WOMEN AND THE SUPERINTENDENCY: GLASS

CEILING AND EMPOWERMENT OF FEMALE

SUPERINTENDENTS IN OKLAHOMA

By

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Abstract: Several acts and movements have attempted to eliminate discrimination in employment opportunities. However, despite these acts and movements, there remains a disproportionate number of males in top leadership positions in public schools. Women who hold the position of superintendent in public school districts in Oklahoma from diverse backgrounds including rural and urban districts, small and large districts, and various regional areas in Oklahoma were invited to participate in this study. This transformative qualitative case study was context bound to a group of eight women who consented to participation. The purpose of this study was to explore through the combined lenses of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling how selected women obtained and experienced their roles as public school district superintendents in Oklahoma. Data were collected through multiple sources, including demographic surveys, interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts and documents. Also, document prompts of participants' own resumes were utilized during interviews.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ella Flagg Young was the first female superintendent of a public school district in the United States (Blount, 1998). In 1909, she was quoted in the *Western Journal of Education* regarding women and the superintendency:

> In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast educational system. It is woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership. (p. 515)

This "near future" has yet to occur. One hundred and ten years later, women are still under-represented in the field of educational leadership and in the position of superintendent (Blount, 1998, 2017).

Most teachers in the field of pre-K through 12 schooling are women (NCES, 2018). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) reported that the education workforce is 77 percent female and 23 percent male. Even though the percentage of women public school superintendents has doubled in the last two decades, from 13 percent in 2000 to 26 percent in 2020, the vast majority of superintendents are white males (Rogers & Tieken, 2020). This suggests continuing barriers and opportunities for advancing women leaders.

Research identifies a significant number of barriers women face in aspiring to the position of superintendent, including lack of support from networks and mentors, greater family demands, glass ceiling, lack of experience of credentials, and imposter syndrome (Bjork, 2000:

Brunner, 1999; Chase, 1995; Glass, 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Kowalski, 2003; Young, 2011). Research on women superintendents has found those who have access to networks and mentors, have support from their spouses, and have advanced degrees are more successful in reaching the superintendency (Bernal et. al, 2017; Hawkins, 2020; Sampson et. al, 2015).

In Oklahoma, research suggests women face gender, racial/ethnic, and religious obstacles in their path to the superintendency (Boone-Wooten, 2003; Evans, 2004). Due to these obstacles, women feel they have to work harder to even be considered for a superintendent position (Hawkins, 2020; Kerber, 2002). Furthermore, studies in Oklahoma corroborate larger studies in finding women need mentors and social networks to support their mobility into and during superintendency (Gammill, 2016; Kerber, 2002; Haynes, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Legislative acts have been enacted and social movements have occurred to eliminate employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Examples include the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Crime Control Act, Civil Rights Act of 1991, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Feminist movements, such as #metoo or #timesup continue the work on bringing women's issues to the forefront of societal discussions in our now online world. However, despite these acts and movements, there remains a disproportionate number of males in top leadership positions in public schools. Blount (1998) reveals women served at higher rates at the beginning of the 20th century, and their numbers declined rapidly after World War II. Furthermore, there was another sharp decline in 1970 that has slowly increased, though at a much slower rate than the early 1900s (Blount, 1998). While women serve as more than three-fourths of the teacher workforce, only 26 percent of superintendents are women (Rogers & Tieken, 2020). And in Oklahoma, the geographic focus of this study, only 20 percent of superintendents are women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019).

Several contributing factors have been brought forth in the literature to account for this discrepancy. For example, some studies indicate that women are marginalized in these roles due to

lack of experience or credentials, and lack of professional mentors (Brunner & Kim, 2010; DiCanio et al., 2016; Hickey-Gramke, 2007; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Sperandio, 2015). Other research and historical narratives demonstrate that society and schools reflect culturally ingrained gender bias (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Grogan, 1996; Kise & Watterson, 2019; Litmanovitz, 2011). Part of this gender bias focuses on the cultural expectations that women focus on family, character traits associated with a successful leader, as well as direct bias in women working to obtain the position of superintendent (Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996; Litmanovitz, 2011; Mahiticanichcha & Rorrer, 2016).

Yet, in the midst of the above-mentioned barriers, some women still obtain superintendent positions. In Oklahoma, women have almost doubled their presence, increasing from 53 to 110 superintendent positions held in the last 17 years (Boone-Wooten, 2003; Hawkins, 2020). One way to address this anomaly is to explore experiences of women superintendents through the combined lenses of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling. This study explored through these combined lenses how selected women obtain public school district superintendent positions in Oklahoma; and what their experiences have been in journeying to this role. It also addresses a gap in the literature as there are few studies concerning women superintendents in Oklahoma.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore through the combined lenses of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling how selected women obtained and experienced their roles as public school district superintendents in Oklahoma.

Research Questions

1. How did current Oklahoma women superintendents attain their positions?
2. What promoted and hindered their movement into these positions?
3. How did they overcome obstacles in the process?

4. How do women perceive the role their gender and race play in the process of obtaining the position of superintendent?

5. What lessons do their experiences have for overcoming injustices on the pathway to the superintendency?

6. How do the concepts of organizational career mobility and glass ceiling explain the data?

Epistemological Perspective

The transformative worldview as an approach to research emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Groups of scholars in this approach to research are typically "critical theorists; participatory action researchers; Marxists; feminists; racial and ethnic minorities; persons with disabilities; indigenous and post-colonial peoples; and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer communities" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 9). Transformative epistemologies, such as critical and feminist approaches to knowledge, assert that "knowledge is socially and historically located within a complex cultural context" (Mertens, 2007, p. 216). Furthermore, awareness of power relations is critical (Mertens, 2007). A transformative worldview holds that research inquiry is intertwined with politics and political change agenda to confront social oppression (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This perspective is especially applicable to sex discrimination in the public school system, as public schools themselves are in the political realm. This study, aligned with transformative epistemology and perspective, explored social oppression of women in the top level of educational leadership.

Theoretical Framework

A transformative perspective requires the researcher to consider historical and social cultural constructs, especially power relations (Mertens, 2007), in designing the study and in the study focus. Societal and structural barriers continue to impede women's integration into male-dominated professions (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Grogan, 1996; Kise & Watterson, 2019; Litmanovitz, 2011). As noted in Creswell & Creswell (2018), the transformative worldview includes critical theorists. In short, "power dynamics are at the heart of critical research" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 61).

Two theoretical lenses salient to my study include organizational career mobility and glass ceiling. Schein (1971) created a three-dimensional model of organizations while exploring organizational career mobility. Kim and Brunner (2009) viewed the career mobility patterns of women superintendents and central office administrators through Schein's theory of organizational career mobility. They applied an additional structure to Schein's three-dimensional model of an organization by adding the filtering boundary of glass ceiling. Schein's organizational career mobility model demonstrates boundaries seen in some organizations which include power structures. Kim and Brunner's (2009) addition of the glass ceiling further demonstrates the power structures that could potentially hinder women from reaching the superintendency. These power structures are constructs that correspond to the transformative paradigm and critical research. I used these frameworks to analyze the data in this study.

Organizational Career Mobility (OCM)

Schein (1971) describes three aspects of career mobility: vertical, radial, and circumferential movement. These aspects are represented in his three-dimensional model of an organization (p. 404). Vertical movement is the increasing or decreasing of rank, power, or level in an organization. Attributes typically associated with increasing vertical movement are getting a raise, promotion, or more prestigious title. This movement could also include a demotion or decreasing of rank. Radial movement or positioning reflects a person's increasing or decreasing centrality in an organization; being more or less "on the inside" (Schein, 1971). Though this movement can happen without a change in rank or department, it usually entails a change of job opportunity and power. Circumferential positioning reflects the changing of one's function or one's division of the organization. This movement is not a changing of rank or level; only a sideways movement from one department to another.

Schein (1971) describes three filtering boundaries in addition to the three dimensions of career mobility. These boundaries determine how or why a person moves within an organization. Kim

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and Brunner (2009) add a fourth filtering boundary in analysis of gender difference in the mobility of superintendents: glass ceiling.

Hierarchical boundaries separate the hierarchical levels from one another. These filter a person's rank within an organization (Schein, 1971). The rules for permeating a hierarchical boundary tend to be somewhat overt. Inclusion boundaries separate individuals or groups from the centrality of the core group. These boundaries can also be more fluid or variable as one moves closer to the inner core of the organization. People within the organization are typically able to see and label who is within the inner circle. The inner circle may cut across many rank levels (Schein, 1971). Functional boundaries are those that separate departments or different functional groupings from one another. Movement between departments can be attributed to wanting to learn a new skill. Other times, this type of movement is used when an organization does not want to promote someone or when they are unable to terminate someone (Schein, 1971).

Kim and Brunner (2009) added the filtering boundary of glass ceiling due to this phenomenon's repeated reporting of women's experiences in education and business literature review. Glass ceiling boundaries are those that involve gender discrimination in hiring processes. Kim and Brunner (2009) found the glass ceiling creates boundaries, both hierarchical and exclusionary, based on the inequitable criteria used in selection and hiring. While it is not possible to claim that the glass ceiling filter is always at work in organizational career mobility, many studies have verified the existence of a glass ceiling in educational leadership career mobility (Bjork, 2000; Brunner, 1999; Chase, 1995; Glass, 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Kowalski, 2003). As stated by Kim and Brunner (2009), "In school administration, in spite of a large number of candidates in the pool, women's under-representation at high levels of administration distinctly reveals the existence of a glass ceiling in women's career development and advancement" (p.103).

Figure 1 depicts the modified Schein (1971, p. 404) Three-Dimensional Model of an Organization in Organizational Career Mobility, with Kim and Brunner's (2009, p. 83) filter of glass ceiling. Career mobility movement is represented by the dark solid lines. The model represents

vertical and radial movement through straight lines. Circumferential movement is represented by the cone shape of the figure. Hierarchical, inclusion, and functional boundaries are represented by shaded shapes within the cone. The glass ceiling boundary is represented along with the hierarchical boundary shape.

Figure 1

Three-Dimensional Model of an Organization with Glass Ceiling Boundary
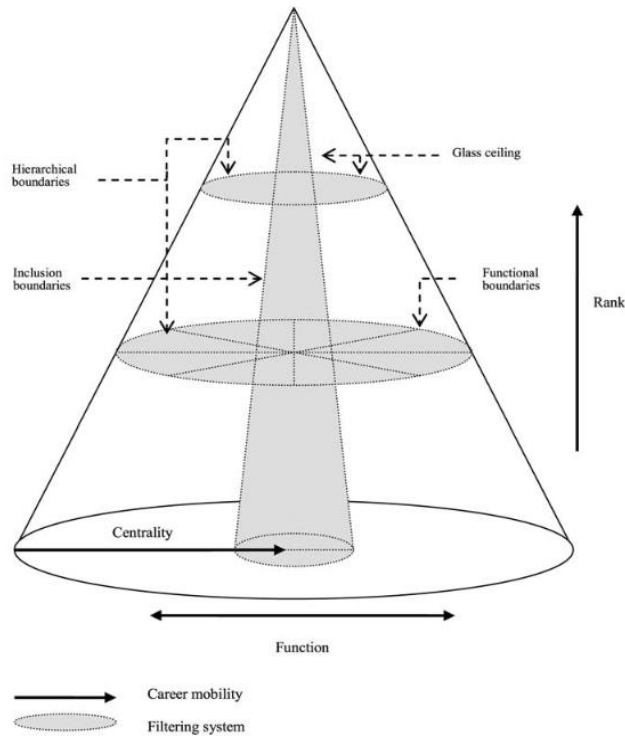
Procedures

As previously stated, critical theory is often associated with the transformative worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A critical lens can be used for conceptualizing the study, collecting the data, and analyzing the data in a case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case study methodology is an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 39). This transformative qualitative case study was context bound to a group of women who hold the position of superintendent in public school districts in Oklahoma. This case was selected based on my

personal experience as an employee in education and my recognition of the need for greater research on women superintendents in Oklahoma. My research found only six studies regarding women superintendents in Oklahoma within the last 20 years (Boone-Wooten, 2003; Gammill, 2016; Hawkins, 2020; Haynes, 2000; Kerber, 2002; Tanner, 2000). And I found one study regarding women who were still aspiring to be superintendents but had not yet made it into a superintendent position (Evans, 2004). There was one additional study regarding mentoring and relationships of Oklahoma superintendents which included a section on gender issues and women superintendents due to data in the study being "so male dominated" (Knight, 1993, p. 92). Although the number of women superintendents has increased, it remains only 20 percent of the total superintendent population (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019). Prior to working in the district in which I am currently a school psychologist, I had only ever worked under a male superintendent. Furthermore, I had never considered the possibility of becoming a superintendent myself until now when I work for a female superintendent who was previously a school psychologist.

This case study explored, through the combined lenses of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling, how selected women obtained and experienced their role as public school district superintendent positions in Oklahoma. Qualitative data were obtained from multiple sources, including: demographic surveys, interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts and documents. Also, I used document prompts of participants' own resumes during my interviews.

Participants were women superintendents in the state of Oklahoma who consented to participation. I printed a list of superintendents in the state of Oklahoma from the state department website through their open records. I filtered this list by checking district websites to ensure the superintendents were as listed and were women. After ensuring criteria had been met, I reached out to the superintendents who were indeed women to see if they were interested in participating in this research study. Using guidelines from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) and the

Oklahoma State Department of Education (2019), I was able to gather participants who served rural and urban districts as part of consideration for a diverse narrative of experiences.

There was a short demographic questionnaire for each participant to complete at the time of individual interview. I conducted individual interviews with eight participants using an interview protocol (see Appendix D). During the interviews, I used document prompts of their own resumes to engage the participants. Observations were made at school board meetings to gain insight on how these women superintendents interacted with their school boards and how this might influence their position as a superintendent. Artifacts were gathered, including degrees, credentials, and resumes from each superintendent. Further information was gathered by searching for local news stories around the time of each superintendent's appointment by their school board.

Personal researcher positionality is an important consideration for any qualitative study based on the researcher as primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Critical studies acknowledge we are all positioned in varied networks which shape our thinking and beliefs. I attempted to be aware of my thinking and beliefs throughout this study. Being an employee of the district in which some data was collected, I kept in mind the bias that could shape the research. Part of the appeal of working for this district, for me, was having a female superintendent. This bias could have created assumptions about the case prior to having a working understanding of what data would reveal about this superintendent's experiences. Knowing my observations and experiences guide my research, I took action to acknowledge bias when it arose. I kept a personal journal as I collected data to monitor and help clarify my own positionality in relation to the data. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, I used member checking to ensure the accuracy of my findings with the participants; I triangulated the different data sources to build sound justification for themes; and I used peer debriefing to review my work and help identify any unseen bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Potential Significance of Study

To Practice

This study explored how women narrated their journey to and attained the position of superintendent within a public school district. Knowing about barriers from women who have experienced them may enable other women who desire to advance to superintendent to be more resilient and irrepressible. This information could influence current women in leadership positions to continue their careers when facing challenges or discrimination.

To Research

The significance of this study is to make a contribution to the body of research in the highest level of public educational leadership by examining women's experiences while holding superintendent positions. Research on this topic in Oklahoma is limited despite its importance in providing equitable opportunities in employment. While the first woman superintendent recognized the inequity in this position in 1909 (Blount, 1998), there is a lack of continuous research exploring why women remain the minority in these positions nationwide or in Oklahoma. This study also explored how women describe overcoming barriers when moving into a superintendent position in Oklahoma. The epistemological perspective of transformative worldview lacks a uniform body of literature (Creswell, 2018). This study will add to the viewpoint and research of this essential perspective.

To Theory

This study added to the literature base of E.G. Schein's Organizational Career Mobility (1971) with the additional filtering boundary of glass ceiling as added by Kim and Brunner (2009). There is a lack of research utilizing this theory with the glass ceiling filtering boundary. Research studies in Oklahoma had yet to apply these lenses to women superintendents' experiences. This study will be one of the few studies within the literature base of organizational career mobility with glass ceiling; and at this time the only one applied to the context of Oklahoma.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Board of education – governing board of a school district (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019).

Career paths – the progression of a person's career from one position to another (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Career development – steps, activities, and credentials that lead to upward mobility on a career path (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Feminism - belief in and advocacy for gender equity (Rampton, 2015).

Gate keepers - individuals in a position of power who identify women as potential candidates for the superintendent position (Sperandio, 2015).

Glass ceiling - boundary that involves gender discrimination in hiring processes (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Hierarchy - organization of institutions in which people are ranked one above the other according to status or authority levels (Schein, 1971).

Imposter syndrome -condition in which a person has a persistent belief in their lack of intelligence, skills, or competence; despite their success (Young, 2011).

Public school – school funded by taxpayer funds and for the benefit of the general public.

Rural area - encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area (Geverdt, 2019).

School administration – management of all school operations.

Superintendent - executive officer of the board of education and the administrative head of the school system of a district maintaining an accredited school, provided the person holds an administrator's certificate recognized by the State Board of Education (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019).

Urban area -   territory that contains 50,000 or more people (Geverdt, 2019).

Urban cluster – territory that contains at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people (Geverdt, 2019).

Urban school district - district with an average daily membership of 30,000 or more (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019).

Summary of Study

Several acts and movements have attempted to eliminate discrimination in employment opportunities. While women hold the majority of teaching positions, they continue to experience a glass ceiling when it comes to the position of superintendent in public schools (NCES, 2018; Rogers & Tieken, 2020). This study explores how women were able to achieve the position of superintendent in Oklahoma, despite its history as a male-dominated role. Furthermore, this study explored how the glass ceiling boundary interacts with organizational career mobility when aspiring to the role of superintendent. Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility Theory and Kim and Brunner's (2009) additional filtering boundary guide this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to explain the existing research and scholarly literature relevant to employment discrimination and organization career mobility theory. Key topics discussed in this literature review include: (a) history of employment discrimination acts and movements; (b) discrimination in educational leadership; (c) framework for organizational career mobility and (d) glass ceiling.

History of Employment Discrimination Acts and Movements

There is a long history of exclusion, discrimination, and inequitable experiences in educational access; and access to educational leadership positions (Blount, 1998, 2017). Societal movements have worked to eradicate these inequitable experiences. These movements have led to acts within our legal system to further diminish these experiences. It is well known that several acts and movements have been enacted to eliminate employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The following are some examples of attempts to eradicate the marginalization of certain groups.

Equal Pay Act of 1963

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was signed into law by President John F. Kennedy on June 10, 1963. It states:

No employer having employees subject to any provisions of this section shall discriminate,

within any establishment in which such employees are employed, between employees on

the basis of sex by paying wages to employees in such establishment at a rate less than

the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex in such establishment

for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and

responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions… (Monthly

Labor Review, p. 947)

This was one of the first statutes of equal employment opportunity. Furthermore, it

amended the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 which did not address sex discrimination. The

purpose of the Equal Pay Act was to establish equal pay for equal work between men and women

(Kovac, 2004).

Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a well-known piece of legislation aimed at correcting

social inequities (Guy & Finley, 2014). This Act focused on gender discrimination exclusively in

the Title VII section. Title VII specifically focused on discrimination in the workplace.

Discrimination based on sex was added late in the development of this legislation and ultimately

may have provided disadvantages to women based on their gaps in employment during

childrearing years. While this piece of legislation was not perfect, it is still considered an

invaluable move toward improving gender equity in employment (Guy & Finley, 2014). Title VII

expressly forbid discrimination based on an individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national

origin. It specified the unlawful practice of discrimination in employer practices, employment

agency practices, labor organization practices, and training programs (U.S. Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission, Title VII).

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967

This act prohibits discrimination of employment for persons who are aged 40 and older.

The reason for this act, as stated by Congress, is "in the face of rising productivity and affluence,

older workers find themselves disadvantaged in their efforts to retain employment, and especially

to regain employment when displaced from jobs" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, ADEA).

Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the gaps in this legislation were revealed through cases regarding women and pregnancy. While courts acknowledge pregnancy was a condition only women could experience, they still allowed companies to discriminate through their disability insurances. This led to the writing and passing of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act to protect women against workplace sex discrimination due to pregnancy (Guy & Fenley, 2014).

Titles I and V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

Title I of the ADA, which became effective for employers with 25 or more employees on July 26, 1992, prohibits employment discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Since July 26, 1994, Title I applies to employers with 15 or more employees. Title V contains miscellaneous provisions which apply to EEOC's enforcement of Title I (U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, ADA).

