounter institutional racism, sexism, tokenism, a lack of role models, and limited, if not absent, access to mentorship and professional networks (Chu, 1980; Fong, 1984; Pacis, 2005). These findings are consistent with the experiences of other female school administrators of color, as Asian American women operate in the context of patriarchy and white supremacy that shapes their underrepresentation, limited career mobility, and double glass ceiling at the intersection of race and gender status (Andrews, 1993; Fitzgerald, 2003). Female Asian American leaders' professional context is marked by a racial and gendered climate that has led them to feel isolated, invisible, and unsure about their leadership competence (Hune, 1998; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Turner, 2002). These conditions have rendered the intersections of race and gender central to their realities. Furthermore, these realities are accompanied by historical stereotypes of Asian American women as obedient and submissive (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016), two characteristics that often work against them in white-male-dominated leadership settings (Blackmore, 2005; Lee, 1998; Youngberg, Miyasoto, & Nakanishi, 2001). In addition to raced and gendered marginalization, female Asian American school administrators are often geographically isolated, as they disproportionately work in schools and districts with predominantly Asian American populations (Lee, 1998).

The limited literature reveals that Asian American women tend to share characteristics and leadership styles with other female leaders in the forms of collaboration, empowerment, and community (Kawahara, Esnil, & Hsu, 2007; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Pacis, 2005). As an aggregated group, Asian American women tend to be bilingual, highly educated, and older than their counterparts who share similar leadership positions. They are also capable of being reflective and decisive and assuming assertive leadership styles verbally and non-verbally (Yamauchi, 1981). As a form of identity, members of this community's bilingual and bicultural dispositions are perceived as an asset to their leadership as they actively reject the stereotypes attributed to them (Yamauchi, 1981). Many have self-

imposed high expectations for excellence and determination in pursuing career goals (Lee, 1998; Pacis, 2005). Thus far, this limited literature has disputed stereotypical notions of Asian American women school administrators as submissive and passive organizational leaders.

This body of research is consistent with many aspects of the literature that show female school administrators encounter systemic challenges based upon raced and gendered stereotypes (e.g., Adkison, 1981, Biklen, 1980; Blackmore, 2002; Noel-Batiste, 2009; Shakeshaft, 1986). Research has shown that negative stereotypes influence an individual's self-awareness and the person's subsequent interactions with others in such environments and contexts (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999; Steele, 2010). This phenomenon, known as stereotype threat, has been understudied in the leadership literature, but it has been shown to be a significant obstacle when one is made aware of the possibility that their perceived race and gender identities are going to be used to discount them and their organizational legitimacy (Steele, 2011).

Instead of consenting themselves to racist and patriarchal conditionings, female leaders across racial backgrounds have shown the ability to debunk the ongoing stereotypes and systemic oppression working against them, and they are committed to making a difference in the world (Helgesen, 1990). As leaders, many value the dignity and worth of each individual – a principle that has become the driving force for their advocacy of children by going above and beyond the daily bureaucracy and transactional leadership (Regan & Brooks, 1995). This principle also drives their moral commitments to be responsive and caring in leadership practices (Shakeshaft, 1986; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). In particular, female school leaders of color have been reported to demonstrate strong commitment to high academic expectations for the wellbeing of communities and children of color (Reed, 2012; Venegas-Garcia, 2013). At the school level, the overall expectation of educators is considered a significant correlate of effective schools (Edmonds, 1979; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). These school level expectations are operative in structuring students' opportunities to learn, as students are often grouped in classrooms by race and abilities to reflect the extent that they are valued and cared for (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Noguera, 2003).

Conditions of high expectations for learning and teaching can have emancipatory effects in the classroom as they promote practices that are closely associated with students' access to a rigorous and empowering curriculum, caring and demanding teachers, and a school culture that treats students' prior knowledge and social capitals from perspectives of asset, not deficit (Liou & Rojas, 2016). From this asset point of view, ethics of caring have

been found to be central to high expectation practices in the school (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006), such that female leaders of color often display a genuine care in their students' wellbeing and opportunities to learn (e.g., Dillard, 1995; Venegas-Garcia, 2013). Similarly, high expectation practices often include the expressions of empathy and sympathy toward staff and students as a method of fostering relationships based on equity, racial understanding, and empowerment (Du Bois, 1935; Rojas & Liou, 2017). Unlike standardized testing, which imposes expectations externally, these expectancy practices stem from a deep interest to nurture and support underserved children to meet higher levels of academic achievement with an uncompromising belief in their intellectual promise. For many female leaders of color, caring and high expectations for children is not a choice, but a lifelong responsibility (e.g., Dillard, 1995; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Together, school-level caring and high expectations have shown to foster academic resiliency among students (Benard, 2004).

RACE-GENDER CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP

School leadership is often perceived as taking on the tasks to convene stakeholders to work toward a set of organizational goals (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). It is in this context that leadership is often conceived to be an observable, linear, and individualistic endeavor and accomplishment (one person leads and everyone else follows). To achieve organizational objectives, the underlying policies, procedures, and practices to guide individual actions are often perceived to be objective, neutral, and fair. This results-oriented approach often discounts history, context, and the current centrality of racism and patriarchy in shaping and differentiating individuals' organizational experiences and outcomes.

Increasingly, leadership has been perceived as having emancipatory potential when the intent is to intervene for educational injustices with the moral use of power (Bogotch, 2000). However, the dominant perception on school improvement has also been a linear perspective without accounting for stereotype threat and political relationships that often require school administrators to enact multiple types of leadership to accomplish their daily objectives. To expand upon this goal and people of color's abilities to speak truth to power, critical race theory in education is one analytical lens that challenges these color- and gender-blind assumptions and organizational norms that 1) often overemphasize school outcomes without critically examining the deeply entrenched belief systems and procedures that differentiate people of color's organizational experiences at the intersection of race and

gender and 2) devalue the race-gender epistemologies and leadership legitimacy of people of color – specifically, female Asian American school leaders (Bernal, 2002).

Scholarship associated with critical race theory has historically centered on the experiences of people of color as a legitimate form of knowledge and as a method to identify, resist, and transform oppressive conditions and practices that perpetuate a system of racial hierarchy through law, social policies, and societal attitudes. Serving both as a framework and a body of research, this theory was initially born out of ethnic studies, legal studies, women's studies, sociology, and other fields where critical scholars were dissatisfied and frustrated with research that often casts communities of color in a negative light and minimizes the role of racism and other intersectional experiences in social institutions like schools (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The literature seeks to provide counter-narratives to traditional civil-rights discourses that fail to challenge the systems of white supremacy, as the basis of emancipation (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

Further, critical race theory in education posits that the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race are operative in the school system (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). It draws on an interdisciplinary approach to formulate an intersectional analysis of racism, capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression (Lynn & Parker, 2006). This intersectional analysis provides an appropriate vantage point to understand the race-gender epistemologies of Asian American women in educational leadership (Bernal, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002), and how these systems of knowing are historically situated to contribute to each person's self-concept and expectations of leadership and the students they serve. The race-gender epistemologies and pedagogy of Asian American women as administrators position them as holders and creators of knowledge, as their leadership experiences often come from a dialogic, relational, and community-driven orientation to challenge a field that has historically been and continues to be decontextualized and grounded in the notion of individualistic achievements, meritocracy, and masculinity. The inclusion of the voices of female Asian American administrators can begin to account for the role of race and gender in their immediate leadership context and in their efforts to dismantle multiple forms of subordination and pursue educational equity through the manifestations of their expectations for themselves and their students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

According to Shields (2010), transformative leadership problematizes static or transactional notions of leadership, for it calls for a fluid and dynamic understanding of leadership beyond institutional and organizational arrangements. It also distinguishes the functions of school leadership in a spectrum of practices associated with transactional,

transformational, and transformative leadership as a method to illuminate its emancipatory potentials. Applying this notion of leadership, we posit the ways in which school administrators' life experiences with systemic oppression can mediate their identity development as leaders and influence their ability to build school communities in which educators are intentional in advancing equity, social justice, and quality of life for all. Therefore, the goal of transformative leadership is much more than to ensure the achievement of organizational goals; it attends keenly to how the process of meeting these goals will revolutionize society toward justice (Shields, 2010).

Through confronting systemic oppression, transformative leaders must be dialogic by foregrounding the strengths, aspirations, and needs of the people as a key source of motivation for leadership (Freire, 2000; Liou, 2016; Shields, 2010). The idea that leadership is relational is consistent with the concepts of dialogic leadership (Shields, 2010) and servant leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002), as people are the center of organizational objectives, not test scores (Dennis, Kinzler-Norheim, & Bocarnea, 2010). The literature has made it clear that race and gender affect women of color's perceptions and expectations of their leadership roles in the school system (Reed & Evans, 2008). Therefore, transformative leadership must also be conscious of the race-gender inequities and their intersections with other forms of oppression.

