

WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS, THE FEMINIST ETHIC,
AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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By

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WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS, THE FEMINIST ETHIC, AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP (270 pp.)

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This qualitative study investigated the research question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate? Data generated from six participants' interviews, journal entries, and writing samples were used to formulate a leadership theory using Charmaz's (2011) constructivist grounded theory approach.

Data analysis resulted in ten common themes among participants, which fell into three main areas: leadership disposition, feminist approaches to leadership, and purpose in leadership. The following theory, grounded in participants' data was developed: When authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment are present, women superintendents are better able to succeed in the masculinized culture of school district leadership and the current climate of educational reform. The essence of women's leadership is manifested in the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique, which allows leaders to bring better outcomes for the individuals and the organization under their stewardship.

The theory developed may allow school boards and universities to better understand the preparation of, hiring of, and support for women in the superintendency. The recommendations of this study and theory may inform educational leaders of both sexes and add to the current body of literature on women in educational leadership in general and in the superintendency specifically. Recommendations for future research

include further study regarding the efficacy of using the theory developed to grow and support the ranks of women superintendents nationally.

Keywords: superintendents, women superintendents, women leaders, educational leadership, feminist ethic, feminist theory, organizational leadership, organizational culture, moral leadership, ethical leadership

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Women Superintendents

Researchers have studied the U.S. superintendency for more than a century; however, it has only been in the past 25 years that gender and women in the superintendency have been examined. This qualitative study investigated the research question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate? The rationale behind my desire to study women superintendents and their experiences of leadership through a qualitative, grounded theory approach will be presented in this chapter.

History of Superintendent Research

Though not labeled gender research, early studies of the superintendency and superintendents, substantively androcentric, left out the study of many non-hierarchical and non-traditional leadership strategies and paradigms (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) additionally found that “leadership and change theories are also based primarily on studies of men” (p. 36). This male-biased approach to understanding leadership and school administration has resulted in finding the experiences of male leadership to be the norm against which other approaches, that is, women’s and minorities’ are judged (Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). By omitting the experiences and voices of women and minorities in research and theories, scholars and leaders lose the ability to leverage resources in

crafting solutions that will work for diverse leaders and populations (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Initial research on gender and administration quantified the numbers of women and men in administrative roles, which led to attempts to uncover why fewer women than men worked as school administrators (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; M. Johnson, Stockard, Schmuck, Charters, & Carlson, 1981; Paddock, Schmuck, Charters, & Carlson, 1981; Schmuck, 1980, 1981a, 1981b; Tyack & Strober, 1981). As more women moved into administrative positions in the 1980s, the resulting studies of gender and school leadership explored women's leadership in comparison to men's as well as the barriers to the superintendency that existed for women. Although some research continues to explore comparisons, research on the effects of the barriers to the superintendency for women evolved the field of study. Instead of merely comparing male and female behaviors within an accepted male paradigm, research studies began exploring "female approaches to leadership and seeing the world through a female lens" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 33).

Although progress has been slow to date, this body of research that explored the obstacles that women faced in accessing the superintendency from the 1980s and 1990s fostered the latest context for research on women superintendents: examining leadership not through a deficit model, but through a different perspective that studies women leaders in terms of their own merit. However, challenges to creating equity and balance between traditional and gendered studies still remain. Tallerico (1999) found that women had conducted nearly all of the research on women in the superintendency whereas a

study by Murphy, Vriesenga, and Storey (2007) showed that of the educational administration studies published between 1979 and 2003, only 5% mentioned gender or race. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) wrote that traditional research on educational administration merely constitutes “the study of male administrative behavior” (p. 31). Further, the majority of research on women educational leaders has been reported through unpublished dissertations, which deny the body of published theoretical literature the balance needed to represent women’s experiences of leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). Yet, even with unbalanced coverage by researchers, successful, non-hierarchical approaches to effective leadership have been uncovered and feminine voices have been added to extant literature on gender and administration. This research has been summarized in the following three sections.

Representation of Women in Superintendency

Focusing on women in the school superintendency, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) presented a portrait of data that, although difficult to compile, still underscored women’s underrepresentation in the position (p. 103). Their study also noted that the representation of women of color and White women in administration was not representative of their numbers in the general population, let alone close to the representation of women in the teaching force, the ranks from which superintendents rise (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 31). Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, and Ellerson (2011) reported in the American Academy of School Administrator (AASA) study that women make up approximately 24% of school superintendents nationally, an increase

from the 13% reported by Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000), but still lower than the 51% of the general population, the 76% of the teaching force, and the 50% of U.S. principals who are women (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009; “Documentation to the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data,” n.d.; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; “U.S. Census Bureau,” n.d.; *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*, 2013).

Women’s Ways of Leading

In Helgesen’s (1990) groundbreaking study of women’s ways of leading, business leader and interviewee Barbara Grogan stated that, “all ships rise when the tide rises—so [women] use their power to effect a rising of the tide” (p. 258). Helgesen (1990) called women’s entry into the public sphere a “profound evolutionary response to a pervasive cultural crisis” and further posited that “we can’t afford to restrict the feminine principles of leadership to the private sphere any longer” in order to bring a more balanced approach to the challenges we face as a nation and society (p. 253). Additionally, she used the metaphor of a web to describe women’s ways of leading. Less linear than hierarchical strategies, the leader places herself in the center of the web, the most desirable spot, which allows her to utilize her strengths in encouraging interrelationships by bringing others closer and strengthening peoples’ connections within the organization (Helgesen, 1990). From this vantage point the “leader’s orientation toward *process*” and “her concern with the means used to achieve her ends” demonstrate the “feminine principles of inclusion, connection,” responsibility, and caring (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Helgesen, 1990, p. 58, emphasis in original; Noddings, 1995).

Although they didn't argue that all women lead in an identical manner, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) recognized that certain "preferences and approaches" distinguish the leadership of women. Utilizing the *Handbook for Achieving Gender Equity Through Education*, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) analyzed over two decades of research on women in leadership especially as it overlapped with school administration to offer five ways that women lead: "*relational leadership, leadership for social justice, leadership for learning, spiritual leadership, and balanced leadership*" (p. 6, emphasis in original). Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) five themes have provided an explanation for what women may view as the important issues in educational leadership and administration as well as ways in which educational leadership can provide the support for more students to be successful in school and beyond.

Women as Educational Leaders

Albeit slowly, the number of women superintendents continues to grow. Yet, because the superintendency is still a masculinized role, when many women do transition to the helm of the entire district, they leave behind the feminized territories of teaching and must make more substantial adjustments than many of their male colleagues (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Newton, 2007). However, the challenges of women leading in the masculinized world of school administration are countered by data that indicate advantages women may possess as educational leaders. Because women's paths to the superintendency often follow a different course than men's, they are often able to add necessary and diverse dispositions, skills, and strengths to the top leadership position. Grogan's (2005) study found that most women who become superintendents have served

as an elementary principal and have spent more time in the classroom than their male counterparts. This prior experience may explain women's tendencies to take a comprehensive approach when dealing with the needs of their students, going beyond merely the academic to address the needs of at-risk students and students from traditionally marginalized populations (Grogan, 2005). Additionally, Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) work concluded that the body of research on women leaders produced over the past 25 years supported the argument that many women superintendents view schools as a social movement, and thus, their leadership as a vehicle for educational reform that is rooted in eliminating current and past inequities in educational opportunities for students (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The five leadership dispositions of relational leadership, leadership for social justice, leadership for learning, spiritual leadership, and balanced leadership offered by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) provide a bridge to the feminist ethic as derived and expanded over the past three decades and also provide a natural framework on which to better understand the leadership of women superintendents. To further the body of research on women and their leadership, I examined the intersection of women superintendents, the feminist ethic and their leadership of their school districts, understanding that the body of literature on feminist theory and feminist ethic skews toward a White, middle-class, privileged perspective (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; hooks, 1981, 1984, 2000; Noddings, 1995). This literature has been summarized in the following section.

The Feminist Ethic

Moral Theory and Epistemology

The feminist ethic as a moral theory and epistemology has evolved in development during its 30 years of visibility in research literature on philosophy, ethics, and moral theory (Held, 2006). While no definitive explanation of the feminist ethic and its properties exists, general themes can be gleaned from the research (Held, 2006). Gilligan's (1982) study of the moral development of women served as the impetus for research that has expanded the traditional conceptualizations of personal and professional ethics. The "different voice" described in Gilligan's findings has been used to underscore a contrast between two types of thought, and instead of generalizing about either sex, to highlight the "problem of interpretation" with the traditional evaluations of moral development in both men and women (p. 2). Three qualitative studies were utilized in Gilligan's (1982) research: the college student study, the abortion decision study, and the rights and responsibility study. Each of these studies reflected Gilligan's assumption about the significance of individuals' own stories about their lives and how these stories illustrate each person's unique epistemology.

In her work, Gilligan (1982) argued that the prevailing rights and autonomy orientation informing the traditional theories of moral development needed to be broadened to include the responsibility and connective perspective revealed by the women included in her study.

This conception of morality, as concerned with the activity of *care* centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as

the conception of morality as *fairness* ties moral development to the understanding of rules and rights. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 19, emphasis added)

Gilligan's (1982) analysis had previously been left out of the empirical studies that had informed the traditional theory of moral development to date. Gilligan's findings not only questioned the previously accepted theories of moral development, but also expanded our understanding of this development in women and spurred a flurry of research that supported a feminist ethic consisting of: care as an ethic applied beyond the family, justice in response to oppression and treatment of others, and critique of systems and theory which have historically omitted non-majority perspectives. More recently, Starratt (2004) further synthesized these three ethics to formulate a framework upon which school leaders could build and nurture educational work that is ethical, by combining organizational leadership theory and the study of ethics.

I have offered an historical background on the struggles to include the "woman's" voice in the ideological and moral development of "mankind" in order to explain why Gilligan's (1982) work has been seminal to inclusive discussions of ethics as well as for my reasoning in connecting women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership as the conceptual framework for my study.

Historical Perspective

Lerner's (1986, 1993) historical perspective on the establishment of patriarchy during the second millennium BCE, and its emergence as the dominant social order in the formation of Western civilization help us extrapolate the long and difficult path women have travelled in order to have a voice in the formation of the ideological constructs on

which our society functions. Lerner's (1993) study suggested that because women had been excluded from the process of developing these concepts, the requirement of a shared feminist consciousness was the integral component in allowing women to reason their way beyond the underlying ideas of patriarchy to be able to "create an alternative vision of egalitarian gender relations" (Bennett, 1993, p. 1193).

Lerner (1993) traced the development of feminist consciousness over the course of 1,200 years beginning with women's isolated voices in the seventh century A.D. and ending her work with the organization of initiatives to gain women's rights in the 1870s. Referred to as the first wave of feminism, the 19th century women's rights movement served as a springboard for the widening of world-view and perspective. This establishment of a critical mass of individuals who embraced the feminist consciousness allowed advances in the understanding of moral development and thought for men and women. It also influenced the many battles for women's equal rights culturally, politically, economically, and legally that advanced into the second wave of feminism beginning in the 1960s and that continued to be refined through feminism's third wave of the 1990s and early 21st century. It is important to acknowledge, however, that even with Sojourner Truth's and other African-American individuals' work for women's rights, the inclusion of the Black woman's voice has been stifled throughout the entire movement due to the "politics of colonization and racial imperialism [that] have made it historically impossible for Black women in the United States to lead a women's movement" (hooks, 1981, p. 161).

Ethic of Care

In contrast to the ethic of rights, which has dominated the traditionally masculinized understanding of leadership theory and that Curtin (1991) described as being based upon a “disembodied rationalism,” Tronto’s (1993) work articulated common themes of the feminist ethic on which I based my study. Coalescing feminist theory and previous work on an ethic of care, Tronto (1993) articulated three key ways that it differed from the ethic of rights. First, an ethic of care involves different moral concepts emphasizing responsibility and relationships rather than rules and rights. Second, it is situational rather than abstract and informal. Thus, morality is tied to social practices and customs and to people’s feelings and opinions. Finally, the ethic of care is described as a moral activity. It is about the “activity of caring” rather than a set of principles which can be followed. Additionally, Tronto (1993) further reasoned that an ethic of care isn’t confined to the practices of women as it is a more general stance and is not gender specific. Noddings (1995) summed up much of the research on the ethic of care:

The one-caring wants to consider, and wants her child to consider, the act itself in full context . . . The “world” may not depend upon him to obey its rules or fulfill its wishes, but you, the individual he encounters, may depend upon him to meet you as one-caring. (p. 21)

Noddings (1995) best described the impact of the feminist ethic in terms of the “one-caring” which I believe gives leaders clear direction and connects to the body of research on organizational leadership theory (p. 19). The one-caring is not interested

only in judging, but instead in “heightening moral perception and sensitivity” (Noddings, 1995, p. 18). Noddings also expressed her own commitment to caring best by daily example. The one-caring also may reinforce this commitment with words explaining family, organizational, community or cultural norms. The one-caring, or leader, must also distinguish between acts that violate caring, acts that she herself holds wrong, and those acts that “some people” hold wrong (Noddings, 1995, p. 19). It is leadership that Belenky et al. (1997) described in terms of a constructivist view that caring and developing “an affinity for the world and the people in it” must drive commitments and action (pp. 149–150).

Leadership Theory and the Ethic of Care

Leadership theories that put relationships and connections in the center of relevance illustrate their natural overlap with the ethic of care. For example, in the field of educational leadership, Starratt’s (2004) work connected three ethics: “the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of critique” with the work of school leadership and thus provided a multidimensional framework to serve as a guide for leaders in the educational field (p. 7). According to Starratt (2009), the ethic of care:

Focuses on the demands of relationships among persons, not from a contractual or legalistic standpoint, but from a standpoint of absolute regard. This ethic places the human persons-in-relationship as occupying a position for each other of absolute value; none can be used as a means to an end; each enjoys an intrinsic dignity and worth, regardless of cultural background, disabilities, socio-economic status, or religion. (p. 23)

Further, he showed educators that caring for others with “heavier burdens than ours” helps us to discover our own humanity (Starratt, 2004, p. 145).

Long before Starratt’s (2004, 2009) theories on educational leadership took form, both Burns (1978) and Greenleaf (1977) had changed academic conversations about leadership and power in the workplace and politics. The relationships and the connections between leader and follower are key to both leadership theories. With his seminal book, *Leadership*, Burns (1978) based his development of transformational leadership theory on the foundations of leadership as understood through the psychological, social, and political perspectives in which he studied past and contemporary power wielders and leaders. The resulting definitions of both transactional leadership and transformational leadership launched a novel way of understanding both leaders and followers (Burns, 1978).

Adding to leadership theory, 40 years ago Greenleaf’s (1977) paradox of the servant-leader became the foundation for another movement away from the traditional hierarchical and autocratic management models to a leadership approach which, like Burns (1978), valued followers and their leaders’ positive, enriching connections to them as integral to the leadership process (Greenleaf, 1998).