Civil Rights Act of 1991

The focus of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 in regards to employment discrimination was that of disparate impact; meaning, the outcomes of equality, not just the intentions. Furthermore, this Act permitted awarding punitive and compensatory damages in cases of intentional discrimination (Guy & Fendley, 2014).

Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) differed from previous acts in that it put into consideration women's roles of wife and/or mother; their roles beyond employees. This Act allowed employees to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave for many different circumstances relating to a person's family or self. Consideration of a growing family, through adoption or birth, is one way this Act considered a woman's varying roles (Guy & Fenley, 2014).

Take Our Daughters to Work Day

In 1993, Nell Merlino was hired by the Ms. Foundation as a consultant to explore how to help adolescent girls develop a greater sense of self. The Ms. Foundation had been examining the research of Carol Gilligan that reported girls lose sense of self and refrain from speaking out during adolescence. Merlino recognized the importance of providing girls more opportunity to see vocational positions and a variety of economic role models (Godfrey, 2002; Waxman, 2017). Ten years later, in 2003, the foundation has changed its name to "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work" with the mission to "empower girls and boys in all sectors of society to confront and overcome societal messages about youth so that they may reach their full potential and live fulfilling lives" (Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work).

Crime Control Act of 1994

The Crime Control Act of 1994 included a provision addressing organizational reforms for police departments that utilized their power in violations of civil rights. This directly addressed employment discrimination in a House Report stating the Justice Department "can sue private and public employers, including police departments, over pattern of employment discrimination" (Burnham, M., 2015, p. 711).

National Pay Inequity Awareness Day

On April 11th, 1996, President William (Bill) J. Clinton signed Proclamation 6883 designating this date as National Pay Inequity Awareness Day. In the proclamation, he states, "More than three decades after the passage of the Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, women and people of color continue to suffer the consequences of unfair pay differentials" (1996, p. 651). His intention behind this proclamation was to bring continued awareness to the inequity in employment practices. Further, President Clinton urged employers to review their wage-setting practices.

Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was written in response to a Supreme Court ruling against Lilly Ledbetter's pay discrimination at Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. Based on the rules in Title VII, Ledbetter was legally not able to file a claim because of the time in which a complaint must be filed. Ledbetter's unawareness of the discrimination for multiple years caused multiple judges to dissent in the ruling of this case. Therefore, the Ledbetter Act was passed to clarify that a violation of Title VII occurs every time discriminatory compensation takes place. Therefore, each paycheck can be considered a discriminatory act by which a plaintiff can bring suit (Guy & Fenley, 2014).

Feminist Movements and Influence in Education

Feminism is belief in and advocacy for gender equity (Rampton, 2015). Feminist and social movements have had a large impact on the introducing and passing of the acts mentioned above. Between the 1840s to the 1920s, women, and some supportive men, began gathering to confront societal norms which impacted their lives. This included fighting for the promotion of equal contract and property rights (Phillips & Cree, 2014). Returning to Ella Flagg Young, the suffragette movement and democratic practices were ways Young saw as a means to empower students and teachers (Blount, 2017). Many of the teachers who rallied together in associations to win rights and hold back overreach of primarily male education leaders played critical leadership roles in the larger women's suffrage movement (Blount, 2017).

In the 1960s through the late 1980s, early 1990s, a hallmark phrase of feminism was "the personal is political" (Phillips & Cree, 2014; Rampton, 2015). At the time, during the 1960s, white feminist Betty Friedan stated, "We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home'" (2013, p. 177). Women wanted more than the traditional role of only wife and mother. Within public school systems, gender roles were increasingly polarized. Even highly-educated women were expected to pursue gender-appropriate roles, like teacher, and stay away from roles that could be considered aggressive or masculine, like that of school administrators (Blount, 1998). During this

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period, the women's educational equity act of 1974 was created to dismantle educational inequities in research, training, education, and other areas (Blount 1998).

In the early to mid-1990s, feminism began to take into account the intersectionality of structural positioning and identities, meaning, how a person's gender intersects with race, ethnicity, social class, and disability, all of which can position people structurally in unique ways and complicate their experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). At Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), women were banding together to bring discrimination in higher education to the forefront. In 1996, a 150-page report was delivered to department heads and the President Vest and Provost. The college then made the report public in 1999 (Colwell & McGrayne, 2020). Through this report, lead scientists at the institute were able to be validated in their concerns of discrimination against women, as well as start systematic changes within the university. From laboratory sizes to salaries, the report had data to effect real change in the practices of the university. The report had lasting effects over the next decade. It became a model for reforming other parts of MIT and other universities for examining bias against female, African American, and Latinx scientists (Colwell & McGrayne, 2020).

As stated by Ruth Phillips and Vivienne Cree (2014), "Social Media has opened up significant spaces for the rebirth of feminist debates and resistance." The creation of the #metoo and #timesup hashtags are cornerstone markers for participation of feminist thought and debate from a new generation of women who live a significant portion of their lives on the world wide web. Colwell and McGrayne (2020) report the need for secrecy when women first began to question and challenge the norms in higher education. They state that "especially before the #MeToo movement- women always had to work behind the scenes" (Colwell & McGrayne, 2020, p. 59). Participants in this online community continue to have difficulty with the word "feminism," as it evokes an idea of gender binary and an air of exclusion (Mosley, 2021). Conversely, this generation acknowledges the problems marginalized populations faced because of the way "society genders and is gendered" (Rampton, 2015). This compels this generation to

continue using the word feminism and its use as a "clarion call for gender equity" (Rampton, 2015). The acknowledgement of a need for political, social, and economic equity for all people continues to reemerge in societal movements and in the field of education. These movements bring the economic inequity of gender and sex to society's attention, encouraging action and change to organizational and systemic issues.

While the major goal of these acts and movements is to eliminate employment discrimination, in education, there are some instances in which women do not experience discrimination (Blount, 2000; Leroux, 2009; Glass, 2000; NCES, 2021), and in other cases, women experience discrimination and remain under-represented (Fox et al., 2019; Glass, 2000; Litmanovitz, 2011; NCES, 1996; Palmer, 2016).

Sex-based Employment Discrimination

Data from the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) report a varying number of received claims of sex-based discrimination in the years 1992 to 2019. The lowest number of reported discrimination cases during this time was in 1992 at 21,796. The highest number of cases reported during this period was in 2012 at 30,356.

Hunt et al. (2020) examined sex-based occupational segregation, specifically in United States Bureaucracies. They report an "optimistic picture of women's public sector employment progress" (p. 458), stating that overall, segregation in occupations has become less frequent in the public areas explored. In their research, they found sex-based occupational segregation was most predominant in regulatory agency administrative labor force. These regulatory agencies include police, fire, utility/transportation, and corrections. The public sectors reflecting most improvement towards gender equality were welfare, hospitals, health, housing, and employment security, under the redistributive employment umbrella.

United States public education is a bureaucracy by nature. The previous study mentioned the areas of most improvement towards gender equality were under the redistributive employment

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umbrella. These sectors are often described as being "helping professions." Public education is also typically considered a helping profession.

Successful Cases in Demarginalizing Women in Education

Blount's (1998, 2017) research provides examples of the success women have had in moving into a previously male dominated employment sector. The influx of women teachers in the mid-1800s is one of the first instances of women changing their status into more powerful figures through attaining a male-dominated societal role. Men previously dominated the teaching profession. It wasn't until the common school movement in the mid-1800s that women infiltrated this position en masse. The common school movement required the availability of a much larger supply of teachers and at a relatively inexpensive cost (Blount, 1998, 2000). Women's status as subordinate to men during this period moved them into the realm of ideal candidates to compensate at a reduced rate.

Another historically successful case of movement towards equal employment is that of the implementation of teacher's pension. This success, too, was established in the 1800s. Elizabeth Allen led this movement which posited that teaching, like military and civil service, was a position of a public servant. Therefore, in this view, teachers should be entitled to the same pension benefits that the military and civil servants were provided. Between 1895 and 1900, ten states passed legislation to pension teachers in their major cities. Further, by 1910, twenty-two states had some form of legislation for teachers' pension (Leroux, 2009).

By the early 1900s, women were the primary sex in the teaching field in the U.S.. This has continued into our current occupational state. Women make up 76 percent of U.S. teachers and are primarily white (Litmanovitz, 2011; NCES, 2021). The National Center for Education Statistics (2021) report an improvement in the numbers of women who hold the position of principal. Women increased representation from 44 percent in 1999-2000 to 54 percent in 2017-2018 and remain primarily white. In terms of gender demographics, this increase reflects a remarkable improvement from education's previous status as a male dominated field.

Less than Successful Cases Demarginalizing Women in Education

Fox et al. (2019) reported there is a clear gender pay gap in education. Male teachers are typically paid twelve percent more than female teachers annually. They further report the gap is significantly larger when considering administrative positions. Male administrators make approximately twenty-seven percent more than women administrators annually (Fox et al. 2019). When restricting the sample to individuals under the age of 35 and without children, Fox and colleagues (2019) discovered the pay gap decreases to approximately six and a half percent. This implies the gender pay gap in K-12 education emerges over time and is potentially related to having children. Furthermore, men continue to hold most high school principal positions (NCES, 2017), which pay approximately six and half percent more annually (NCES, 2021). The National Center for Education Statistics (1996) Statistical Analysis Report on patterns of teacher compensation indicates there has been little change between their report and Fox et al. (2019) findings. In this report, male public school teachers earn between 10 to 13 percent more than females. Wallace (2014) reported women superintendents earn an average of $4,000 to $18,000 less than their male counterparts.

Superintendents

The high percentage of women teachers would lead one to think that the field of education would also have a high number of females in the top leadership role of superintendent. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2021) reported a slight increase in disparity between male and female teachers from 1999-2000 to 2017-2018. Female teachers increased from 75 to 76 percent of the workforce. Yet, women comprise only 26 percent of superintendents (Rogers & Tieken, 2020). In Oklahoma, more than eight out of ten superintendents are still men (Palmer, 2016; Hawkins, 2020). Few studies have been conducted on women's experiences in Oklahoma attaining a superintendent position (Boone-Wooten, 2003; Evans, 2004; Gammill, 2016; Hawkins, 2020; Haynes, 2000; Kerber, 2002; Tanner, 2000).

Many factors could be contributing to the lack of women in the superintendency. Some of these factors could be lack of desired experience or credentials; lack of support from networks and mentors; greater amount of family demands; glass ceiling and gender bias; or lack of desire to pursue the superintendency (Brunner, 1999; Brunner & Kim, 2010; DiCanio, D., Schilling, L., Ferrantino et al., 2016; Glass, 2019; Grogan, 1996; Hickey-Gramke, 2007; Kise & Watterston, 2019; Litmanovitz, 2011; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Maranto et al., 2018; Maranto et al., 2019; Sperandio, 2015).

Lack of Desired Experience or Credentials

Leaders in education can take multiple routes or paths to their positions. Ninety-five to ninety-seven percent of superintendents indicate they have teaching experience on their path to the superintendency (Robinson et al., 2017). These statistics would seem encouraging for women aspiring to the superintendency since they make up the majority of the teacher population. Yet, most superintendents' position prior to the superintendency is that of the high school principalship, another male dominated position in school systems (NCES, 2017). This position may be more desirable a pre-cursor to the superintendency due to the perceived role and responsibilities of secondary principals (Hickey-Gramke, 2007).

Another facet of this issue is the lack of leadership development for the female dominated role of teaching. Most educational organizations do not have a system in place to identify and train exceptional teachers for leadership positions (Litmanovitz, 2011). Glass (2000) found women make up more than fifty percent of students enrolled in graduate level educational administration programs. Women superintendents also hold more doctorate degrees than male superintendents. Approximately 57 percent of female superintendents hold an Ed.D. or Ph.D., compared to 44 percent of male superintendents (Glass et al., 2000). In Oklahoma, 53 percent of female superintendents had doctorates, while the overall percentage of doctorates held by superintendents was 15.3 percent (Knight, 1993). Aceves' (2013) dissertation on Latina superintendents found family cultural expectations played a part in their lack of credentials for

furthering their career path. With the exception of one participant, participants reported not

receiving much family support for their post-secondary education. As previously stated, there are

multiple paths to the superintendent position. While the history of this path is an androcentric

one, scholars have found that women's career paths are more diverse than men's, possibly giving

them an edge on experiential preparedness (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Robinson et al., 2017).

Lack of Support from Networks and Mentors

To transition into a new role in an occupational field requires support from others. Part of

gaining this support is creating a network of people who understand the viewpoint and struggles

that come with a position, as well as understand the skills necessary to successfully hold a

position. When women can create a network of support and mentors, this network can also create

role models for aspiring superintendents (Hickey-Gramke, 2007). Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer

(2006) found that mentoring women into the superintendency is important due to the difficulties

that come with navigating women's space in male dominated established professional networks.

Further, building a network connects people who can attest to women superintendents' leadership

capacity, enhances access to gatekeepers of upper-level positions, and motivates women to aspire

to the position of superintendent (Haynes, 2000; Reid, 2020; Sperandio, 2015). Brunner and Kim

(2010) found even though women are skilled, trained, and prepared for a superintendent position,

they had not been encouraged to pursue advancement to the superintendency. Mentorship is a

significant predictor of women's willingness to advance to the position of superintendent,

especially when the mentor is a current superintendent or mentor within the woman's current

district (DiCanio et al., 2016). White males are more likely to receive effective mentoring, which

empowers them to move ahead in their careers (Blount, 1998). Robinson and colleagues (2017)

found that superintendents are most likely to mentor those like themselves. For example, white

women mentor white women more than other groups, white males mentor white males more than

other groups, females of color mentor females of color more than other groups, and males of

color mentor males of color more than other groups. Since most superintendents are white male

(Rogers & Tieken, 2020), this pattern of mentoring could perpetuate this cycle of fewer women in the position.

Greater Amount of Family Demands

Grogan (1996) found women who aimed to be superintendent felt the pressure of maintaining multiple roles. Specifically, these women noted their roles as mother, partner, and household caretaker, or in other words, the domestic responsibilities often perceived as a woman's role. Brunner (1999) shares women's narratives regarding the difficulties they faced in in navigating the role of partner and superintendent. Many of the women in the study had been through divorces because of their choice to follow a career trajectory to the superintendency, instead of focusing on a traditional marriage. In established research, women superintendents in Oklahoma who have children discussed their children being priority over everything else. Furthermore, these women had to overcome "Superwoman syndrome" – feeling they had to be a perfect wife, homemaker, and career woman (Boone-Wooten, 2003, p. 175). Litmanovitz (2011) further discusses the sacrifice women make when balancing work and domestic life. She stated that even though there has been a shift in gender roles with more women going to school and working, it is still the dominant thought that women should take the role of stay-at-home parent if necessary. This is true in Oklahoma as well. Kerber's (2002) study found women superintendents felt they still had the expectation of being nurturers at home and keeping more traditional roles, which means putting children or family first. Most of the women who participated in Hawkins' (2020) study reported a consequence of their superintendent job was sacrificing time with their own children and family. Additionally, one respondent who did not have children reported she would have experienced more difficulty becoming a superintendent if she had children (Hawkins, 2020).

Another facet of the care provider role is the disadvantage women have when returning to work, should they stay at home for a period. This period out of the workforce leads men to have an experiential advantage when applying for leadership positions. The time requirements of

balancing work and family is the underlying issue when considering family demands. The role of superintendent requires attending not only the traditional school day but also events and meetings after hours. Further, superintendents are typically in an "on-call" situation should any emergencies or school community needs arise (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Allred et al. (2017) reported the most common challenge for women superintendents in their study was the work-family balance. While many of their participants reported having good family support, they also reported working hard to keep the balance between career and family time.

An additional factor for women in more traditional marriages includes contemplation of family and domestic role when deciding if they are willing to relocate or commute for access to a position. Respondents in Bernal and colleagues (2017) study reported having to take careful consideration of their domestic responsibility when deciding to take a superintendent position.

Glass Ceiling and Gender Bias

Commensurate with the stereotyping of gender roles at home is that of gender bias in the workplace. Women in leadership are viewed through a different lens than their male counterparts (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Grogan, 1996; Kise & Watterston, 2019). In education, women are often expected to take the role of a caretaking for students, while men are typically expected to have a take-charge role (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). There is historical bias as to what a great leader looks like. Some would argue this androcentric stereotyping dates back to ancient Greece (Kise & Watterston, 2019). Others report the concept of a great leader has often been that of a "great-man" in research since the turn of the century. Additionally, leadership studies have historically been about men; and the standards by which leaders were judged were set by men (Kise & Watterston, 2019). Previous research has painted a picture of women in leadership as less capable than men (Grogan, 1996). Brunner (2000) found women superintendents experienced this stereotypical bias and verbalized their experience by stating, "They say, 'Well, she knows what she is doing in education. She's really brilliant in education, but she really doesn't understand business'" (p. 41). Another way of saying this is that characteristics of teachers have been

stereotypically feminine, such as nurturance and patience; and characteristics of school leaders have been stereotypically masculine, like authority and rationality (Chase & Bell, 1990; Maranto et al., 2018). The long-standing stereotype of men in leadership perpetuates the belief that women do not possess the traits needed to hold leadership positions (Kise & Watterson, 2019; Litmanovitz, 2011).

Researchers have found gender bias in multiple studies regarding the hiring of women superintendents by their school boards. Glass (2000) reports a significant percentage of male superintendents agree that school boards tend to view women as incapable of managing a school district. Brunner and Kim (2010) found school board members perceived women as weak managers and unqualified to handle budgeting and finances. Shakeshaft (1989) examined male superintendents hiring practices in regard to the perceptions of their school boards. In this study, researchers noted that male superintendents were unlikely to hire an attractive woman as an assistant superintendent due to perceived lack of comfort by their school board. Another reason, and Shakeshaft argues this hurts women the most, is these male superintendents thought they might be attracted to the woman. Toland (2020) found male school board members are more likely to hire male superintendent candidates.

Some research suggests that school boards and educational leaders who report being aware of gender bias and supportive of women actually perpetuate male dominance. Dobie & Hummel (2001) found educational leaders who deny or ignore gender bias in the superintendency continue the marginalization of women in this role. This research also posits the danger of sustained glass ceiling practices in education, stating inequities in one part of the system will unavoidably be continued in others. Chase and Bell (1990) state "gatekeepers simultaneously may be supportive of women leaders and distracted from the question of how men hold on to positions of power in the field of public education" (p. 174). This idea is further supported in later research by Chase (1995) that documents women's narratives of opportunities becoming available for her due to powerful men opening the doors. Her research also reveals a direct form

of gender bias when a women participant states she heard multiple times from board members that they were afraid the staff wouldn't accept her as superintendent due to her gender. This same participant recounts an experience in which the school board deliberately altered hiring procedures in order to offer a job to one of the "good old guys" (p. 161). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) cite a school board's more direct form of gender bias. A woman superintendent shares her story of being told that this board member did not want a woman superintendent. He further stated that women should submit to men and he would be sure she did her job the way he wanted.

Bernal and associates (2017) reported that issues of gender bias are still present within the superintendency. They found women are perceived as being inferior in strength and intelligence when compared to men. Further, many continue to feel concerned that women will make decisions based on emotion rather than facts. Maranto and colleagues (2019) also found the persistence of gendered career systems in U.S. public education that perpetuate gender bias. They additionally discovered female principals express less desire for the superintendency than their male counterparts. They note that ambitious women may be less likely than men to choose careers in educational administration because of perceived negative gender bias. In Allred et al. (2017), 43 percent of respondents reported they had not originally aspired to become superintendents. These participants reported being urged by their spouses, being asked by their districts, or being inspired to do better than their current leaders. In Reid's (2020) study, all women participants reported they had experienced overt or implied gender stereotyping while holding previous administrative positions, as well as during their current superintendencies.

Women of Color

Most of the research on women superintendents is based on experiences of White women (Alston, 2005; Angel et al., 2013; Katz, 2012). Rodriguez's (2019) study found Mexican American women are being selected to lead districts that are small, rural, isolated, and with a large majority Hispanic population. There were many similar themes to what aided in their success moving into a superintendent role as previously cited in studies based mostly on White

women's experiences. These participants reported sponsorship and networking as important facets of Latina leadership (Rodriguez, 2019). Acves (2013) found that Latina women, who all reported prejudice against them based on appearance, gender, skin color, speech, accent or cultural background, felt that this was an intrinsic motivator to continue to work towards the superintendency. They wanted it to be known that they did not want to hired because of their race, gender, or ethnicity. In Cox's (2017) study, she found a similar theme; Black women superintendents wanted to explain that race does not affect job performance. Participants in another study reported the "double-whammy" of race and gender as barriers to the role of superintendent (Angel et. al., 2013, p. 605). One participant reported there were places she would not apply for a superintendent position because "they don't look like me there and they don't want anybody that looks like me in their town" (Angel et. al., 2013, p. 605). Conversely, one woman's experience as a Black superintendent in a majority White school district found her race was not an issue. She states, "I thought: how is this district going to cope with an African American female as a superintendent after they've had a White male superintendent… And I have to say, knock on wood, it just hasn't been an issue" (Katz, 2012, pp. 778-779). In Oklahoma, only one study reported the demographics of participants, though it did not explore the intersectionality of race and gender for the women of color who participated (Boone-Wooten, 2003).