The race-gender conscious leadership provides an analytic framework that is consistent with the literature, where the race-gender epistemologies and pedagogy of women of color educational leaders are closely associated with justice-oriented dispositions to challenge dominant ideologies of leadership and schooling and to create schools as counter-spaces of radical possibilities for the future in working with and for others. Given the ways in which race and gender mediate one's organizational experiences, the dialogic nature of school leadership must also require individuals to be conscious, responsive, and adaptive to problematize organizational norms. Therefore, the pedagogy of Asian American women as school administrators must not be overly essentialized as a fixed, biological trait of leadership. Rather, each person's individual positionality and situated context matter in how they resist and defy social categories and stereotypes in their identification and affiliation with their social justice work (Artiles, 2015). School administrators' inter-subjectivities within and across particular communities are fluid in shaping their perceptions and relationships with the tasks of school leadership. Their experiences with race and gender give them the abilities to enact leadership in ways that are much more nuanced and iterative than what has been reported in the literature so far. Hence, school administrators' consciousness about the social justice challenges in their school, the shifting terrains of their

local context, and ability to harness the appropriate expectations of themselves and those around them is significant in how they chart their course toward revolutionary leadership (Marshall & Oliva, 2006).

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

This study took place in a Southern U.S. state, where there are only a handful of female Asian American building-level administrators working in the K-12 school system. We used pseudonyms to protect the identities of our participants and the communities they served. As a general snapshot, there are 2,246 public schools located in the state, serving approximately 1.6 million students. Asian American students account for 3% of the total public school enrollment. Asian American teachers and school principals combined make up less than 1 percent of the educators working in public schools. A purposeful sampling procedure was used to recruit participants (Merriam, 1988). The public contact inventory of Asian American administrators was requested from the State Department of Education; an invitation-to-participate email was sent to all the female administrators on the list. In the end, four Asian American women school administrators participated in the study. All participants were first-generation Asian Americans. Our participants' professional experience in education ranged from 15 to 30 years, of which between 5 to 11 years were in administration. Three of the participants were middle school administrators and one was an elementary school administrator. These participants were either in their late 40s or late 50s, which is slightly higher than the national average of 48 years of age (NCES, 2016). Two of the women were Thai American, one Filipina American, and one of Vietnamese descent. The participants' schools varied in location and student demographics. All the schools but one were classified as Title I schools.

Employing a critical race counter-storytelling approach (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), data collection primarily relied on semi-structured in-depth interviews (Johnson, 2002) and field observations. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001), counter-storytelling is a process in which those who are dehumanized by dominant epistemologies and discourses identify and articulate the sources of dominance and subjugation that seek to de-legitimatize their existence. In this study, we elicited the stories of Asian American women school administrators for the purpose of making meaning of their leadership experiences outside of the traditional white male-centric models of leadership that often assume themselves as normal and universal. We sought approaches to contribute to new ways of understanding the complex nuances of school leadership, and the salience of race and gender in the lives

of school administrators. In addition to our research participants' counter-narratives, we also collected archival data to strengthen our understanding of the school context and to further substantiate our interpretation and analysis of our participants' leadership practices. Lastly, we also developed reflective memos throughout the fieldwork and analysis process to identify emerging themes over time, and to also provide another source of evidence for triangulation.

Data analysis was ongoing from the start of the project. A constant comparative method was adapted from Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory to allow for themes within and across each counter-story to emerge and to compare data with the literature to look for consistencies and discrepancies. For member checking (Merriam, 2002), the participants were given opportunity to review their interview transcripts and initial thematic findings to name and theorize their experiences, to further clarify and substantiate their stories, and to make meanings of events and experiences attributable to their perceptions and expectations of themselves and of others around them (Merriam, 2002). Triangulation between multiple forms of data, member checking, and participant debriefing was instrumental for establishing the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Together, these methodological and analytical approaches allowed us to explore the complexity in our participants' experiences and to put their stories into context (Maxwell, 2004).

Defining Expectations for School Leadership at the Intersection of Race and Gender

Our findings show that the female Asian American school administrators in the study conceive of leadership with a great deal of purpose and with the expectation that practices that are closely associated with multiple forms of leadership through their race-gender epistemology. These leadership practices are mediated by their race-gender consciousness, as we found their self-concept as Asian American women informs their expectation practices as leaders in their school.

Double glass ceiling and intersected discriminations

These administrators' experiences with racism and patriarchy played a major role in shaping their self-concept as school leaders. One of the major challenges to their ability to function was the stereotype threat that cast a perception of doubt about their leadership credentials. For example, Anna described the feeling of having to prove and disprove herself due to her identity as a female Asian American administrator. She explained,

> *I have to prove again and again and again, that I am an administrator; I deserve this.... Because I am an Asian and I am a woman, I have to work harder than a*

native, because this is my adopted country. If I don't do well, then they will think, 'She got the job because she knows someone.' I don't want to be that person. This thought is always there... it is very hard.

To Anna, race and gender are salient threats to how she experiences the unspoken pressure of constantly having to prove her self-worth. Despite the societal stereotype of Asian Americans as hard working and industrious, these external perceptions do not alleviate the stereotype that somehow she was unqualified, foreign, and lacking the skills to be an administrator.

Additionally, our research participants felt societal expectations of Asian Americans as non-English-speaking immigrants play a role in how they experienced stereotype threat. When asked about her self-perceptions as a school administrator, Mary explained the impact of stereotypes on her self-concept and day-to-day realities. She explained,

You have to work three times as hard.... People underestimate us because we, Asians, tend to be quiet.... Do people ever yell at you? People would be like, 'Do you understand English?' 'Just keep yelling,' I said, 'I speak with an accent but I am not deaf.' They think less of you because of your accent and because of the way you look.

Mary's experiences with stereotype threats show that even those in the position to lead an organization are not immune to systemic racism. Consistent with the literature on female Asian school administrators (Hune, 1998; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Pacis, 2005), our research participants had to endure stereotype threats regarding their English-speaking capabilities, and by extension their credibility, to provide school leadership in male-centric English monolingual settings. We found that these administrators perceive that stereotypes negatively sensitize their race and gender identities and impact their expectations for school leadership. In turn, they use "working hard" as a strategy to counteract these stereotypes and to resist the constant feeling of being minimized due to negative perceptions of their physical appearance at the intersections of race, gender, and immigration.

Resistance and self-defining

Despite navigating negative stereotypes and presumed deficits, our participants also resist these perceptions by defining leadership by who they are, instead of aspiring to the dominant images of white male leadership. Their abilities to resist these stereotypes contribute to their consciousness about themselves, and they are able to turn these negative

images into positives and affirm their beliefs and responsibilities as leaders. When asked about the pressure to prove and disprove herself as a school administrator, Hope described,

> I have to take the courage to be me, the blue-collar, warm, and receptive me.... I can't be someone else, putting up this tough façade, because I am wearing a different hat. Yes, I'm a leader, but I'm not really a different person. I'm who I am.... That respect for a human is the basis of my faith; it plays out in my interactions with teachers, parents, other community members, and it plays out in my decisions.... It never gets easy, but you have to stand up for your beliefs.

Instead of conforming to the white male images of school leadership, Hope insisted that she was not going to become a different person simply because of her responsibilities in school. She was inspired to authentically develop relationships with her school community as a method to reject the historical and ideological representation of female Asian American administrators. By not conforming to the white male images of leadership, Hope asserts her human agency to define her role and expectations for leadership, not waiting for others to legitimize her through racist, patriarchal frameworks. Through her authenticity and respect for her own humanity, the dehumanization associated with these stereotype threats has led her to put *people* at the center of her leadership approach. Her experiences with racial and gender marginalization have only encouraged her to stand up for her beliefs and to seek practices that affirm the humanity of her teachers and students.

Similarly, other administrators also discussed the role of race and gender in shaping their consciousness in school leadership. Our research participants use their knowledge of racism and patriarchy to help them gain political clarity about who they are and their positionality in life, and to cultivate leadership arsenals to sustain them while they work toward justice. Such perspective was exemplified by Mary's description of her expectations for social justice leadership,

> The good thing about knowing where you are is that you are always conscious of who you are.... If you ask me what is it I hold dearest to my heart, it is justice. When people question you, challenge you, and even threaten you with your life, ... that kind of politics.... Even now people told me to shut up. My mom always lives in fear that I will say something not quite right and then.... Imagine that sometimes you do something and you just don't know whether you will get it or not.... I keep going... that's my way of thinking and my way of paying back to the society.

Through these administrators' race-gender epistemology, the idea of paying back to society provides the impetus for administrators like Mary to conceive of leadership as public service. This concept of leadership for the public good has led them to associate their

leadership with practices that focus on collaboration, building bridges between stakeholders, and serving others by creating a just-oriented school culture. While these administrators may be threatened by overt and subtle racial and gender hostilities, they are using these experiences to inform their leadership to create inclusive communities where everyone is valued and cared for.