Ethic of Justice

It is from the feminist ethic of care and its heightened moral perception that an ethic of justice naturally flows. Justice is illustrated by individuals in their fair treatment of all others, regardless of their position in the organization or society. The ethic of justice covers peers and followers alike as well as those with whom a person does not

have a relationship. Additionally, Sadurski (1985) defined social justice, an important component of the ethic of justice, by distinguishing it from legal justice. Whereas legal justice deals with conforming to society's rules, social justice concerns how those rules are distributed. Additionally, Griffiths (1998a, 1998b) described social justice as a movement to a fairer and less oppressive society and offered two components to a working definition. First, it involves working for the common good; the good for each and also the good for all, in an acknowledgment that one depends on the other. Second, the good depends on there being a right distribution of benefits and responsibilities.

In their longitudinal study of 77 women leaders in higher education over 30 years, Astin and Leland (1991) concluded "that the women leaders worked through collective and non-hierarchical action with other like-minded people to accomplish the social reform they desired" (p. 79). They also discovered three themes in the women's interviews: leadership used in a collective manner as a process of working with and through people; a strong commitment to social justice and change through their leadership; and a thoughtful approach that included clear values, listening to and empowering others, and always doing their homework (Astin & Leland, 1991).

Leadership Theory and the Ethic of Justice

According to Starratt (2004), the ethic of justice begs the question: "How do we govern ourselves while carrying out our educational activities? We govern ourselves by observing justice. The ethic of justice demands that the claims of the institution serve both the common good and the rights of the individuals in the school" (p. 23). Grounded in relationships, Burns' (1978) theory of leadership proposed that the tool to determine

the effectiveness of leaders is social change as measured in the satisfaction of peoples' needs and desires. Burns (1978) further believed that political leadership results from not only the influences of family and society, but also from opportunities, moral principles and the "recognized necessities of power" (p. 4). He posed that by addressing concepts of political leadership within the context of historical events and self-determination that "common standards of justice in the conduct of peoples' affairs" would be reaffirmed (Burns, 1978, p. 4).

Another influential educational researcher, Sergiovanni (1992) has studied leadership consistently guided by his argument that leadership must join the "process and substance and accounts not only for the hand of leadership but also for its head and its heart" (p. xiv). He theorized a school leadership model based on moral authority and further believed that in order to move leadership theory in that direction, the value structure and authority basis for school leadership must be broadened (Sergiovanni, 1992). As a result, Sergiovanni's (1992, 2005) nearly two decades of work with schools expanded the traditional sources of authority: bureaucratic, psychological, and technical-rational authority, for leadership that includes moral authority as the foundation for school leadership practice.

Ethic of Critique

As Lerner's (1993) research suggested, with the development and spread of the feminist consciousness during the late 19th century, feminist voices critical of the established social, educational, and moral structures of society emerged. These first-wave feminists promoted the development of women's critical reasoning as being imperative to

the liberation process. They began a tradition of feminist thought that called for better educational opportunities for women, with a focus on critical thinking as an important foundation for the evolution of critical feminist theory. According to Russell (1974), “critical discernment” was essential in affording full liberation to women (p. 39). Further, women’s fluency with “discernment and critique” of “those parts of the world (including themselves) which deny . . . justice, freedom and peace for humanity” allows women to better articulate the harm that the “cultural myths” which perpetuate the unequal status of women in society mean to all of society (Russell, 1974, p. 39). This work by early feminists provided the foundation for the ethic of critique. The ethic of critique also originated from the body of research on feminist issues generated with the second- and third-wave feminist voices during the past 40 years, mostly by women and minorities, that has sometimes meekly and other times forcefully inserted itself into the traditional androcentric nature of American society.

Leadership Theory and the Ethic of Critique

Starratt (2004) offered that the ethic of critique encourages leaders to investigate who really benefits from the status quo of social, economic, and political arrangements. More specifically, an ethic of critique allows us to explore which groups dominate in given social, economic, and political relationships and who defines what is valued and disvalued in a given situation. Additionally, the ethic of critique unearths “inherent injustice imbedded in the languages and structures of the school system” (p. 23). Such critique of systems is necessary to overcome systemic injustice (Starratt, 2004).

Leadership. Overlapping the feminist ethic, Burns' (1978) theory on transformational and transactional leadership, offered a paradigm of organizational leadership that included a moral and ethical realm of leadership that had previously been absent from the management and leadership theories commonly used at the time. Burns (1978) also addressed the long held male bias that had conceived of leadership as merely situational command or control. He contended that as the conception of leadership evolved to include the process of leaders connecting with the needs and aspirations of followers as a motivating source, not only will women be recognized as leaders, but also "men will change their leadership styles" (p. 50). He further theorized that,

The transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (Burns 1978, p. 4)

Bass and Riggio's (2006) expansion of Burns' (1978) work on the transforming leader found that the nature of leadership has changed as a result of our world's increasing complexity and the speed with which events happen and information is required to be processed. Thus, both organizational needs and the needs of followers have also changed (Bass & Riggio, 2006). To remain viable in our economy, individuals, groups, and organizations are required to be continually changing and adapting to new circumstances. The processes of successful transformation and meaningful change form

the core of transformational leadership. Therefore understanding and working within such a model can provide leaders with the necessary tools and skills for meeting the divergent needs of followers in this new century; followers who are knowledge workers, informed and enlightened and are a diverse group (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Servant leadership also found a place of relevance in leadership and management theory in the 1970s. It also remains important as a framework for the needs of 21st century institutions and organizations and is compatible with and enhances other leadership and management models (Greenleaf, 1998). “At its core, servant-leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work—in essence, a way of being—that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 5). Like Greenleaf (1977, 1998), Starratt (2004) believed that moral leadership encompasses more than the workings of the day-to-day environment of an organization or school. Instead, he advocated for leaders to truly connect with people “within the circumstances of their lives” whether it is with the staff, learners, or families with whom they interact (p. 144).

Schools should be places where everyone watches out for the ones carrying the heaviest burdens, whether those burdens appear in the form of a congenital disability, a chaotic home environment, the loss of a home to a fire or a tornado, or the loss of a parent or sibling. (Starratt, 2004, p. 145)

Organizational culture. The “learning organization” and “systems thinking” as developed by Senge (1990) can also provide a basis for institutional understanding and action in addressing the big questions posed in the ethic of critique. In order to build

organizations that learn, the individuals who make up the organizations must themselves become learners. They must become “learningful” because all humans are innately learners (Senge, 1990, p. 4). Leaders must help colleagues and followers understand that our world is built on connections and that people will be better able to create the results they desire by creating an environment where people are continuing to learn together undoing the false belief that our world is a collection of separate, unrelated forces (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Schein’s (2010) work also concerned connections and delved into the culture of organizations and how leaders influence the learning potential and growth within their own. He argued that leaders are the main architects of culture, once cultures are formed they influence the type of leadership possible, and that if the elements of culture become dysfunctional, leadership can and must do something to speed up culture change (Schein, 2010).

The Feminist Ethic and Organizational Leadership

As feminist researchers Belenky et al. (1997), Gilligan (1982) and Lerner (1986, 1993) and others have suggested, women and minorities have been in the position of translating their innate ontology and epistemology into the predominate language of the patriarchal and androcentric collective world-view of Western civilization throughout history and into modern times. Women and minorities also have struggled to gain foothold as equal to White men socially, culturally, economically, and politically. This struggle will continue until women and minorities have parity in leadership roles throughout our society. Late 20th century gendered study and feminist theory articulated the lost voices of past women as they attempted to contribute to the underpinnings of

more than four millennia of ideological development, as well as offering current women's views of gynocentric ontology and epistemology. Although research on gender and feminist theory in connection with theory on organizational leadership in general as well as with the school superintendency specifically remain underrepresented in published academic literature, points of contact between the three are apparent. This study explored the connections among the qualities of the feminist ethic: responsibility, connection, relationship, care, justice, and critique and the leadership dispositions and actions of study participants.

Statement of the Problem

The demands of leadership in the current educational climate require superintendents who are able to successfully engage the community in creating a vision and mission of the school district that serves the common good of the student body while also addressing the individual needs of its students. School superintendents face numerous challenges in navigating the sea of obstacles that interfere with the district's mission as they lead their staff, students, families, and community members toward that shared vision that provides students with equitable opportunities for success beyond high school graduation.

Data on current and future job requirements, U.S. educational funding, student performance, availability of resources, and their intersection with the struggles that transcend education including childhood poverty, a growing prison population, and re-segregated schools, illustrate the strong necessity for both educational and societal solutions that address a myriad of issues (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 2005;

Ravitch, 2010; Watkins, 2012). Three factors create the conditions for the current inequities in educational opportunity for children: High poverty levels coupled with low or non-existent social supports, inequitable allocation of school resources including highly qualified teachers and guaranteed quality curriculum, and outdated school system designs resulting in dysfunctional learning environments (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Further, the data collected internationally suggest that not only are U. S. educational standings slipping among industrialized nations, but also rankings of educational equity based on the socioeconomic status of their students put the U. S. at the bottom of the comparison group (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Douglass, 2007; *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, 2013). These data suggest that the U.S. achievement gap results from an opportunity gap as “inequality and inequity pervade the landscape of education in America, providing a convincing argument that the education system in the U.S. is in crisis because it mirrors and perpetuates the imbalances in access and opportunity present in society” (Levin, Lambert, & Petty, 2012, p. 269).

Darling-Hammond (2010) suggested that in order to regain our nation’s educational footing, we must recognize the need for

A new paradigm for national and state education policy [that] should be guided by twin commitments to *support meaningful learning* on the part of students, teachers, and schools and to *equalize access to educational opportunity*, making it possible for all students to profit from more productive schools. (p. 279, emphasis in original)

“We cannot just bail ourselves out of this crisis. We must teach our way out” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 3). And school district leadership must allow and encourage this teaching to occur.

These complex issues must be addressed by school leaders who have an appreciation of the connections, relationships, roles, and responsibilities that affect school organizations and the individuals whom they serve. Yet, with the current gap in numbers between male and female leaders in school superintendencies nation-wide, school boards are not engaging all quality, potential leaders in the search for paths through the treacherous era of school reform in which our nation’s public schools find themselves. Based upon their research and existing leadership theory, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) have offered five dispositions of women educational leaders. These leadership dispositions begin to address the challenges raised by proponents of education as the main arbiter for escaping poverty: relational, striving for social justice, spiritual, leading for learning, and using balance in leadership. This work overlaps with other contemporary leadership and organizational theories and research (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Schein, 2010; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2004). It also intersects a feminist ethic consisting of care, justice, and critique.

Helgesen (1990) illustrated what has been and still is missing due to the disproportionate representation of sexes in educational administration and leadership positions and most importantly the superintendency offering this Chinese proverb:

Women hold up half the sky. It means that half the work and half the thinking in the world is done by women. For the sky to be complete, both halves must work

together; nothing can be truly human that excludes one half of humanity. Until recently, the half of the sky assigned to women has been the private half; the public half has been ceded to men. But as women assume positions of leadership in the public realm, they are bringing their values with them, and the ancient dichotomies—between male and female, between public and private—are dissolving. (Helgesen, 1990, xli)

By exploring women superintendents' lived experiences, this study gave voice and illustration to the unique manner in which these top school district female leaders led utilizing the feminist ethic and organizational leadership theory for the purpose of positively impacting the common good of students in their public schools.

Purpose Statement

The theories of the feminist ethic and organizational leadership provided the multiple perspectives necessary in examining women superintendents as they negotiated the daunting educational and societal issues facing U.S. students. My study has added findings to the theoretical body of knowledge that continues to inform school leadership, gender studies, and women's leadership. This study also has added volume to the current underrepresented voices of women superintendents in the on-going discussion of school reform, student achievement, and other factors affecting the leadership of our public school districts. This study explored the interaction of women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and the demands of leading U.S. public school districts answering the question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women

superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature has been divided into two main sections. The first section presents research on women superintendents set in the broader context of women's leadership through studies generated from the social science fields of psychology, sociology, economics, and political science. This section moves from a review of the literature concerning the leadership of women in and out of the field of education, to specifics regarding women superintendents: the representation of women in the superintendency, the obstacles they have faced in obtaining and remaining in their positions, and the perceived differences between male and female superintendents. The second section outlines and expands the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 1 by providing an integrated and deepened explanation, using extant literature, of the foundational theories of the feminist ethic and organizational leadership. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework created by these three fields of study and their intersection—the topic of my study, which has not, to date, been explored in published research.

Women Superintendents

I have begun the review of literature discussing women superintendents by first providing information about women leaders from perspectives other than education. This approach provided the foundation for understanding how the study of women in leadership has evolved through the different waves of feminism and gendered research. The literature presented also addressed the similarities and differences in the study of

women in PK-12 educational leadership with that of women in academia, business, and politics.

Research on Women in Leadership

Research on women in leadership has evolved. Rooted in the feminist studies of the 1960s and 1970s, which focused mainly on women's general equality with men and gaining equity of freedom and opportunity within the personal, economic, and professional realms, the current body of literature on women's leadership included

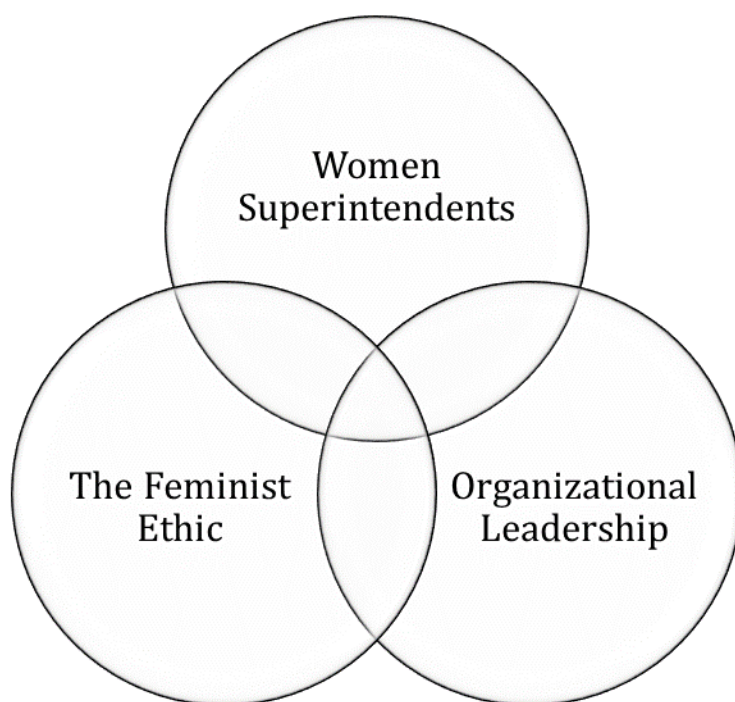


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study: The intersection of the study of women superintendents, organizational leadership, and the feminist ethic.

empirical studies of the growing numbers of women who have earned leadership positions in the past three decades. Initial leadership studies which were focused on quantifying women in leadership roles were followed by research on the barriers to

women aspiring to leadership positions and comparisons of their leadership dispositions with those of men. This direction of gendered leadership study gave way to a current body of literature which aimed to understand the leadership approaches of women as well as those from other marginalized populations; leadership approaches which, understood in terms of their overlap and gap between the body of research on traditional androcentric leadership perspectives, grounded my study.

Shakeshaft et al. (2007) found that the United States conducts more research on women leaders than in other countries. They also found that the majority of research on women in leadership described women's career paths as well as the obstacles remaining for women as they seek top positions. Additionally, findings from gynocentric leadership studies that made comparisons between men and women's leadership dispositions were mixed. Quantitative studies showed no difference between women and men's leadership while qualitative studies described women's different approaches to leadership (Shakeshaft et al., 2007).