Gender and Marginalization

There have been many acts and movements created to eliminate employment discrimination. While women have successfully obtained majority status in the role of teaching, they still remain marginalized in pay and in educational leadership roles (Fox et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2017). Women are thought to remain underrepresented in these roles due to multiple factors including experience or credentials, and lack of mentors (DiCanio et al., 2016; Hickey-Gramke, 2007; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Robinson et al., 2017). Research and historical narratives demonstrate culturally ingrained gender bias. Part of this gender bias focuses

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on family expectations as a woman, character traits associated with a successful leader, as well as direct bias in women working to obtain the superintendency (Boone-Wooten, 2003; Maranto et al., 2019). Furthermore, women of color are additionally marginalized due to the societal values constructed around the intersections of both gender and race (Acves, 2013; Alston, 2005; Brown, 2014; Cox, 2017; Katz, 2012).

<div align="center">Organizational Career Mobility and Glass Ceiling</div>

Organizational Career Mobility (OCM)

Considering the career mobility of superintendents, research supports that there are many different pathways to the superintendency (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020; Kim & Brunner, 2009; McDade & Drake, 1982). These pathways can be affected by the person's career background and the leadership opportunities within the district. Organizational position and movement contain various degrees of opportunity and power. Vertical movement in an organization is typically what people think of when discussing career mobility. This direction is associated with an increase in salary, source of improvement, and a person's stage in life (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Schein (1971) describes vertical movement along with two additional aspects of career mobility: radial and circumferential movement.

Vertical Movement

Vertical movement is the increasing or decreasing of rank, power, or level in an organization. Benefits typically associated with increasing vertical movement are getting a raise, promotion, or more prestigious title. This movement could also include a demotion or decreasing of rank. Vertical movement sometimes produces some radial movement; a promotion would move one closer to the inside, whereas a demotion would move one further from the inside group (Schein, 1971). There are also instances in which a person moves primarily upward without moving in or around. This would be in the case of a highly trained specialist who the organization needs to keep through upward movement, but this person is given little administrative power (Schein, 1971).

Radial Movement

Radial movement or positioning reflects a person's increasing or decreasing centrality in an organization; being more or less "on the inside" (Schein, 1971). Though this movement can happen without a change in rank or department, it usually entails a change of job opportunity and power. Moving closer to the leader of an organization would bring more power and public visibility, which could lead to opportunity (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Circumferential Movement

Circumferential positioning reflects the changing of one's function or one's division of the organization. This movement is not a changing of rank or level; only a sideways movement from one department to another. It is a functional change without additional salary, opportunity for advancement, or additional power. This is often the movement of a "perpetual student" or someone who tries a new skill or work area as soon as they believe mastery has been achieved in their current department. (Schein, 1971; Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Schein (1971) describes three filtering boundaries in addition to the three dimensions of career mobility. These boundaries determine how or why a person moves within an organization. Schein states that these boundaries can vary. Some of the varying characteristics of these boundaries in different organizations are number, degree of permeability, and type of filtering properties (p. 405). Kim and Brunner (2009) add a fourth filtering boundary in analysis of gender difference in the mobility of superintendents, glass ceiling.

Hierarchical Boundaries

Hierarchical boundaries separate the hierarchical levels from one another. These filter a person's rank within an organization. Qualities considered within hierarchical boundaries include merit, personal characteristics, types of attitudes held, seniority, and who is mentoring the employee. Hierarchical boundaries are widely known and accepted as part of organizational life. The rules for permeating a hierarchical boundary tend to be somewhat overt.

Inclusion Boundaries

These boundaries separate individuals or groups from the centrality of the core group. Schein describes an external inclusion boundary as the ease in which one can gain initial entry into the organization. Once in the organization, inclusion boundaries can be more difficult to describe. These boundaries can also be more fluid or variable as one moves closer to the inner core of the organization. Permeating into the core group can be affected by traits of personality, seniority, belonging, and a person's willingness to play a political game.

Inclusion boundaries may be clear to everyone within the organization but may be denied when an outsider is examining the organizational structure. People within the organization are typically able to see and label who is within the inner circle. The inner circle may cut across many rank levels.

Functional or Departmental Boundaries

Functional boundaries are those that separate departments or different functional groupings from one another. For example, a small business would have less functional boundaries with potentially one manager performing many different duties and functions. A university would have many different boundaries based on academic areas. Movement between departments can be attributed to wanting to learn a new skill. Other times, this type of movement is used when an organization does not want to promote someone; or they are unable to terminate someone.

Glass Ceiling

Feminists have identified, described and analyzed many types of gender imbalances. These imbalances are typically described as reflecting a power hierarchy leading to injustice. Power, in one form, refers to the historical pattern of men dominating women, and the advocacy of women to gain social and economic equality (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2010). Considering power roles through a feminist lens and the superintendency, Dana and Bourisaw's (2006) research of power issues directly relates to this study. They consolidated their analysis into four issues women superintendents navigate: power of and over self; power of social and cultural

norms and expectations; power in relationships with others; and power through and to others (Munoz et al., 2014; Sampson et al., 2015).

Power Of and Over Self.

The power of and over self addresses "issues over which individuals have control, including the volition, and resiliency to fulfill and enact decisions" (Muñoz et al., 2014, p. 765). These decisions could be things like; who to marry, or occupational and educational choices, including pursuing higher degrees or more credentials. A woman in lower-power educational positions may not believe she has dominion over self to pursue upward job mobility due to one or more of these barriers (Sampson et al., 2015).

Power of Social and Cultural Norms and Expectations.

Traditionally, the office of district superintendent is held by males. As Eagly and Karau (2002) explained, when a woman seeks the superintendency, she may find role incongruity where women are expected by organizations to be secondary to males in leadership and also more communal than men. Despite these role incongruities, they see themselves as strong leaders (Muñoz et al., 2014). This was found to be true for Oklahoma women superintendents as well (Hawkins, 2020). It is the social and cultural expectation that the role of superintendent is filled by males. Women who attain the office of superintendent are viewed negatively and judged more stringently (Muñoz et al., 2014). Furthermore, if a woman has a family, she may feel constrained by cultural norms to be primary caregiver over a woman in a position of power in her career.

Power in Relationships with Others.

A superintendent's success is often based on how well relationships are built with others. This includes relationships with staff, school board members, and community members (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Bernal et al., 2017). Women who have built strong relationships with colleagues and developed strong networks may be encouraged to apply for higher positions if they are viewed as having great potential (Muñoz et al., 2014). Furthermore, the network of connections may increase likelihood of being hired if a woman applies on her own, without direct

encouragement to do so (Haynes, 2000). In Oklahoma, women described the encouragement of a male mentor, and a few described the additional influence of female mentors as an empowering aspect of their movement into a superintendent role (Hawkins, 2020).

Power Through and to Others.

This power refers to "power transference" (p. 766) and relates to a perceived female trait to be communal (Munoz et al., 2014). Brunner (1999) researched women superintendents and found they usually have a capacity to work collaboratively to build power. Muñoz et al. (2014) indicated the power of through and to others may foster student success and be a contributor to school improvement.

Kim and Brunner's (2009) research focused on organizational positions and their various degrees of opportunity and power in relation to the position of superintendency. In their definition of power, a person with power is able to get things done, mobilize resources, and use whatever is needed to reach their goals (p. 80). Power in school leadership for their purposes was defined in two ways: power over and power to.

Power Over.

Power over is the ability to influence people to agree with decisions made by leadership. This is the ability to have people below a leader follow their directives. This power is associated with social control and domination (Brunner & Schumaker, 1998; Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Power To.

Power to is the ability to achieve desired outcomes which the organization is attempting to attain. This involves the idea of delegating power to one's employees. It is social production and collaboration. (Brunner & Schumaker, 1998; Kim & Brunner, 2009). Power to can be seen in Dana and Bourisaw's (2006) power in relationships with others, and power through and to others.

Structural barriers continue to impede women's integration into male-dominated professions. Men's control, or power over, the formal and informal filters of hiring, decision-making, power-brokering (power to), and sponsorship impede women from becoming members

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of the inner circles that provide opportunities (Chase, 1995). Kim and Brunner (2009) viewed the career mobility patterns of women superintendents and central office administrators through Schein's theory of organizational career mobility. They applied a feminist lens to Schein's three-dimensional model of an organization by adding the filtering boundary of glass ceiling.

According to Kim and Brunner (2009), the glass ceiling separates marginalized groups and works as a screening filter in vertical and radial organizational career mobility. It is worth noting Schein (1971) introduces this model in an androcentric manner by saying "…we do not have readily available concepts for describing the multitude of separate experiences and adventures which the individual encounters during the life of his organizational career" (p .401). Kim and Brunner (2009) added the filtering boundary of glass ceiling due to this phenomenon's recurrent reporting of women's experiences in education and business literature review (p.82). They state this boundary could potentially be under the umbrella of Schein's inclusion boundaries, but it's filtering is a combination of inclusion and hierarchical boundaries. The glass ceiling is considered to be an obvious barrier that prevents marginalized groups from moving up hierarchically to administrative positions.

Glass ceiling boundaries are those that involve gender discrimination in hiring and promotion processes. Kim and Brunner (2009) found the glass ceiling creates boundaries both hierarchical and exclusionary based on the inequitable criteria used in selection and hiring. While it is not possible to claim that the glass ceiling filter is always at work in organizational career mobility, many studies have verified the existence of a glass ceiling in educational leadership career mobility (Bjork, 2000; Brunner, 1999; Chase, 1995; Glass, 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Kowalski, 2003). As stated by Kim and Brunner (2009), "In school administration, in spite of a large number of candidates in the pool, women's under-representation at high levels of administration distinctly reveals the existence of a glass ceiling in women's career development and advancement" (p. 103). Therefore, the inclusion of this filtering boundary is an important

addition to the organizational career mobility model when considering the marginalization of women in the position of superintendent.

Figure 1 depicts the modified Schein (1971, p. 404) Three-Dimensional Model of an Organization in Organizational Career Mobility, with Kim and Brunner's (2009, p. 83) filter of glass ceiling. Career mobility movement is represented by the dark solid lines. The model represents vertical and radial movement through straight lines. Circumferential movement is represented by the cone shape of the figure. Hierarchical, inclusion, and functional boundaries are represented by shaded shapes within the cone. The glass ceiling boundary is represented along with the hierarchical boundary shape.

Figure 1

Three-Dimensional Model of an Organization with Glass Ceiling Boundary
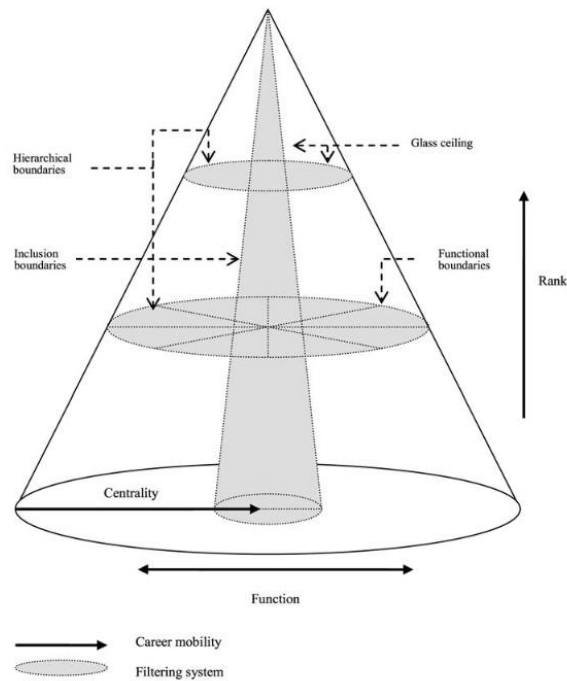
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III provides a detailed account of the research procedures I employed during this qualitative case study. Key topics discussed in this chapter include: (a) research design; (b) methodological procedures; (c) researcher role (d) ethical considerations; (e) trustworthiness; and (f) limitations of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore, through the combined lenses of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling, how selected women obtained and experienced their roles as public school district superintendents in Oklahoma.

Research Questions

1. How did current Oklahoma women superintendents attain their positions?

2. What promoted and hindered their movement into these positions?

3. How did they overcome obstacles in the process?

4. How do women perceive the role their gender and race plays in the process of obtaining the position of superintendent?

5. What lessons do their experiences have for overcoming injustices on the pathway to the superintendency?

6. How does organizational career mobility and glass ceiling explain the data?

Theoretical Foundations of Research

Transformative epistemological perspective guided this research study. Transformative worldview emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Groups of researchers in this area are typically "critical theorists; participatory action researchers; Marxists; feminists; racial and ethnic minorities; persons with disabilities; indigenous and post-colonial peoples; and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer communities" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 9). Transformative epistemology says "knowledge is socially and historically located within a complex cultural context" (Mertens, 2007, p. 216). Furthermore, awareness of power relations is critical (Mertens, 2007). A transformative worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and political change agenda to confront social oppression (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This perspective is especially applicable to sex discrimination in the public school system, as public schools themselves are in the political realm. Both the processes of undertaking inquiry and the findings in this worldview align with social justice positioning.

Transformative ontology posits there are multiple, socially constructed realities, but it is necessary to be direct regarding the characteristics that define these realities. Researchers need to be aware of social principles and privileges in regards to social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, racial, gender, age, and disability in determining the reality that shapes people's lives. Such awareness has the possibility to increase social justice (Mertens, 2007). Within this study, I gathered demographic data to increase awareness of cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, and age positioning that may play a part in the participants' and researcher's values and privileges.

Transformative epistemology states there must be an interactive link between the researcher and the participants in a study. Within the cultural context, there must be awareness of power relations (Mertens, 2007). As the researcher, I interviewed and interacted with women who are in a higher position of power within public school districts than my role as school

psychologist. I was aware of my positionality as a white woman when interacting with indigenous women. To maintain an interactive link, I included opportunities for the participants to speak about their experiences which I did not directly prompt through interviews or document stimuli. When the interviews were completed, I followed up with participants to ensure my understanding of their responses was their intended meaning.

Transformative methodology accepts quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research strategies. As part of methodology, the interactive link between researcher and participants should lead to the definition of the problem. "Methods should be adjusted to accommodate cultural complexity, power issues should be explicitly addressed, and issues of discrimination and oppression should be recognized" (Mertens, 2007, p. 216). This study is a qualitative case study. While I as the researcher initially defined the problem, I was open to the participants' experiences and insights as well as their beliefs to the actual existence of gender barriers in the path to the superintendency. Furthermore, I was open to their understanding of race as part of their experience moving into a superintendent position. As previously stated, I was aware of power dynamics within our roles and my positionality as a white woman.

Transformative axiology asserts the three basic principles that underlie regulatory ethics in research: respect, beneficence, and justice.

Respect is critically examined in terms of the cultural norms of interaction within a community and across communities. Beneficence is defined in terms of the promotion of human rights and an increase in social justice. An explicit connection is made between the process of the outcomes of research and furtherance of a social justice agenda. (Mertens, 2007, p. 216)

I was aware of acting with respect within my interactions with participants through active listening. I attempted to be fully engaged in hearing what they had to say, as well as attempted conversational etiquette of not interrupting, or allowing them to stop speaking before following up. Furthermore, this study created an opportunity for women who have traditionally had fewer

chances to share their experiences as a marginalized person within the role of Oklahoma superintendent to make their voice heard (Mertens, 2007). Within the data presentation and study findings, direct quotes are often used to convey the participants' exact experiences, thoughts, and feelings. This study is intended to further social justice by sharing the experiences of Oklahoma women and their perceptions of gender or intersectionality with race as a societal value that has created barriers to the superintendency. I also hope these findings will inform and support the pathways of other women pursuing the superintendency.

Research Design

Case studies are a mode of inquiry in which a researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often meaning one or more individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These studies are bounded by time and activity. Researchers collect data using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case study methodology is an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 39). This transformative qualitative case study was context bound to a group of women who hold the position of superintendent in public school districts in Oklahoma. Research was also bound by time. Data was gathered from November 2021 to January 2022. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) methodology served as a guide for this case study.

The purpose of this study is to explore through the combined lenses of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling how selected women obtained public school district superintendent positions in Oklahoma. The unit of analysis in this case study was women who have obtained the position of district superintendent in Oklahoma public schools. Their experiences with barriers and empowerment in reaching this position was explored. Furthermore, their perceptions of gender bias within the role of superintendent were considered.

Methodology

Qualitative Case Study

Case study approach to qualitative analysis represents an analysis process (Patton, 2015). The purpose is to gain in-depth information about each case of interest. The analysis process results in a case study (Patton, 2015). Case data contains all the information the researcher has about a case. This includes interview data, observations, documents, and contextual information (Patton, 2015). A case record may be built from the raw case data. The case record is the accumulation of raw case data that is analyzed into a comprehensive condensed package (Patton, 2015). Once the case study data had been collected, I created a case record for the individual participants, a case record for the collective documents, and then my final report on women superintendents in Oklahoma. Case studies may be layered to build larger case units out of smaller ones (Patton, 2015). This case study builds a case of women in Oklahoma superintendency positions out of the smaller unit of individual women superintendents.

Procedures

Participant Selection

The participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling. As stated in Creswell and Creswell (2018), "The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185). Selecting women who are currently in the role of district superintendent in an Oklahoma public school system helped me understand the problem and questions surrounding the lack of women in superintendent roles. When selecting participants, I aimed for diversity in race, years of experience, and geographic placement in the state. I gathered demographic information to explore the similarities and differences of participants. As noted in Gamill (2016), there was, and currently remains, only one Black female superintendent in this state. Including her in this study would not have allowed for true confidentiality and anonymity because it would not be hard to figure out her identity. While confidentiality could have potentially been broached with her participation, I did invite her to participate to give her the option of sharing her experiences and adding to the limited voices of Black women superintendent experiences. I aimed not to further

marginalize Black female voices in the superintendency through exclusion of opportunity to share in my research.

I printed a list of superintendents in the state of Oklahoma from the state department website, through their open records. Based on the report run from the state department at the time of proposal, there are 110 women superintendents. I filtered this list by checking district websites to ensure the superintendents are as listed and are women. Other purposive selection was made through consideration of size of district and location within Oklahoma. Using guidelines from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) and the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2019), I gathered participants from both urban and rural territories. After ensuring criteria were met, I attempted to contact women superintendents by email to see if they were interested in participating in this research study. I was able to get consent from eight participants. There were responses from two other potential participants, but one declined due to her resigning from the position within the current year, and another was seeking a different position within education. Other purposive selection was made through consideration of size of district and location within Oklahoma. I noted approximate locations of these districts in the state by marking if they were central, northeastern, northcentral, northwestern, southeastern, southcentral, or southwestern in their locations from the center of the state to ensure diversity. Size of the district was gathered through data from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (2019) and student enrollment within each district was recorded.

Methods of Data Collection

Case study research requires collection of data from multiple resources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data were collected from a brief demographic survey, interviews, observation, district websites, and artifacts such as resumes, teaching certificates, and local news articles surrounding their time of hiring.

Demographic Questionnaire

At the time of interview, a short three question demographic questionnaire was given to the participant. It was labeled "demographic survey" (see Appendix C). This survey asked each participant's race, age range, and years as a superintendent. This survey collected data related to the transformative paradigm in discovering values and privileges that define realities.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with participants either face to face or through a video conferencing platform, Zoom. An interview protocol, found in Appendix D, was developed to guide the interview process, while leaving room for open-ended responses. This allowed for me to actively listen to each participant and "better follow avenues of inquiry that will yield potentially rich contributions" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 126). Each interview was recorded with the permission of the participants. Document prompts can take the form photos, pictures, drawings, paintings, a story, or even video. In this case, I utilized participants' resume and career timeline to further engage them. As part of the interviewing process, utilizing projection elicitation techniques, like document prompts, can greatly enhance recall for personal experiences (Patton, 2015).