Redefining high expectations through caregiving leadership

In our study, the idea that school-level caring and high expectations help to increase student resiliency also translated into how these administrators use their race-gender epistemologies to persist in their leadership roles. The administrators in our study often described themselves as "the caregiver," which includes caring and nurturing their teachers and school staff. Even in difficult situations with challenging teachers or parents, the administrators want to remain attentive to personal needs, diverse perspectives, and contexts within and beyond the immediate issue. The administrators consider themselves servants to the school community, and the administrative position they hold is a means to that end. Their commitment to people and sensitivity to individual differences are reflective of caregiving leadership, under which human actualization is both an organizational asset and an organizational goal (Dennis et al., 2010).

When asked about this people-driven model of leadership, Hope talked about her ability to sympathize and empathize with her teachers and staff. From this collectivist vantage point, Hope was able to define her leadership based on equity and solidarity. Hope illuminated:

> I was a teacher myself, so I know how challenging it is to be a teacher and more so, how dedicated one needs to be as a teacher…. As an administrator, you will have those difficult moments or conversations, … it was not and will never be easy, but I think I have been able to do it with empathy and respect. Teachers are very self-critical already; it is hard to take feedback that is harsh and doesn't come with lots of empathy. By empathy I mean, … maybe there was a reason. Instead of saying, 'This is what I see and this is what you must do,' I take my time to listen and to understand their perspectives. If the rationale doesn't make sense, then of course, I will give them the feedback that I know. I say, 'This is not the best way but this is how I know. What do you think?' So, it's more collaborative.

Our participants' expectations for school leadership are not necessarily to lead as a front person, but to work in solidarity side-by-side with the entire community through race and gender unity. When asked about how she viewed and expected of herself as a school leader, Mary explained,

I am not what you see as typical, the lead-in-the-front type; I am a servant leader, if I have to name it. I am a people person. And we are in a human endeavor of serving humans.... I am here to work with them [teachers, students, and parents], support them, and do everything I can to help them.

By placing people, not products such as test scores, as the center of her leadership objectives, Mary was able to focus on building relationships with those she is serving. Our field observation also confirmed her assertions; Mary's teachers, staff, and students know her at a deep, interpersonal level, and in turn, she expects them to treat her and each other with respect, equity, and care. This finding is consistent with the literature, where female administrators are often found to value the dignity and worth of each individual, for the purpose of building an inclusive and empowering community for learning and teaching (e.g., Fennell, 1999; Lindsay, 1997; Regan & Brooks, 1995). It is this public servant leadership framework that provides Hope, Mary, and our other research participants a purpose to persist as administrators.

Fostering Conditions of High Expectations for Educational Equity

The second major theme that emerged in our findings spoke to the mechanisms through which these female Asian American administrators cultivated the conditions for others to harness similar high expectations for themselves and with each other to work toward educational equity. By placing people at the center of their leadership focus, our research participants use their interpersonal relationships as the basis to role model and communicate their expectations for teaching and learning.

High self-expectations

Earlier, we discussed that these administrators worked long hours as a strategy to counteract the doubts of incompetence that had been cast upon them. A part of this commitment is also due to their high expectations of themselves to ensure that their school was free from the injustices they had to encounter as Asian American women. When asked about how she demonstrated her expectations for herself as a school leader, Mary said,

People say that I aged a lot over the years since I started here. That probably is an understatement. The first five or six years, I barely had five hours of sleep every day. I did not get to see my families much at all because I was here all the time. I still work long hours but I think I am better at juggling between [family and work] now.

Even though these administrators were able to persist in their leadership roles, they worked tirelessly, sacrificed family time, and some even paid the price of their own personal health. When asked about the amount of time they spent on their jobs, Shine described

such practice as a form of role modeling for her students. She was motivated to instill the consciousness and work ethic that would help her students access the education opportunities they need to take on the fight against systemic inequities as future leaders. Shine elaborated:

> I would like my students to be able to look up at [me], an Asian woman, and say, 'You know, she didn't just learn English, become a teacher, and stop there.' I want them to see that I had the obstacle of learning English and here I am.... They can go to college, they can become a teacher if they want to, and they can become an administrator, and more, that they can become a leader in any areas.

For Shine, this outlook is a way to pay back to society. It started with having the self-expectations to improve the learning conditions of her students. Then, it was about using a method of role modeling and interpersonal relationships to instill confidence and belief that her students could also become leaders of their future profession.

High expectations as equity and ethics of care

It is by engaging teachers and students based on where they are that allows our research participants to act upon their expectations with and for their school community. For instance, Mary said:

> All my students were not born and raised here, like myself. I came here on a student visa; I almost had nothing, but you know, my students have even less. That's why I keep doing what I am doing [working for equity and social justice]. I am a role model for my students. They need to see, to know that they can too [be a leader of their profession] and even more.

The deep interpersonal relationships and high expectations are not limited to the confines of the classroom or the principal's office. Our field observations in these schools were marked by repeated patterns of positive interactions between the school administrator, teachers, and parents. When asked about the importance of developing positive relationships with the school community, Shine shared: "The only way you can have a relationship is to get to know them [teachers, students, and parents].... Relationships help you to understand each other better, like what angle the reaction is coming from."

Through the process of building relationships of caring and high expectations, our research participants also see the importance of these deep interpersonal relationships reflected in the ways students are characterized and treated in the classroom. For instance, when Hope was asked about her school-level expectations for her teachers and students, she responded, "You can tell my blood is boiling when I see there is no teaching and learning

in the classroom; you just can tell. My face, my body, my throat… all just tensed up." For our participants, high expectations in the classroom are quintessential to the success of all students. The literature shows that caring and high expectations go hand-in-hand, and without one, a school cannot have the other (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). As a case in point, Hope was equally demanding of herself and the entire school community to stay committed to the intellectual promise of all students.

As the participants described the importance of creating caring and high expectation cultures in their school, we asked how they went about supporting all populations to meet their expectations to foster equity. Mary illuminated:

I choose to work for the neediest people [refugee and/or immigrant students and parents], for those whom nobody wants [to work with]. It has been my mission in life. After all these years, I am still doing the same thing… trying to level the playing field. Life is precious and yet fragile…. I think education is one of the most important professions; it actually saves lives, creates lives, [and] gives hope. I want the school to be a sanctuary, a small piece of heaven on earth… my kids [students] know the school is a safe place, we love them, and we expect highly of them.

Our finding was consistent with the literature on sanctuary schools, where educational institutions work to eliminate stereotype threat and low expectations by deeply caring for all students' intellectual promise as a strategy to harness school-wide equity (Antrop-González, 2011; Muñoz, Espino, & Antrop-González, 2014). For Mary, her educational expectations also starts with idea that her school must be a safe place to learn for all students, regardless of background. She insists that schools must play a role in leveling the playing field through higher expectations, both for the profession and for the students. Furthermore, it is important for Mary to not limit her expectations to school success such as test scores or graduation rates, but to expand these visions to see how education can be a tool for the most marginalized students to work toward a more justice-oriented future.

To these administrators, they expect their students to go beyond meeting educational standards, because that may not always be good enough in life. Therefore, they strive to exceed their own expectations for themselves to be the best and more, so that their intentions can set a higher level of standards for everyone. Anna discussed how caring and high expectations must be conveyed in ways that treat students like their own. She said.

I live by my father's teaching. Since I was young, he always said, 'Whatever you do, do your best and more.' He said that best was not enough; it had to be best and more…. I struggled when I first came [to this country]. I was here all by myself and poor. I have worked very, very hard to get here…. I tell my students, 'You put your

mind to it, you will get what you want. You may not get it today, you may not get it tomorrow, just don't give it up.' I never raise my voice to my students, but they know I am very strict. They know, and my teachers know, too, that they can't and will not get away with being slacking .... My students and their families have been through a lot... it's a tough love... they know where my heart is.

Similarly, Shine's expectations for her school community also prioritizes students' socialization and safety as the basis to promote equity. For Shine, equity means more than equal access to educational opportunities or test scores. Rather, it is about having high expectations to educate and nurture the whole child. She defines success in the following way,

How you define success.... what we do is a day-to-day thing; I suppose you can measure that in terms of children feel safe, they are happy to be in school, they do well... not just do well measured by a score or a test but measured in terms of socialization, learning to become a good person... I mean you see improvement in their whole being; it shows in their attitudes, ... they feel good, they are more respectful, they smile more, they look happier... It's not one thing; it's about the whole child.

Likewise, Anna also believes in the whole-child approach to promote school-wide success. Her response to the question regarding her expectations of students was unequivocal,

I am very protective and motherly to my students. And they know. They know I will fight every obstacle for them.... They make you feel like you are doing something all the time, they keep you awake worried about them, and they make you happy when they succeed.... You have to take away all the grief and all that low-esteem before you can make a whole child. The whole idea of you need to feel loved, someone loves you enough to do something for you. .... I want that one day they will still remember, 'Someone actually thinks well of me.'