By the Numbers

In general, although women's representation has improved in lower- and middle-management positions, that hasn't been the case with their representation in upper-management positions in business, politics, academia, and education. The most current U.S. census data indicate that while 51% of the population, 47% of the total employment in the U.S., and 51% of all people employed in "management, professional and related occupations" are women, only 4% of CEOs, 8% of top earners, 17% of board seats, and 14% of executive officers are women ("Knowledge Center | Catalyst.org," n.d.,

“Women in the Labor Force: A Databook 2012,” 2013). Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the proportion of women within the larger category of “management, professional and related occupations” varied offering that “14 percent of architects and engineers and 34 percent of physicians and surgeons were women, whereas 61 percent of accountants and auditors and 82 percent of elementary and middle school teachers were women” (“Women in the Labor Force: A Databook 2012,” 2013). Furthering the inequity for women, their pay for equivalent work remains lower than for men. Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2012 indicated that women’s earnings were 82% of men’s (“Women in the Labor Force: A Databook 2012,” 2013).

The representation of women, both in elected office and in academia also do not meet the proportion of women in the general population. In the U.S. Congress, women comprise 18% of the House of Representatives and 20% of the Senate (“Knowledge Center | Catalyst.org,” n.d.). In academia, while 57% of U.S. college students are women, they comprise 26% of college and university presidents (Cook & Young, 2012).

Women also currently continue to be underrepresented in district and state superintendent positions nationally. However, women led the field at the statewide level early on with Laura J. Eisenhuth’s election to the position of State Superintendent of North Dakota in 1892 (Burlbaw, Caldwell, Maldonado-Castillo, & Merricks, 2006). That period of women’s educational leadership, however, was short-lived. During the 113 year time period following Eisenhuth’s service in the top state educator position, 59% of the 45 states and District of Columbia with data available, have employed female state superintendents under 10% of the time (Burlbaw et al., 2006). Additionally, women

currently hold 24% of the superintendent positions nation-wide (Kowalski et al., 2011). While the number of women leaders continues to grow, parity in representation eludes school district and state superintendent positions.

Katz (2006) summed up the impact of the underrepresentation of women in the school district CEO position.

We haven't "arrived" until we no longer can say that what we have in this country is women teaching and men leading. If 75% of teachers in the U.S. are women and teaching is the first position on the pathway leading to the superintendency, we would expect to see many more women in the role. (Katz, 2006, p. 15)

She further challenged her colleagues in educational leadership preparatory programs to mentor women into leadership roles (Katz, 2006).

Women Leaders and the Impact of Societal Expectations

Eagly and Karau (2002) posited that "prejudice toward female leaders follows from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles" (p. 574). Eagly and Karau's theory extended social role theory to explore the connection between gender roles and leadership roles. Their theory identified key factors that impact women leaders and may impact perceptions of congruity and the resulting prejudice and prejudicial behaviors toward women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). An analysis of the body of extant literature on women in leadership illustrated that women have been perceived to have less leadership ability than men due to the perceptions that connect the leader role with masculine traits and dispositions. To address this hole in the literature, Chin (2004) called for more qualitative and quantitative

research that identifies feminist dispositions promoting effectual leadership and evaluative indicators that can highlight the evolution from current “masculinized and homogenized” organizational contexts to more equitable ones (p. 7).

To Chin’s (2004) point, men are considered to be “agentic, possessing traits such as ambition, confidence, self-sufficiency, dominance, and assertiveness,” whereas women have been considered “to be communal, possessing traits such as kindness, helpfulness, concern for others, warmth, and gentleness” (Carli & Eagly, 2007, p. 127). Perceptions such as this advantage most men due to the congruity between their inherent masculine qualities and society’s perception of leadership as typically masculine. Men “do not need to be concerned about tailoring their leadership style to be accepted as legitimate . . . and are freer than women to execute leadership as they see fit” (Carli & Eagly, 2007, p. 128). This perceived incongruity disadvantages women due to the commonly perceived dichotomy between stereotypical female traits and leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Valian, 1999). Additionally, the perceptions of leadership as masculine conflict with the actual role of leadership and the perceived traditional gender roles of women (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Chin, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Research supports the belief that a “double-bind” exists for women that their male counterparts do not face. Eagly and Karau’s (2002) incongruity theory suggested that this double-bind occurs because when women are perceived as possessing qualities that make them strong leaders, they often will be evaluated poorly as a leader due to the discrepancy between the masculinized leadership roles and the gender stereotypes that continue to perpetuate society’s perceptions of women (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Chin, 2011;

Eagly & Karau, 2002). For example, Chin (2011) found that in performance appraisals, even when women performed the same leadership behavior as men, they often were evaluated more negatively. Chin offered the rhetorical question, “are they to be feminine women and be perceived as weak or strong leaders and be perceived as too domineering?” (Chin, 2011, p. 4). So while different female leaders have their own views about leadership, assertiveness, authority, and control, without representative numbers of women in top leadership positions to combat incorrect assumptions and perceptions, women leaders continue to be limited and defined by “social role stereotypes and expectations” (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Chin, 2011, p. 4).

Chin (2011) further elaborated that other factors also influence the perceived performance of leaders and can be used to disenfranchise women. She found that often leadership characteristics permeate the evaluations of leaders even though these qualities do not have an actual impact on leader effectiveness (Chin, 2011). “Consequently, the context of masculinized norms and the expectations about —what a leader looks like introduce conditions of bias against women and racial/ethnic minority leaders” (Chin, 2011, p. 3). Her work further indicated that the current masculine context and focus on appearance also raises challenges for women and minorities to be perceived as credible leaders, and that these challenges are not generally faced by White Anglo males. The tendency for women to be defined by their fashion must also be factored into the complex mix of characteristics and other physical features that present obstacles to them advancing as credible leaders. Further, a woman’s high-pitched voice that may be viewed as less commanding than a deeper male voice is another observation and one that

has the potential to make it more difficult for women to gain the floor when debating an issue (Chin, 2011, pp. 3–4). Madeleine Albright, the first female U.S. Secretary of State, addressed this reality and her solution in the closing of her 2003 memoir. “Perhaps some will also say that I helped teach a generation of older women to stand tall and young women not to be afraid to interrupt” (Albright & Woodward, 2003, p. 512).

Barnett (2007) also found that whereas evidence supported the concept that women are succeeding in leadership positions, this information still is not a part of the daily vernacular of the general population and that an incorrect belief still remains and is reinforced continually: “that men are naturally suited to take charge whereas women are naturally suited to take care” (p. 168). While much evidence exists to the contrary, this message is perpetuated throughout society (Barnett, 2007). One way is through “stereotype confirmation” which allows us to perceive only the examples, which confirm our stereotype, and to disregard counterexamples (Snyder & Haugen, 1994). Barnett (2007) called for all of us to challenge this incorrect belief in a “natural order” of leadership and to challenge those who perpetuate that belief with data supporting the understanding that an equal potential exists for both men and women to be successful leaders. Additionally, Eagly and Carli (2007) also offered that “the psychological portrait of good leaders is neither masculine nor feminine but includes traits from both of these domains in approximately equal measure” (p. 29).

With this understanding that women and men possess equal potential for leadership, regardless of societal stereotypes, research suggests that personality has more to do with leadership disposition than does gender (Chin, 2011; Crump, 2009; Eagly &

Carli, 2007). However, because the majority of the current body of research has defined leadership by examining only those who currently hold leadership positions, and due to the historical underrepresentation of women and persons of color in leadership positions, a biased and incomplete portrayal of leadership and leadership effectiveness has remained the norm (Chin, 2011). Further, because authors of leadership theory view women and minorities as “special populations,” leadership studies often leave the study of them out (Chin, 2011). As Chin explained, “it is increasingly clear that a race and gender neutral view of leadership fails to consider the influence of cultural worldviews and socialization on shaping leadership style” (p. 1). Including the unique experiences of women and minority leaders’ differences may offer the study of leadership expanded world-views and broadened leadership theory (Chin, 2011). Thus, published research that explored alternative non-hierarchical leadership dispositions did emerge with the increase of women leaders in the 1980s and 1990s. However, this research has continued to remain under-representative of women’s and minorities’ leadership experiences and needs to be expanded thus providing a rationale for this study.

Glass Ceiling to Labyrinth

Despite the challenges I have addressed, women have successfully navigated the circuitous path to the upper levels of leadership that had previously been unavailable to them. This phenomenon has allowed entry of women into some of the most powerful leadership positions in our country as corporate CEOs, governors, presidential cabinet members, as well as state, county, and school district superintendents. The U.S. now, for the first time in our nation’s history, has a female major party presidential candidate,

Hillary Clinton. However, at the same time, the proportion of female and minority upper tier leaders still does not match their percentage in the general population. And in education, with women holding 75% of the teaching positions whereas only occupying 24% of the nation's superintendent posts, the rates are even more troubling. With women's access to leadership roles opening up, and these positions of power becoming more accessible for women, Eagly and Carli (2007) have offered an alternative to the rigidity of the glass ceiling metaphor popularized in the 1980s: "the *labyrinth*, that captures the varied challenges confronting women as they travel, often on indirect paths, sometimes through alien territory, on their way to leadership" (p. 1, emphasis in original). The following section expands and explores this labyrinth as it intersects with the challenges women experience in the gaining and retention of the superintendency.

Women as Superintendents

Research on woman serving as superintendents may provide aspiring women leaders with the background necessary to overcome the accumulated disadvantage documented by Valian (1999) and experienced by many women in their careers and education. After a brief history, readers have been provided research literature on: barriers to the superintendency, evaluation and compensation, and leadership disposition and actions.

Historical Perspective

Among early studies that explored gender and school leadership, Tyack and Strober's (1981) National Institute of Education study stood out. Presenting an historical exploration of jobs and gender in the occupations of teaching and administration, Tyack

and Strober (1981) offered their study to highlight the “structuring of opportunity by sex” and to provide data that would result in greater equity for women in educational leadership. They found that three of the approaches utilized historically in the study of women were prevalent also in the exploration of women in educational leadership (Tyack & Strober, 1981).

The first line of research offered that women contributed greatly to public education and that some stood out as “cultural heroes” (Tyack & Strober, 1981, p. 149). The second proposed that women teachers were victims because they were paid meager wages and were denied access to leadership positions. Finally, the third approach posed that women teachers created “bonds of sisterhood” and acted together “in some of the most impressive forms of militance that women achieved” (Tyack & Strober, 1981, p. 149). Tyack and Strober reasoned that all approaches held truth and could be useful to furthering the goal of promoting better representation of women in leadership positions in education. They concluded that “the *structuring of society*, by sex, and particularly in the public school system, within which both women and men teachers systematically plied their craft and lived their lives” illustrated the dynamics of gender inequality in educational employment (Tyack & Strober, 1981, p. 149, emphasis in original).

Women’s Experience of Barriers to Superintendency

Kim and Brunner’s (2008) study on the gender differences in the career development and ascendancy to the superintendency provided evidence that many women still face discrimination during the superintendent selection and hiring process. While nearly 40% of women in their study aspired to the superintendency, only 18% of

superintendents were women at the time of their study illustrating the potential existence of a glass ceiling that “filters out individuals by using criteria of inherent personal characteristics and dominant cultural boundaries” (Kim & Brunner, 2008, p. 103). Further, they posed the question that “if there is no evidence that the most promising pathway to the superintendency creates the highest quality superintendents, then why are people who travel this pathway hired more often than any other traveler” (Kim & Brunner, 2008, p. 104). This phenomenon disadvantages women because they, more often than men, take the longer, less traditional, more horizontal path to the superintendency. Kim and Brunner suggested that further research was needed to determine if a “superior” path to the superintendency existed.

Kim and Brunner’s (2008) study also found no evidence that the time between teaching and administration had an impact on the performance of the superintendent once hired. Additionally, the study found that the time lag difference between men and women was lower than noted in their prior study. Whereas previous studies had reported that women tended to have 10 more years of teaching experience than men, Kim and Brunner found that the difference was five years and that both men and women spent approximately 10 years in administrative roles before their first superintendent position.

Barriers to the top school district position have remained for women, but progress has been made in overcoming these obstacles. Eagly and Carli’s (2007) labyrinth metaphor provided a reasonable replacement for the glass ceiling visual that represented the unseen barriers that have been referenced by research during the past 30 years of women pursuing leadership. With some women earning a place among top leadership

positions, the difficult, unpredictable path of the labyrinth better illustrated that women have been making their way around and through the challenges they encounter.

Brunner and Grogan's (2007) nation-wide descriptive study of women in educational leadership commissioned by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) explored the perceptions of top level women educational leaders both superintendents and central office administrators about their aspirations for the superintendency. Twelve common barriers for women seeking the superintendency were included on their survey to female superintendents and central office administrators—those aspiring to the superintendency and those uninterested in the superintendency. They found that barriers to the superintendency were more important factors to aspirants than non-aspirants when surveyed. The authors surmised that perhaps the aspirants viewed the barriers more seriously due to the fact that they were seeking the superintendent position and that while they may have to face obstacles, “such challenges are just right for these risk-takers” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 62). The top four barriers that were cited by 40–50% of the aspirants surveyed as “most important” were:

1. women perceived as weak managers by school board members (50%);
2. women perceived as unqualified to handle budgeting and finances (48.5%);
3. women perceived to allow emotions to influence administrative decisions (46%);
4. women not recruited by school boards (45.5%). (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 61)

Brunner and Grogan's (2007) findings also indicated that women superintendents perceive the following to be barriers to the superintendency:

1. a lack of mobility of family members;
2. school board members' perceptions that women are not good managers;
3. school board members' perceptions that women are unqualified to handle budget and finances;
4. school boards don't actively recruit women. (p. 92)

Drawing a distinction between published and unpublished studies, dissertation research also addressed the barriers to the superintendency for women. With the majority of empirical studies of educational administration found in dissertation work it is also helpful to understand findings from these unpublished studies (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). However, like published research on educational leadership, dissertation research also underrepresents the study of women and gender in their field with only 9% of educational administration dissertations between 1985 and 2005 specifically including women and/or gender (Brown & Irby, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This section closes with data reported from dissertations on women superintendents and the barriers they have faced in achieving a superintendent's position.

Hanson's (2011) case-study analysis of all 11 women superintendents in a western state county suggested that three of the barriers to the superintendency for women commonly referenced in research literature: gender, family responsibilities, and lack of professional networks were found to not negatively impact participants' rise to their positions. However, other dissertation findings suggested that barriers still do

impact women seeking the superintendency and those who currently serve in that role. Both intersecting with and expanding upon the language used by Brunner and Grogan (2007), barriers reported in these studies that women have experienced on their way to the position of superintendent are: the demands of family, societal socialization for traditional gender roles for men and women, gender bias or discrimination in the screening and selection process, lack of ability to relocate, the need to constantly prove oneself, the nature of superintendency work, little room for error, lack of job security, and exclusion from the established professional networks created by male administrators (Brouillette, 2009; Colbert, 2009; Goffney, 2010; B. Johnson, 2012; MacArthur, 2010). These studies also addressed ways that women can ameliorate the barriers that are part of women's paths to the superintendency. These include in no particular order: a supportive family, excellent communication skills, a "no excuses" attitude, a doctorate, strong mentoring relationships with both men and women superintendents, management and leadership experiences, understanding of school finance, curriculum, and instruction, and having a spiritual life (Brouillette, 2009; Colbert, 2009; Goffney, 2010; B. Johnson, 2012; MacArthur, 2010).