Observations

Observations of each participant engaging in a leadership task were collected. I observed most participants at a local board meeting in person or through video. This allowed for collection of data regarding each superintendent's interaction with the school boards that hired them and how this might influence their position as a superintendent. "Observation is a research tool when it is systematic…" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 138). To ensure observations from each participant were systematic, an observation protocol was used. This protocol can be found in Appendix E.

Artifacts

Documents and artifacts were collected through public records. I explored what educational degrees and state certifications each participant has through the state department of

education website. I also asked each participant for a resume to further my understanding of these superintendent's experiences. Each superintendent also provided the meeting minutes from a board meeting within the research time frame. Furthermore, a search of local news stories was conducted to gather additional background information about the environment and atmosphere surrounding each woman superintendent at the time of their appointment by the school board. Table 1 represents an overview of data collection strategies and their alignment with the research questions.

Table 1

Data Collection Strategies Alignment

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Observations	Artifacts
How did current women superintendents obtain their positions?	2, 4	Board Meetings	Degrees Certifications Resume Interview Transcripts
What promoted and hindered their movement into these positions?	2, 3, 4	Board Meetings	Degrees Certifications Resume News Stories Interview Transcripts
How did they overcome obstacles in the process?	4, 6, 7		Interview Transcriptions
How do women perceive the role their gender and race play in the process of obtaining the position of superintendent?	8		Interview Transcripts Demographic Survey
What lessons do their experiences have for overcoming injustices on the pathway to the superintendency?	8, 9		Degrees Certifications Resume News Stories Interview Transcripts Demographic Survey

How do organizational career mobility and glass ceiling explain the data?	2, 5, 8	Board Meetings	Observation Notes Interview Transcriptions

Data Analysis

Creswell and Creswell (2018) offer five steps of the data analysis process: organize and prepare the data for analysis; read and review all the data; start coding all of the data; generate a description and themes; represent the description and themes (pp. 193-195). Throughout these five steps, I utilized Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) trustworthiness techniques. When organizing and preparing for data analysis, I reached out to participants to ensure accuracy of interviews and meanings. I compiled each participant's data into their own case record as part of the organization process for analyzing and synthesizing data (Patton, 2015). In another review of the data, I organized the participants' resumes and timelines collectively to generate data records. Furthermore, I collected information from their demographic surveys into a record during another organizational review. During the coding of data, I used In Vivo coding procedures.

In Vivo Coding

Saldana (2016) states, "In Vivo coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers… and studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (p. 106). As a beginning researcher and one who intended to prioritize the experiences of my participants, In Vivo coding methods were used. As I read through interview transcripts and documents that featured my participants voices, I actively focused on words and phrases that called for notice. These words and phrases kept me on track for codes that are participant-inspired, rather than researcher-generated (Saldana, 2016).

<div align="center">Researcher Role</div>

Researcher Positionality

After graduating with an undergraduate degree in psychology, I quickly realized I would need more education to have a fulfilling career. My family's history as educators, as well as my

original desire to be a teacher, led me to school psychology. I was accepted into a school psychology program that started with a Master's degree in psychometrics, or psychological assessment, and finished with an Education Specialist degree, which allowed me to practice as a school psychologist. While attending this school psychology program, gender differences began to stand out to me. The professors in the program were mostly male, while my field supervisors (people who worked as school psychometrists/psychologists) were female. My introduction into education through practicums and internship immediately introduced me to the large number of female teachers who worked for males in the leadership positions of either principals or superintendents. This stuck with me as I began my full-time career as a school psychologist.

Once in the field, I began to come across more women leaders in the roles of lead psychologist, special education coordinator, or special education director. It wasn't until my seventh year, and third school district, that I would work under a female superintendent. This was especially interesting to me in that this particular superintendent had started out as a school psychologist, like myself, moved up to the role of special education director, then assistant superintendent, and finally superintendent. My decision to continue my education in the field of educational leadership was partly influenced by the realization that someone before me had started where I am and continued upward career mobility. This piqued my interest in how other female superintendents in Oklahoma, being the minority, came to attain the leadership position of school district superintendent. Furthermore, when researching studies on women superintendents in Oklahoma, only one reports race of participants. This leaves out important intersectionality values that need to be explored in Oklahoma.

Being an employee of the district in which some data will be collected, I was sure to keep in mind research bias that could shape research findings. There is a power dynamic within the relationship of myself as an employee of that particular superintendent. Furthermore, my position as school psychologist will be considered a lower-level position when interviewing the other participants. I am also aware of my privilege as a white woman and kept this in mind when

interacting with indigenous women. During interactions with participants, I was mindful of the power dynamic of being further ahead in a doctoral program than some of the women I was interviewing; this seemed especially worthy of mindfulness due to my being younger than the participants.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues in research are necessary considerations prior to, during, and when analyzing data in a study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest consulting codes of ethics prior to beginning a study (p. 91). As a Nationally Certified School Psychologist and Licensed Professional Counselor, I am aware of multiple codes of ethics that I reviewed prior to the start of my study. When working with my participants, I kept these codes in mind to ensure best practices should an ethical dilemma arise.

Transformative axiology assets the three basic principles that form the foundation of regulatory ethics in research: respect, beneficence, and justice (Mertens, 2007). I demonstrated respect within my interactions with participants through active listening. Furthermore, this study creates an opportunity for women who have traditionally had fewer chances to share their experiences as a marginalized person within the role of Oklahoma superintendent to make their voice heard (Mertens, 2007). This study is intended to further social justice by sharing the experiences of Oklahoma women and their perceptions of gender or intersectionality with race as a societal value that has created barriers to the superintendency.

Data Collection Ethics

Creswell and Creswell (2018) give six ethical guidelines to follow when collecting data: respect the site and disrupt as little as possible; make sure all participants receive the benefits; avoid deceiving participants; respect potential power imbalances; avoid exploitation of participants; and avoid collecting harmful information (pp. 93-94). To ensure I followed these guidelines, I created an informed consent for all participants. Also, the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved my study before any data collection began. I

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attempted to limit disruption by completing observations and interviews at the convenience of my participants. Participants have access to their interview transcripts, as well as the research paper and completed study findings.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Ethics

Further ethical strategies by Creswell and Creswell (2018) gives three guidelines when analyzing research data: avoid going native (disregard data that proves or disproves personal hypotheses the research may hold); avoid disclosing only positive results; and respect the privacy of participants (pp. 94-95). I considered my personal investments and thoughts about the topic before beginning data collection to increase awareness of my own positionality in relation to the data. I have reported on the diversity of perspectives about the topic. To protect the privacy of participants, I utilized pseudonyms when describing their experiences and exploring their narratives. Data were kept secure on my person, in a password protected file, on my personal password protected computer, or in a locked filing cabinet at home. The OSU Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved my project before I began data collection.

<div align="center">

Trustworthiness of Findings

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"Being able to trust research results is especially important to professional in applied fields because practitioners intervene in people's lives" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). To establish trustworthiness and accuracy in this qualitative research study, I used validity, reliability, and generalizability techniques.

Validity

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), internal validity addresses the question of how research findings match reality. Since people are the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative studies, internal validity is more a question of credibility. To increase the credibility of qualitative findings, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest the techniques of triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement, researcher's position of reflexivity, and peer examination.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. Since human behavior is never static and humans are the primary instruments in qualitative studies, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) have additional techniques differing from quantitative measures to ensure "results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 251). Some of these are included in validity techniques: triangulation, peer examination, researcher's position, and the audit trail.

Generalizability

Generalizability is also considered external credibility. This is the ability of a study to be transferred to another setting. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe two additional strategies for generalizability to enhance trustworthiness: rich, thick descriptions; and maximum variation. The following table describes trustworthiness techniques that were utilized in this qualitative study.

Table 2

Trustworthiness Techniques

Strategy	Description	Activity
Triangulation	Using multiple sources of data or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings.	Interviews, document prompts, resumes, state certification records, board meeting observations, district websites, and news article search.
Member checks	Taking tentative interpretations and finding back to participants to check plausibility.	Follow up with participants to clarify responses and ask additional questions.
Adequate engagement	Adequate time spent collecting data.	In the field from November 2021 to February 2022. Communication was in person, through email, and videoconferencing.
Researcher's position or reflexivity	Critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation.	Journaling throughout the data collection process to engage in critical self-reflection.

Peer review	Discussions with colleagues regarding the process of the study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations.	Sharing of data collection process with peers; review of initial interview transcription with a professor; multiple reviews of tentative themes and interpretations with professors.
Audit trail	A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study.	Audit trail was included in researcher's journaling process throughout the study.
Rich, thick descriptions	Providing enough description to contextualize the study so readers can determine the extent to which their situations match the research context. Allowing reader to note if findings can be transferred.	Reader is able to picture the snapshot of this group of women superintendents in Oklahoma through descriptions and the participants' own words.
Maximum variation	Purposefully seeking variation and diversity in participant selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research.	Review of potential participants and their diversity of district size; demographic survey completed by each participant.

Note. Adapted from Merriam, S.B., and Tisdell, E.J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* Jossey-Bass.

Significance of Study

Based on what I have learned from dissertations and the scholarship on women superintendents, we know women continue to be marginalized as leaders of public school districts, despite holding the majority of teaching positions. Furthermore, we know women recognize particular constructions of the meaning of gender and race as entrenched societal values that can impede their movement into these positions. We do not know how the intersectionality of race and gender has played a part in women's access to the role of district superintendent in Oklahoma. Based on the six dissertations I found, which primarily address white women's experiences, and their limits as older studies, the conditions in Oklahoma have likely changed. The numbers of women superintendents in Oklahoma have grown since many of these studies were completed. We need to learn more about current obstacles and struggles; and point toward leadership paths that provide more equitable access and experiences in this role.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE PRESENTATION OF DATA

Chapter IV is a narrative description of the data collected throughout this study. The background composition of the study is in Oklahoma. The focus is on a group of women who are district superintendents. Some of the background scene may feel concrete, as if the woman in front of it has been there the whole time, like the women who have been in the same district throughout career mobility. Other parts of the background scene are more malleable, as if the woman in front is more mobile and fluid, moving to other districts on their career path. Some of the women are from urban contexts, and some are from rural. These women have varied experiences and career paths that have led them to this snapshot of the superintendency. In researching these women, several themes emerged, such as doing what is best for kids; struggles of working towards and in a historically male role; their expectations and introspections; collaboration, communication networks, and systems of support; and an overwhelming maxim of "go for it" in encouraging future women superintendents.

Timing is another important consideration in the creation of this picture. With a pandemic looming during these women's tenure as superintendent, it is important to include the effects it has had on their experiences. While it did not come up in every interview, most participants described navigating COVID-19 as one of their most memorable experiences during their time as a superintendent. A couple of participants went on to say that they have never had a "normal"

year of being a superintendent because they began the job when the pandemic first hit. I weave this aspect into the themes of the data presentation.

Introduction

Eight women were interviewed to gather wisdom regarding their experiences of obtaining and maintaining a school district superintendency position through the combined lenses of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling. Representative of women superintendents nationally, the majority of the women interviewed were white (Alston, 2005; Angel et al., 2013; Katz, 2012). They were mostly in their 50s, and the majority had held a superintendent position between one and six years. Lack of diversity within age and years of experience as a superintendent is largely believed to be a result of the experiences required to be considered for the position. It took multiple job roles and years within each position for these women to both feel ready to apply for a superintendency, and to be seriously considered by a school board for a position. Table 3 shows the demographics of the participants.

Table 3

Results of Demographic Survey

*Pseudonyms have been assigned to protect participants' confidentiality.

Participant*	Race	Age Range	Years as a Superintendent
Renee	White	50-59	5
Lisa	White	50-59	5
Chelsea	White	50-59	9
Grace	White	40-49	2
Wendy	White	50-59	4
Nina	White	40-49	2
Iris	Native American	60-69	10
Elaine	Native American	50-59	2

Participant Profiles

Renee

Renee has been the superintendent in her district for five complete school years. She is white, in her fifties, and has worked in her district for 25 years. Prior to her service in this district, she was a teacher in a neighboring district. Her first position within her current district was that of a school psychologist and coordinator. She then served as the director of special education and federal programs, followed by being an assistant superintendent, and finally district superintendent. Renee has a Master of Science. She also completed a post-graduate certificate program. She currently has seven endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification, all of which were issued as standard certifications.

Lisa

Lisa has been the superintendent in her district for three years. She is white, in her fifties, and has worked in her district for three years. Prior to attaining the superintendent role in her district, she worked for the Oklahoma State Department of Education in two different capacities. She held a different superintendent position for three years prior to her doctorate work and roles at the state department. Her previous superintendent role came after working as a principal and assistant superintendent in that district. Her career beginnings included being a teacher in three different districts. Lisa has a Doctor of Philosophy and currently has three endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification. Her three endorsements were issued as standard certifications.

Chelsea

Chelsea has been the superintendent in her district for nine years. She is white, in her fifties, and has worked in her district for over 30 years. She has held the roles of classroom teacher, director of communications, building principal, assistant superintendent, and associate superintendent prior to attaining the role of district superintendent. She has earned a Doctor of Education and currently has three endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification. Her three endorsements were obtained through standard certification methods.

Grace

Grace has been the superintendent in her district for two years. She is white and in her forties. Prior to her role in this district, she served another district for over twenty years. She worked as a teacher, grant coordinator, assistant principal, principal, director of special education and federal programs, and assistant superintendent. Grace is currently completing a Doctorate of Education and has eight endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification, all of which were issued as standard certifications.

Wendy

Wendy has been the superintendent in her current district for almost one year. She is white and in her fifties. She previously served as superintendent in another district for three years. She has been a principal, director of special services, special education instructor, and elementary teacher. Wendy is currently completing a Doctor of Education and has seven endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification. Her seven endorsements were all issued as standard certifications.

Nina

Nina is in the second year of her role as superintendent in her district. She is white and in her forties. Prior to serving as superintendent, Nina was a principal in her district. She worked as a grant writer, project coordinator, program director, and instructional coach in a cooperative before starting in her current district. She has served as an instructional coach and classroom teacher in other public school districts. Nina is currently completing a Doctor of Education. She has six endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification. All of Nina's endorsements were obtained through alternative certification methods.

Iris

Iris is in the third year as superintendent in her district. She is Native American and in her sixties. Prior to her current superintendent role, she held the position of superintendent in another district for seven years. Before moving into a superintendent position, Iris worked as a special services administrator, principal, curriculum director, and teacher in another district. Iris has a

Doctor of Education and holds 12 endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification. All endorsements were issued as standard certifications.

Elaine

Elaine is in her third year as superintendent in her district. She is Native American and in her fifties. Before working as superintendent in her current district, she was an assistant superintendent in another district. Other roles Elaine has had include executive director of secondary schools and reform, principal, director of professional careers/director of educational services in a technology center, as well as additional principal jobs, science teacher, and athletic coach in public schools. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy and has eight endorsements on her Oklahoma Educator Certification. All endorsements were issued as standard certifications.

The majority of these women hold a doctoral degree or are in the process of completing a doctoral degree. They all hold multiple credential areas on their state certificates for employment. For example, two superintendents had Elementary Education Grades 1 to 8, Elementary Principal Kindergarten to Grade 8, and Superintendent listed on their state certificates. Four of these participants moved into their first superintendent position from a district other than where they had held lower hierarchical administrative positions. Four had been an administrator in the same district for at least a year before moving into the superintendent position. Two of those three women moved vertically within the same district they have served for 25 years or more. Table 4 shows characteristics gathered from the resumes of participants.

Table 4

Professional Characteristics of Participants

	Highest Degree	State Certifications	1st Superintendent Position
PhD or EdD	4		
Currently Earning EdD	3		
Masters	1		
Three Certification Areas		2	
Six to Eight Certification Areas		5	

12 Certification Areas	1
Vertical within same district	4
Vertical move to different district	4

One participant worked with a school board that consisted entirely of women. Otherwise, the majority of school boards were made up of mostly males. There were no school boards comprised entirely of males. If the superintendent is included in the number of participants for school board meetings, then three of the eight participants would have an even representation of male and females. Table 5 shows the characteristics of the school boards.

Table 5

School Board Characteristics

Board with majority female members	2
Board with majority male members	6
Same amount of male and female participants if superintendent is included in count	3

Public education means many different things to many people—some may think of a yellow school bus or cafeteria food. Others may think of a favorite teacher or staff member. Or maybe some remember peers and the social annoyances of adolescent development. People who are currently educators more than likely think of students. That is where the five themes that emerged within this study begin, the participants' focus on students as their purpose.

It's Always for the Children

Each woman interviewed in this study mentioned their mission as a district leader was doing what was best for kids. They all brought up the importance of the students they serve in guiding how they perform their job as a superintendent. Renee talked about her board of education being supportive of initiatives that are good for the students and making improvements that are based on data. She also described the importance of administration roles in supporting kids: "I feel like the impact we make in central office affects all, and it's fun to see it from that

viewpoint and impact change that I think makes a difference." When engaging in problem solving or making a big decision, Renee stated, "If I'm making a decision based on - it's the right thing to do for kids - then it's the right thing to do for kids." Wendy said, "Hold true to yourself, make the best decisions that you can make and that know when you go home at night, if you can look at yourself in the mirror and lay your head on the pillow- that you did the right thing for kids, that's the best you can do." Elaine remarked, "You have to keep the vision of the kids. The students that we're here to serve, you have to keep them at the forefront of every decision." Decision-making happens with the students of their districts in the forefront of their minds. After a decision is made, its worth, regardless of stakeholder or employee perception, is based on the idea that it was done in the best interest of students.

Lisa echoed that sentiment, "I have to do what's best for kids. And if every decision you make is what's best for kids, then you're not ever gonna mess up." Some of those decisions Lisa has made as a superintendent include practices that some may consider outside-of-the box. Lisa has even told her administrators, "Don't think outside of the box, get rid of the box, start all over because these kids are different." Her district has let high schoolers start later because research shows that is what is best for them. "We need to start looking at the research and really implementing what it's saying. And not just, 'oh yeah, that's when kids learn their best,' but we're gonna keep doing it the same way we've always done it." Another decision Lisa has made that others may consider tough is letting staff go. "Our kids deserve that very best, and if you're not willing to put in your very best then you don't need to work here." This decision making comes after providing learning opportunities, coaching, and mentoring, but the decisions to let staff go comes down to ensuring the students in her district have great teachers. While some leaders find it hard to let people go, the idea that students deserve the best makes these types of decisions easier for Lisa. Lisa also talked about school being the safe place for students in her district. Her efforts to ensure care for the high poverty, high trauma demographic of her school district is a source of pride. While historically the schools were this community's safe place, Lisa

talks about COVID-19 taking away some of that feeling of safety. "We've always been the safe place, but with COVID they realize there's really not a safe place. And so that has caused additional trauma." Lisa has worked hard to do what is best for the students by ensuring Licensed Professional Counselors are employed by the district to support students as best they can.

Chelsea's passion for students had not diminished since beginning teaching and moving into administration. She described a recent incident with her board when taking them for visits to school sites. "The board president said to me, 'You know it is obvious your passion, even though you've been out of the classroom now many years, your passion has not waned for the kids because you light up when you're in the classroom.'" She also shared Lisa's sentiment in changing education for today's students: "Education is evolving. We need to innovate. We have to have new initiatives. We've gotta keep pushing the bar and pushing forward to deliver educational experiences our kids need today. Not the educational experiences of 10 years ago." Chelsea brought up educational research on organizational structure when she talked about doing what is best for students. Her knowledge of turnover in leadership and how that effects an organization is important to doing what is best for students. She said, "I have more of appreciation of the research about what longevity can do for an organization. And that this 'churn every few years in the superintendency role' that happens in some districts is just not, it's not good for the kids." Chelsea is one of the rare district career superintendents in this study. She shared that she knows that is not "typical" for moving into a superintendent position. But regardless of the career path, she shared strong feelings about staying in the role for longer periods as consideration for what is best for students in any district.

Even though moving into a superintendent role can remove leaders from direct contact with students, these women reported that serving students is still their purpose. Grace said that the connections she makes with students is her reason for what she does. "I try to go to all of their events… so they see me, and they know that I'm there to support them. I think for me, when they walk up and gimme a hug, that is why I do what I do." Nina also talked about the importance of

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building relationships with her students. She reported that is where leadership should start –

relationships and focusing on students' whole well-being. "I have expectations that I will see

students learning… but I don't just care about their learning. I care about their emotional well-

being as well." Iris said that one of the most memorable parts of her job is the relationships she

has been able to make with students. For her, this also included going to every event she can. Iris

reflected on a story about going to a student event in bad weather and an interaction with her

husband. He had conveyed he was in disbelief that they were driving three and a half hours in the

bad weather and that going to the event didn't make a difference. "So, we get there, and I walk

into the gym and my whole team stands up and runs over to me to thank me for being there."