Instead of defining their expectations merely on test scores, our participants care for the whole child and strive to provide the leadership necessary to remove obstacles so that the students are nurtured from the perspectives of love and mindfulness. One of the obstacles that Anna pointed to was the self-fulfilling prophecy of low teacher expectations that often lead students to develop negative self-perceptions for academic achievement (Liou, Marsh, & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2017). By prioritizing interpersonal relationships, Anna's leadership not only tackles systemic inequities, but also ensures that students are loved equitably, so they too could embrace and care for who they are and who they wanted to become.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our study discovered that these administrators' experiences with race, gender, and immigration status had shaped their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations as school leaders. For our participants, their high expectations for learning and teaching were considered as "the glue," as Mary noted, for building a school culture where social relations and classroom learning were not conceived hierarchically, but with an authentic form of equity in all aspects of schooling. Our participants' race-gender epistemologies provided them the ability to critique the racist and patriarchal norms of school leadership and to harness expectations of themselves and for others by creating conditions that reject the white, patriarchal norms that have come to define race, gender, and leadership. By taking on a grounded approach to elicit these administrators' counter-stories, we learned that their leadership framework and commitments were not a result of being model minorities. Rather, their abilities to resist racism and patriarchy are a result of their strong sense of purpose for social justice leadership. By dialogically placing people at the center of their leadership framework, these administrators are conscious about the ways in which their school operates in these racist patriarchal contexts and utilize their knowledge to define leadership for themselves and the school community. We found these administrators' efforts to create conditions of caring, sympathy, and solidarity with and for their school community to be manifestations of their race-gender epistemologies as school leaders.

The findings of our study suggest potential areas for future research. We found that race and gender played an important role in shaping Asian American women's minoritized status in the field of educational leadership. Because the current study was based on a relatively small sample size in one state in the US, replicative studies on a large scale or using an expanded pool of Asian American female administrators inclusive of district-level administrators would help test the pervasiveness of these findings.

Further, our findings call for additional research to be conducted on how school principals operate from their race-gender insider knowledge to promote equity and social justice (hooks, 1984). The race-gender epistemologies of these administrators were developed through their experiences with systemic oppression, which allow them to be highly responsive to the needs of their students, parents, and communities that might be systemically marginalized in similar or different ways. We need to continue to use research as a tool to create platforms and spaces for these counter-stories and leadership lessons to emerge. We also need to further examine the effects of school leaders' expectations of

students as a method to broaden the body of research that has historically focused on teachers in the classroom. Creating a new pathway to investigate the relationships between educational expectations and school-wide equity can help to shift our understanding of such dynamics from pedagogical to ecological and systemic (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016a; Weinstein, 2002). This expanded look of educational equity can contribute to school administrators' understanding of how to create conditions to foster school effectiveness in authentic ways. Additionally, the field of educational leadership must develop an extensive body of knowledge on ways to reshape the traditional images and ideologies of school leadership and to critically develop aspiring school administrators' consciousness to work for and with those around them from the perspectives of equity and solidarity.

As these female administrator participants positioned themselves as the creators of knowledge, their insights have important implications for the educational leadership pipeline. Given that students of color are already the majority population in the K-12 system, there is a pressing need to address systemic inequities through conscious leadership to interrogate and transform structures, procedures, curriculum, and practices that are rooted in the dominant ideology (Bernal, 2002). Conversely, students of color also need to have access to conscious administrators of similar backgrounds so they can be prepared for social justice leadership in their future professions. As such, implications for practice also point to the pressing need in principal preparation programs to strengthen aspiring school leaders' ability to receive systems of continuous mentoring at the intersections of race, gender, and other important identity markers. This strengthening could reduce the instances of school administrators constantly feeling and resisting the pressure to respond to stereotype threat in isolation. Finally, our study also underscores the importance of defining leadership as an adaptive, fluid, and highly situated set of behaviors mediated by one's positionality, consciousness, and social relationships with those around them. This said, we are reluctant to classify our participants' self-reported practices as a fixed notion of leadership that can be easily explained through a single, one-dimensional, and linear framework of leadership. The field has an obligation to raise consciousness beyond transactional and transformational leadership, to recruit and develop leaders who will exercise the political will to take on fundamental issues regarding race and gender, while creating belief systems and cultures that will result in equity and justice for all.

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Women as University Presidents: Navigating the Administrative Labyrinth

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Abstract

Eleven of the 81 public research universities within the Carnegie Classification of Doctoral Universities: Highest Research are led by woman presidents. Using Eagly & Carli's (2007) labyrinth framework, five of the women presidents were interviewed to identify their experiences navigating leadership barriers. Findings indicated that women university presidents demonstrate expertise in three areas: Know the Rules, Hear the Message, and Opt-in. The findings of the narrative study indicate how women university presidents moved through and around organizational barriers to successfully reach the top.

Keywords: Women's Leadership, Educational Leadership, Women, Universities, University Presidents

The question of how women reach and sustain leadership positions is complex. Leadership success is often measured by follower perceptions and expectations. A woman's path to leadership is informed by this metric. According to Eagly & Carli (2007a), women display equal leadership competencies to men but are more often viewed through a bifurcated lens defined by gender. Women are expected to engage communally and lead with traditional female traits. Thus, an agentic leadership style may be acceptable from a male leader but brings confusion when enacted as a female (Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Eagly & Mladinic, 2011). In the end, Social Role Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the implication of gender as a defining boundary of behavior bring challenges for women aspiring to leadership positions.

In addition to follower perceptions of a leader, women face organizational challenges related to career advancement. Eagly and Carli (2007a, b) describe the evolving structure women moving into leadership positions in the workplace with a new metaphor. Previously women who entered the workforce experienced career advancement until suddenly meeting the impenetrable glass ceiling (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Made popular in a 1986 *Wall Street Journal* article by Hymowitz and Shellhardt (1986), the glass ceiling offered a descriptive phrase to explain the implied and explicit bias experienced by women and why they remained underrepresented in top leadership positions. A visual representation of women rising in leadership, yet stopped by an invisible barrier that allowed women to see top leadership positions but never gain access made the glass ceiling a popular metaphor.

Eagly & Carli (2007a, b) broaden the explanation of why women remain underrepresented in leadership through their metaphor of a labyrinth. A labyrinth, with multiple twists and turns, more closely mirrors women's modern career experience. Women face a myriad of challenges in moving toward leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, b). Bias in pay, lack of promotion, and a dearth of leadership opportunities create multiple barriers for women. Women do not move past these barriers only to reach a solid glass ceiling. Instead, women move around barriers through a series of twists and turns. The complex navigation of the leadership pathway means some women eventually can, and do, make it to the top. In short, for women, the pathway to leadership is tricky and complicated but not unreachable.

Women no longer encounter a glass ceiling in pursuing leadership positions but a labyrinth. The traditional glass ceiling has been replaced by a complex maze filled with barriers and roadblocks. Women must navigate around these barriers with a precision that permits forward movement. This is not new information to administrative leaders. Talking to female leaders who have made the climb shows evidence that the labyrinth exists (Carli

& Eagly, 2016; Reis, 2015). The ways women navigate the labyrinth defines the next chapter in this narrative.

BACKGROUND

Navigating the labyrinth can be both a rewarding and exhausting experience. Part of the reason stems from the fact that barriers to leadership are often hidden (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Williams & Dempsey, 2014). Unequal pay scales, decisions regarding promotion, bias in social exchange, meetings where a woman's ideas are attributed to a man, all stack up to create a parallel promotion system that requires a woman's constant attention. Male leaders operate on a more linear path, and promotion to leadership positions follows a predictable pattern (Eagly & Carli, 2007b). Women must operate sharp sense-making in order to know when to push through or move around an obstacle. The decisions women make at each turn are what makes the labyrinth model challenging and unique.

Higher education presents specific challenges to women navigating the leadership labyrinth. The passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and the Women's Educational Equity Act in 1974 brought change to the treatment of women in higher education (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Stromquest, 1993). Commonly referred to as Title IX, this law prohibits gender discrimination in educational systems. Non-compliant institutions risked losing federal funds. Post Title IX, colleges and universities are required to enact equity not only in student admissions but in all areas of the institution (Glazer-Raymo, 2008). These areas include athletic programs, extracurricular clubs, residence halls, and the hiring and promotion of faculty.

However, the gender equity required by Title IX in faculty hiring and promotion has had mixed results in higher education leadership. Specifically, according to the most recent data collected by the American Council on Education (2012), 57% of faculty and administrative staff are women but only 26% are represented in the presidency. Examining that number more closely reveals that the majority of women, 33%, lead community colleges compared to 22.3% who lead doctoral-granting institutions. The narrowing of the path to presidential leadership for women offers a revealing lens into the ways women move through and around barriers, and continue forward to lead research institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the navigational experiences of female university presidents who lead public research institutions. The guiding research questions were:

1. How do female [women] university presidents describe the path to the presidency?

2. How do female [women] university presidents experience the leadership labyrinth?

According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2015), there are 81 public universities with the basic descriptor Doctoral Universities: Highest Research. Of those 81 institutions, 11 were led by a woman president in 2016.

To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers chose a narrative approach. Narrative research allowed for the collection of stories through the use of dialogue and examination of the participant's lived experiences as university presidents (Clandinin & Connelly, 2009; Riessman, 2008). Each of the 11 presidents was contacted to participate in the study. Five women agreed to participate. In-depth semi-structured interviews were completed with five women presidents who led a public university listed as Carnegie Classification Category Doctoral University: Highest Research. The interviews were completed in-person on the campus of each president.