Evaluation and Compensation

Once in the role of superintendent, women face the new territory of evaluation by a Board of Education and negotiations of adequate and competitive compensation packages. Long's (2010) mixed-method study reported no significant differences in salaries for male and female superintendents when educational attainment and educational experience are held constant. Analysis of the data did show, however, that

differences existed in the questions asked of the men and women on interviews for superintendent positions. Women were asked more questions about leadership style and mobility whereas men were asked more questions about vision. Contract negotiations did not produce differences.

Halloran's (2007) quantitative study found no significant differences between the perceived leadership practices of male and female superintendents as well as in performance rating of study participants. Additionally, Kolb's (2009) quantitative study analyzed gender differences in the leadership styles of male and female public school superintendents through subordinates' ratings. Data from this study indicated that female superintendents were more likely than male superintendents to display behaviors that are commonly associated with effective leaders and managers (Kolb, 2009).

Leadership Activities and Dispositions

Regardless of sex, Pitner, Schmuck, Charters, and Carlson's (1981) work showed that the majority of superintendents' daily time was spent on routine aspects of their work. These elements of the superintendent position were characterized by interactions with school board members, community members, professional peers, and employees of the district. Men and women in the study also experienced equally the rapidity with which they were required to address issues, an emphasis on time and schedules, a cyclical activity level, preference for oral communications, and significant control over their work (Pitner et al., 1981). A notable difference between the men and women in the study showed up in the handling of meetings. "Women exercised less control over the construction of agendas and the outcome of meetings—thinking out loud, questioning,

probing, and hooking up ideas as opposed to announcing decisions during meetings” (Pitner et al., 1981, p. 291).

Both the presence and absence of discrepancies have been reported in recent research about leadership dispositions and styles of women and men in the superintendency (Boatman, 2007; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; McGinnis, 2012). Studies by Bass, Avolio, and Atwater (1996) and Eagly et al. (2003) suggested that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders. Also, while male leadership behaviors utilized the less effective modes of transactional and Laissez-faire leadership, women leaders engaged in the transformational leadership behaviors (Burns, 1978). Katz’s (2004) conclusion that the women in her study viewed relational leadership as an important part of their leadership approach validated Burns observation about women engaging more in transformational leadership actions (1978). Katz (2006) also noted that in order to reassure their staff members, to build trust within the school setting, as well as to build a positive culture and climate of the school district, the women leaders in her study preferred to build relationships first, thus creating a “safe, protective environment so they would be willing to take the risks needed to change educational practices and programs” (p. 9). Additionally, Boatman (2007) summed up his 20 years of leadership study offering that women often utilized their own personal power rather than the positional power used by their male counterparts. Women also used a team-oriented and cooperative approach more often whereas men tended to be hierarchical and competitive in approach (Boatman, 2007).

On the other hand, McGinnis (2012) conducted a correlational study of women superintendents to determine the relationship between their dominant multiple intelligences and moral values. The data indicated a positive correlation between intrapersonal intelligence and the moral value of self-direction, as well as linguistic intelligence and the moral value of power (McGinnis, 2012). The data from the study also suggested that interpersonal intelligence and the moral value of tradition might be useful in predicting women's abilities to navigate through the well-documented barriers that remain for women seeking the superintendency (McGinnis, 2012).

Another area of difference between men and women superintendents has been found to be managing the stress of the school district CEO position. Hawk and Martin's (2011) findings suggested that although superintendents of both sexes must manage their job related stress on their own, the data from their study showed a statistical difference between ways in which women and men cope with job pressures. Women superintendents chose "exercise" first with "utilizing a mentor" a very close second. Men, on the other hand, chose "get away" most often as a stress release (Hawk & Martin, 2011, p. 364).

While this section highlighted qualitative and quantitative studies illustrating the differences and similarities between the sexes in leading school districts, I offer Beard's (2012) study to bring the discussion back to a vision of the superintendency as a moral obligation to students of all backgrounds with her findings. Beard (2012) concluded that:

What this study really implies is that any administrator who cares about and for their students, the community they serve, equity and excellence, can and must do

this work. One need not be African-American to remedy inequities, nor is it necessary to be a woman to invoke the ethic of care. Decision-making is value-centered. With an emphasis on the value of diverse perspectives and a commitment to academic excellence and equity for all students, the decision to be on the right side of history is its own reward. (p. 70)

Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative data presented in this section of my review of the literature served as the foundation for understanding women superintendents leading in a male-dominated profession. The disparity in the representation of women remains proportionally larger in the superintendency than in leadership positions of other professions considering that 76% of classroom teachers are women, and women hold only 24% of superintendent positions nationally. In their review of literature using a three-part framework to study women in the superintendency, Lemasters and Roach (2012) summed up the situation: Women superintendents lead differently than men and both genders operate in a world and paradigm designed by and around men. Further, the physiological and socialized differences perceived between female and male leaders have been viewed negatively by the current masculinized culture in most school districts, superintendencies, and in general leadership theory (Lemasters & Roach, 2012). The findings of this study have provided more information about women's experiences in the superintendency and thus have added to the body of literature that has informed this important leadership profession.

The Feminist Ethic

The feminist ethic outlined in this section has been built from the body of research that addressed the three waves of feminism and the feminist thought from the 1960s through the decades of the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century. While described as the *feminist* ethic, this ethic applies to both sexes and addressed an expanded way of experiencing the world and interacting with others.

Historical Perspective

This historical perspective has provided the reader with society's and education's movement through the waves of feminism and feminist thought. This feminist theory has provided the backdrop for the feminist ethic used as part of the contextual framework for this study.

Feminism's first wave. An understanding of the development of the feminist consciousness and efforts to include women's voices in the development and evolution of Western society has been foundational to the feminist ethic. Women's current personal and societal status has been the result of the four millennia of patriarchal systems which resulted in the under-education of women throughout history. Thus, women's isolated voices remained obscured and silenced and virtually omitted from the religious, scientific, sociological, psychological, economic, political, and theoretical development in the early emergence of Western civilization (hooks, 1981; Lerner, 1986, 1993). Those who understood the world in different ways than the dominant masculinized ontology perpetuated by systems of patriarchy have been and continue to remain underrepresented in the leadership of Western society and thus have not been an equal voice in the

development of U.S. and global world-views (hooks, 1981; Lerner, 1986, 1993). It has only been relatively recently, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries during the first wave of feminism that these isolated voices found the ability to join together, aided by the realization of a feminist consciousness, to have impact on the status quo of the times and into the future (hooks, 1981; Lerner, 1986, 1993).

Women's energy and activism coalesced with the "first wave" of feminism, beginning in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 with the first comprehensive women's rights convention (hooks, 1981; Kinser, 2004; Lerner, 1993). Many have pointed out, however, that with African American and Native American women's roles in the events that led to the Seneca Falls convention and their subsequent lack of voice in the movement, that the first wave of feminism perpetuated instead a *White privileged* initial feminist movement as it ignored women of color and White women born into poverty (hooks, 1981, 1984, 2000; Kinser, 2004). As hooks (2000) posited, all women and Black women in particular throughout history have been personally, economically, and politically relegated to the margins of society. She claimed that, "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (hooks, 2000, p. xvi). Additionally, hooks (1984) offered that, "racism is fundamentally a feminist issue because it is so interconnected with sexist oppression" (p. 53). Nevertheless, as feminism's first wave continued through the 19th century, the organized women's movement's concern for the plight of Black women was abandoned in order to attempt to "woo white southern support" (Donovan, 1994, p. 23). This phenomenon did not silence Black feminists; it

did, however, cause a split in the women's movement which has continued to heal into the 21st century.

Feminism's second wave. Feminism's second wave marked by the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s not only brought the battle for equality in both the personal and professional realms but it also gave rise to the first women's studies courses, programs, and faculty development on university and college campuses across the United States (Thompson Tetreault, 1985). Out of this academic research, second wave theories, such as the feminist phase theory, were developed. Feminist phase theory was utilized to evaluate university courses and programs in terms of a continuum of stages in thinking about women and provided women's studies scholars a tool to use to study how the addition of women to curricula and academic discourse affected how knowledge was conceptualized (Thompson Tetreault, 1985). The five phases formed a continuum of ontology regarding gendered perspectives:

1. Male scholarship—"assumes that the male experience is universal, that it is representative of humanity and that it constitutes a basis for generalizing about all human beings;"
2. Compensatory scholarship—"there is a consciousness that women are missing; however, males are still perceived as the norm, the representative, the paradigmatic human being;"
3. Bifocal scholarship—"emphasis is on a complementary but equal conceptualization of men's and women's spheres and personal qualities;"

4. Feminist scholarship—“women’s activities, not men’s are the measure of significance. What was formerly devalued, the content of women’s everyday lives, assumes new value;” and
5. Multifocal or relational scholarship—“rather than conceptualizing human experience in dualistic terms, maleness and femaleness are perceived as a continuum of humanness” (Thompson Tetreault, 1985, pp. 367-375).

From scholarship to mainstream thought, dialogue about the economic, political, and personal realities inherent in the female experience evolved throughout the final decades of the 20th century, yet top leadership positions have remained the territory of White, heterosexual men. Perched on this reality of the continued underrepresentation of women in upper tier leadership in most fields, Marshall’s (1999) feminist critical policy analysis furthered the larger societal dialogue by offering tools for academic researchers to evaluate policies, curricula, and programs. As Marshall (1998) stated:

Feminist theory-driven questioning will not only inform gender equity issues, it will expand our questions, models and methods. It demonstrates openings for a rich and democratizing agenda for education policy analysts to embrace. Feminist critical policy analysis seeks ways to make our policy system more just, democratic and equitable, demanding that these expanded issues be included in all policy analysis. (p. 6)

The body of work by Marshall (1997, 1998, 1999) and Biklen, Marshall, and Pollard (2008) made the case for moving beyond a liberal feminist focus on allowing girls into male domains and instead revealed the deep assumptions sustaining gender

issues which had not been part of a policy agenda. Marshall (1997, 1998, 1999) explored and critiqued the policy culture that had not been able to alleviate inequitable gender relations in schools, re-conceptualize definitions of male and female, family life, and the value of women's work, as well as power and gender relationships at work and in the home. Marshall revealed how gender research issues rarely have connected to policy such as the U.S. Title IX policy for eliminating sexism in schooling and the ways in which policy researchers "collude with this evasion" (Marshall, 1999, p. 60). Biklen et al. (2008) also illustrated that, "feminist critical policy analysis starts with the assumptions that bias, power, and values drive the identification, labeling, and legitimization of problems and the methods seen as useful for studying and solving them" (p. 455). In order to allow critical feminist policy analysis and action to become a viable force in equitable opportunities for those individuals in groups that remain on the margins of society, Marshall (1999) called for:

A safe place and sponsorship in education, a protected space, perhaps in the development of a feminist theory of the state, theory that guides political awareness of gender as a stand-alone and separate issue, independent of critical theory, cultural studies, and mainstream politics. (p. 70)

Feminism's third wave and beyond. Marshall's policy work continued within and alongside feminism's third wave. Kinser's (2004) essay explored the space between "the rock that has been second-wave feminism, and the hard place that feminism and its dissidents have led us to" in the third wave (p. 127). Kinser (2004) also illustrated how third-wave participants negotiate that space while offering suggestions for moving

forward as feminists in the 21st century. Kinser called for the third wavers' dialogue to go beyond the tempting monolithic view of second-wave feminism and position itself to address the connection "between feminism, *struggle* and social change" while examining the cost of living in the margins (Kinser, 2004, p. 135, emphasis in original). For, as Kinser offered, the challenges, lies, and "seductions" of post-feminism bring the threat of an "acceptance of the status quo and a failure to see the need" for the continued change necessary for women and minorities to gain equity in our society (p. 147).

Moral Theory and Epistemology

The theory of study regarding moral leadership and epistemology have been developed chronologically from the feminist consciousness of the late 19th century through the continued growing pains of the third wave of feminist study.

Decade of development (1980–1990). Built upon the long history of struggle for women's voices to be heard and valued in their own right, the feminist ethic as a moral theory and epistemology has continued to evolve in its usefulness across gender lines and throughout our society. More than three decades of research, which built upon Gilligan's (1982) work have resulted in the understanding of a feminist ethic, which I have used in my study of women superintendents: Caring as an ethic applied beyond the family, justice in response to interactions with all others and to oppression, and critique of systems and theory which have historically omitted non-majority perspectives.

Like the greater awareness of a feminist consciousness during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the research about feminist theory advanced by Gilligan, Noddings, Held, Card, Tronto, and Donovan in the 1980s and 1990s paved the way for society to

interact with women as fully capable human beings. Lerner (1993) described this societal phenomenon as recognizing that “differences do not connote dominance” and “that sex is irrelevant to thought, that gender is a social construct and that woman, like man, makes and defines history” (pp. 281 & 283). To that end, Belenky et al. (1997) used Gilligan’s (1982) study of moral development in women and Lyons’ (1983) study that expanded the concept of a responsibility orientation to provide the basis for their study. Gilligan (1982) and Lyons (1983) found the concept of a responsibility orientation central to those whose conceptions of self were more rooted in connections and relatedness to others than those with a rights orientation who define themselves in terms of separation and autonomy.

Informed by the belief that the collaboration and egalitarianism expressed by the women in their study should be encouraged in all men’s and women’s professional lives, Belenky et al., (1997) described challenges that women have faced in developing their minds and voices throughout their lives. Belenky et al. (1997) further positioned their study using the work of Perry (1970) which described the epistemological developments of college students over time using the voices of male students. Belenky et al. (1997) believed that a flaw of that study was in its design, which did not allow themes that could be more pronounced in women to be revealed. Thus, their study built on Perry’s (1970) work to expand upon the voices that were the core of the schema he developed and had been utilized as a developmental framework with which to understand the young adult in academic settings for more than a decade (Belenky et al., 1997).

According to Belenky et al. (1997) the search for “self and voice” played an integral role in the development of women’s understandings of the world (p. 133). Their findings illustrated an epistemology that explained knowledge as a human construction and positioned the knower in relationship with the known, co-constructing meaning within the context of the setting (Belenky et al., 1997; Hatch, 2002). The Belenky et al. (1997) study identified five epistemological positions, two of which shared the connection between the knower and known as a characteristic. Termed the “connected knower” and the “constructed knower,” women at both positions were attached to and cared about the objects they sought to understand. Constructed knowers, however, having transitioned from the objective and procedural connected knowing, found a way to further expand their knowing by integrating care, reflection, reason, intuition, the expertise of others, and their own voices and perceptions into this epistemological position (Belenky et al., 1997). “For constructivists, the moral response is a caring response” and it is this caring response on which the feminist ethic has been further developed (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 149).