After this, her husband said, "OK, I won't say it anymore. I know why you do it. Because it

makes a difference to the kids; it makes a big difference." These experiences showed that not

only is building relationships with students a priority for these leaders, but the impact on students

is also evident.

As shown by each participant's comments and attestations, students are what drive these

women to do the hard jobs they currently hold. Their persistence in working towards

administration positions comes down to making an impact on the students they serve. Even in the

way they perform their job through decision-making, these women want what is best for the

students for which they are responsible. And while students are at the forefront of their minds,

motivating these leaders' perseverance, inevitably there are struggles and barriers to obtaining the

highest position in a school district. Furthermore, once they reach the position, these women

describe barriers and double standards as females in the role.

High Heels, Hard Hats, Ties, and Golf Clubs

Participants experienced similar gendered barriers and double standards. Additionally,

they acknowledged that physical apparel sometimes held symbolic meaning for these women

when dealing with discrimination, barriers, or recognition of marginalizing practices towards

women superintendents. In some experiences within their narratives, apparel like high heels

symbolized a perceived inability to perform certain job tasks; however, these women shifted the narrative and redefined what the apparel represented. As they described how they challenged the stereotypes of traditionally female apparel, it was as if these women were putting on protective coverings of other attire, like metaphorical hard hats. They challenged men to think of high heels as footwear for any job, ties as clothing for any gender, and hard hats as accessories to any outfit. These stories, while significant even in the literal sense, became symbolic moments that seemed to empower the participants in their efforts to overcome barriers.

Renee shared a story about walking into a leadership meeting of predominantly men with her male high school principal. She noticed as they entered, she would get a "hello," but the handshake would go to the male principal and the conversation was directed toward him, being in like company. Renee recalled a colleague's story and response when considering how she shields herself from this type of sidelining. This colleague reported when she was told, after following a man in a leadership role, that she had big shoes to fill, her pat response was, "I have my own shoes, and they have heels on them." After this point, Renee talked about the choice of letting these actions hinder her or just moving on and doing what she can. She said these small encounters are things that one learns to let go. She shared ultimately superintendents just keeping doing the best job one knows to do regardless of how she is received in a room full of men in educational leadership.

Chelsea stated there are multiple situations where the assumption was made that she was not the superintendent due to her gender. "There have been a handful of times, like in construction meetings, where I'm clearly the one that has the answers, and I know exactly what's going on with that construction project… but the questions are directed to the two men in the room." Furthermore, people call and ask her secretary, "When will *he* be back in the office?" Chelsea also brushed these off as little things that don't interfere with the job she is doing. She, like Renee, stated she keeps working hard and ignores the assumptions. Chelsea also recounted a particularly memorable experience during the superintendent search in her district. During an

open board meeting, board members were asked to describe the traits or characteristics they wanted in the next superintendent. One of the board members stated he wanted "a great collection of ties." She recalled the surprise and looks from around the room. Thankfully, this superintendent was gifted some great ties the next day by a long-time administrator in the district. She still has those ties and is continuing her success as superintendent in this district.

Grace's experience on construction sites in schools with renovations included high heels and the protective shield of farm experience.

> Walking onto a construction site as a woman, they act like you don't know anything about roofing, or you know, fire alarms, sprinkler systems. So, when you're the only woman there with a bunch of contractors, it's like, okay you gotta play the game and that's what you do. I mean, I wear my high heels and then I'll go onto a site and they'll look at me and I'm like, listen, don't let these clothes fool you. I was raised on the farm. I know what to do. It's just trying to be personable so that way I'm not an idiot, you know, that they think, oh yeah, she is somewhat bright. (Grace, interview, December 16, 2021)

Wendy talked about more than one experience of microaggressions when interviewing for superintendent positions. The first was related to construction, as we have seen with other participants. "When I would interview for a superintendent's position, I believe that number one, I was judged on the fact of, 'as a female, could you actually handle construction projects?'" This was especially frustrating to her because she reported that "you can't do anything without an architect. So that shouldn't reflect whether you're male or female." When it comes to apparel, Wendy had another challenge by way of questioning in an interview.

> They said, 'I see you in your heels, you've got your rustic cuffs on and you're looking very nice, but can you get on top of a roof? Can you crawl in a hole and dig a hole for plumbing or whatever?' (Wendy, interview, January 12, 2022)

She, too, put on the protective hard hat of farm experience to shield herself from dismissive gendered comments and discrimination. "I'm like, I grew up on a farm… I could probably

outwork anybody in this room if I had to. Just because I am not dressed like that today, doesn't mean that I can't do that." She reported after these experiences, she will always question herself, "Do I wear a dress or do I wear pants? Because a man is going to have on pants and a suit." After getting her first superintendent position, Wendy shared an experience she encountered with an older board member who was "definitely a generation above where I was."

> He did not see the necessity of having a woman in charge. And so, it was a big challenge to go into a meeting or to try and conduct business when you were being questioned. In an open meeting at one point, he did ask me if I wanted to call my husband and ask his opinion on a decision I was about to make before I made it. (Wendy, interview, January 12, 2022)

Iris' experience likewise came during interviews for superintendent positions. "I took all my data to show them, how I had improved our scores at (another district) … Their questions to me were, 'Can you change a flat tire on a bus?' and 'Can you repair a roof of the school?'" She thinks she would not have gotten a superintendent job without her doctorate degree due to these types of questions. Iris' higher education was the hard hat that protected her in this scenario. Even though she came prepared with valuable experiences, she needed the additional layer of a doctorate to move into that position.

Nina shared an experience similar to these other women regarding contractors and construction. "I think, and sometimes I call it the 'little woman thing,' they try to little woman me. And so, I very quickly will call someone." Nina reported calling family members who were plumbers when a contractor tried to have her replace all the pipe in her school with copper. This saved her from a huge expense and from being taken advantage of. When asked if this "little woman" thing happens often, Nina confirmed salesmen will try to capitalize on believing she doesn't know the construction or mechanical side of things. Another notable story she shared was the difference it made when her husband entered the room. "There was one man… just talking

down to me terribly until my husband just happened to walk into my office and bring me something. The whole conversation changed – like that. And it blew me away."

Elaine's experience echoed that of Chelsea's when it comes to whom construction questions are directed. "Any issues you have with construction, I think it's just that natural tendency that they want to go to that person, that male figure." She reflected that this also happens in athletics. People tend to bring their concerns with a coach to the assistant superintendent, who is male, and he will in turn direct them to Elaine. "I think sometimes people have a misconception, especially if you're dealing with construction kinds of things, maybe even finances, athletics, they tend to talk around you. But at the end of the day, it's going to come back to me." Being the highest level of leadership in the district, these questions and answers do come back to these women. And while they continue to experience exchanges that are sexist in nature, they persevere and continue to work hard towards their vision of the district.

Another example of marginalizing practices came in the form of being a part of the men's club, or more specifically, golf club. Renee's description was "There's subjects that you don't get to be involved in because you know, we're gonna go play golf, which I am not a golfer... That's kind of just a current that nobody really talks about that exists." Grace also mentioned the golf club as she gives the advice to aspiring women superintendents: "Start learning how to play golf because that's where they all go. And so, when you can play golf, whether you're good or bad, you'll at least get invited to those get togethers more." While Wendy's experiences don't involve golf, she reflected that her male counterparts would ride in the same car to events, but they would not ride with her. She was excluded from the carpool experiences which offer another time to connect. These experiences echoed back to walking into a room with a man and he gets the handshake and conversation. These occurrences point to the ways relationships, which are central to doing effective work, can be hindered by these norms and slights. Despite feeling like an outsider in these situations, these women have accepted these conditions as something that does not ultimately shadow their hard work in leading a district successfully.

Though some of these questions or responses are shocking during and after securing a superintendent position, there were men and women in each scenario who supported these women. And while each participant vividly remembers these interactions; they continued to persevere and work towards their goals. They did not let these events set them back or stop them from trying. These women were able to utilize protective shields and adaptive strategies to stay the course towards obtaining and maintaining their leadership positions.

Expectations and Introspections

Part of leading successfully includes meeting and exceeding expectations. This requires personal reflection and understanding expectations. Each participant described outside expectations from their communities, as well as the expectations for themselves. Furthermore, they reported the need to be self-reflective, or defined times when they were introspective of their job performance. The participants' feelings towards themselves as superintendents really shines through when reflecting on expectations and introspections.

When discussing barriers to success as a superintendent, Renee reported her own expectation of her success was a big barrier. She used the phrase "beat myself up" when dealing with the burden of running a district and trying to ensure everyone is getting what they need. Furthermore, she described a self-expectation of wanting to be the best. Renee's advice to inspiring leaders was to go and self-reflect whenever there is a conflict or problem. She stated at times she will "go home and really think through how could I have handled that differently? Because I can't control how you respond to something, but I can control how I respond to it." Elaine had a similar statement when it comes to self-expectations. "I find that I have a higher expectation for myself than necessarily anybody else does. And so, I have to live up to my own expectations, which is a lot harder than living up to other people's." These women expressed importance of knowing what your expectations are for yourself with the understanding that maybe others are not being so hard on them. There was a sense of pride in wanting to be the very best, but they also acknowledged this can lead to frustration in leadership.

Chelsea talked about self-reflection and awareness in the context of conversation being female versus male. "We may have to have an awareness, self-awareness of how to navigate some conversations and still demonstrate to some that we can do exactly what our male counterparts do." She was conveying that there is a balance in proving yourself as equal to male counterparts. The conversations she has had in these events caused her to be assertive in what she wanted to do, as well as assertive in sharing why she knew she could do it. But on the other side, she shared that in being assertive in this moment she related it as wanting the opportunity and if it didn't work out then they could revisit the conversation. These conversations have a balance of assertiveness and malleability. She wanted to be given the opportunity but have the balance of understanding the opportunity may not end with a successful situation. If she was granted the opportunity, she wanted leadership to know she can step back should things not work out. Chelsea also talked about self-reflection when balancing work and family life. She reported she is more intentional about how she balances after school activities to ensure she is also spending time with her family. This comes after years of "reflecting and watching others."

Nina similarly reflected on making sure she is giving her family quality time. "I have tried to start encouraging staff to take family time, but to also allow me to take that time. Spending that time with family and making it quality time, not just I'm halfway here and halfway at work." Wendy's self-reflection propelled her path into administration and now a superintendent role. She missed the strategy and planning of being a coach after stopping when she had her own kids. This motivated her to search for an outlet to use these skills, which led to her becoming an administrator. Self-reflection and introspection have been important practices for these women. It helped their leadership skills through understanding how to deal with others, how to assert their abilities, and ensuring a work-life balance.

More than one participant described the belief that they need to be more prepared than their male counterparts. Renee reported when she was applying for the superintendent role, she felt she needed to "be more prepared, be more knowledgeable, more able to support her opinions

with data than maybe my male counterparts… I found myself making sure I was overprepared."

Lisa reported part of her impetus to get her doctorate was because of people questioning her

ability to run a district as a woman. "That was the reason I finally decided to go get that… I had a

hard time with that – people thinking I was not capable." And as previously stated, Iris was not

sure she would have gotten a superintendent position in her area of the state without her

doctorate. Chelsea's contemplation was this: "You're going to have to show and prove you can

do this. You can be the first female superintendent in this district, but you're going to have to sell

yourself." Grace's observation reflected on moving into more than just the superintendent role.

She shared a story about moving into an assistant principal role and being denied the first time

because the principal flat out stated, "I needed a man in that job." After the man did not last and

Grace got the job, she laughed it off that he now needed a woman apparently. She reported

"women have to work harder than men to move up the ladder."

Elaine shared she had to defend herself to be picked over a man for her current

superintendent position. The district had previously had a woman who did not work out and so

they asked her how she would differ from the previous woman. "I said, well, just like not all men

are the same, all women aren't the same either. So, we all stand on our own merits." Board

expectations for a superintendent were noted in one news article surrounding the hiring of one of

these participants. It stated the newly hired superintendent was a "transformative leader," and the

board was excited to have someone with her experiences and background joining the district.

This perspective goes further than just preparation for a superintendent position. Once

they have secured a superintendent role, these women expressed they needed to continue to be

overprepared. Renee described this feeling when developing guidelines for a new district policy:

"I wrote those… and it was because I needed to be proficient to talk about it (to the board) … I do

think that I have to overcompensate. I have to make sure I've read every bit of that." Elaine

declared, "I feel there are times you really have to do things probably twice as well as some of

your colleagues." This led into her current work with other superintendents in her region. Because

of this work ethic and need to prove herself, she said the men in her local group will inadvertently ask for any required documentation for the state department of education that she has created. "They all say, 'Can you share that with me?' Which I'm always happy to do, but you don't get a lot back the other way." She said part of this one-way collaboration may be that she doesn't ask because "a lot of it wouldn't meet my standard."

Chelsea described the need to work harder as being held to a different standard. "If I say something and I say it exactly like my male counterpart, I'm still held to a different standard at times." Grace expressed she must prove herself as well. This seems especially true because she followed a "well-liked man." Her reflections also led her to share that she also deploys extra effort when proving herself to other women. "I have to prove myself more here and it's more so even with the women. I think there are still women that don't like to see other women succeed." Elaine described a similar observation. "I've found that a lot of times other women are very threatened by women that are in leadership positions. And that's a whole other category. I am not great at those situations." When prompted further, she noted these experiences were harder to explain. She gave the impression that other women sometimes felt threatened, as if she was trying to take their role, or take over in their area of control. Elaine explained that when she directly addresses this with another person, she received the response, "you want to take over my area". She has attempted to use these situations as opportunities to work better as a team. She has confronted people to understand where they are coming from and attempted to figure out how it can help them work better together. She stated that "some people it rubs the wrong way", and other times aides in understanding. Elaine also likened these situations as a way to hold power. "It can be a real struggle when there's an effort to undermine initiatives or withhold information. They (other women) use information. They wield that as a weapon." Once the event has taken place, Elaine stated there are times conflict is perceived differently for men and women.

There are times I feel like you can probably have a conflict with a male colleague or a male leadership level person and once the conflict is kind of resolved it's over and you

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move on. But I think sometimes when that same conversation, maybe plays out between women there is a, I don't know, there's a desire to hold onto that, you know, and it takes it more personal when it's not personal at all, it's just a disagreement about whatever is, you know, at the moment, a disagreement. (Elaine, interview, January 24, 2022)

Part of the preparation for the role of superintendent includes appearances and impressions. Grace stated, "And then, I always feel like too, that we're women in a man's role. So, we have to have a different appearance about ourselves or something because there's not as many women superintendents as there are men." Wendy's reflection on going above and beyond is a reverberation from her construction site experience. "In my prior district, if the architect came out, I got on the ladder, I crawled on top of the roof and I said 'talk me through it, walk me through what's going on.'" Nina's attitude and self-reflection goes against what her male counterparts encourage her to be.

I have a male friend that tells me all the time, 'You've gotta be harder, be hard, be tough.' And I'm like, listen, there's a time and a place. I'm not that person. And I won't ever be that person. And if they wanted that person, they shouldn't have hired me and they know it. (Nina, interview, January 14, 2022)

Iris reflects on being the first woman superintendent of both districts she has worked in. This gave her the impetus to work harder than her male counterparts on behalf of other women.

I always felt like I had to do far above and beyond what a man would do. I wanted to work as hard or harder than any man and it's a big motivator, you know? Cause you think, oh, I don't wanna mess this up for women after me. (Iris, interview, January 24, 2022)

Further indication that these women work harder than their male counterparts is noted in a news article surrounding the vertical movement to another district by one superintendent. The article reports that the board hired two people to perform the job that this participant had been doing alone before moving on.

Another common expression for these women echoed the inevitability of mistakes. Lisa encouraged future women leaders to not be afraid of these mistakes. "Don't be afraid of making a mistake because you are going to. And you just have to learn from them and do better the next day." Chelsea stated a very similar understanding of mistakes: "We make mistakes, and we learn from those and we improve and we try to do better." Grace said, "I mean, we're all gonna fail. We all have our good days and bad days of stuff." These women said that despite mistakes and failures, you will continue to have people who support you. These are the people with whom to surround yourself. This group of women superintendents all described the necessity of collaborating, communicating, and having support systems. And as noted in previous sections, when encountering barriers and double standards, there have been people who supported these women along their career paths.

Collaboration, Communication Networks, and Support Systems

Behind the setting, appearances, and introspections of this portrait are networks of colleagues and community, along with the development of staff. Building others up in their district empowers these leaders. Each woman talked about the importance of finding a person or group of people that she can trust outside of your district. Each leader shared the importance of being able to talk with individuals who share the same struggles. The networks provide strength and support for the struggles of being a woman superintendent. People are part of the adaptive strategies these women used to move into their roles as superintendents despite barriers. And people are what has helped these women continue their perseverance in a career with challenges.

Renee described this as, "There's something to be said… for commiserating together…misery loves company a little bit. I'm joking about that, but truly because you also find people who have been where you're at that can help you kind of plan through." Nina's sentiment was almost the exact same. "Just seeing that there's other people in the same boat as you, it, it does help. It's terrible, misery loves company, but positive things love company, too." Lisa talked about the importance of having a mentor and connecting to others who can help. "Every

time you go through something, someone's been through it before." She said to find the strengths of the people around you and in your network. When a problem arises that you are struggling to deal with, "you know who to call. … This is a people profession. And so, people are willing to help, but sometimes you have to reach out and ask." Nina also reported a network of people she can rely on for help. "So, I have this group of not just leaders, but other women that I can fall back on and call and say, 'Hey this is the issue I'm facing. How would you handle it?'"

In connecting with other mentors and administrators, Chelsea echoed the importance of candid conversations. "It's safe ground to have conversations. They know me, they know my heart, I can talk candidly because there's that trust there." Nina resonated with this sentiment as she says to "…find someone you can even just, you've gotta call and have a vent session, find that person you can do that with." Grace described this within a support group of other superintendents who she can rely on and "text when we're having hard days." Elaine said to take opportunities to meet with colleagues and people in your same shoes. "In a lot of areas, they can commiserate… finding those people you can call and say just whatever to. You can call them and just have that out and out 'Ugh' conversation with, that's really supportive and helpful."

Wendy feels she has been supported through people and organizations like Oklahoma State School Boards Association. "I've got a multitude of network of people I can call; I can pick up the phone and ask questions… I couldn't be in the position that I am without that." Iris talked about the importance of having mentors but also remarked she tries to provide mentorship for other women superintendents who are newer in her area. "I always reach out to them and offer assistance and encouragement. And make sure they have someone they can vent to and listen and maybe give them some encouraging words or advice." Mentors, colleagues, and other networks of support helped these women continue their difficult jobs. They are able to endure the tough parts of the profession through collaboration with others who understand. This understanding may be the superintendent role, specific job functions, or it maybe they understand these women who need a safe place to vent.

Lisa talked about the importance of working together as a district and encouraging the community to be a part of the school's improvement. "I really try to push with the administrators… we have to work together. We can't do it alone. … I'm trying to get and encourage more people to come in and help from the community." As part of building this community, Lisa stated she is working to include herself in more community groups like Lions and Rotary. She emphasized her push to use "we" when sharing that the district has been awarded a grant. Though she does the grant writing for her district, the success is that "we" got this for our kids. Part of Lisa's collaboration included creating an organization that will last even after she leaves. "My biggest concern is, I wanna create a system that is successful without me. And I want to build leaders and teachers so they can keep whatever we have going – even when I retire."

Chelsea also talked about collaboration and its importance in building future leaders for the district. "It is about succession planning and supporting others in growing their abilities and their confidence." Collaboration for Chelsea is especially important, as she reported many of her favorite memories as a leader are "connecting with people and contributing to their stability and their success, whatever that looks like." She encouraged working together inside and outside the district. "If we are working in isolation, we are setting ourselves up for failure. I am a firm believer in collaboration internally and externally and interacting with colleagues in other districts and locally, statewide, and then nationally." These types of collaboration, in her mind, ensured they are up on current movements or programs that may be applicable to her district. She reported that she believes in learning from others – older, younger, and in between. Iris similarly talked about building up her staff through collaboration. "I continually work on being a mentor and encourager – of helping my staff feel valued and making sure I'm meeting their needs so they can do the best job they can." She worked on coaching others in her district who are interested in moving into leadership. She echoed back to the importance of students here and talked about also looking for students who could benefit from her mentoring.