Interview questions were derived from a review of the literature on women's leadership and the labyrinth model (Bornstein, 2008; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, b; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Galzer-Raymo, 2008). A gap was identified in understanding ways women experience the labyrinth at the personal level. An interview protocol (Seidman, 2006) was developed to support qualitative inquiry into the ways female presidents navigate their leadership journeys. Twenty questions were created in the category of career and administrative development. Questions were open ended to give time to the participant to fully tell her story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Riessman, 2008; Seidman, 2006).

The small number of female presidents leading public research universities required specific attention to research protocol. This study was completed with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the researcher's university. At each interview, the participant was reminded that per the Informed Consent Document, publications from the data collected would not include names or information that identified either them or their institutions. Each participant received a copy of her interview transcript for member-checking and signed an interview verification form which was returned to the researchers.

It is important to note characteristics of the sample. The number of female presidents in the Carnegie Classification category Doctoral Universities: Highest Research is very low. Only 13% of universities in this category had a woman as president in 2016. To better understand the size of the sample, a historical analysis was completed to chart female

university presidents of the 81 institutions. In 2011, 15 of the 81 universities were led by a woman. In 2013, two years later, the number of women presidents dropped to 13. In 2015, there were 14 women presidents of public research universities highest research. In 2016, only 11 of these institutions had a female president, and two women had announced they would be leaving their positions at the end of their term. The summary of the data shows the challenges of identifying this population of leaders. It also represents the pressures of leading a high profile university with the competing interests of multi-level stakeholders, tightening financial budgets at the state and national levels, and the need to keep a university stable in an ever-changing environment. In short, women are a rarity in the male-dominated role as presidents of high research institutions.

The interviews were transcribed and hand coded. The researchers used narrative coding (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) to look for actions, events, and story lines that matched the purpose of the study. Data were hand coded using a first and second cycle coding method (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña 2016). First-cycle coding used descriptive codes to identify experiences of leadership within each participant's story. Second-cycle coding linked data derived from descriptive coding to pattern codes and connected events with action (Saldaña, 2016), which allowed us to identify emerging themes.

The researchers for this study are both female faculty in higher education. Neither serves as an administrative member at her prospective institution. There is the potential that their experience as women in higher education may influence the ability to code the data without bias. To mitigate this possibility, a historical and cohesive analysis was completed to support the reliability of the codes (Riessman, 2008). The primary data were the interviews. To support the themes found in the study, data from the interviews were analyzed in relation to extensive field notes, biographical information collected on each participant, and 290 secondary source articles collected from the news media. Chronology of the participant's story was verified with points of convergence with the themes. This allowed the researchers to create a cohesive history of each participant's leadership journey, and increase reliability of the findings.

FINDINGS

None of the women interviewed had planned to be a university president. Still, each of the five presidents made decisions at multiple points in her career regarding the next step in her career. Each woman conveyed a depth of expertise in reading signals that supported a high-yield choice that in turn, widened her journey in the labyrinth. Findings from this

study show that a woman's time in the labyrinth is directly related to choice, how choice merges with organizational boundaries and norms, that in turn lead back to another choice. This cyclical model of choice was repeated in the three themes that emerged from the study: Know the Rules, Hear the Message, Opt in.

Know the Rules

Each president was cognizant of the rules that defined the boundaries of her chosen profession, and each recognized the importance of rules within the culture of higher education. This was especially true as each president related how she navigated positions prior to entering the leadership domain. One president tells the story of how she joined a hiring committee for a Dean's position and learned that the resumes from women were less robust than those from men.

> *I got involved in the search for a new Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and I was willing to be on the search committee because I wanted to be certain women were included in the pool. I was hot to make certain that I screened all the applicants. Since I was absolutely convinced that the applications for women were simply being overlooked. And what I learned was that while there were applications from women, at that time at least, and this would be close to 1990, there was a pool of over 100 candidates [and] fewer than a dozen applications from women. The pool was not what you, what I, expected to see. And most of the women that were in the pool had somehow, along the way, gotten into administration before they had been promoted to full professor. So they didn't have the scholarly credentials that the men had.*

Learning this information allowed this president to make decisions early in her career that built her academic capital and increased her credibility within the norms of higher education.

> *So I learned a lot from just reading those applications and discovering that, well, you know, if this was something that I might want to do someday, the first thing I had to do was to focus on my scholarship and my teaching, get promoted to full professor. We hired a new dean; and, he promptly invited me to join his staff as an associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. I said no because I had at least another year to go before I could be promoted to full professor. I had to get my grants written, my papers written.*

For this president, being recognized for administrative skills was both a favorable opportunity and a potential obstacle to future success. Good administrative skills did not create a boundary of protection from the need for expertise and experience. In order to

create a more robust administrative resume, this president needed to match her credentials to the highest level of the position. She did not discount the opportunity, but rather, moved around it, returned to the roots of her professorial practice, and then moved forward into administrative leadership when she was satisfied her credentials would sustain her. Knowing the rules of hiring in administration, and the need to build a resume that matched that of her male peers, forced her to make decisions within the labyrinth that slowed her move into leadership; but in the end, helped push her forward.

Other participants in the study echoed the theme of knowing the rules of higher education and the path to promotion at an early stage in their careers. They recognized the importance of making conscious decisions to move within the professoriate in a mindful manner that supported entry into the leadership labyrinth. All five of the women were tapped for leadership positions along the way; but as one participant said, "I had to get my union card." She continued,

> *I loved graduate school. I loved the work of being a professor. I was fully immersed in being in the professorial lifestyle. So, I went up through the ranks, sort of, you know, the ordinary way.*

Another participant described completing a post doc before taking her first professor job. "I was there for 12 to 13 years, (promoted) from research, to assistant professor, to associate professor to full professor" before she began to consider the move to administration.

Knowing the rules of how higher education works proved to be a grounding framework for how these women presidents entered the leadership labyrinth. Certainly higher education operates within traditional boundaries; and, it seems logical that any person, regardless of gender, who seeks to be a president at a research university would need to spend time in the professoriate. But for these women, the time in the professoriate was a purposeful move within the labyrinth to support a vision of leadership that most never thought would be available. As one president said, "I don't know very many women that plan this kind of thing; and, if they do, they're crazy."

The connection between choice and preparation for leadership were woven throughout the conversation with each participant. One president summarized how her history informs the ways she navigates her current leadership position,

> *You really have to understand, you know, your profession. You have to understand higher ed. You have to really be passionately connected to the role of public higher ed. In my case, when I decided to go into the profession as a faculty member, it was*

about what I could do to help people move along in their lives and transform themselves. As a president, chancellor, I do the same thing only on a broader scale.

Hear the Message

Connected to Know the Rules was a second theme, Hear the Message. There is no shortage of advice to women pursuing leadership positions. Career advice, be it collegial or supervisory, was something each woman received throughout her career. Information is both implied and explicit. These messages need to be negotiated carefully and understood in a way that each woman could evaluate the next turn in the labyrinth. The labyrinth, as a connecting metaphor, is "complex and nuanced, but not insurmountable" (Carli & Eagly, 2016, p. 514). Understanding the message, and being clear on associated action, was an integral part of each president's climb to leadership. In the end, understanding the message led to greater learning, and in turn, increased movement in the labyrinth.

One president recounted her move from professor to administration.

I got put on a lot of committees. Many of them were really good ones to have some exposure on, and other ones were a lot of busy work. But, one of the committees that I served on was a [high profile] committee. And the chair of the committee came up to me, after he'd gotten to know me for a few years and said, 'I've been watching you serve on this committee, and I think that you will be bored here, because you've been on all the important committees, including the dean's committee, etcetera. And I think that, I can tell, that you really like new challenges.'

This committee chair told her to look for positions in her discipline of study, and he said that he would nominate her, "because at this level, you don't go and nominate yourself. It's better to be nominated because you want to appear to be known by other people." This process led to several interviews.

I went on several interviews to different places. I don't know how many of them I was really qualified for; and how many of them, you know, they wanted to check the box of having interviewed a woman. But the interesting thing for me was that it was my first inkling that I really enjoyed learning more about being asked questions about the future of [broad discipline] versus my own narrow discipline.

Listening to this president, it is important to understand the context of her story. At first, her comment appears to be a data point associated with women and mentors, and the support women get from mentor relationships. However, coding the data this way undermines the social capital earned by women and the agency of decision. Both of these are integral parts of the labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007b). All leaders, male and female, report gaining some support or advice from a mentor (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima,

2003; Clayt, Sanzo & Myran, 2013). In short, "no one does it alone" is true for both genders. Although the position of women in organizations makes their experience seem more unique, data from this study shows that women did not cling to the mentor relationship as the key to opportunity. Instead, each president took the message from the experience and translated it into new learning that she used to further her leadership movement.

Interpreting messages was important for another president as she described her decision to enter graduate school. She was unsure how to move forward with her career and decided to meet with an administrator at a public research university to get advice.