Twenty-first century thought (1990–present). Continuing the dialogue, Donovan (1994) described the “new feminist moral vision” (p. 173) in similar terms to Gilligan (1982) and Belenky et al. (1997). “Women’s judgments are based on a fundamental respect for the contingent order, for the environmental context, for the concrete, everyday world” (Donovan, 1994, p. 173). Donovan (1994) further offered that women traditionally have been less willing than men to “wrench” context apart from meanings and to “impose upon it alien abstractions or to use implements that subdue it

intellectually or physically” (Donovan, 1994, p. 173). According to Donovan, “such an epistemology provides the basis for an ethic that is non-imperialistic, that is life-affirming, and that reverences the concrete details of life” (p. 173).

In keeping with the expansion and development of feminist research and the theories that arose from the work of the nineteen-nineties, Starratt’s (2004) work on ethical school leadership offered a framework in which school leaders could further the educational goals of their organization by building upon the combined study of organizational leadership theory, ethics, and public administration. Starratt’s theory (2004) also overlapped with the feminist ethic as defined in my study. Furthering Foster’s (1986) and Sergiovanni’s (1992) discussions of school leadership as moral, as well as T. L. Cooper’s (1991, 2001, 2006) scholarship on ethics in public administration, Starratt (2004) offered his framework in order to enable school leaders to “operationalize democracy in civil society” (p. 8). Starratt (2004) used an approach of the analysis of ethical and moral leadership toward a “virtue ethics” which identified leadership as “involving the cultivation of virtues that will ground the work of the school as well as guide a diffusion of leadership among all constituencies of the school” (p. 8). Starratt (2004) made the case that educators must move beyond our current “assumptions of technical efficiency in the delivery and performance of learning” and instead understand that the learning process is “a profoundly moral activity that should engage the full humanity of learners and their teachers” and that school leaders needed to likewise understand school leadership as a “moral activity that engages the full humanity of the school community” (p. 9). The key to helping leaders and educators internalize this

vision and embody it in their daily work is the framework of a “virtue ethics” which consists of responsibility, authenticity, and presence and fits under the larger umbrella of Starratt’s (1991, 2003, 2004) “three-dimensional map of the ethical terrain” of the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of critique (p. 7).

Additionally, Fine’s (2009) study of women who held senior leadership positions in business, government, or nonprofit organizations suggested that in the discourse of women’s constructions of their leadership, they focused attention to the analysis of their organization and the strategies they might use to develop organizational cultures conducive to, appreciative of, and nourishing to ethical behavior including ethical leadership.

Ethic of Care

Early works delineating the ethic of care have argued that it is not limited to the personal and private sphere and that responsibility, relationship, and action have provided the foundation for this ethic (Noddings, 1995, 2003). Noddings (1995, 2003) and Reynolds (2011) have both offered that a central concern of the ethic of care is the personal investment of the one caring and the responsibility of the one caring to put their caring into action. Noddings (1995, 2003) outlined five characteristics of an ethic of care. First, the central focus of the ethic of care was on the moral importance of meeting the needs of the others for whom we take responsibility. Second, the ethic of care values rather than rejects emotion. It appreciated and allowed the “morally concerned persons in actual interpersonal contexts to understand what would be best” (pp. 10-11). Third, the ethic of care rejected the view of dominant moral theories that the more abstract the

reasoning about a moral problem, the better. These dominant moral theories often interpreted conflicts into the extremes of the “selfish individual” versus “humanity” leaving out consideration that the person in the caring relationship was acting for the self and other together; the well-being of a caring relation involves the well-being of those in relation and the relationship itself (p. 12). Fourth, the ethic of care re-conceptualized the traditional notions of the public and private. It addressed rather than neglected moral issues that arose in relations among the “unequal and dependent; relations that are often laden with emotion and are involuntary, and then notices how these attributes apply not only in the household, but in the wider society as well” (p. 13). Fifth, the ethic of care offered the conception of persons as relational, interdependent, both morally and epistemologically, rather than the self-sufficient independent individuals of the dominant moral theories (Noddings, 1995).

Additionally, Held (2006) described an ethic of care as, “a radical ethic calling for a profound restructuring of society” that also included “the resources for dealing with power and violence” (p. 19). She further argued that:

As we see the deficiencies of the contractual model of human relations within the household, we can see them also in the world beyond and begin to think about how society should be reorganized to be hospitable to care, rather than continuing to marginalize it . . . Instead of a society dominated by conflict restrained by law and preoccupied with economic gain, we might have a society that saw as its most important task the flourishing of children and the development of caring relations

not only in personal contexts but among citizens and using governmental institutions. (Held, 2006, p. 18)

Glanz (2010) also addressed the ethic of care in his study and defined it as involving three activities: “receiving the other’s perspective; responding appropriately to the awareness that comes from this reception; and remaining committed to others and to the relationship” (p. 75). Glanz further explained the challenging relationship between the traditional, masculinized ethic of justice, also referred to as “rights,” and an ethic of care in the educational environment.

An educational commitment to seeking justice in terms of promoting equality, equity and respect in the classroom for all students is fundamentally premised on an ethic of caring. Caring about the worth and needs of the individual student, not necessarily the needs of the school as an organization, is of utmost concern to educators who work from an ethic of caring and justice . . . Justice generally strives for a sense of impartiality; that is, right is right, wrong is wrong. An ethic of care, in contrast, avoids impartiality. Moral reasoning is passionate and involved. (Glanz, 2010, p. 75)

Leadership Theory and the Ethic of Care

Like the ethic of care, leadership theory, of the late 20th century, while much of it still androcentric, began to embrace relationships and connections as key components in successful leadership. Relationships were integral to both transactional and transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). Less complex than transformational leadership, the more commonly experienced transactional leadership was exemplified by

an exchange that occurred between leaders and followers. On the other hand, transformational leadership illustrated the impact of the interaction of conflict and power on leadership and the importance of leadership as it was connected to collective purpose. Additionally Burns offered that leadership occurred when leaders inspired followers to action in attaining goals that were desired by both leaders and followers (p. 19). An expansion of Burns' (1978) theory of transformational leadership, Bass and Riggio (2006) refined the definition calling it leadership that results in followers who "do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible" through leaders' empowerment of followers thereby developing leadership in their followers (p. 4).

According to Greenleaf (1977), "the servant-leader *is* servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 27, emphasis in the original). The strength and success of a leader was dependent on the personal growth of her followers, those who are served by her leadership. The leader's goal was to help her followers not only to grow as persons, becoming "healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous," but also to become servant leaders in their own right, ensuring that the least privileged in society would benefit from the organization's actions or at least not be further deprived by them (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27).

The findings from Fine's (2009) study of women leaders suggested that an organic desire to impact society for the better through service to followers and the greater good existed with study participants. Fine (2009) explored the leadership narratives of 15

high-level women leaders and gleaned themes grounded in an ethic of care from the data about leadership motives, leadership behaviors, and expectations of others' behavior. The study's findings suggested that a moral discourse of leadership could offer a wealth of possibilities for the development of new theoretical approaches to the underdeveloped area of leadership ethics (Fine, 2009). Fine's findings also suggested that the dimensions of leadership could be expanded to include the application of ethical criteria to include the organization as well as the larger societal domain. The need for the development of a model of leadership based upon the feminist ethic of care on which leadership is evaluated also were findings of the study. Additionally, the participants in Fine's study put feminist ethics at the center of their understandings of leadership with their emphases on open communication and leadership as service (Fine, 2009). Fine's data further suggested that women leaders' descriptions reflected an ethic of care because some women choose to leave organizations not due to the impetus to raise a family, but instead because of the desire to make a meaningful contribution to society and their belief that organizational life will not provide the ethical center they desire.

Reynolds (2011) also addressed the connection of leadership and the ethic of care in her study. She pointed to the importance of the relationship in both the ethic of care and in servant leadership as outlined by Greenleaf (1977) and highlighted the commonality that the one-caring is in relationship with the one cared-for while similarly the servant leader also is in relationship with the one being led. Reynolds (2011) used this connection to build a theoretical foundation for conceptualizing servant leadership as a gender-integrative approach to leadership.

Ethic of Justice

Conceptualizations of the ethic of justice necessarily include the definitions of social justice, which have continued to evolve and build upon one another as society moves forward. Griffiths (1998a, 1998b) offered a framework used in her Fairer Schools project in the United Kingdom, which took the tenets of social justice in education to the practical school level in education and provided a foundation for the interaction of social justice and education. This framework was a practical one and included a three part structure: both the good and the right; a belief in and a commitment to the good and the right; and an understanding that the first two terms are revisable (Griffiths, 1998a, 1998b).

Adams' (2007) study also emphasized this point and described social justice in terms of ensuring all groups had equal participation in a society that was together crafted to meet members' needs with adequate opportunities for resources and members who were physically and psychologically secure. Additionally, Swigonski and Raheim (2011) discussed the concepts of care and the social justice focus of social work as the context for their research and added that while no one feminist truth existed, multiple feminist truths approximated fuller and more accurate understandings of women's lived experiences. They further illustrated that with each wave of feminism, social workers have gained tools to not only evaluate and help those in their care, but also to deconstruct systems of oppression and dominant ideologies which have circumscribed women's lives and the lives of others living on society's margins (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011). The

social work field is a natural fit for infusing social justice into an organization. As Swigonski and Raheim stated,

Feminist theorists call for beginning theories from the lives of those who are marginalized, grounding the search for truths within lives that have been hidden. No theory that fails to recognize the importance of including the lives and voices of those who are marginalized . . . can any longer be taken seriously. (p. 19)

Even the disposition of ambition takes a unique turn when studied with a feminist lens. Fine's (2009) study suggested that although participants were not asked about ambition, all of them expressed a desire to accomplish something with their lives for others, but not for themselves. This feminist understanding allows women to embrace a definition of ambition that better aligns with a desire to create community (Fine, 2009). However, as Fine further explained, while doing good for others can be a rational and commendable ambition, it was still not one that always had been valued in organizations.

Leadership Theory and the Ethic of Justice

From educational leadership to corporate leadership theory, the past three decades of academic research and discussion around the need for and impact of an ethic of justice within the organization has broadened traditional leadership theories. Burns' (1978) and Bass and Riggio's (2006) conceptualizations and development of transformational leadership, along with Greenleaf's (1977) promotion of servant-leadership marked a shift in the conversations both in academic theory and practical applications of leadership. While both transformational and servant-leadership as initially developed would perhaps be deemed phase two, compensatory scholarship or phase three, bifocal scholarship on

the continuum of gendered perspectives called feminist phase theory, both theories of leadership opened the door to include dispositions traditionally left out of hierarchical models of leadership and that women had been traditionally socialized to embrace: communication, collaboration, and relationships (Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977; Thompson Tetreault, 1985; Valian, 1999). Both theories of transformational leadership and servant leadership as well as the moral leadership espoused by Sergiovanni (1992) and ethical leadership promoted by Starratt (2004) had strong justice and social justice veins running through them.

In addressing servant leadership in a bureaucratic society, Greenleaf also stated that: Great destructive violence has been done in the name of virtue and justice. Ideas about virtue and justice, when validated by experience are useful guides and not to be ignored. But, at best, they are abstractions. In the ultimate test, the only reality to be trusted, that which shelters decision-making with sensitivity and compassion so that one sees and feels what fits the situation, is the prompting of the human spirit—from the heart. (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 318)

Likewise, the feminist ethic of justice implied that context is everything and is necessary for justice, social justice, and equity work.

Burns (1978) pulled away from simplistic theories of leadership, such as the “great man” theory in pursuit of a theory of leadership, which embraced the complexities inherent in organizational structure and the relationships among leaders and followers. This theory developed through his study of leaders drawn from history, proposed that essentially the leader’s task is “consciousness raising on a wide plane” (Burns, 1978, p.

43). A leader must ultimately inspire people to be aware of what they feel, becoming conscious of their true needs so strongly and defining their values so meaningfully that they can be moved to “purposeful action” (Burns, 1978, p. 44). Burns believed that lifting people out of their everyday lives and “into *their* better selves is the secret of transforming leadership and the moral and practical theme of his work” (1978, p. 462, emphasis in original).

Consciousness raising and value driven action, both components of transformational leadership, also have comprised two important components of the feminist ethic of justice. Improving the lives of those we touch for the better has been the call of both Starratt (2004) and Sergiovanni (1992) as they respectively promoted ethical and moral leadership in school settings. While education has remained the institution directly responsible for providing opportunities that allow children to overcome the disadvantages of poverty and living on the margins of society, leadership that promotes equity for all students including those on the margins will be required as society continues to struggle with poverty, racial discrimination, and equity.

In her work with leadership and the ethic of social justice, Fine (2007) proposed an ethics-based model of leadership, which she believed added value to existing models of leadership and illustrated the commitment to social change that was grounded in a feminist ethic of care. Her study of fifteen senior women from private, nonprofit, and government organizations suggested that women built their leadership through a “moral discourse of leadership” emphasizing four main principles: Making a positive contribution to the local or global community; collaboration with and among team

members while building a leadership paradigm that embraced a sink or swim together mentality; open communication by building an environment where people feel heard; and honesty in relationships; being straightforward with followers and partners alike (Fine, 2007, 2009).

In another glimpse of feminist leadership and social justice, Porter and Daniel's (2007) theory for developing transformational leaders deconstructed feminist leadership in order to develop transformational leaders who could navigate the current 21st century corporate, civic, educational, and philanthropic institutions. Values are the core of feminist leadership, which has been strongly informed by social context, flexible and reflexive to multiple perspectives, autonomous and accountable, and self-reflective (Porter & Daniel, 2007). Ethical practices promoting inclusiveness, integrity, and responsibility also rounded out their theory (Porter & Daniel, 2007).

Ethic of Critique

Like the feminist ethics of care and justice, the ethic of critique was born in the struggles of feminists and those living on the margins of society to have their voices heard by the leaders of their time. Without critical discussions of policies in place that impact each member of society, the civil rights movement wouldn't be a reality, women and minorities could not seek parity in opportunities for education and jobs, and those with the least privilege among us would be forgotten. Critique has allowed the United States freedom from colonial control and has held our lawmakers accountable for the policies they have made. The ability to reason critically is a prerequisite to being able to engage in critique. And critique makes it possible for marginalized voices to be heard.

Donovan's (1994) account of the intellectual traditions of the feminist movement began with the first major work of feminist theory in history by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792. Wollstonecraft reasoned that women must not be denied access to education and public life, and women must be able to become economically independent. These three criteria were only possible with access to critical thought (Donovan, 1994). Others continued to carry the torch of women's equality, and arguments against women's subordination forward with Sarah Grimke's work in the early 19th century promoting the efficacy of critical thinking and speaking out about the denial of women's "natural" rights by men (Donovan, 1994, p. 14). Thus, a long road to striving for equity in the private and public domains of women moved toward our modern times and the underpinning of critical thinking as imperative to the process of critique began. The feminist ethic of critique has remained an important element in leadership theory and has continued to inspire study.

A recent study from Australia illustrated the evolution of critique in feminist theory. Feminist Systems Theory (FST), an emerging theory that has built its foundation on cultural ecofeminism and critical systems theory, utilized critique to further the inclusion of marginalized populations in Australia and in the opportunities available for all Australians (Stephens, 2011). Constructivist, emergent, inductive, and pluralist, FST made action toward social change its priority (Stephens, 2011). FST is the result of a two-year adapted grounded theory study that compared critical systems thinking and cultural ecofeminism and used boundary analysis, identifying and analyzing boundary issues (Stephens, 2011). In this study, the feminist component of FST highlighted the

importance of listening to and understanding the voices of those at the margins of community development projects and social research, while the critical systems theory focused on understanding and addressing power and coercion as obstacles to social improvement, emancipation from oppression, and in the research practice (Stephens, 2011).