Grace moved into her school community as an outsider and has worked hard to build relationship with the community. She has put in communication systems to support her diverse student population. "I started a diversity council… we started having conversations about their culture and what they needed from the school. Which is why we did the communication system that we did… there was just this huge disconnect." Grace testified that ultimately, "it's about building relationships and getting people together to communicate and build a sense of community, and establish some partnerships." She stated these things are key to being a successful superintendent. She also wanted the collaboration within her district to bring a sense of encouragement to her staff. "I always want people to feel empowered to do their job. I have people in positions that I trust to do their job and so I want to empower them to do that job." Wendy also talked about her school community as an essential source collaboration. "It feels good to have a team of people that you can ask, I need you to take care of this. And you know they'll handle it and you don't have to." These experiences indicated the trust that is built through communication and collaboration networks created by these leaders.

Elaine likewise described the importance of being a part of rotary, civic organizations, and meeting with union representatives. Also important, in her opinion, is attending ball games and allowing people to come up and talk to you. She reported this opens the communication network to ensure she is accessible. When it comes to communication within her district, Elaine disclosed that she worked hard to make sure she shows appreciation to her staff. She created reminders to reach out to encourage or thank people, and keep the communication lines open. Again, these women described creating networks of trust in building their communication and collaboration networks.

Another facet outside of this picture itself is the support systems for these women that are maybe not in direct lines of communication or collaborative networks. Many of them described the support of their communities, whether through the passing of a bond issue or the willingness of stakeholders to stand up for the district on social media platforms. Support from colleagues,

their school board, and their staff was another common thread. And of course, each participant talked about their families' support of their movement into and sustaining the superintendent position.

Renee talked about the support of her husband when returning to school to further her education and career options; "I was fortunate to have a husband that was supportive and watched the kids at night." He watched the kids while she pursued high education through night classes at a university about an hour away. His support has continued as she moved into the superintendency. "My husband's a cheerleader… backs me up because this job is a heavy lift and you can't help but take it home with you. And having that emotional support at home…" He has been there when she is dealing with the emotions that come along with big decision-making or emotional events that happened in the school community. He supports her emotionally by being a place she has been able to "share and go, my gosh, I need help through this." She described feeling community support when the bond issue passed at over 90%. That public support that made new initiatives and programming happen is an important source of support as she reported it "probably makes me the proudest." Renee also talked about keeping positive notes and emails in special places to reflect on when efforts are recognized. She has a drawer with thank you cards and other positive affirmations, as well as a folder in her email where she has kept the ones that remind her why she does this hard job. Another big source of support for Renee is having people follow when you lead. She described an event during the start of the pandemic where a principal told her, "All you have to do is tell us what you want us to do – we're gonna do it." She said "I think that's a testament to how I feel supported. It's because they follow."

Lisa felt supported by her community when they recognized her efforts to improve the district. This was especially true when she received feedback from parents who notice the things that make an impact on them. Like Renee, she has kept thank you notes for when she is having a bad day; "I reach over and read, you know, you're making a difference and we appreciate it." These things make it easier to keep pushing through when something isn't going as planned, or

the job is feeling especially difficult. The community has also shown support on social media. She laughed as she said, "The community's really good if someone is posting negative stuff, community members will go on and snap at 'em." Lisa has worked in another district as a superintendent where she did not have the support of her community and school board. She said being in her current supportive district makes all the difference. "That's why I love it here. They are so supportive, and they're so excited (about changes she is making)." She left the position in the other district because for her, the lack of support made the negative aspects and difficulty of the job not worth it. Lisa's family support came by way of encouraging her to make a career change and making her parents proud. She decided the time had come to pursue her doctorate when one of her kids asked her if she was happy in her role at the time. This caused her to think about her path and take an opportunity to continue her education. Lisa reported she comes from a family of educators, and her dad likes to bring up a story occasionally that demonstrates his pride for her. "He went into a local store, they didn't know who he was, and he heard somebody saying, 'Yep, our superintendent, she is the best in the state.'" He is reported to like to remind her occasionally that the community thinks of her this way.

Chelsea said she has support from her community, too. She reported that she feels fortunate to work and live in a community that values education and "certainly supports us as a district." She shared the importance of connecting with other superintendents as a means of support.

> I think for all superintendents you've got to be willing to connect with others, males, females, you have to be willing to make those connections and have a mutual support. And I think for female superintendents, it is even more important to make those connections with other females. I think it's important for us to support one another as females. (Chelsea, interview, December 15, 2021)

Chelsea also comes from a family of educators and feels their support. She specifically talked about her mother and grandmother, retired educators, who pushed her to go for opportunities

beyond teaching. They encouraged her to consider other roles with the knowledge that teaching would always be there and she could go back to it if she was unhappy in any of the other roles. Furthermore, her husband is very supportive of her role as a superintendent. She summed up her support network by saying, "So family is very supportive and then colleagues, and friends. And you know friends can't always relate to what it means to be an educator, but they can relate to what it means to balance home life and working." Chelsea talked about ensuring leaders are taking care of your relationships outside of the job because "they are the ones that are going to be there when we say goodbye to our roles and responsibilities." This kind of balance is something she feels she has learned later in her career through watching others and reflecting on her own behaviors.

Grace described support from her employees, especially when they are building their relationships together. "When they feel like they can come in and just have hard conversations with me or they want to share something personal in their life – that's when I feel supported." And, like other participants, her community of stakeholders has been important. "When I'm out places and parents come up and say, 'Hey you're doing a good job.'" These are moments that made her feel supported, especially as an outsider coming into a new community. Grace's family support has been demonstrated through her husband's willingness to move when she was offered a superintendent position. She stated they moved for his job, and now it's her turn. So, they moved for her to take the position she currently holds.

Nina echoed the importance of relationships within her staff as part of her support system. She stated building relationships with people is what makes those frank or hard conversations easier. "I build relationships first because I think when you have a relationship with someone, it's a lot easier to have that tough conversation." Nina felt community support when she was applying for her superintendent position. "I had a community member show up to the board meeting before interviews and spoke on my behalf. And teachers wrote these letters of support… I was blown away because they trusted someone who didn't have the formal training yet." When

thinking about the support of her family, Nina shared that as a rural superintendent, everyone is doing part of the job. Her husband has stepped in to drive the bus or clean the gymnasium after a special evening event. "They've had to learn that me being in this position means they're also in this position because it puts a light on them as well." Her son also works in the district now. Furthermore, the amount of time she spends working for the district "takes a toll on your family." This makes the support systems of family and beyond all the more important. She said she needs their support since they are all in it together in the rural district. Within the context of family support, Nina brought up the topic of COVID-19. She described a situation in which the school had to be shut down for a mechanical issue. Adding to the crisis, she had COVID-19 at the time. Since she is the superintendent in a rural district, she had to go up to the school, deal with the issue, deal with the electricians, and take care of business. After sharing this story, she talks about her family support system being so important because they have had to adjust to her being "on call 24/7."

Wendy brought up the support of her family early into her interview. She talked about how her husband has "always been a huge supporter." Their family at one point even lived apart and only saw each other on weekends so she could keep her administrative position in a distant district. They moved for her husband's job, but there was not a comparable opening at the time for her, so they maintained their relationship long distance. She said she could not have gotten to where she is without her husband. "He's always taken care of the kids and managed the house, and worked extra jobs whenever he needed to, to make sure that I got to complete my education and achieve the dreams I wanted to achieve." She has been able to obtain higher education degrees and work experiences that would not have been possible without his support.

Having previously felt unsupported by a school board, Iris feels fortunate to have her current supportive board. "I'm now blessed to have the best school board I could ever imagine. But then I've experienced the opposite and that can lead to stress that isn't worth it." She jokingly shared about the support of her husband. He's "very, very supportive. In fact, so supportive that

he came out of retirement after nine years to be a math teacher. We couldn't find a math teacher. A little more than he wanted to do, but he's a good sport." His support is also seen in the previously shared story regarding driving three and a half hours to a ball game. While he may get into some things he isn't expecting or maybe doesn't see the benefit of doing initially, he gets involved and supports Iris.

Elaine agreed that affirmation from staff, school board, and families makes her feel supported. "That's always a great vote of confidence when you get the positive feedback kinds of things." When describing the support of her family, Elaine stated, "My husband's always been very, very supportive of anything I've wanted to do." This included moving into administration positions that put him in her line of hierarchy. This has led her to take jobs in other locations, with his support, so there was no appearance of unfairness. She described the support of mentors and other administrators by their encouragement to continue her education. She credited a key to this support came from her willingness to ask for extra projects. "Those kinds of things were really helpful in solidifying in some of my supervisors' minds that, yeah, she can handle those tasks." Elaine would ask for extra projects to learn new skills and show her abilities to lead. These kinds of things are what led to administrators and bosses to encourage her to get other degrees or certifications, or to encourage movement into higher positions.

Go for It

The final aspect of this depiction is a group of women with an expression conveyed verbally or through their body language—a portrait that is most certainly a picture of hope— telling other women to pursue their passion. Most of these women described a variation of "Go for it" when talking about women aspiring to be superintendents. They also talked about the importance of preparing for the interview process and role. Furthermore, there was a feeling of hope that it was getting easier for women in Oklahoma to become superintendents. In this section, participants will speak for themselves without the paraphrasing or narration of the researcher. The passion and expression of hope for this mantra is best left to the participants themselves.

Renee gives the advice, "When opportunities present themselves, you go for it. If you really want to go for it, then be competent in it… make sure you come to the table well prepared. Don't give up." Her expression of hope was the belief that things are changing in the field: "I think it's changing by the way. I've got a bunch of male colleagues that are amazing that I don't think see that gender difference is different."

Lisa's response when asked her advice for other women who want to pursue a superintendent position is, "Go for it. I try to encourage anyone – like women I see – go get your administrators certification. You never know." Though she still thinks women have a harder time, Lisa's expression of hope was this: "I think it's gotten better, and there are more women superintendents."

Chelsea's advice and hope springs from a place of confidence. "First and foremost, follow your passion. And we can do exactly what our male counterparts can do… we can absolutely do what our male counterparts do."

Grace says, "Oh, just go for it. Just don't ever sell yourself short because you know as much as a man does. And anyway, if you don't, you can learn it. I would just encourage any woman that wants to, to just go for it."

Wendy says, "Go for it. Do your work, get your experience, get your education, and have knowledge of what you're doing. Be confident in yourself. Know that there's the right fit out there for you, and there are all kinds of people that will support you and make sure you are successful."

Nina declares, "Do it, and don't go in blind. Go in with the attitude I'm just as good as any man. And I can do the job that any man can do. I just, I just have to go out and do the job. Don't try to prove yourself, just do the job. And that's proof enough."

Iris's message of hope is also the belief things are getting easier. "I think slowly things are getting easier for women superintendents. When you go to superintendent meetings, women are way outnumbered, but I think it's getting easier. I hope."

Elaine suggests women should equip themselves along the way. "I think you have to set yourself up along the way… prepare yourself for taking on leadership roles. And just go for it. If you have the degree and the background and experience, then get out there and put your name in the hat. And sometimes, it may take you a little time to get to that position that you ultimately want, but take those first steps."

Summary

Chapter IV portrays eight women obtained and experience the superintendency in Oklahoma. Their experiences converge on themes that include the following: doing what is best for kids; struggles of working in a historically male role; their expectations and introspections; collaboration, communication networks, and systems of support; and the maxim of "go for it" in encouraging future women superintendents. Working through a pandemic was another aspect of experience that weaved throughout their portrayals of being a superintendent and intertwined through the themes they shared. While it was not present in every theme, most described COVID-19 as one of their most memorable experiences as a superintendent during the first interview question.

CHAPTER V

EXPLANATION THROUGH THEORETICAL LENS

Data in this study were collected through a variety of sources including interviews, observations, resumes, school websites, and other artifacts. Throughout the analysis of this data, I utilized Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) trustworthiness techniques. Chapter IV presented a narrative description of the data. The purpose of this study is to explore how selected women obtained and experienced their roles as public school district superintendents in Oklahoma. The theoretical framework of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling is used to provide a lens to explain the narrative description of data in Chapter V. Schein (1971) describes three aspects of career mobility: vertical, radial, and circumferential movement.

These aspects describe how people move through an organization over their career trajectory. These facets are not only the typical vertical movement descriptors of promotion or demotion. They explain how people may change positions circumferentially through departments or functions without vertical movement, as well as radial movement that describes being on the inside of an organization through relationships with a core group in the organization. Schein (1971) identified three filtering boundaries in addition to the three dimensions of career mobility. These boundaries determine how or why a person moves within an organization. Boundaries can be variable within an organization or career path. For example, a job may have difficult initial

inclusion boundaries in the formal statement of requirements for the position, but once included in the organization, job functions may be added or changed allowing easy circumferential movement. Additionally, one may meet the initial inclusion boundary criteria, but once they are within the organization, have a harder time moving through inclusion boundaries due to personality or willingness to engage in activities that would bring them closer to the "inner core" (Schein, 1971). Kim and Brunner (2009) add a fourth filtering boundary in analysis of gender difference in the mobility of superintendents: glass ceiling. This filter was added as a combination of inclusion and hierarchical boundaries directly related to being a woman who is attempting movement within an organization. The glass ceiling boundary is a filter that has been identified as a barrier for vertical and radial movement as women attempt to move into the superintendent role.

Manifestations of Organizational Career Mobility

Organizational Career Mobility

Considering the career mobility of superintendents, research supports that there are many different pathways to the superintendency (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020; Kim & Brunner, 2009; McDade & Drake, 1982). These pathways can be affected by the person's career background and the leadership opportunities within the district. As reflected in other research, the women in this study took varying pathways to the superintendency (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020; Kim & Brunner, 2009; McDade & Drake, 1982). Some careers are predominantly within the same district, while others had experiences in multiple districts before moving into a superintendent position. Within the model of Organizational Career Mobility, movement is three dimensional and includes radial, circumferential, and vertical motions. The ability to move through and within an organization can be influenced by filtering boundaries described as inclusion, functional or departmental, or hierarchical. These boundaries can be established based on an organization's policies, culture, or leadership (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Radial Movement

Radial movement or positioning reflects a person's increasing or decreasing centrality in an organization; being more or less "on the inside" (Schein, 1971). This typically means moving closer to the highest position of power (superintendent), thus, increasing one's opportunities and power related to their position (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Radial movement does not always mean hierarchical movement within an organization, but as previously stated, the power a person has may increase due to their proximity to the core group. Three of the participants moved radially due to their ability to stay within a district or community. Two of these three became well known in their district and had reputations that afforded them not only radial movement, but vertical movement as well. Renee started in a smaller district but eventually landed in the district she currently leads in and moved radially and vertically through job functions and roles. Chelsea, who has spent her career in one district, described building her reputation through hard work which contributes to her ability to move both radially and vertically.

> I was able to establish myself as a highly effective teacher, went on to be teacher of the year. My reputation allowed me to move beyond those first few years 'She's fresh out of college'. I was able to build a reputation and move beyond that. I think that is one of the benefits of being in this same district, not moving around, is my reputation. (Chelsea, interview, December 15, 2021)

Spending time and effort in one district allowed these women to move within the organization and break any barriers or boundaries other people may encounter. In Chelsea's experience, her work spoke for itself and led to being asked by the superintendent to move within the organization. This network of support allowed radial movement and a relationship with the superintendent, and vertical movement into central office leadership roles.

The other participant with radial and vertical movement, Nina, was still actively a part of her school's community while she worked in other districts. She not only lived there, but she also participated in school district activities and served on the school board. Local people who knew her supported her movement back into her community for her career. She quit the school board,

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took a principal's role and worked while the superintendent completed their current contract, knowing the position would soon open. And while she says the job position was open to others for employment and wasn't a guarantee, she knew the school board was wanting her to move into the superintendent role. Her relationship with the school board demonstrates how radial positionality can influence hierarchical movement and help break through boundaries or barriers. Most of the other participants in this study experienced inclusion boundaries in their attempt of radial movement within their career paths.

Inclusion Boundaries.

Inclusion boundaries separate individuals or groups from the centrality of the core group. Permeating into the core group can be affected by traits of "personality, seniority, belonging, and a person's willingness to play a certain type of political game" (Schein, 1971, p. 406). Alienation from core groups for these participants can be seen when they were excluded from things like golf games, football talk, or a car ride. These types of exclusions limit a person's ability to have that sense of belonging. Not being allowed access into those core men groups could potentially limit their upward mobility. The example of the male getting the handshake despite arriving with the female superintendent is another situation in which connection to upward mobility is stifled. Exclusion from connection can mean exclusion from opportunity. This is a type of power over female leaders due to the ability to influence others through connection or networking (Brunner & Schumaker, 1998; Kim & Brunner, 2009).

One participant, Grace, described inclusion boundaries when attempting to move into an assistant principal position in a district she had worked for over a long period. The core leadership blatantly told her he needed a man in that position. This was the same group she described as leaving her alone to run the school while the male principal and assistant principal went to lunch together. This experience demonstrated the power dynamic between being "on the inside" with the boy's club and being excluded as a woman. These insiders have the power to add to the workload and responsibilities of the female leader.

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More than one participant shared experiences of inclusion boundaries in action when describing previous school board members with whom they had worked. School boards in these experiences were attempting to have power over the female superintendents in hopes of meeting their own agendas. Iris described her unwillingness to perform illegal or unethical tasks that the board pushed her to do. Lisa reported she felt questioned about everything she tried to do. Furthermore, she had a board member who tried to have her fired because she would not serve on a county committee he led. While she had support from the board president in this situation, a board member continually yelled at her and challenged her, which led her to think the time had come to go somewhere else. Wendy described radial barriers when working in her previous district and the board changed from mixed gender to all male. As previously stated, a male board member asked her if she needed to call her husband before making a decision. She reported feeling constantly questioned, like Lisa also shared.

Participants described these relationships as stressful and tumultuous, ultimately leading them to move on to other superintendent positions or experiences. Their ability to reclaim their autonomy and power was only available through leaving those situations. Their power to achieve their goals and improve school outcomes was limited by the school board inclusion boundaries. These experiences are directly related to the glass ceiling boundary. As stated by Kim and Brunner (2009), "glass ceiling stands in as a combination of inclusion and hierarchical boundaries" (p. 82).

Participants also described their attempts to connect to groups and avoid inclusion boundaries. They expressed the need to be proactive when in leadership to continue blurring and breaking of inclusion barriers. Chelsea described making connections with males and females: "I think for all superintendents you've got to be willing to connect with others, males, females, you have to be willing to make those connections and have a mutual support." Nina stated, "This is a people profession. And so, people are willing to help, but sometimes you have to reach out and ask." Both of these participants stated as individuals in superintendent positions, you "have to" be

assertive and work on those connections. Grace made a statement that was part of Schein's (1971) exact definition of doing what it takes to bypass inclusion boundaries "So, when you're the only woman there with a bunch of contractors, it's like, okay you gotta play the game and that's what you do." She expressed the necessity in playing some sort of political game to overcome gendered expectations.

Circumferential Movement

Circumferential positioning reflects the changing of one's function or one's division of the organization (Schein, 1971). This movement is not typically associated with additional salary, power, or opportunity. It is described largely as a functional change (Kim & Brunner, 2009). The participants in this study largely experienced circumferential movement when endeavoring to add to their skill set. Within circumferential movement, there can be functional or departmental boundaries, though these were not largely experienced by these participants. Most of the time, there was not necessarily an actual move, but more an addition of job functions. They typically took on special projects or roles that were not part of the original job title in order to add to experiences and prove their work ethic to school district leadership.

Functional or Departmental Boundaries.

Functional boundaries are those that separate departments or different functional groupings from one another. Movement between departments can be attributed to wanting to learn a new skill (Schein, 1971). There were no recollections or sharing of functional boundaries within these women's path to the superintendency. Due to their desire to learn more and work harder than their counterparts, these women gained functions that were not necessarily a part of their job title. Instead of being bound in one department or functional grouping, they blurred boundary lines to gain new skills and experiences. Elaine described blurring boundary lines because she knew for her desired career path, she would need those extra experiences.

I was a secondary teacher and I was a secondary principal. I knew I didn't have a lot of experience in elementary, but I knew on the career path that I wanted to take, I really

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needed a lot more of that interaction. So when we implemented full day kindergarten in

(district name), they were going to contract out and have somebody manage the project.

And I went to my superintendent and I said, 'let me do that'. (Elaine, interview, January

24, 2022)

Iris described a similar experience in breaking functional or departmental boundaries.