> So I drove up, met with [Name]. He smoked his pipe and stared out the window. He sent me off to have lunch with these women, who I later found out were really important women; but, I didn't know that at the time, because there's no Google. I mean, it didn't exist. So there's no way of knowing because there's no Google to ask, or you know, Siri, to tell you who these people are. So I figured it was a wasted trip.

Later that month, she received a letter in the mail with a job offer as a graduate assistant and an application.

> And again, I'm a first generation college kid, you know. Not very experienced. I thought this is how it always works. So I had misjudged this experience with these women and [Name] so badly that I figured I better come.

She summarized her learning from that experience.

> I was very much a product of, you know, at that point in time what you would call the old boy system. But, [Name]'s all boy system was almost all women. Yeah. Which is you know, very fascinating to me. I learned a lot from that.

In addition to subtle messaging, each woman president received explicit messages that caused a turn in the labyrinth. As one president described,

> I got into a discussion with the provost, and I basically said to him, I'm not thrilled at being the lowest paid arts and sciences dean among the AAU schools. I think I'm better than that, and, I think I deserve better treatment than that. At which point he said, 'Okay, but there's nothing I'm going to do about it.' And I said well, I think I'm just going to have to look for another job.

She explained that she had been getting phone calls for different positions. The message she received regarding her salary gave her reason to take action. For these

participants, explicit messages about bias in promotion and opportunity were easy to hear, but challenging to act on.

Specific to the labyrinth, one woman described how she transcended the bias she experienced as a provost at a public institution and how she interpreted that experience within in the context of broader self-assessment.

> *I had very little respect for [university leader], and I realized I really didn't want to be his provost. That's number one. And number two is I realized probably, for the first time in my life, very late in life, in my professional career, that I'm not able to go back and do the same thing that I did before. I realized how much I enjoyed new challenges and different things; and so, then this [presidential] leadership position came open. I decided to go ahead and allow my name to be put forward. And of course the rest is history.*

Hearing the message was a silent skill that served each woman well during her leadership career. The data from this study shows that the experience of understanding implicit messages was as important in creating action as was understanding explicit words. Operating within the labyrinth requires skills in both. The overlay of the reflected narratives of the women on their past experiences gave rich context to the power of the small and large messages heard within the labyrinth.

Opt-In

The third theme that emerged from the data is Opt-in. Each president noted specific opportunities in her life that compelled her take an administrative role and lead in a challenging position. Each woman's leadership journey was different, and thus, the response to opportunity reflected this diversity. According to Carli & Eagly (2016), for women the path in the labyrinth is highly personal and individualized. Thus, being a female president of a public research university did not mean each woman mirrored the other's movements. It means each woman experienced opting-in and choice and knowing when opting-in was worth the risk. Sometimes opting-in meant taking an unpaid position, and sometimes it meant choosing to leave an institution. However, in the end, for these participants, opting-in was always a choice.

One president described her labyrinth experience as a series of unpaid positions in addition to her faculty duties.

> *I didn't really look for administrative positions; but, I kind of accreted them. They were never paid. They were always kind-of "in addition to" everything else I was doing. I became director of [a program on campus], which was an unpaid position. I was the training director for a [research center on campus] which was also, you*

know, an unpaid position. No course relief or anything. I just sort of went ahead and did it on top of everything else. And I found out, I was really good at doing this.

In addition to her emboldened expression of accomplishments, her work in unpaid positions brought her social capital. She said, "One of the associate deans said to me at one point, 'you know, in the dean's office here, we know if we want something done right, we go to [her].' That's the reputation I got and it was a good reputation to have."

A second participant discussed her decision to leave an administrative position earlier than she planned. She was working as a high-level administrator at a research university when she was called for another position.

> *I had not intended to move from there; but, another headhunter came and asked me whether or not I'd be interested in the position of provost at another university. I have to say, I told the headhunter that I actually don't believe that it is appropriate or borderline unethical to move in less than 5 years, because people have spent a significant amount of money getting you out there, getting you adjusted, learning the community. But the headhunter said 'you know, this [University] is a pretty unique place, and you know, things don't always happen in your life exactly when you want them to.'*

She said she decided to apply and opt-in to the opportunity. She explained the learning that came from the risk.

> *I was very attracted to that position because it was really the first time I had a chance. It was the opportunity and the challenges of looking across the whole university and seeing how all the different parts, departments and colleges interacted with each other.*

She eventually moved from this position to become a university president.

A third president described how she moved through a series of positons that opened up at one university and summed up each move with a connection between risk and choice.

> *Then, as it happened, a position opened in the Provost's Office, that was assistant provost or other. And, it had some interesting things [specific to the campus]. So, that seemed like an interesting thing to do, and, something I was unprepared to do. So, I did it. Okay. So there's a little bit of risk taking. You know, sort of, that I can do this stuff, that I can learn this stuff. That's an early part of this.*

A fourth president recalled a series of decisions she made as a mid-level administrator member to opt-in and, how that prepared her for her eventual role as president.

> *I got involved in the budgeting process and the appropriations, went to regents' meetings, and started to observe university leadership. When I was at [University],*

I had all these campus experiences; but, I also had linkages to the system with other provosts and other chancellors. And so, during about a 10-year timespan, I got to, in some ways, to take the mystery out of the leadership position as chancellor and president.

The fifth president took the view of opting-in as a process of doing the next thing and learning by doing. She summarized her career with a series of events where she was compelled to opt-in, but she also learned that, for her, less analysis of choice proved more rewarding. When asked if she had planned to be a university president she answered,

You know, you do make certain decisions during your career that ultimately can lead in this direction. And, if it works out, it's often times serendipitous that it does. There are people that I know that have planned, that this is what they wanted to be, and good for them. I'm glad they planned it. I can't say that this was ever part of any plan that I had.

The idea of opting-in as a choice, and the ways a series of choices might mimic a plan, is systemic of the labyrinth metaphor (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Women face numerous obstacles to leadership, and each turn in the labyrinth requires a choice. In the day-to-day linkage, it is challenging to see the connection of choices over time. However, as more women make it to the top in leadership positions, the ability to reflect and re-create shows similarities in the pattern. True, each journey is specific to the individual. Yet, the action to opt-in is universal.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the navigational experiences of female university presidents leading public research institutions. In 2016, 11 of 81 universities in the Carnegie Classification category Doctoral Universities: Highest Research were led by a woman. These presidents led the top research institutions in the US and had traveled complicated journeys to reach the presidential position. For the study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews of five of the 11 female presidents were conducted. Their stories provide data to support the labyrinth metaphor.

Three themes emerged from the study: Know the Rules, Hear the Message, and Opt-in. The first theme, Know the Rules, provides the labyrinth framework and context. According to Eagly & Carli (2007a, b), the labyrinth metaphor offers a concrete understanding of social phenomenon and provides an image of how women can, and do, reach leadership positions. For these participants, knowing the rules, or more specifically, how intellectual experiences inform university leadership, served as the foundation for the

labyrinth journey. Knowing the rules grounded each participant in her profession and gave guidance to her choices.

Knowing the rules did not negate bias or create a linear path to the top. Moving through the labyrinth is cumbersome and slow (Carli & Eagly, 2016). However, Know the Rules offers clarity to the question of agency and gives guidance to ways women can make positive career decisions. According to Williams and Dempsey (2014), if a woman can understand the challenges to leadership within her organization, she is better armed to confront the challenges.

The presidents interviewed for this study indicated that they had to understand the credentials needed for success. Higher education can be an unforgiving environment for university leaders. These women stepped into leadership with robust resumes and knowledge of the environment that supported them in their leadership journeys.

Similar to how Know the Rules gives a defining boundary to the labyrinth, Hear the Message offers insight on ways to interpret implied and explicit meanings in leadership promotion and organizational structure. In this study, each president identified moments in her career of Hear the Message, where she was given a message about inclusion or lack of inclusion and needed to make a decision based upon that message. The idea of choice, and how women enact decisions, is relevant as well.

According to Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2008; 2012), the word "choice" implies the actor has free will. However, for women in academia, there is no free choice. Every choice is made within a traditional hierarchy, and thus, requires a woman to pay close attention to the impact of her decision (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2008;2012). For these participants, the connection between Hear the Message and choice was tightly woven as each woman moved through the labyrinth.

The third theme, Opt-in, explains the breadth and depth of movement female leaders make in regard to personal navigation in leadership. For these women, Opt-in is not the opposite of Opt-out. None of the women interviewed identified making a decision in which she disengaged. Each movement in the labyrinth was forward, sideways, or around. If a woman chose not to stay at a university due to bias in salary, promotion, or work conditions, she did not Opt-out, but rather, Opted-in to a different direction. In short, Opt-in equals repeated momentum, which in turn, defines each woman's labyrinth journey.