Leadership Theory and the Ethic of Critique

An ethic of critique has allowed individuals and researchers to better understand which groups dominate in given social, economic, and political relationships and who defines qualities and actions that society values and disregards in our interactions and experiences. Leadership theory and organizational culture intertwine to support or deny necessary critique to occur.

Leadership. Educational Leadership theorists, Sergiovanni (1992) and Starratt (2004), included the ethic of critique in their calls for ethical and moral leadership. Along with the ethic of critique, the ethic of care and the ethic of justice, form a multidimensional framework which Starratt (2004) believed to be “made up of basic assumptions about the way societies and organizations are and should be organized; beliefs about human beings; and central values and principles to guide choices, decisions, and actions” (p. 7). Moral leadership connected action, intellect, and compassion to the daily activities of an organization and moral authority to traditionally bureaucratic, psychological, and technical-rational authority (Sergiovanni, 1992).

An ethic of critique underpinned the transformational leadership of Bass and Riggio (2006) and Burns (1978). Transforming leadership has relied on leaders’ abilities

to measure social change by the satisfaction of their followers and those affected by the organization. Meaningful change and the inspired action necessary for it were the results of leaders enabling followers to connect to their deep desires and developing *them* to become leaders enacting critique and change (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978).

Like transforming leadership, at the core of servant leadership were the concepts of relationship and connection. Servant leadership has been about serving first and leading second. The servant leader not only worked to allow the personal growth of followers, but also was concerned with the effects of the organization on the least privileged in society; necessitating the question: what of my leadership and the organizational impact on society is of benefit? The answer to this question began the process of critique (Greenleaf, 1977, 1998).

In the field of education, Glanz (2010) tied strategic leadership to ethical leadership in his study. Glanz found that an ethical lens used to evaluate strategic plans was missing despite the call by theorists for educational leadership to lead from a position of ethical awareness. Additionally he found empirical studies around ethics and school leadership to be lacking in number, that school leaders lacked an ethical awareness, and that the role of ethics in practitioner literature had received minimal coverage (Glanz, 2010). Therefore, he called for strategic planning that is underpinned by “a well-established vision, mission and series of goals for the school that is filtered through and monitored by an ethical and moral lens” (Glanz, 2010, p. 79).

Glanz (2010) concluded that

The most egregious sign of mediocrity . . . is the absence of an *ethical* lens to guide strategic decisions. Researchers and those who write in the field of strategic leadership can better inform theory, research and practice by accentuating an ethical conceptual framework around issues of justice and caring. (p. 81, emphasis in original)

In keeping with an ethic of critique, Glanz (2010) also suggested that the following ethical questions should be addressed:

- Has the strategic vision or plan been screened by an ethical lens?
- What are the implications of power and politics for providing the highest-quality education for students?
- What is the role power, politics and ethics have on leading strategically?

(Glanz, 2010, p. 73).

Feminists also have addressed critique in their reviews of leadership and equity for women and people of color. For as Fine (2009) concluded: “The male ideology of leadership is visible in two critical ways: (1) the lack of representation of women in leadership positions in the U.S., and (2) the construction of leadership as comprising masculine characteristics” (p. 181).

Organizational culture. Schein (2010) and Senge (1990) both have offered a look at leadership through the lens of systems thinking and organizational culture. Three core ideas underscored Senge’s (1990) organizational theory: working together can be more satisfying and productive than prevailing systems of management have allowed; changes needed to occur at both the organizational and individual levels; and building

learning organizations was a life-long journey. He also proposed that systems of management as structured traditionally have led to mediocrity and that by capitalizing on the essence of the collective intelligence of organizational members working together toward a common goal, leaders would be able to help their organizations grow, not only allowing followers to thrive, but also allowing positive contributions to the 21st century challenges faced by organizations.

Ultimately Senge's (1990) theory of the fifth discipline grew from his belief that outstanding organizations were the ones that would learn how to engage their members' commitment and their ability to continually learn throughout the organization. Integral to an organization's ability to be "learningful" were five disciplines to be practiced by individuals and groups throughout the organization (p. 4). Senge argued that these five practices: personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking, when developed as an ensemble, would propel the individuals and organization to become "lifelong learners" and thus, a learning organization (p. 10). Each was critical to the others' success, and all provided an essential dimension in building an organization that could "learn" or reach its highest aspirations (Senge, 1990, p. 10). Most importantly, the fifth discipline, systems thinking, served as the practice that integrated the other disciplines and combined them to become a cogent theory and practice. It kept them connected and, thus, enabled individuals and groups within the organization to look beyond their individual perspectives to the bigger picture that is the organizational vision; allowing members to experience the reality that "the whole can exceed the sum of its parts" (Senge, 1990, p. 12).

Also interested in explaining leadership through an understanding of the importance of the entire system of an organization, Schein (2010) theorized that the culture of an organization would determine its level of success. Schein connected organizational culture and leadership and built upon an understanding of culture that eschewed superficial definitions and instead was based on the deeper, complex anthropological models. For his theory, Schein defined group culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 18, emphasis in original)

Moreover, leadership and culture were “two sides of the same coin” because leaders began the process of creating culture in their organizations when they created the groups that had become the organization (Schein, 2010, p. 22). Once established, the culture would determine the criteria for leadership and therefore determine who actually became a leader within the organization (Schein, 2010). Schein also argued that because leaders were the main architects of culture and that once cultures are formed they influenced the type of leadership possible, if the elements of culture became dysfunctional, leadership could and must do something to speed up culture change even though that change would prove to be challenging for the entire organization.

This cultural change would prove difficult because cultural forces generally operate outside of an individual’s awareness, and therefore can become extremely

powerful. And because the human psyche craves cognitive stability, challenging and questioning the basic assumptions of an organization's culture would result in anxiety and defensiveness in members of the organization (Schein, 2010, p. 29). Additionally, national, ethnic, occupational, organizational, and micro-system issues would also be interconnected, creating further challenge to establishing and maintaining a healthy organizational culture. Thus, understanding culture at any level required some understanding of all cultures and at all levels of culture. The three levels of culture utilized by Schein (2010) as a foundation for the analysis of culture were:

1. Artifacts

- Visible and “feelable” structures and processes
- Observed behavior (Difficult to decipher)

2. Espoused Beliefs and Values

- Ideals, goals, values, aspirations
- Ideologies
- Rationalizations (May or may not be congruent with behavior and other artifacts)

3. Basic Underlying Assumptions

- Unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values (Determine behavior, perception, thought, and feeling). (p. 24)

Although both Schein (2010) and Senge (1990) discussed organizational leadership and addressed culture as a component of leadership, neither included a feminist lens. However Chin's (2007) overview for *Women and Leadership*:

Transforming Visions and Diverse Voices did just that (p. 8). Chin (2007) introduced studies that explored women's experiences as leaders in a variety of organizations and cultures by reminding readers that the organizational cultures in which women led were often masculinized and thus their leadership would need to adapt accordingly (Chin, 2007). Women leaders could be confined to others' perceptions constraining them to traditional gender roles and influencing their leadership dispositions and behaviors (Chin, 2007). Yet, these same behaviors were the ones that often signal ineffective leadership (Chin, 2007).

The Feminist Ethic, Organizational Leadership, and Organizational Culture

While general theories of leadership had excluded the role that gender and ethnicity played in organizational leadership and even implied that they were inconsequential to leading organizations, the existing body of literature at the intersection of feminist theory and leadership theory offered argument and context which questioned that implication. Therefore, I have extrapolated a feminist ethic as a set of moral principles and a guiding philosophy from the body of literature on feminism and feminist theories that was conceptualized by three characteristics:

1. Responsibility to both self and others (Belenky et al., 1997; Beard, 2012; Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983);
2. Connections to others (Belenky et al., 1997; Boatman, 2007; Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983); and
3. Relationships with others (Belenky et al., 1997; Gilligan, 1982, Katz, 2006; Lyons, 1983).

Constructed on three ethics:

1. Ethic of Care as applied beyond the family unit (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Noddings, 1995, 2003; Starratt, 1991, 1994);
2. Ethic of Justice in response to treatment of others, oppression, and inequality (Starratt, 1991, 1994; Swigonski & Raheim, 2011); and
3. Ethic of Critique of the systems and theory that omit non-majority perspectives (Donovan, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991, 1994).

Additionally, I have examined how these three characteristics and three ethics intersect and overlap with aspects of current leadership and organizational culture theories and practices. The transformational leadership theory offered by Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass and Riggio (2006) espoused the practice of helping followers to grow by aligning individuals' aspirations and goals to those of the organization inspiring "extraordinary outcomes" and developing followers' leadership capacities (p. 3). Through Greenleaf's (1977, 1998) general theory of servant leadership, he also sought to inspire leadership and autonomy in individuals' behaviors. Greenleaf (1977, 1998) also suggested that when leaders catered to the individual needs of their followers, they were better able to reach higher organizational goals.

Organizational culture also has been included to provide further information about how the foundational elements of the culture in an organization can positively impact leadership in that organization. Both Senge's (1990) and Schein's (2010) theories described that organizational culture and leadership rely on understanding the

relationships and interactions between followers and using “systems thinking” (Senge, 1990) and the elements of positive culture (Schein, 2010).

Rounding out this discussion of the conceptual framework I’ve created that has connected women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership, I have shared information about studies that explored the intersection of women in leadership; the challenges they faced and opportunities these challenges provided. For example, Chin (2007, 2011) and Binns (2008) both found that although women needed to navigate an organizational culture that required them to translate masculinized meaning and structure into their personal understanding, this reality offered women opportunities to grow in knowledge otherwise not necessary for the majority White male population that made up the superintendent ranks. Binns’ study on gender and relational leading found that study participants confronted incongruity between their gender identification as women and the values and ideals of what was considered the norm of traditional, masculinized, heroic leadership. Participants also believed that male leaders did not have to negotiate this disconnect in the same way. For whereas both men and women must work up against the masculinized ideal view of being a leader, most men have not been required to engage in the gender switching that women constantly must achieve (Binns, 2008). However, Binns did posit that the tensions between the “embodied feminine and the masculinized ideals embedded in dominant notions of leadership” created the conditions of “uncertainty, fluidity, and vulnerability” that formed a foundation that resulted in a women’s practice that was “reflexive, transformative and ethical” (Binns,

2008, p. 616). Additionally, Binns concluded that this phenomenon could result in more relational and ethical leadership constructs and practices.

Chin's (2011) work also concluded that whereas leader authenticity remained an important prerequisite for successful leadership:

It is increasingly clear that cultural worldviews, socialization of gender roles, and different life experiences do contribute to one's resulting philosophy and style of leadership. Authenticity as a leader is more challenging when needing to negotiate multiple and intersecting identities. (Chin, 2011, p. 4)

Yet, Chin also proposed that women could utilize the strength they have gained through their ability to translate leadership identities between the "masculinized ideal" and their "embodied feminine" to better navigate and understand the multiple realities experienced by the communities they serve (Binns, 2008, p. 616; Chin, 2011).

In another study on women leaders, Carson, Chandler, Collins, and Snow (2010) explored the administrative efforts associated with the struggle of leading schools through feminist leadership practices which were outside of the leadership norm in the school district they studied and included "Buddhist philosophies, equity, and social justice through a paradigm of peaceful leadership" (p. 1). By recognizing when decisions were made that went against participant leaders' ethical and instinctual inclination due to the systemic structures in place, school leaders both challenged and supported one another as they all defined and lived the challenging work of a personal peaceful leadership that evolved and was grounded in connection to others, but was sometimes at odds with the established culture of the participants' school district. Like other studies

which explored women's leadership, the Carson et al. (2010) study linked successful leadership for these participants to the support of a peer network of like-minded leaders providing all involved with support.

Finally, Eicher-Catt's (2005) feminist deconstruction of servant-leadership argued that it was impossible to de-gender servant leadership due to societal distortion of particular qualities as "naturally" feminine or masculine characteristics, and that the language of servant-leadership perpetuated gender dominance because of the pre-given androcentric ethos (p. 23). However, notwithstanding Eicher-Catt's (2005) critique, Reynolds (2011) presented the view that, "by informing servant-leadership through feminist perspectives leadership educators can access a useful resource for developing critical thought as well as gender-integrative leaders and organizations for the future" (p. 167).

Conclusion

The complexity of issues that women leaders have faced due to society's limited view of acceptable roles and behaviors in women leaders has suggested the need for a contextual and practical change in the work environment; change that would come in the way of celebrating "women's strengths in a gender-equitable work environment" (Chin, 2007, p. 13). The challenge for women leaders has, however, remained: "how to conform to what is 'expected' while still retaining their credibility and effectiveness as leaders" (Chin, 2007, p. 14). Eagly's (2007) account of contemporary leadership culture further summarized the factors impacting women as they have led:

To the extent that feminist analysts of leadership take the complexities of women's leadership into account, they are not merely rediscovering what makes leaders effective in general. Even though transformational and authentic leadership are advantageous for leaders of both sexes, leadership remains a different experience for women and men. When women enter male-dominated leader roles, they face expectations that have been shaped by these prior male occupants of the roles. Traditions are masculine, and women are at risk for seeming unqualified and having others resist their efforts to exert influence. (p. xix).

This study uncovered what the participant women superintendents believed about their leadership as they addressed the demands of leading in the current climate of educational reform.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

A review of the literature on women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership resulted in both qualitative and quantitative empirical studies in all three areas. It has been in the qualitative studies that participants' voices could best be heard, and the lessons learned from the lived experiences of the study participants could be applied to similar situations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002, 2009). As my literature review illustrated, published theory and research on leadership, organizational culture, and the superintendency has been well represented. Yet the majority of studies on organizational leadership and the superintendency have been found to be androcentric and only explored the experiences of minorities and women when the authors of studies were minorities and women (Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Murphy et al., 2007; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). This phenomenon has left issues, dispositions, perspectives, and approaches that were not the upper- and middle-class White male experience represented in the majority of studies to remain underrepresented and underutilized. Additionally, a gap existed in research that addressed all three topics, women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership theory together in a comprehensive manner.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found that although earlier studies of gender and leadership examined women's leadership in comparison to men's, those studies had been replaced by explorations of women's ontology and experiences as leaders. Thus, the current body of literature on leadership has provided the springboard for opening up the

study of leadership to other perspectives not previously presented (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This study utilized the opening created by this body of literature on women in educational leadership and used a qualitative grounded theory approach to extend the theories from which we now operate (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This approach allowed the currently underrepresented women's voices and lived experiences as leaders of school districts to be understood in terms of common themes and in a common theory of leadership as I explored to what extent, if any, they intersected with the feminist ethic (Charmaz, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This grounded theory approach also has allowed readers, both female and male, who have served as superintendents or aspire to the superintendency to apply the theory generated from this study to their daily work in that field (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 248).