I left the classroom and I became the curriculum coordinator and the district test administrator. I was over all the textbooks, I was over the district program, just a lot of little jobs that altogether made a big job. And then right before school started, the assistant high school principal took a job at another school and it was just like two weeks before school started. So the superintendent came to me and said, 'Okay, you're gonna be the assistant high school principal.' And I said 'Okay.' And so I did that for two years and continued my other job that I was doing already and just added to it. (Iris, interview, January 24, 2022)

Vertical Movement

Vertical movement is the increasing or decreasing of rank, power, or level in an

organization (Schein, 1971). Each participant began their career in a teaching or instructing

position. They then took varying movements vertically on their career path. Three moved into a

principal position after teaching. Three moved into another role which provided support to

teachers or the district in a different capacity and was considered a position of additional power or

authority. The other two moved into a central office position from their teaching role. Though

they moved into central office after teaching, both of these participants went back to a building

level administrative role as a principal at some point in their career to afford themselves

experiences deemed necessary for the highest position of superintendent. The average amount of

positions held between being a teacher or instructor and the first superintendent role was four,

with the least being two and the most being six. Four of the participants changed districts for

vertical movement into their first superintendency. Participants in this study experienced

hierarchical boundaries in their vertical movement but were able to overcome these barriers to ultimately reach the highest position in the organization – superintendent.

Hierarchical Boundaries.

Hierarchical boundaries separate the hierarchical levels from one another. These filter a person's rank within an organization (Schein, 1971). Many times these boundaries are attributed to formal requirements like degrees, credentials, certificates, and varied experiences (Kim & Brunner, 2009). The women in this study experienced hierarchical boundaries when moving into administrative positions or higher rank educational positions. They penetrated these boundaries and barriers through due diligence in gaining education, certifications, and experiences that would allow them to move hierarchically within an organization. Like when Lisa stated she decided to go back for her doctorate while in her first superintendent position because she "had a hard time with people thinking I was not capable." Or when these women blurred functional boundaries to ensure varied experiences so as not to come up against hierarchical boundaries like Elaine did when she asked her superintendent to take on a project for elementary sites because her experiences were all in secondary sites. Furthermore, their work ethic in doing more than required in a position could also contribute to their ability to break boundaries in this type of movement. The majority of hierarchical boundaries were specifically related to gender, making them part of glass ceiling boundaries.

Glass Ceiling Boundaries.

Glass ceiling boundaries are those that involve gender discrimination in hiring and promotion processes (Kim & Brunner, 2009). These boundaries were evident in these women's experiences attempting to move through and into hierarchical positions in school administration, and especially evident in bids for the superintendent role. Chelsea came up against a boundary when a school board member declared he wanted a superintendent with a great set of ties. Wendy describes applying for multiple superintendent positions and being judged on her perceived ability to handle construction projects. She also was judged based on her apparel in interviews

when an interviewee directly stated she was dressed nicely, but then asked if she could handle the work of maintaining buildings. Elaine described glass ceiling boundaries when she disclosed that during her interview, she was asked how she would be different from the previous female superintendent who did not "work out". She reported "I think it was really hard for them to pull the trigger on me because I think they were harkening back to what happened previously." Elaine had to stand up for herself to break the barrier and get the job. Questions asked of these women like, "Do you need to call your husband?" before making a decision for the district, or "Can you change a tire on a bus?" are further examples of inherent culturally ingrained gender bias. These type of questions towards women contain an assumption by others that they are not competent in perceived functions of the job. Historically male characteristics of being physically strong and able to perform mechanical functions like vehicle maintenance or building repairs ignored the qualities these women brought to the role. In these cases, women are viewed from a deficit standpoint.

Another characteristic women in this study reported as necessary to break glass ceiling barriers included working harder than male counterparts. Chelsea stated, "You're going to have to show and prove you can do this," when describing what it takes to be the first woman superintendent in a district. Grace reported you "have to work harder than men to move up the ladder." Elaine declared, "I feel there are times you really have to do things probably twice as well as some of your (male) colleagues." Their narratives again use assertive language to show what women "have to" do in order to break glass ceiling boundaries.

As previously stated, there have been many acts and movements created to eliminate employment discrimination. While women have successfully obtained majority status in the role of teaching, they still remain marginalized in pay and in educational leadership roles (Fox et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2017). Women are thought to remain marginalized in these roles due to multiple factors including lack of experience or credentials, and lack of mentors (DiCanio et al., 2016; Hickey-Gramke, 2007; Mahitivanichcha & Rorer, 2006; Robinson et al., 2017). In this

study, women did not have a lack of experience or credentials that should limit their movement into a superintendent position. Each participant had multiple roles in their career paths that provided experiences necessary to successfully navigate the position of superintendent. These women also had higher education degrees that are necessary for certification to perform administrative roles. In fact, some went on to obtain a doctorate degree due to glass ceiling boundaries, despite already having the state certification credential necessary to perform the role. Each participant had multiple certification areas on their Oklahoma certificates, including areas that allow employment in administration roles.

When exploring the element of mentors, these women were not lacking in that area either. Each participant described people, mentors, and networks alike that have encouraged them into the role and supported them as superintendents. Renee talked about the male superintendent before her who mentored and supported her. Chelsea also voiced that her relationship with the previous male superintendent in her district was a source of mentorship and support. Lisa shared about her continued relationship with the male superintendent who was assigned to be her mentor her first year as superintendent. She also relied on his network to help at different times. Grace shared she had a female mentor who is now retired, but she still talks to. She also talked about a superintendent who "highly encouraged" her to keep moving up. Wendy reported having "a multitude of people" she knows she can rely on. She described having other superintendents who "saw something in" her that gave her opportunities to achieve more. Nina described a female teacher turned mentor, along with another female boss, who have been examples for her. She also described a male superintendent friend who she looks to as an example because of his success in the position. Iris described her mentors as male superintendents she worked for, largely because "there weren't any female mentors cause all the leaders at school were male." These mentor experiences echo back to the radial, circumferential, and hierarchical movements these women were able to make on their career paths with support and encouragement, while breaking glass ceiling boundaries. Many of them had mentors who, as superintendents, were part of the core

group of the organizations they worked for. While most of them did not move into the ultimate

hierarchical position in these districts, the inclusion they experienced in previous districts enabled

them to keep pushing for inclusion and hierarchy in other districts. This enabled their movement

into their current superintendent roles.

Another point of interest is these women not only have mentors, but they also strive to be

mentors for others which is a learning experience in itself. Lisa described wanting to "pay it back

by helping other people." Chelsea stated "I think it's also important to mentor others." Iris

reported she "continually works on being a mentor and encourager." Elaine said

> I really try to encourage them to take that next step, jump out there in a leadership
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> position, put yourself, you have the skills. And sometimes people just need to hear that.
>
> They need to hear that for confidence and women need to hear it, I think more so. I take a
>
> lot of pride and pleasure in seeing women that I have worked with in various districts and
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> spots, to see them excel. (Elaine, interview January, 24, 2022)

Lack of experience and credentials, as well as lack of mentors are factors researchers have

attempted to use to explain the marginalization of women in educational leadership and the

superintendency (DiCanio et al., 2016; Hickey-Gramke, 2007; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006;

Robinson et al., 2017). These factors are not evident in this particular study. The women in this

study were able to blur boundary lines and break through barriers described by organizational

career mobility and glass ceiling (Kim & Brunner, 2009; Schein, 1971). Though these types of

movement and boundaries are evident in their narratives, this is a picture of success stories in

shattering the glass ceiling and other career mobility barriers.

White women were most represented in this study, as they are in the majority of studies

regarding women and the superintendency. Black, indigenous, and women of color are

additionally marginalized due to the societal values of both gender and race (Acves, 2013; Alston,

2005; Brown, 2014; Cox, 2017; Katz, 2012). Native American participants in this study did not

feel this hindered their movement into a superintendent position due to being in Oklahoma.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Native Americans make up almost ten percent of the population in Oklahoma, with an additional six percent responding as two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). One participant stated that in her county of Oklahoma "everyone has some Native American." These women did not see this as a point of further marginalization in this role, and they did not formally recognize it as a privilege due to being in Oklahoma.

Summary

Chapter V explored data collected from interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts. This information was viewed through the lens of Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) filter of glass ceiling. Vertical, radial and circumferential movements within career trajectory were explored, along with the corresponding boundaries of hierarchical, inclusion, functional or departmental, and glass ceiling. Furthermore, actions and characteristics necessary to blur or break boundaries were explored.

Figure 2 illustrates examples of some glass ceiling boundaries represented in the experiences of participants in this study. Chapter VI will answer the research questions posed in this study and explore how organizational career mobility and glass ceiling explains the findings. Implications for theory, research, and practice will be presented, along with conclusions, limitations, and final researcher comments.

Figure 2

Example Glass Ceiling Boundaries in Organizational Career Mobility
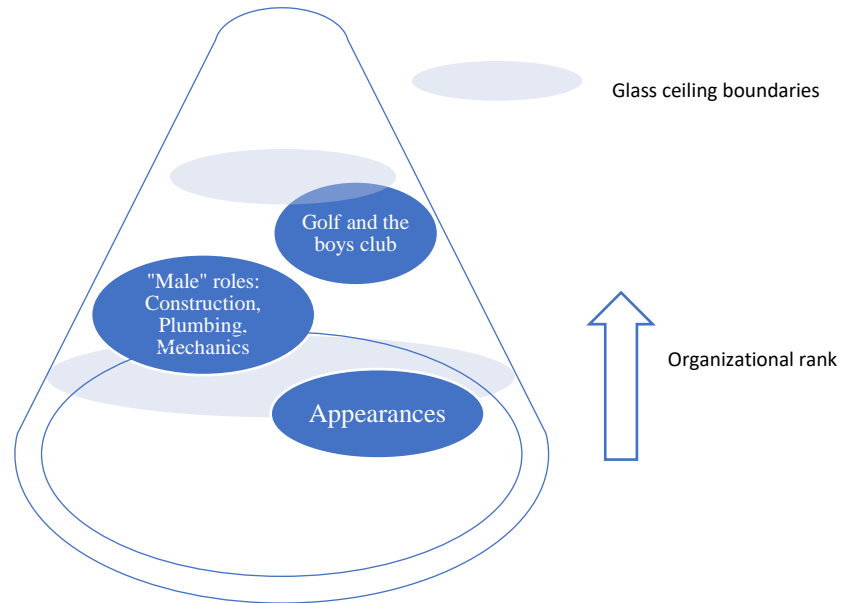
Note. Adapted from the modified Schein (1971, p. 404) Three-Dimensional Model of an

Organization in Organizational Career Mobility, with Kim and Brunner's (2009, p. 83) filter of

glass ceiling.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore how selected women obtained and experienced

their roles as public school district superintendents in Oklahoma. Below are the research

questions that directed this study:

1. How did current Oklahoma women superintendents attain their positions?

2. What promoted and hindered their movement into these positions?

3. How did they overcome obstacles in the process?

4. How do women perceive the role their gender and race play in the process of obtaining the position of superintendent?

5. What lessons do their experiences have for overcoming injustices on the pathway to the superintendency?

6. How do the concepts of organizational career mobility and glass ceiling explain the data?

Research Question One: How did current Oklahoma women superintendents attain their

positions?

The women in this study attained their positions through hard work and perseverance.

Most of them hold, or are working towards, a doctorate degree. Only one participant holds a

master's degree with no plan of going back for a doctorate. They each have, or recently held, a

building level administration credential on their Oklahoma teaching certificates, and they all hold

district superintendent certification. These superintendents worked to gather experiences that would help them be prepared for a superintendent position, often asking for additional duties or accepting additional roles to blur the functional boundaries within a job capacity. Each of them describes a time when they had to work harder or be more prepared than their male counterparts. For example, being "overprepared" with data for an interview; or having materials prepared for regional networking with male superintendents who then asked for her materials. Another example is feeling the need to go above and beyond male peers so as not to "mess it up" for future female candidates of a superintendent position. A news article supports this notion as it was reported two people were hired to replace one woman from this study when she moved on to a superintendent role in another district. Furthermore, the women in rural districts had more than one attempt at moving into a superintendent position. They each applied to more than one open position, and it took multiple tries to land the position they currently hold. They persevered through rejections to ultimately end up as a superintendent in rural Oklahoma. Another obtained her position through relationship with her home community. She stayed active in school community matters while working in other districts. When the time came, the community wanted her as superintendent, knowing she was working on a Doctorate in leadership and was invested in the interests of the school district.

Some participants in more suburban or urban areas were able to move vertically within the district they had been a part of for a lengthy amount of time. Hierarchical and inclusion boundaries were described by these participants, including gendered interview questions for the position of superintendent. However, ultimately, they were able to move within their district because of the reputations they had built over the years. Another participant was able to defend herself as a woman applicant for superintendent in her current district by telling her board that not all people are the same, so she would not be the same as a female superintendent with whom they had not been pleased.

Research Question Two: What promoted and hindered their movement into these positions?

Movement into a superintendent position was promoted through relationships with mentors and attainment of certifications that allowed practice as a school administrator. Each participant described mentors and networks of people who supported them moving into their role. Often times, a leader would encourage them to get certifications for leadership positions, even if they had not thought of moving out of teaching before. Other times, they were asked to change job functions or add functions to their current roles because an administrator felt they would be successful in those positions. Most of these women reported they had not originally imagined themselves applying for a superintendent job when visualizing their career trajectories. It took the encouragement and support of others to lead them down the leadership path.

Promotion into these positions is notable for experiences on their resumes. These women worked to obtain experiences that would aide in their proficiency as a district leader. They held multiple roles and jobs on their career path as part of building skills and practices. These experiences ultimately aided in blurring boundaries and breaking barriers on their career mobility path. One news article surrounding the hiring of one of the participants states the district school board was looking for a "transformative leader who can build on current successes." Furthermore, they said the board was excited to have this superintendent's experience and background joining the district. Her work in gathering experience in multiple roles and projects was evident on her resume and to the hiring board. Her background and varied functional experiences aided her promotion into a superintendent position.

Participants in this study appeared to have professional working relationships with their board members. Each district had a formal process for running board meetings. Most board presidents presented each agenda item and the superintendent followed up with explanation of the item. One superintendent described her leadership style as shared and this was evident in the way board meetings were held. Different leaders and members within the team presented different

items on the board agenda. There was no noted tension between superintendents and board members during any of these observations. The participants in the study all reported they were pleased with their relationships with their board. This is important to note because more than one participant described a time as a superintendent in which they did not have good relationships with their board, causing them to leave. A good relationship with their district's board supports these women's continued success in these roles.

Promotion was most notably hindered by gender for the participants who were in rural areas of the state. They had multiple employment opportunities denied before they were able to move into a superintendent role. These women reported that during the interview process, gender biased questions were asked that lead them to report part of the difficulty in securing a superintendent position in rural Oklahoma was due to being female. Questions regarding their apparel or their ability to perform gendered tasks involving construction or plumbing were examples of these barriers. Also, these districts had historically been led by males and they potentially would have been the first female superintendent. One participant described the difficulty of securing a position in rural Oklahoma like this:

> It's probably harder to come into a district, especially in a rural area because there's so many different dynamics of working into a rural community anyways. You know, we don't know you, you're an outsider. Do we trust you? Now you're a female. What are you, you know, what are you gonna be about? What are you bringing to us? How are you gonna benefit us? I don't see that changing. I really don't. (Wendy, interview, January 12, 2022)

Gender was a hinderance in the majority of participants' opinions. Glass ceiling boundaries were evident to these women in their experiences when attempting to move vertically within their career. Descriptions of gender biased interview questions and exclusion from activities due to gender were blatant examples of glass ceiling boundaries. Furthermore, participants described the need to be more prepared or to be overprepared when interviewing for

a position, knowing they would have to prove themselves over their male counterparts. Only one participant stated her gender was not a factor in hiring. This was, in her opinion, partially due to the board being all women and because of her role as a lifelong community member.

Research Question Three: How did they overcome obstacles in the process?

When coming up against inclusion, hierarchical, or glass ceiling boundaries, these women described using protective shields to overcome these obstacles. They shared stories of strong comebacks for challenges to their ability to fill a man's shoes. They described being assertive and defending themselves when other gender biased questions are posed. Most described the ability to move-on from, or not let gender biased obstacles bother them. They reported the ability to ignore the bias and let their work speak for them. The balance of assertiveness and passiveness is evident in their descriptions of gender biased experiences. They can be assertive, but also have the ability to disregard some gender biased or double standard encounters. These women reported that they had to work harder than men to prove themselves and overcome obstacles. This meant "overcompensating" at times, or doing things "probably twice as well." They described playing "the game" in order to fit in and prove themselves as female leaders. Furthermore, being intentional in creating relationships by their ability to "reach out and ask" or willingness to "make those connections" with male and female counterparts. Each of these factors were characteristics these participants described as necessary steps in overcoming gender-based obstacles.

These women not only worked hard to obtain their current positions, but they continue to work towards higher degrees or skill development. On their path to the superintendency, they added functions to their roles and continue to add skills to their toolboxes. Each participant described how they are actively taking steps to better their performance as a district leader. Overcoming obstacles through skill development sticks with these women as they maintain superintendent careers. These participants were self-reflective and have high expectations for their performance in the superintendent role. This contributed to their ability to overcome

obstacles by constantly working to add skills and better their job performance. They worked toward higher education degrees and additional state department certifications. They reflected on how they handled situations and described contemplating how things could have been done differently. They reported that women leaders have to "live up to my own expectations" and "have self-awareness" in order to know areas of improvement in job performance.

Participants described networks of support that keep them going when coming up against an obstacle. Reliance on mentors continued as they navigate their role. They call when they need help or encouragement. Inclusion in state organizations keeps them connected to others who are able to support their development and success. Networks of educators are there when they need encouragement. All participants had family support and noted how impactful that was for them, even going as far as their family members filling vacant positions within a district, or playing after-hours custodian during special school events, or living separately for a period. Community support aides in overcoming obstacles as well. One superintendent recounted community members coming to speak to the school board on her behalf when going through the hiring process. Another reported community support during the superintendent hiring process in a district in which she was career-long employee. Support was especially evident when gender-biased superintendent characteristics were described as desirable, "a great collection of ties", and this participant was gifted ties the following day.

Research Questions Four: How do women perceive the role their gender and race play in the process of obtaining the position of superintendent?

The women in this study mostly reported their race did not play a part in their ability to gain a superintendent position. One superintendent acknowledged that her race had been a privilege in obtaining her current position due to the rural demographics in her county being majority white and her identity as a white woman. Another was more inattentive of this characteristic privilege of being white but did acknowledge it to a small degree. She acknowledged that there may be "questions of is it easier, a white male or white female, having

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kind of a hand up in upper leadership roles", and hoping that it is not the case, but also not wanting to "make myself oblivious to issues surrounding race." Another participant who was Native American reported race did not play a part because of the large Native American population in her county. Again, not stating the privilege of being the majority in her county.

As previously stated, one superintendent felt her gender was not a hinderance in becoming a superintendent because of her all-female board. She further reflected that gender was not a factor because of her ties to the community as a whole. She supposed she was hired on knowledge of her personally, and the confidence from the community she would do what is best for the district. While she did not feel it was a hinderance in becoming a superintendent, she described experiences of gender bias while holding the position. When dealing with matters of building maintenance, outside professionals treated her differently depending on her husband being around; or appeared to try to take advantage of her perceived lack of knowledge regarding maintenance.

The other participants openly acknowledged gender as a hinderance in obtaining the position of superintendent. Their experiences relayed in chapter four give multiple examples of how gender has been an issue in their career trajectories. Hierarchical and inclusion boundaries specifically tied to glass ceiling boundaries are evident in their narratives. Furthermore, this theme was explored in answering research questions two and three. Gender obstacles were overwhelmingly present on these women's path to the superintendency.

Research Question Five: What lessons do their experiences have for overcoming injustices on the pathway to the superintendency?

The biggest lesson from these experiences is best said in their own words, "Go for it." Even when met with adverse experiences or blatant discrimination, keep trying to reach the goal of a superintendent position. While the pathway may not be easy, work towards the goal through asking for job tasks that help further develop skills. Blur functional or departmental boundaries. Apply for positions that help move you vertically through an organization. The more experiences

and skills you build, the more prepared you will be when applying for a superintendent position. Even if you can't say you have the experience and title of superintendent, being able to describe skills gained from asking for additional roles will help your chances at landing a superintendent position. This echoes back to the sentiment of being overprepared when interviewing for a superintendent job. Bring data and examples of how you have improved other districts or departments. Let the interviewers see how the extra job tasks have played into the skills you have and how that will be beneficial as a superintendent. And if you don't get the job on your first attempt, keep applying and trying to move into a superintendent role. One participant stated

> I had everyone tell me getting your first superintendency is the hardest thing to do because you have to get someone that will give you that opportunity. Once you've had that opportunity, it's easy to get the next one because you have the experience and they were right. It wasn't difficult at all to get that second job, but it was really difficult to get that first one. (Wendy, interview, January 12, 2022)

Another lesson is knowing your district or audience. A recommendation from one participant was to know the area in which you are applying for a position. This means having background knowledge regarding other women who have held the position or knowing if you could potentially be the first woman to hold the position. Another facet of this included knowing the demographics of the district. Understanding how these things may play a part in your hiring will prepare you for the interview process and overcoming any injustices within that context.