The theme of Opt-in supports Eagly & Carli's (2007a, b) description of the labyrinth as a viable metaphor that "to be successful, women must continue to carefully chart a path through the impediments and puzzles they encounter"(p. 522). The word *continue*, defines the essence of Opt-in and merges with Sandberg's (2013) theme that women must

repeatedly lean-in. In practice, the labyrinth metaphor is helpful in defining how women experience paths to leadership, but does not describe a seamless or worry-free road. A woman working her way through the labyrinth may well find the experience exhausting. However, in reviewing the leadership paths of these women presidents, one finding is universal. When faced with a barrier, women in the labyrinth must Opt-in at each new direction.

CONCLUSION

This study identified and described the navigational experiences of five women university presidents leading public research institutions. Although the number of women leading in this category of institutions remains small, with only 13% of public Doctoral Granting: Highest Research universities having a female president, there is power in their stories. Sharing the stories of women who have sustained a successful path to leadership paves the way for social change (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, b).

Eagly and Carli (2007a, b) are correct, in that women are breaking through the glass ceiling (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Much has been written about leadership and the difficulties women experience when navigating leadership positions (Bornstein, 2008; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013; Williams & Dempsey, 2014). The story often carries the same history of bias and barriers but little information about how women actually get it done. For the participants of this study, the model of the labyrinth more closely mirrors their experience. There is no guidebook for how a woman moves past barriers and into university leadership. Each president created her own path through skillful navigation.

It is more than simple luck that women are finding their way to the top. Although disproportionate to men, women are leading Fortune 500 companies, research-intensive institutions, and making strides in this platform. The new story that needs to emerge is to report the skills women use to make it to that level and survive. Universities do not make vertical movement easy for women, and each journey is traveled alone. Learning how women reach top levels of administration is valuable in creating a collective voice for women in leadership. As organizations change and women access their social power, the number of women in top leadership positions will continue to increase. It will never be an easy role, and there will always be barriers along the road. However, in the end, leadership for women is about taking the next step. Collecting the narratives of women in the journey brings communal understanding to the experience. Each woman's path to leadership may be her own but builds on the paths of women who have come before her.

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Female Superintendents' Longevity: Their Experiences

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Abstract

This paper describes a qualitative research study of the experiences of Texas female superintendents with longevity. Specifically, five superintendents with tenure of at least six years in one school district were interviewed to hear their voices. Findings show that a strong working relationship with their boards, a solid connection with their communities, a commitment and passion for the position, as well as a sense of achievement were factors in their longevity.

Keywords: superintendent tenure, superintendent longevity, school board relationship, community connection, job satisfaction

The purpose of this study was to give voice to Texas female superintendents who achieved longevity in their position. The research question that guided this study was: What are the lived experiences that contribute to women superintendents' longevity? As a previous superintendent who is a woman, I was curious about the reasons that impact a person staying in the superintendent position. The literature shows mixed results for the tenure of superintendents in school districts as well as the factors that have led to longer tenure. Some researchers have used at least five years of tenure in a district to describe longevity (Asbury, 2008; Chance & Capps, 1952; Kamrath & brunner, 2014; Rohlfing, 2011; Simpson, 2013; Talbert, 2011), while other researchers used at least six years of tenure (Arlt, 2016; Prezas, 2014; Sethna, 2014). Additionally, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) allege that there was no accurate numbers for women superintendents and their longevity. The American Association of School Administrators found that the mean tenure for superintendents staying in one school district was six years (Glass & Franceshcini, 2007). Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) found that the average tenure of a superintendent was 6.7 years. The Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) found similar results for tenure of Texas superintendents. While there have been some studies on superintendent tenure and various factors, very few are specific to women as superintendents. Currently, there are 222 female superintendents in Texas, out of 1,028 superintendents. Of those 222 women, 43 (19%) have achieved over six years of tenure in one school district with a range of longevity from six to 19 years.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The longevity of superintendents has been studied, but primarily with all superintendents and not specific to gender. Many researchers use five years or more at one school district as the determinant for higher longevity (Alsbury, 2008; Arlt, 2016; Chance & Capps, 1992; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014; Rohlfing, 2011; Simpson, 2013; Talbert, 2011). One factor related to superintendent tenure was district student achievement. Some researchers determined that the higher the student achievement in their districts, the longer the superintendent tenure (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Johnson, Huffman, Madden & Shope, 2011; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014; Simpson, 2013). Pascopella (2011) argues that as a district has increased stability of programs, as well as cohesiveness of instructional strategies for increased student achievement, the more time a superintendent stays in the district. Conversely, Arlt (2016) found no statistical significance between student achievement and superintendent tenure.

Leadership characteristics are another determinant of superintendent longevity. Some research suggests that female superintendents tend to govern in a more democratic, team-oriented leadership approach that is collectively results-oriented (Ion & Fulch, 2009: Northouse, 2012). This collective orientation includes more people who give more support to a superintendent, which then leads to a longer tenure. Rohlfing (2011) researched five women superintendents with at least five years in their current positions. These female superintendents had leadership styles described as caring, interactive with a strong follow-up, and relational and power sharing (Rohlfing, 2011).

Talbert (2011) found a correlation between superintendent commitment and their longevity with a school district. The superintendents who stayed the longest in a district were those who had a strong affective commitment to stay in the district (Talbert, 2011).

The style of leading by example and dependability are strong factors for tenure (Prezas, 2014). These are followed by communication skills, high expectations, emotional stability, and high integrity as factors for longevity (Prezas, 2014). These observations concur with previous research that show that factors associated with *lower* superintendent tenure are poor school board president relationships, not getting decisions made at the school board level, and poor school board communication (Bryd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006).

The balance between professional and personal relationships is an additional aspect of superintendent endurance. Sethna (2014) conducted a qualitative case study with five women superintendents who had at least six years of experience in order to determine perceived barriers to longevity. The study showed that female superintendents had self-imposed barriers related to the glass ceiling, morale, and mentorships with their professional work. The professional environment was impacted by the district employees' morale, as many of the women superintendents were hired in low morale districts. The women attributed their longevity to the relationships they had developed and their process of self-reflection on their major decisions. Term length was increased when a female superintendent found a mentor to support her professional work (Sethna, 2014; Smith, 2015). Other school personnel relationships also impact their lastingness, as the superintendents felt a need to prove themselves as competent leaders. Additionally, the women in Sethna's (2014) study identified that their personal relationships of family support was important.

School location and size of the school district are factors that negatively impacted a superintendent's longevity (Alsbury, 2008). Rural school superintendents face many challenges, such as working with limited resources, fewer administrators to share the workload, and resistance to change (Forner, Beirlen-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012; Hawk, 2011;

Kamratin & Brunner, 2014; Yates. 2016). Alsbury (2008) and Yates (2016) found that the smaller school districts had the highest turnover of superintendents, and they suggest that the superintendents often move to larger districts for higher-paying positions.

The school board and superintendent relationship is a strong indicator of the term-length of a superintendent (Alsbury, 2008; Goodman, 2012; Sethna, 2014). The school boards' desire to keep a superintendent or not are determined by many internal and external factors. Chen (2014) found that superintendents often did not feel well-prepared and were not given enough time to gain the skills that would lead to their success with their school boards. Some women feel threatened by internal administrators who have more knowledge of the community and the curriculum in a district, as well as knowing the school board (Grogan, 2000). This often leads to a stressful relationship between board members and the superintendent and then a higher turnover rate in the superintendent position.

There are many determining factors that impact a superintendent's longevity in a school district. Some of these factors are district student achievement, superintendent leadership characteristics, balance between professional and personal relationships, school board relationships, leadership styles, size and location of school districts. Some of the components studied connected to female superintendents but many studies did not look for the unique factors for women. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of five Texas female superintendents with at least six years of tenure.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study examines the experiences of women superintendent who have had at least six years of tenure in a Texas school district. At the time of the study, there were forty-three Texas female superintendents with at least six years of tenure as superintendents in their district. All forty-three were contacted to participate in this study. Five responded to the request and agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted at locations chosen by the participants. The approach of this study is a qualitative narrative inquiry to study the experiences of women superintendents with longevity. This type of approach gives voice to the women, and hopefully, the chance for other women to connect with their stories and increase the number of women superintendents as well as their longevity as superintendents (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). In-depth interviews were conducted with each identfied superintendent. The interviews were 60 minutes with an initial telephone contact with the superintendent to gain permission for the interviews. The interviews were then written as stories for each participant. Pseudonyms were chosen for each woman.

A limitation of the study was the small sample size. This sample size is often used in qualitative studies however, there is limited generalizability due to this small sample size. Trustworthiness was established as participants were asked to provide a retrospective account of their lived experiences. The reflective narrative of each female superintendent's lived experiences was carefully analyzed and retold, paying attention to the trustworthiness of the study. Each participant reviewed their own stories to ensure that the interpretations by the researcher were correct. Interviews were open-ended with each participant reflecting on what they perceived as most important in their career. Data analysis was a narrative analysis to keep the focus on the stories of each women superintendent's longevity story (Polkinghorne, 1995).

FINDINGS

The findings of the five superintendents interviewed showed that emergent themes for factors that led to their longevity were a stable school board, strong connections with the community, a commitment to the job, a passion and love for what they were doing, and continual improvement.