Research Context and Rationale

I am a 55 year old, White, middle-class woman who has held positions as a student, teacher, mother, assistant principal, principal, PTA president, and school board member and president. In these various roles my gender and experiences have been inseparable from how I have completed my work, how I interacted with colleagues and stakeholders, and how I advocated for the people in my care and for myself. My gender and society's complicated understanding of it, has impacted my own self-confidence and my ability to lead (Chin, 2004, 2007, 2011; Valian, 1999). Additionally, my study has been positioned within the feminist ethic as it has been defined and encompassed by the larger context of the feminist consciousness, which ultimately rests within the Western societal ontology that has been derived from the patriarchal society that was firmly in

place two millennia B.C.E. This limitation must be recognized within my work to derive theory from study participant interviews. For even as the feminist ethic and feminist consciousness continue to be redefined, previously taken for granted societal expectations around gender roles and participants' understanding of their leadership experiences cannot be wrenched apart from the dominant Western patriarchal androcentric ontology still pervasive in Western society today (See Figure 2). As a female researcher, I also am aware that my interaction with data has been strongly influenced by my own learning and experiences with navigating the overarching Western societal androcentric ontology. As a woman and school leader, as a parent and school board member, I believe that the findings of this study may have an impact on the work of educational leaders as it has had on my own professional and personal interactions and work.

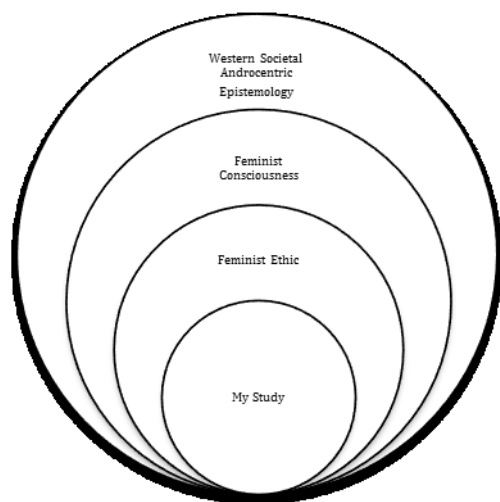


Figure 2. Research context

Further rationale for this study were the data which highlighted the underrepresentation of women as research subjects in published studies on the

superintendency, the small percentage of studies on the superintendency and gender, and the resulting need to unearth potentially successful leadership paradigms that remain unexplored due to the lack of women's voices in leadership research. Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) research supports this rationale with their recommendation that because change demands leadership, the study of leadership must be gender conscious and inclusive. Additionally Chin (2007) found feminist leadership to be contextual and that it must be understood by exploring the contexts in which women have led. Lemasters and Roach (2012) also contended that, "women experience the superintendency in fundamentally different ways based on gender. Hence, there is a need to conduct more research that challenges prevailing theories of the superintendency and develops new theories that take into account women in the superintendency" (p. 10). By studying the interplay among women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership, this study has added those previously unheard voices to the academic conversation regarding valid leadership dispositions and approaches that have long been unrepresented and underrepresented in educational leadership theory, school reform discussions, policy-making and policy-implementation. This study also placed and observed participants within their personal leadership contexts.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found that traditional leadership scholars developed and used research instruments to examine leadership that often left out the dispositions and behaviors that didn't readily appear in the accepted masculinized world of leadership. Deemed deficit from the androcentric leadership norms, these leadership behaviors, used by both sexes, have remained underrepresented because women and

minorities are underrepresented in school administration and published research. As Brunner and Grogan (2007) offered, perhaps it is the very research being done by women and persons of color on women and individuals from traditionally marginalized groups in the superintendency that has resulted in even the small increases of both populations in the top school leadership position. This study has added this important perspective on organizational leadership as it intersected with the feminist ethic through the experiences of the female superintendent participants of this study.

Another reason for this study as Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) noted, has been the lack of empathetic research methods in studies on women in administrative roles. The Skrla et al. findings suggested that research on women in the superintendency should move beyond “surface-level views to more fully involve participants and to reach out to wider audiences” than traditional research on superintendents (p. 65). Skrla et al. also suggested that:

As research is conducted with women in administrative positions, the research context should encourage an empathetic dialogue that provides a comfortable place for women to tell stories of successful professional work, interwoven with acknowledgments of their own silence. In this context, women are more likely to be able to relay candid accounts of their experiences with sexism and discriminatory treatment, which may make it possible to “learn how women leaders construct their identities in inherently inequitable circumstances such [as] those found in the superintendency.” (p. 71)

The qualitative method utilized for this study allowed for the nuances implicit in individual stories to be reflected in the data that I collected. This grounded theory study also allowed for the “empathetic dialogue” called for by Skrla et al. (2000). Also, Fine’s (2009) narrative study of 15 women leaders’ discursive representations of leadership concluded that, “future studies should examine the leadership stories of women who represent a broader range of racial, national, and ethnic identities” (pp. 199-200).

Although Fine’s (2009) study took a narrative form and this study used a grounded theory approach, such qualitative studies often have offered the “conceptual ideas that can inform theory building and provide the conceptual basis for new research questions” as is addressed in my concluding chapter (Fine, 2009, pp. 199–200). Fine’s study also called for further research that would add “purpose and scene to the dimensions of leadership that are subject to ethical considerations” as well as using a model of an ethical leadership based on an ethic of care (Fine, 2009, pp. 199–200). Both of Fine’s findings suggested that further research like this study could benefit the field of educational leadership.

Finally, numerous education associations and state organizations have reported on the shortage of applicants for the superintendent position and the concerns over high turnover rates (B. S. Cooper et al., 2000). And, while this shortage of qualified superintendents had garnered attention and investment in determining strategies for expanding and strengthening the pool of potential superintendents, gender and the superintendency has not been studied proportionately as a potential factor in and solution for addressing this superintendent shortage given the underutilization of women in

educational administration (Young & Mcleod, 2001). With this shortage of qualified candidates for the school superintendency coupled with the underrepresentation of women in the lead district position in mind, this study has highlighted participants' experiences of leadership. The resulting theory has added a new perspective to the current leadership dialogue and potentially may serve as the impetus for more women to seek out the superintendency as a viable position for utilization of their leadership talents and strengths. The complexity of studying the intersection of leadership and gender in this exploration has allowed individual women's dispositions to be revealed apart from those stereotypically deemed masculine or feminine.

Although my study focused on women, effective leadership dispositions appropriate for both men and women were uncovered and explained. The majority of leadership research had been conducted on men and generally provided a deficit view of deviations from the traditional heterosexual White male perspective and dispositions. Gynocentric leadership dispositions associated with connection, relationship, and context historically have been omitted from theory and practice. Inclusive leadership approaches have become increasingly important in addressing our nation's issues as we resolve the widening achievement gap in our prekindergarten through twelfth grade schools. This study of the intersection among women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership theory will allow readers to determine if the illuminated findings further current educational discourse toward solutions that positively impact *all* students in our nation's public schools (Merriam, 2002).

Assumptions

For this study I made the following three assumptions. First, the procedures and methods utilized were appropriate for my purposes. Second, the participants were honest in their responses. And my final assumption, interviewing women superintendents in a variety of school district types will be valuable to the field of educational leadership and to organizational leadership theory in general.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the fact that with a national rate of women in the superintendency currently at 24%, there are fewer women superintendents to study, with women of color or non-majority cultural backgrounds even fewer in numbers (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). Further, in Ohio, the state in which I have drawn my participants, women hold 16% of the superintendent positions (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 5, 2014). The data collection timetable of September 2015 through July 2016 could also have been a limitation as the time period chosen was not amenable to some superintendent schedules. And finally, because of the small sample size utilized for a grounded theory study, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to a larger population.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was limited to women who currently serve or previously had served as public school superintendents. The number of study participants utilized was determined by ongoing coding and theory development. The coding and analysis suggested that theoretical saturation had occurred after the sixth participant's data were analyzed with

the coding and common themes from the prior five participants' data (Charmaz, 2011). Charmaz (2011) offered an expansion of the traditional definition of saturation suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (2008). Instead of forcing data into the preconceived frameworks that those researchers imposed by the structure of the axial coding matrices, Charmaz (2011) suggested, instead, that the researcher must be open to revisiting and recoding earlier data to uncover whether new leads and deeper theory would emerge. Thus, a predetermined number of participants could not be indicated and identified when I began this study (Charmaz, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

I then used the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) typologies of school districts to determine whether a variety of school districts were represented by the study participants ("The NCES Fast Facts Tool," n.d.). Additionally, this study did not include male superintendents because the majority of studies done on educational leadership, administration, and, specifically, superintendents have been done on men, thus causing the majority of leadership theories and suppositions to have been made based upon a masculinized norm of behavior causing non-dominant leadership dispositions to be understood as deficit to the accepted and desired male dispositions (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Chin, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Skrla, 2000).

Participants

The women superintendents who agreed to participate provided the focus for this study. I used purposeful, snowball sampling of female superintendents in order to have a starting point for the development of a theory based upon my research question: How

does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate? A predetermined, definitive number of study participants was not made due to the nature of the grounded theory study in which I engaged and which is based upon Charmaz's (2011) conceptualization of theoretical sampling and saturation. I also attempted to include participants who self-identified with racial minority populations due to the overwhelming predominance of White superintendents currently in the field and the need to hear minority voices in research literature on top educational leaders (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011).

The AASA American School Superintendent 2010 Decennial Study reported that women comprised 24% of responding superintendents up from 13% in 2000 (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). The same study identified 6% of respondents as minority up from 5% as reported in 2000 (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). Yet, none of the three most recent comprehensive studies regarding the American superintendency reported data disaggregated by gender *and* race/ethnicity. This phenomenon made the number of women superintendents from minority populations difficult to quantify and as a result, has left their voices out of extant literature on women in the superintendency. Their stories need to be heard as well. Therefore, I attempted to identify and include a racially, culturally, and/or religiously diverse group of participants in order to add maximum variation "to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research" (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). However, I did not fully achieve this goal due the limited number of women superintendents currently employed in Ohio.

After receiving the Kent State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and creating the informed consent document specific to this study, I chose participants purposefully using snowball sampling, which began with leads and entrée to participants as offered from a former superintendent (See Appendices A and B). This superintendent was asked to identify current or former women superintendents who could be identified with at least one tenet of the feminist ethic defined as an ethic of care, justice, and critique. Additionally, at the end of each interview I conducted, I asked for recommendations of current or former women superintendents who may be interested in participation in this study and could be identified with an aspect of the feminist ethic. I also reached out in person to women superintendents presenting and attending the November 2015 Ohio School Board Association Capital Conference. Potential participants were emailed to gauge interest in participation in this study (See Appendix C).

Study participants included: One White superintendent, currently employed as a superintendent, one African American and four White former superintendents. All participants were interviewed during September, October, and November of the 2015–2016 school year. Each participant signed the informed consent form at the beginning of the face-to-face interview and was given the list of participant tasks (See Appendices B and D). I used Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing model which encourages researchers to use a design and protocol that is continuous, flexible, and adaptable" (p.42) (See Appendices E and F). Each of the six participants identified her religion as a Christian denomination. In developing this study, I had estimated

collecting data from between 5 and 10 participants while continually evaluating the need for further interviews based upon the coding and analysis of each interview and written data provided by participants. Snowball sampling for this study occurred until the saturation of data and themes became apparent through my ongoing analysis as prescribed by the constant comparison method and by the theoretical sampling and the saturation of theoretical categories resulting in the use of information from the six participants for theory development (See Appendix G) (Charmaz, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

My participant sample of women represented four different school district typologies as delineated by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) School District Typology Report. I used this information in order to provide a variety of possible experiences shared and a more universal theory associated with women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership to the extent possible within the constraints of the limited numbers of women who had served or were serving as superintendents across the state when data collection occurred (see Table 1).

The six participants led school districts in seven different Ohio municipalities and six different counties. The school districts they led fell into four different ODE typologies: 3—Small town—Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population, 5—Suburban—Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population and Size, 6—Suburban—Very Low Student Poverty & Large Student Population, and 7—Urban-High Student Poverty & Average Student Population. By utilizing the information about and from women leaders who had been purposely chosen based upon their leadership as it intersected with the feminist ethic, I gained the insight and gathered the rich information

necessary to garner enough data points to generate substantive theory that led to a formal theory which was the goal of this study (Charmaz, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Pseudonyms were assigned to all research participants and identifiable information such as school district, city, and county was eliminated or fictionalized in the body of my dissertation in order to protect participants' privacy.

Table 1

2013 School Districts Typology

2013 Typology Code	Major Grouping	Full Descriptor	Districts Within Typology	Students Within Typology
1	Rural	Rural - High Student Poverty & Small Student Population	124	170,000
2	Rural	Rural - Average Student Poverty & Very Small Student Population	107	110,000
3	Small Town	Small Town - Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population	111	185,000
4	Small Town	Small Town - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	89	200,000
5	Suburban	Suburban - Low Student Poverty & Average Student Population Size	77	320,000
6	Suburban	Suburban - Very Low Student Poverty & Large Student Population	46	240,000
7	Urban	Urban - High Student Poverty & Average Student Population	47	210,000
8	Urban	Urban - Very High Student Poverty & Very Large Student Population	8	200,000

Information retrieved October 16, 2016 from ODE website: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Report-Card-Resources/Ohio-Report-Cards/Typology-of-Ohio-School-Districts>

Data Collection

Since its introduction to the qualitative research community, the concepts and usage of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory strategies have taken hold and have evolved (Charmaz, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002, 2009). I used Charmaz's (2011) constructivist approach to her work translating Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original framework into practical usage for 21st century theory to guide my research. I also utilized the work of Corbin and Strauss (2008), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Hatch (2002), and Merriam (2009) for their suggested data collection methods and in the analysis of the data generated by this study. These researchers supported the following general process of grounded theory research:

1. The researcher is the data collection tool.
2. Theoretical analysis begins with the first data collected and analysis continues until saturation of theoretical categories occurs.
3. The analytic categories and the relationships between them become the concepts to describe the developing theory.
4. The final product is the grounded theory, which is "an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience." (Charmaz, 2011, p. 4)

As a grounded theory study, I collected data while simultaneously analyzing it interviewing participants until the saturation of data was reached (Charmaz, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). Charmaz (2011) defined saturation as occurring, "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories" which

went beyond merely experiencing repetition of descriptive information (p. 113). Because I used the constant comparative method of coding and analyzing data generated from interviews and writing samples, I immersed myself in the coding and analysis of the data from the first interview conducted and transcribed and throughout my study. This allowed me to become so grounded in my participants' information that the new data generated with each additional data point eventually gave way to the common themes that signaled saturation (See Appendix G).

Data Collection Framework

As Charmaz (2011) offered, “the quality—and credibility—of your study starts with the data” (p. 18). Data collection and analysis for my study took place from September 2015 through July 2016. These data were gathered from participant interviews, journal entries, and previous and current professional documents used for communication with faculty, staff, students, families, or community members during participants' service as superintendents. The multiple sources of data I used provided the triangulation of data necessary for readers to evaluate to what extent the data and findings would be able to be transferred to their own daily experiences (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). This discussion is expanded further under the subheadings: interviews, data verification, and data analysis.

For reasons of confidentiality, any hard copies of data from interviews and documents have been organized in binders and folders labeled by interview number and stored in a cabinet in my home office. I used a digital recording device to record all interviews, which were fully transcribed into word documents. Documents and

recordings were stored electronically using my private computer, the password-protected *Dropbox* cloud-storage website and the *NVivo* software for electronic data management and storage available only on my password-protected laptop. As suggested by Hatch (2002) and Rubin and Rubin (2012), I also utilized a design journal to provide an outlet for my informal notes, research memos, and ideas while conducting my research. This design journal also included my research activities in chronological order.