Research Question Six: How do the concepts of organizational career mobility and glass ceiling explain the data?

Organizational career mobility to obtain a superintendent position mostly meant vertical movement within a district or to another district. Functional boundaries were viewed as more flexible when attempting to gain skills and experiences to aide in vertical movement. These boundaries blurred due to the desire to learn new skills and practices while working in a certain department or role. For example, one participant asked for an elementary district wide project

when her career experience had only been in secondary roles up to that time. Hierarchical boundaries were often barriers within the context of glass ceiling boundaries. Experiences with moving into administration positions below the superintendency were met at times with confrontation about needing a male in the role and excluding their credentials based on gender. These women were met with questions about their abilities to perform tasks that are considered historically male characteristics, like "can you get on a roof?" Inclusion boundaries were largely seen within the context of the glass ceiling boundary. Women were often left out of the insiders' club when the group was exclusively men. The handshake went to the male colleague and the woman was left to take care of the school building while the men went to lunch. Male administrators were less likely to include the female administrator in group activities or even in simple encounters like transportation. Glass ceiling boundaries were more evident in rural areas. These women were less likely to obtain a superintendent position on their first attempt, despite having the required certifications and experiences. They reported it was harder in rural areas because you were seen as an "outsider" in the community whom the locals were not sure they could trust. This boundary was evident in the participants' experiences of being more prepared for superintendent interviews than their male counterparts. Participants stated they had to be "overprepared" when going to interview for superintendent positions. Also, blatant questioning about their gender potentially being a barrier to success as a superintendent verified glass ceiling boundaries; "How will you be different from the last female superintendent we had?"

Conclusions

The findings from this case study indicate there are similarities in women superintendent's experiences in Oklahoma. And while my research questions focused on pathways, it was inevitable that experiences within the job over the years would surface as well. The study includes both experiences reflecting on the pathway to and within the superintendency. While career trajectories and experiences may vary, there are analogous threads of desire to do what's best for students, challenges and glass ceiling experiences, meeting expectations and

introspections about their job performance, support networks, and feelings of hope. This snapshot of women superintendents in Oklahoma paints a picture of how glass ceiling boundaries are present in career mobility. It also shows how women have been able to blur boundaries and break barriers. Experiences by these participants demonstrated the privilege of being a white woman, or Native American in Oklahoma, due to the lack of diversity within the intersection of race and gender within this role. Though still underrepresented as women in this role overall, white women continue to be most represented within the position.

Kerber's (2002) study about female superintendents in Oklahoma found similar experiences to the women in this study. Participants in Kerber's (2002) study described their impetus to do the job was making a difference in a child's life. Unsurprising in commonality is the theme of support. Like the participants in this study, Kerber's (2002) participants described support and mentors as necessary elements in their ability to move into and work as a superintendent. They described similar double standards when they reported women had to work harder to prove themselves. Furthermore, Kerber's (2002) participants described inclusion boundaries in small towns, describing the ability of men to be able to walk into a coffee shop, sit down, and "fit right in", and stated women would not be able to do the same (p.112). These findings in similarities suggest that though two decades have passed and there is an appearance of improvement in the numbers of female superintendents in Oklahoma, many of the barriers and challenges have not changed. Despite barriers and challenges, educators' mission to serve students has not waned.

Additionally, women leaders acknowledge the continued need for support systems and mentors to achieve the highest position in a school district. Research on women superintendents has found those who have access to networks and mentors, have support from their spouses, and have advanced degrees are more successful in reaching the superintendency (Bernal et. al, 2017; Hawkins, 2020; Sampson et. al, 2015). Furthermore, studies in Oklahoma corroborate larger studies in finding women need mentors, and social networks to support their mobility into and

during superintendency (Gammill, 2016; Kerber, 2002; Haynes, 2000). This study of women who have successfully obtained a superintendent position substantiates the need for networks and mentors, support from family and spouses, and attainment of advanced degrees in order to break barriers. These are factors that contributed to these women's success in obtaining the superintendent position.

Research on female superintendents' career trajectories and attainment of superintendent positions in Oklahoma is diverse in the theoretical lenses used to understand this phenomenon. While similar themes have emerged in what participants described as necessary factors to obtain and be successful in the position, theoretical explanations are varied (Boone-Wooten, 2003; Evans, 2004; Gammill, 2016; Hawkins, 2020; Haynes, 2000; Kerber, 2002; Tanner, 2000). Schein's (1971) Organizational Career Mobility (OCM) and Kim and Brunner's (2009) added filter of glass ceiling extends the understanding of how women are able to break barriers to ultimately obtain the highest level position within a school district. These lenses have not previously been applied to experiences and narratives of Oklahoma female superintendents. This research provides additional understanding of career mobility within the pathways of women who have obtained a superintendency.

Limitations of Study

Like all research, this case study has limitations. The time-bound context limits the number of participants and data gathered. Additionally, participants may have been limited due to the name of the study. Some women may not relate to the glass ceiling metaphor. Since this term was included in correspondence to acquire participants, some women may have decided subject matter did not apply to them. There may have been experience narratives not gathered due to participants' differing career paths to the superintendency. Similar to most other studies regarding women superintendents, this study is limited by the lack of diversity in participants' race. The body of literature on female superintendents is limited to largely white women's experiences, and this study unintentionally is the same. Furthermore, most of the women in this study were within

the same age range. This may limit the diversity of responses and experiences shared. Finally, while this study gives a snapshot of women's experiences in attaining the superintendency, it cannot give the full picture of all the components at play for every female superintendent.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

The findings from this study have implications for research, theory, and practice. Examples of these implications are described in the following sections. While these implications may not generalize to other contexts or cases, they may have some elements of transferability for similar settings.

Implications for Research

This study makes a contribution to the body of research in the highest level of public educational leadership by examining women's experiences overcoming barriers when moving into a superintendent position. Nationally, there is a small body of research on this topic to which this study will add. Research on this topic in Oklahoma is limited despite its importance in providing equitable opportunities in employment. While the first woman superintendent recognized the inequity in this position in 1909 (Blount, 1998), there is a lack of continuous research exploring why women remain the minority in Oklahoma. This study adds to the small research body of women superintendents' experiences in the state of Oklahoma. The epistemological perspective of transformative worldview lacks a uniform body of literature (Creswell, 2018). This study will add to the viewpoint and research of this essential perspective. Transformative perspective is evident throughout this study in the societal and structural barriers experienced by participants in obtaining a superintendent position in Oklahoma. This role has historically been dominated by white males and continues to marginalize women through organizational barriers. Nationally and locally, research demonstrates the organizational barriers experienced when attempting to move into a superintendent position. This study substantiates the narratives of experience from women in both realms.

During the time of this study, two potential participants indicated they were leaving the position of superintendent- one to move into another educational leadership position at the state level, and the other to pursue other things. There was another participant who was asked to participate, and did not respond, but news showed she, too, was leaving the role of superintendent. Future research could include perspectives of women in Oklahoma who are leaving the role of superintendent. This may bring further insight into the experiences of being a female superintendent in Oklahoma. Future research could also explore perspectives of women who have attained a principal or director role in a district, but are unable to secure employment in a superintendent position. Quantitative research could compare experiences of male and female superintendent career pathways.

Implications for Theory

This study will add to the literature base of E.G. Schein's Organizational Career Mobility with the additional filtering boundary of glass ceiling as added by Kim and Brunner (2009). There are few studies utilizing this theory with the glass ceiling filtering boundary. This study adds to the very small research base of applying Organizational Career Mobility with the glass ceiling to studies on women district superintendents. Furthermore, this study explores factors often used to explain marginalization of women in educational leadership and illustrates how women are able to blur boundaries and break barriers. This theory was useful in understanding how women superintendents move through organizations and public education careers to obtain the highest position. It aided in understanding of the different types of movements experienced by educators, as well as barriers to movements and how to overcome them. Donald E. Super's Career Development Theory may be a useful theory in a similar study on female superintendent's career development over their lifespan. Social Cognitive Career Theory is another option for useful theories as a lens to understand female superintendents' movements into the position.

Implications for Practice

This study explored how women reach the position of superintendent within a public school district. Moreover, it explored female superintendents' experiences in Oklahoma. As stated in Merriam and Tisdale (2016), "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people's lives." Knowing barriers and challenges from women who have experienced them may enable other women who desire to advance to superintendent to be more resilient and irrepressible. Having an understanding of what one may encounter in their career mobility could lead to preparation for these encounters and a smoother trajectory. The encouraging and hopeful messages from these current superintendents could influence other women in leadership positions to continue their upward career mobility when facing challenges or discrimination. Women seeking a rural superintendent position may need to attempt to do so in multiple districts before gaining a position. Black, Indigenous, and women of color continue to be marginalized in this position. It is up to educational leaders to be aware of the lack of representation and take action in mentoring and supporting these women who are experiencing intersectional marginalization.

Leadership preparation programs can use information from this and other studies to better prepare female leaders for the obstacles they may encounter. Beyond this small snapshot, there are further implications for the larger picture of social justice. Social justice is a necessary field of study that should be included in leadership preparation programs. Coursework dedicated to understanding social injustices and how to empower marginalized populations can aide in creating truly transformative leaders. Some future leaders, like myself, seek out courses on diversity and equity in education, but this was not a requirement in the leadership preparation course progression. All leaders need to be aware of gender, race, and intersectional experiences; as well as how to empower individuals who live these situations daily. Beyond exclusive courses on the topic of social justice in educational leadership, this topic can be woven into other typical classes in leadership preparation programs. For example, when discussing school finance, incorporate themes of marginalized populations and their access to funding. Or talk about school

funding formulas and how they may benefit already privileged populations. Bringing awareness to this topic within the field of educational leadership will better equip future leaders in breaking barriers and mentoring the underrepresented. As narrated in this study and others on this topic, mentors and networks of support are a necessary facet of overcoming marginalization. Leadership preparation programs have the ability to create knowledgeable future mentors who, again, can create transformative change in the field of educational leadership.

Summary

Legislative acts have been enacted and social movements have occurred to eliminate employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. However, despite these acts and movements, there remains a disproportionate number of males in top leadership positions in public schools. While women serve as more than three-fourths of the teacher workforce, only 26 percent serve in superintendent roles (Rogers & Tieken, 2020). And in Oklahoma, only 20 percent of the superintendents are women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2019).

Chapter II reviewed literature regarding the history of employment discrimination acts and movements. It then explored literature specifically regarding sex-based employment discrimination. Narrowing the subject to sex-based discrimination in education, research was reviewed regarding successful and unsuccessful cases of demarginalizing women. Finally, educational leadership roles and gender marginalization brought the focus to the glass ceiling and barriers women experience in the career mobility to the superintendency.

Chapter III defined the qualitative case study methodology used in this study. Transformative epistemological perspective guided this research study. Power relations were acknowledged as well as privilege within the researcher's role. Eight Oklahoma women superintendents agreed to participate in the study. Data collection occurred from November 2021 to February 2022. Data included interviews, observations, a demographic survey, document reviews, and artifacts. I conducted interviews with the eight participants and used their resumes as

document prompts. Observations were made during public board meetings. Artifacts collected included Oklahoma state certifications for each participant, and a couple news articles found surrounding the time of two participants' career changes.

Chapter IV presented the data as a narrative portrait of this group of women superintendents in Oklahoma. Themes within their experiences were described and presented. While the participants have differentiating career paths and experiences, there were common threads that painted the collective case study portrait.

Chapter V applied the data portrait to the theoretical lenses of organizational career mobility and glass ceiling. Lived experiences from the participants gave evidence of a glass ceiling within the career mobility of female superintendents. The glass ceiling boundaries were evident in other levels of school administration, but especially relevant to moving into the position of public school district superintendent. Necessary traits and actions to blur and break boundaries were described.

Chapter VI answered the research questions posed to be answered at the start of the study. Conclusions were made regarding findings. More specifically, there are similarities in women superintendent's experiences in Oklahoma. While career trajectories and experiences may vary, there are analogous threads of desire to do what is best for children, challenges, glass ceiling experiences, networks, and feelings of hope. This portrait of women superintendents in Oklahoma paints a picture of how glass ceiling boundaries are still present in career mobility. Experiences by these participants demonstrate the privilege of being a white or Native American woman in Oklahoma. Furthermore, Chapter VI described implications for research, theory, and practice.

Researcher Comments

Something that came as a surprise to me during this study was participants' comments on working in education at a time when it had a competitive edge for employment in Oklahoma. More than one participant described a time when there were large amounts of applications for

teaching and principal positions. One woman described the need to apply for a building-level leadership position four to five years before your actual desire to obtain that position as part of the career path. While I have worked in education in Oklahoma for 11 years, I have never known a time when there wasn't a shortage of educators. In the three districts I have been a part of, there is typically not a large pool of applicants to pull from for positions. This was especially true in the large urban district I worked in, but even in the smaller districts, that are typically able to fill employment needs, there are only a couple or a handful of applicants. This shortage of educators makes me wonder how leadership positions will look in the future. Will these roles be harder to fill? How will this effect gender and intersectionality of identities within educational leadership?

Lastly, I wanted to end the presentation of this dissertation study with words from one of the participants. Her passion and thoughtfulness regarding women supporting other women stuck with me. And seeing that qualitative research, especially transformative epistemology, aims to make a difference in people's lives through the perspectives of the participants, I will end with this quote:

> It is hard and it is lonely because there aren't many of us. And I like that you ask do we keep in touch (with the one other woman superintendent in her region), because now I feel bad because we don't. And you know when I go places, I think, when I walk in a room and there might be two or three other females, I think, oh, well, at least they're here. But females don't always gravitate to one another. They tend to cling on to the other male leadership in the room because they are the ones that are going to be usually looked toward driving things. Even though we have a female state superintendent, and we have, you know, female presidents in universities, it's still a male dominated world. And so, we just need to be more cognizant of supporting one another. We're not vying for anything against each other. So, we really need to be supportive of one another. (Wendy, interview, January 12, 2022)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Email to Potential Participants

Sending Email Address: Karen.Knepper@Okstate.edu

Subject Line: Dissertation Research Study

Dear (potential participant name),

I am emailing to request your participation in a qualitative research study for completion of a dissertation as part of requirements for a Doctorate of Education at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa. The topic of study is women district superintendents in the state of Oklahoma; barriers and empowerment. I am hoping to interview women superintendents in our state to gain an understanding of their experiences on the pathway to becoming a superintendent. Female superintendents are a minority, despite their being the majority of teaching positions.

If you choose to participate, one 45-60 minute interview will be conducted. This can be either in-person or over ZOOM© web conference software; whichever is your preference. Following the initial interview, there may be brief follow-up by phone or email to ensure understanding/meaning of responses. I would also like to observe one of your district's open public board meetings.

Measures will be taken to safeguard confidentiality, including use of pseudonyms in place of names.

Thank you for your consideration to participate in this study.
If you decide to participate, please read the attached consent form and reply to this email to schedule your interview. I can also be reached by phone to schedule the interview.

Thank you again,

Karen Knepper Mitchek, M.S., Ed.S.

918-6**-2***
karen.knepper@Okstate.edu

Consent to Participate

School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation

CONSENT FORM
Women and the Superintendency: Glass Ceiling and Empowerment of Female
Superintendents in Oklahoma

Background Information
You are invited to be in a research study of women superintendents in Oklahoma. You were selected as a possible participant because of your job title of district superintendent. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

This study is being conducted by: Karen Mitchek, M.S., Ed.S. Oklahoma State University, College of Education and Human Sciences- School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation, under the direction of Dr. Ed Harris, Oklahoma State University, College of Education and Human Sciences- School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in one 45-60 minute interview about your experiences as a woman in the position of superintendent of a public school district in Oklahoma. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions and you may consent to being audiotaped. Should you elect to participate in the interview over Zoom, you may consent to being videotaped. You would also provide one copy of your resume to the researcher as a document prompt during the interview session. There is a short, 3 question demographic survey that will also be collected at the time of the interview. I would also like to observe one of the regularly scheduled open public board meetings.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: Participation in the interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study
The study involves the following foreseeable risks:
There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

The benefits to participation are:
There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about women who are superintendents in the state of Oklahoma, and may help women who desire to be a district superintendent in Oklahoma overcome barriers to this position.

Compensation

You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

We will collect your information through interviews, demographic survey, resumes, and video or audio recordings. This information will be stored on a personal, password protected computer with the exception of the demographic survey. The demographic survey will be kept in a file folder in a locked file cabinet in the investigator's private office behind a locked door. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the code list linking names to study numbers will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than June 2022. The audio/video recording will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately 1 month. This informed consent form will be kept for 3 years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed. Your data collected as part of this research project, will not be used or distributed for future research studies. Should you elect to be interviewed over Zoom, the research team works to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online interview involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the interview provider privacy policy at https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview/survey at any time.

Contacts and Questions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 918-688-2184 or karen.knepper@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:
I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.
      ___Yes ___No

I give consent to be videotaped during this study:
      ___Yes ___No

I give consent to be contacted for follow-up in this study or future similar studies:
        ___Yes   ___No

Signature:_____   Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____   Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Demographic Survey

1. Race: _____

2. Circle age range: 20-29   30-39   40-49   50-59   60-69

3. Years as a superintendent: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

1. What are some of your most memorable experiences as a district administrator?

2. Please describe your career path to your current leadership position.

    a. Here is a copy of your resume. Tell me more about this transition. Pause on this role,

    tell me your experiences.

3. In your opinion, what has contributed to your success as a leader in school

administration?

    a. Education "Tell me more about that"

    b. People "Tell me more about that"

4. What barriers have you experienced in the assent to your current position?

5. What advice can you provide to aspiring leaders in education?

6. What makes you feel supported in your position?

7. What makes you feel unsupported in your position?

8. What role do you think your gender or race played in obtaining the position of superintendent?

9. What advice would you give to other women who want to pursue a superintendent position?

10. Is there anything else you were prepared to answer that I didn't ask?

11. If there are any other questions I think of in the future, may I contact you?

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX E

Observation Protocol

1. **The Setting**
   - Map the space
   - What is the physical environment like? (e.g., displays, posters, technology…)
   - What is the desk arrangement?
   - What is the context? (What is the backdrop? Community? Demographics?)
   - What kinds of behavior does the setting promote of prevent?
   - How is the physical environment decorated and maintained?
   - What values are conveyed through the organization and décor?

2. **The Participants**
   - Who is in the scene? Describe them.
   - How many?
   - What are their roles?
   - Who is allowed and not allowed to participate in the scene?

3. **Activities and Interactions**
   - What is going on?
   - What are they saying?
   - How do they interact?
   - How are people and activities connected and interrelated?

4. **Time: Frequency and Duration**
   - When did the situation or scene occur?
   - How long does it last?
   - Is it a recurring type of situation or is it unique?

5. **Subtle Factors**
   - Unplanned Activities?
   - Nonverbal Communication?
   - What is not happening that is supposed to?
   - What is happening that is not supposed to?

APPENDIX F

Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	11/19/2021
Application Number:	IRB-21-490
Proposal Title:	Women and the Superintendency: Glass Ceiling and Empowerment of Female Superintendents in Oklahoma.
Principal Investigator:	Karen Knepper
Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	Ed Harris
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt
Exempt Category:	

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which <u>continuing review is not required</u>. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Karen Knepper Mitchek

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: WOMEN AND THE SUPERINTENDENCY: GLASS CEILING AND
EMPOWERMENT OF FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN OKLAHOMA

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July,
2022.

Completed the requirements for the Specialist in Education at Oklahoma State
University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational
Psychology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2009.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2007.

Experience:
School Psychologist, Sand Springs Public Schools, present
School Psychology Team Specialist, Tulsa Public Schools, 2016-2017
School Psychologist, Bixby Public Schools, 2015-2016
School Psychologist, Tulsa Public Schools, 2011-2015

Professional Memberships:
National Association of School Psychologists, Oklahoma School Psychology
Association, American Counseling Association