One superintendent, Mrs. White, had been in her district for 12 years and planned to stay in that district as a central office administrator until her retirement. However, when the superintendent had health issues and needed to retire, the school board asked her to apply for the position. She has been the superintendent for 19 years. She was the first female superintendent in the district. The previous superintendent retired and remained in the community. That retired superintendent provided support and financial guidance her first year as superintendent. This allowed a easier transition for continuity with the school district. She strongly believes in the development of her own leaders. She provides training and has high expectations for her administrators. Further, she said, "my task was to make the district an exemplary district with a strong commitment to provide cutting edge practices with a vision that was unique to this district." Mrs. White shared, "I view the superintendent position as a calling, and my longevity is based on appreciating the work of others who shared my vision and passion for system improvement." She strongly valued approaching her work from that system view rather than piecemeal.

Additionally, she shared, "it was important for administrators to revisit their value system to ensure that they were doing the best for kids and adults in the school." According to Mrs. White, "the stressors for the job are legislative issues as well as financial issues for my district." She shared "when she first started, the school board was not functioning well. The community had to turn that around." Mrs. White said, "I was able to involve the new

board in a strong vision to meet the needs of all students." That commitment meant several new programs to meet the needs of all students. She elaborated, "I am very proud of the programs started in my district that let students develop and showcase their individual talents." Some of these programs included athletics, while others were increased fine arts programs and career field programs. Mrs. White declared, "my excitement comes from the success of my students."

The second superintendent we interviewed also had a strong connection with her community. Mrs. Key has been the superintendent for six years. She was the first female superintendent in her district. She had an extremely rough start in her position. Her first board evaluation was a "grueling process." She shared, "my first board said I was not doing what they thought I should be doing." The school board gave her this evaluation when she had been in the district only three months. Because of this poor evaluation, Mrs. Key said, "I went to two male superintendents for advice. Their advice was to go to the community and get their support." She worked with these mentors and created a "battle plan." Mrs. Key shared, "I joined community service organizations and asked to be put on administrative boards so I could fast track support for a school bond." She also joined a church. Mrs. Key stated, "the community was more open than my board.... The school bond passed in the spring, and then in the summer of my first year the middle school students' scores went up. The school board had little to say after that." She shared that she battled until the second board allowed her to make a change in leadership that had been detrimental to her. Mrs. Key stated that "I had a bulldog tenacity and was not going to be beat." Mrs. Key said,

> After reflecting on my first year, it was intimidating. The board had been used to a specific way things were done. There are pictures of men above my office door of previous superintendents. The first is standing by a wagon. They had long-term status. It was intimidating. I was naïve and so hungry for this first superintendent position. So many things I would do differently now.

Mrs. Key described that "other stressors to the position were legislative decisions and the need to stay current on all changes. This took a lot of my time." Mrs. Key's advice for longevity is "to develop a network of people you can trust. Then you must find a critical friend that will help you assess if your actions are true to your words and beliefs."

A third participant, Mrs. Mac, has been a superintendent for 12 years in one district. She was the first female superintendent in the district. She had been in the district seven years prior to being named the superintendent. She shared that "the salary increase was an important consideration to taking the position." Further, she stated, "I was able to expand

my role to school board relations, finance, and human resources." Mrs. Mac shared, that "self-confidence is essential to success and longevity of a superintendent." She shared that "there are difficult days in the position." Further, the things that caused her stress were "self-induced." The things that stressed her were "board members when they over-meddle, inadequate school funding, parents who do not take their role of parent seriously or otherwise have no value in education, and employees who like to keep things stirred up." She said, "On these days when you felt like a piñata, you have got to have some way to get back up." Mrs. Mac stated that it was important to have good interpersonal skills and conflict resolution skills. Mrs. Mac said, "The role of a superintendent requires constant dealing with people."

Another important skill, according to Mrs. Mac was to be patient. She said, "You do not need to speak up immediately or try to fix everything." Mrs. Mac also said that she had a strong relationship with her board members because she respects their role. She emphasized that "many superintendents are asked to leave a district because of their egos." She stated, "The board members are the link between the community and the superintendents. They know the history and needs of the community." Mrs. Mac shared that "I am very transparent with my board." Her major stressors have been inadequate funding and an occasional board member who "over-meddles." But typically, she says the other board members can be enlisted to keep the board member "in line." She also shared that "my longevity was based on a love for the community. Mrs. Mac stated, "I enjoy this community. We have our struggles, but they are 'our' struggles. I like the idea that I have watched students graduate that I have known since birth. As for the community, they have largely supported me. I think primarily because they know that I will 'shoot them straight'." The community supports her. They also appreciate her and understand that she "may not be able to fix it, but that she would tell them why it is that way." Mrs. Mac stated, "superintendent turnover is based on poor school board and superintendent relations, retirement, and advancement to higher paying positions." She advises others to maintain a balance to keep things in perspective. She shared "I love to go to work every day."

A fourth participant, Mrs. Joe, has been the superintendent for 13 years in her district. She became the superintendent when she was an assistant superintendent in the district and the school board asked her to consider being the superintendent. She shared. "I am very laid back and do not take things personally." Additionally, she stated, "I am highly organized and expect everyone to carry his or her own weight." She went to school in this same district, so she knows the community well. She was a teacher, vice principal, and assistant superintendent prior to being the superintendent. Mrs. Joe shared, "I have a

good relationship with my school board." Mrs. Joe said, "Tenure in a district is extended when superintendents are able to get along with various personalities on the school board." She added that "school board members do need training." Then she also revisits that training with her school board members. Mrs. Joe said, "I continue to provide training for our board. I invite lawyers and other consultant to provide training to the board. Once they know their roles and responsibility it helps. I have to revisit that training from time to time." She stated that "the reasons for superintendent turnover were people advancing to larger districts or poor relations with their current school board." According to Mrs. Joe, "my longevity is based on getting along with various members of the community, the school board, and the administrative team." She stated, "It is important to keep quality teachers and administrators."

The fifth participant, Ms. Anderson, has been the superintendent for nine years in one district. Prior to being hired as the superintendent, she was an assistant superintendent in the same district.She has worked in the same district for 31 years. She applied for the superintendent position because it felt like the "natural progression in her career." She had been a teacher, principal, director of federal programs, and assistant superintendent. Her decision to be the superintendent was also based on her desire to give back to the community. Ms. Anderson said, "I take my role very seriously and I am very detail oriented." She shared, "every decision I make is based on what is best for the students." Her major strength is her ability to listen and put others first. She shared, "personal agendas and personal pride of others has been detrimental to the school district." Ms. Anderson said, "a major stressor for my job is not enough time in the day." Also, Ms. Anderson stated, "Adults can cause stress." She said, "we expect students to have some problems, but we expect adults to make ethical decisions, so when that doesn't happen, it is stressful." She also shared the importance of team building exercises with her school board. Ms. Anderson stated that "team building with the board is important for building trust, honesty, cooperation, and transparency between me and the board." Ms. Anderson stated that many superintendents leave because they are "working their way up the ladder." She said, "another reason for leaving is that a superintendent finds he/she is not a good fit with the community." Ms. Anderson added that female superintendents have to work harder than male superintendents, but that they also seem to be more vested in the community. She shared, "I take my role as superintendent very seriously. I want to ensure that every decision is made with what is best for our students as the overriding thought. You aren't going to please everyone, but we must ensure that the students remain our number one priority."

CONCLUSION

The five female superintendents with longevity (at least six years) for this study display a passion and commitment to their jobs, their districts, and their communities, matching Talbert's (2011) findings for longevity of Texas superintendents in general. Three women in this study emphasized the importance of meeting the needs of the students. This was similar to findings that districts with higher student achievement had a positive impact on superintendent longevity (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Johnson, Huffman, Madden & Shope, 2011; Kamrath & Brunner, 2014; Simpson, 2013).

All of the women who are superintendents in this study also discussed school board relations. Two of the women had difficult school board relations at the beginning of their tenure in the district. Both women were able to develop plans to improve this relationship. The plans involved the community and gaining their support so a more positive board could be established for the district. The board relationship with the superintendent as it relates to longevity is mentioned in other research studies (Bryd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006; Lere, 2004; Libka, 2012; Martiz, 2006; Waters, & Marzano, 2006). Two of the women superintendents said that their school boards needed training. One of these women shared that the training was specific to team building. Three women felt that superintendent turnover was actually based on poor school board relations. Other reasons for turnover were advancement to larger districts, retirement, or not a fit between the superintendent and the community Stressors in the job were time, keeping up with legislative issues, and finances.

There was little mention of balance between professional work and personal relationships such as family, differing from Sethna's (2014) research that found women having difficulty with the balance between work and family. One woman said that mentorship and self-reflection were important to her longevity, which was similar to Sethna's (2014) findings. Another woman shared the importance of high expectations similar also to Sethna's work. Several women discussed the need for good communication. The female superintendents in this study still enjoyed their jobs and showed a commitment to their community and district. Female superintendents in Texas are staying in their positions longer with a commitment for improvement of schools and their communities. As women increase their superintendent longevity, they also increase their visibility and may help other women superintendents new to the position.

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