Interviews

I conducted semistructured, responsive interviews utilizing the techniques suggested by Charmaz (2011), Corbin and Morse (2003), Corbin and Strauss (2008), Merriam (2009), and Rubin and Rubin (2012) in order to collect the rich and dense data necessary to formulate original grounded theory. All six face-to-face interviews were recorded and lasted from approximately 52 minutes to one hour and 40 minutes in length. I offered each participant the option of choosing the location for her interview, allowing each leader to choose a site that was convenient as well as physically and psychologically comfortable. Before each interview, study participants read and signed a standard informed consent letter delineating the privacy protections I had put into place for the information they shared.

Each of the interviews was transcribed verbatim. Follow-up emails were exchanged as needed for probing, clarification, and expansion of participant ideas following my review of each recording and transcription (See Appendices E and F).

Documents

In order to gather a variety of types of data so that theory could be generated, I asked participants to keep a journal consisting of three entries they made over the course of 30 days and submit writing samples for my review. According to Charmaz (2011), these “elicited texts work best when participants have a stake in the addressed topics, experience in the relevant areas, and view the questions as significant” (p. 37). Both types of written documents illustrated an aspect of how the participant superintendent handled difficulty in her role as the district leader. The journal was maintained throughout the first month of each individual’s participation in my study. Participants were given the same prompt to elicit reflection upon a difficult professional decision or dilemma she faced, how she handled it, what her thought process was, and what she considered as she determined her course of action.

The other document that participants were asked to submit was a published article, a school district or community newsletter, a presentation, a letter to faculty and staff members, or a letter to families. I asked that this written piece documented a situation that had taken place under the superintendent’s leadership of the district and that was difficult for the participant and/or for those under her leadership. Because the writing sample was a self-selected by the study participant, there was flexibility regarding the type and subject matter of written work used.

Data Verification

Substantiation of the data collected and tentative interpretations took the form of member checks, follow-up emails, and one scheduled focus group meeting (See

Appendices H, I, and J). According to Merriam (2009), member checks were a common method of ensuring that the data collected and the interpretations the researcher made were plausible in the participant's eyes. After each interview I submitted the interview tape to the *TranscribeMe* transcription service affiliated with the *NVivo* data storage and analysis protocol. After each interview was transcribed, I read the transcription for accuracy as it compared to the recorded interview.

Scheduling and conducting a focus group made up of all study participants provided another avenue for the verification of my data. Hatch (2002) offered that not only can focus groups be used "to supplement and enrich data from other sources," they also provide a valuable opportunity for researcher follow-up with the intent to make necessary corrections to interpretations (p.13). Therefore, once all coding and analysis of interviews, journal entries, and writing samples were complete, I scheduled a focus group inviting all participants to meet at a central location in Ohio in July 2016. The focus group allowed me to bring four of the six study participants together so that they could network, interact with each other and me, and substantiate my initial interpretations of the data and emerging theory. This semi-structured interaction among study participants and data collected during the focus group offered a further generation of data and validated the theoretical categories I had drafted after analyzing this data that were based upon each participant's responses to the initial individual face-to-face interview questions, journals, and writing samples (See Appendices H, I, and J).

Data Analysis

The structure of constructivist grounded theory methodology espoused by Charmaz (2011) was used in my study. I used a combination of purposeful sampling, snowball sampling, and theoretical sampling. Additionally, using the constant comparative method of data analysis, I coded and began analysis with the first transcribed interview and documents I had received (Merriam, 2009).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined theoretical sampling as the “process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 45). This method of sampling combined with the traditional components of the constant comparison method of analyzing data allowed a theory grounded in the data that I mined from participants’ words to be realized. Analysis occurred simultaneously with the data collection, and as I analyzed each data set, I compared it to the others in order to identify common themes and concepts (Charmaz, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling allowed me to better elaborate on the meaning of my categories as they emerged, and I was able to see the variation within the categories and “define *gaps among categories*” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 108, emphasis in original). Charmaz (2011) further offered that the categories that began to develop during the analysis of this type of qualitative data would not encompass the “full range of relevant experience” thus, gaps between categories could be found through the comparative methods used within the model of theoretical sampling (p. 108). Additionally, using Charmaz (2011) to guide my data analysis, I was cognizant

that in seeking saturation in the developing categories around my data, when new data were added into analysis, “new theoretical insights” and “properties of these core theoretical categories” continued to develop until I reached saturation with my data (See Appendix G) (p. 113).

Trustworthiness

In this study, I utilized Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research: “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 300).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested five techniques for ensuring credibility: activities such as triangulation and prolonged engagement that make it more likely that credible findings will be produced; activity that offers an external check on the inquiry process such as peer debriefing; activities aimed at refining the working hypothesis such as negative case analysis; checking preliminary findings against archived “raw data” such as referential adequacy; and a method of checking the findings and interpretations with the sources of the information such as member checking (p. 301). Due to the inquiry nature of this grounded theory study two of the techniques suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were not used: negative case analysis and referential adequacy. I did, however, use three of the five techniques they suggested for addressing its credibility.

Prolonged engagement and triangulation were used as sources of credibility for my study (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). In order to demonstrate prolonged engagement, data collection and analysis occurred within an 11-month period; long enough for rich data to be generated from the sources I’ve outlined, but brief enough

to occur within one calendar year. Triangulation also was used as an indicator of the credibility of this study. This was achieved by using three sources of data collection for my study: face-to-face interviews, professional writing samples, and participants' professional journal entries (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Peer debriefing throughout data collection and analysis and member checking were used to establish credibility for this study (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Throughout the course of my study I engaged in regular discussions with a doctoral candidate colleague who also was working on her qualitative dissertation study. Also, I engaged in regular discussions with the director of my dissertation committee which allowed me the opportunity to ask questions and discuss, out loud, my writing, analysis, thoughts, and plans as I progressed through the stages of this study. As detailed in the "data verification" section above, member checking through emails, phone conversations, and the focus group played an important roles in ensuring that the data and interpretation fit with the study participants' memories of their interviews (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Addressing transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1986) explained that "thick description" provided readers with the necessary information to determine if the findings could be fully or partially applied in other instances (1985, p. 316; 1986, p. 19). I believe that the "thick description" I provided in the literature review, research context, and most importantly in Chapter 4 *Research Findings* supported by details from the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences as well as from the documents they provided will allow readers of this study to determine the degree to which parallels can be drawn

between the findings from this study and their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316; 1986, p. 19; Merriam, 2009, p. 229).

Dependability and confirmability both relied on the establishment of an audit trail and the outcome of an independent audit of the research process and product (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). I have established an audit trail of documents, data analyses, and research journal that have been completed and sample entries included in order to provide readers and evaluators evidence of the dependability and confirmability of this study. As I collected data, coded and analyzed data for my study, I met regularly with the director of my dissertation committee. Together we reviewed transcripts, writing samples, coding documents and charts, and drafts of memos I created during the analysis of the data for this study.

Researcher Role and Ethics

Schram (2006) suggested that, “ethical considerations are inseparable from your interactions with study participants in the field. Although ethical decisions are certainly not peculiar to qualitative inquiry, the negotiated and heavily contextualized nature of ethical dilemmas is a defining characteristic of quality fieldwork” (p. 137). I provided protections for potential ethical dilemmas for study participants and researcher alike. Upon approval from my dissertation committee for my proposed study in May 2014, I submitted my full research application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kent State University. My study was approved in June 2014 (Appendix A). Once participants were identified, I emailed the informed consent letter describing privacy protections and the scope of the study along with a document outlining the study activities in detail to the

participant (Appendices B, C, & D). This allowed each participant more than one opportunity to decline participation if any of the work would be unacceptable to her for any reason. The participant signed the informed consent form, which was collected before each face-to-face interview and was kept with each participant's paperwork.

An ethical consideration that I also needed to make was how my role as a board of education member could impact my study participants. For this reason, I did not seek out study participants from my home school district nor did I conduct interviews with anyone from my school district, thereby avoiding any conflict of interest. However, my role and connections from being involved in school board leadership at the district-level did help me gain entrée with women superintendents who knew me or knew of me through my board of education work. I addressed this issue by disclosing the information about myself before I gained approval from the superintendent to serve as a study participant.

Conclusion

This chapter described Charmaz's (2011) constructivist grounded theory approach as I have utilized it in my study of women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership. Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interview method and structures provided the main framework for my interviews of study participants. I used Charmaz's (2011) techniques and stages of coding: initial coding and focused coding to organize and analyze the data I collected, from the interviews, the written documentation of journal entries and writing samples, and the focus group I conducted. The initial coding consisted of the line-by-line coding I began with the first transcript of the first interview and continued through all six interviews and all written documents that had

been coded as well. The focused coding included: categorization of focused coding, thematic coding, participant themes, and theoretical coding, which led to a theory developed from the coded data.

Trustworthiness, through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggested four criteria of: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were established and discussed through the techniques and strategies expanded upon in this chapter. Schram's (2006) ethical considerations have also been addressed.

In Chapter 4 the findings of this study are shared and the methodology discussed in Chapter 3 is expanded and interwoven with participant stories and experiences.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study explored the interaction of the feminist ethic and the leadership of women superintendents as they addressed the demands of leading in the current educational climate. In order to understand this interaction, I used a constructivist grounded theory approach because I believe that the lived experiences of study participants would combine to form a unique take on the intersection of leadership theory, theories of the feminist ethic, and these women's experiences of being female in a traditionally masculinized leadership role. My construction of the data was derived from the experiences, reflections, and interactions of the participants of this study answering the research question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate? The theory of leadership emergent of the findings may inform educational leaders in both PK-12 and higher education settings as well as educational policy-makers.

Charmaz's (2011) constructivist grounded theory served as the framework for me to answer this research question and develop theory. I collected the necessary data through face-to-face interviews, follow-up emails and phone calls, journal entries, writing samples, and verified the data with a focus group conducted at the end of the individual data collection. I also kept a design journal where my progress, analysis, and memos were recorded.

In my process of constructing substantive theory from study participants' experiences, three themes emerged and bridged my journey from data collection, to coded data, to grounded theory:

1. *Leadership Disposition*, which is characterized by the importance participants placed on relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication.
2. *Leadership Purpose*, which is grounded in participants' authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment from others.
3. *Feminist Ethic/Feminist Approach to Leadership* manifested in the three ethics of care, justice, and critique.

I have shared the voices of the women leaders who participated in this study as I have guided readers through the path on which participants' data led me in this chapter. The data analysis is organized by the first two themes, *Leadership Disposition* and *Leadership Purpose*. The third theme comprises the essence of the theory, which has emerged from the data analyzed and presented.

Data Analysis

Charmaz suggested that

Grounded theory coding consists of at least two main phases: 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by 2) a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data. (2011, p. 46)

Using Charmaz to guide this study, I used line-by-line coding for the initial phase of my data analysis, which utilized my interaction with each of the study participants through the interviews, writing samples, and journal entries I gathered from each. Continuing to utilize Charmaz's (2011) approach, for focused coding I compared the codes gleaned from the initial coding with each other among that group of data. I then determined which initial codes were "the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes" allowing me to consider the large amounts of data generated from initial coding and condensing the information (Charmaz, 2011, p. 57). The list of focused codes was then separated into categories under which the individual focused codes were placed for further analysis.

Once the movement from a list of focused codes to the categorization of the focused coding under broad themes was complete, the thematic coding began. I did this by comparing the actual focused codes across categories for individual participants in order to identify and assign relationships between the categories developed during the focused coding (Charmaz, 2011). According to Charmaz, "these codes not only conceptualize how . . . substantive codes are related, but also move your analytic story in a theoretical direction" that would have coherence (Charmaz, 2011, p. 63). The results of the theoretical coding were the themes that were generated for each individual participant (Appendix G).

The final step before developing theory was to compare these themes across participants' data once an individual's themes were determined. For example, when the initial, focused, and theoretical coding was complete for the two first participants the themes derived from their individual theoretical coding were compared. This process

continued with each consecutive participant's coding themes until saturation was reached. The common themes among all six participants became the building blocks for the resulting grounded theory, which answered the original research question.

Participants

For the purpose of introduction and in order to help readers understand the context in which each of the study participants led, I have included background information about each woman and the communities in which they served in this section. Participants for this study were chosen purposefully based upon their sex and their display of at least one component of the feminist ethic as defined as an ethic of care, justice, and critique. The participants are listed by pseudonym and are described below. Participants are also listed in Table 2. In order to further protect participants' privacy, their communities and school districts were also given pseudonyms.

Participants' district Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Report Card and School District Typology Report information (see Table 1) have also been described in each of the following individual participant's introduction. In Ohio, the ODE "oversees the state's public education system" which includes the task of issuing district and school report cards based upon the required state achievement tests (ODE, n.d.-b). I have used the 2013–2014 school year report card information in order to be consistent with the most current year available for the other school data point used in these introductions, the ODE School District Typology Report. See Tables 2 and 3 for a summary of the participants' information.

The three measures used from the ODE school district report card data in the following superintendent introductions were the *Performance Index*, *Percent of Indicators Met*, and *Progress/Value-Added Overall Score*. According to the *Ohio Guide to 2016 Ohio School Report Cards*, the Performance Index

Measures the achievement of every student, not just whether or not he or she reaches ‘proficient.’ Districts and schools receive points for every student’s level of achievement. The higher the student’s level, the more points the school earns toward its index . . . The Indicators Met measure represents whether student performance on state tests met established thresholds. (ODE, n.d.-c, p. 8)

The 2013–2014 ODE Report Card used 24 indicators in grades three through eight, 10th grade, and 11th grade for that year’s Indicators Met score. The final measure I used to describe participants’ school districts, the Progress/Value-Added grade, showed districts and parents “how much each student learns in a year” in grades four through eight in math and reading (ODC, n.d.-d).

I used Rubin and Rubin’s (2012) responsive interview model. “In this model both interviewer and interviewee are treated as people, with feelings, opinions, and experiences. Rather than emphasizing detachment, responsive interviewing encourages building a relationship between researchers and conversational partners” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 10). Further, Rubin and Rubin suggested that using this model, “interviewers do not need to claim they have found truth, only that they have learned to see the world from the perspective of the interviewees” (2012, p. 10). My goal with the interviews was to help individuals feel comfortable and relaxed as they shared their

stories so that I could better share their experiences through the work of this study (Appendix E).

Connie

After exchanging introductory emails, I met Connie at her superintendent's office in Molington in Northern Ohio (Appendix C). The Molington School District was identified by the 2013 Ohio Department of Education (ODE) School District Typology Report as typology 3—Small Town—Low Student Poverty and Small Student Population. The student enrollment reported was 907 students and of those students 27% lived in poverty with 2% of the students identifying as minority. We sat at her rectangular conference table as I began the interview process with reading and signing the informed consent previously approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (Appendix B). I also explained the process I would be using to collect data and participant requirements to which she readily agreed (Appendix D). Connie identified herself as a White, Christian woman who was 64 years of age at the time of the interview. Connie earned her Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree early in her career. Connie was Mollington's second female superintendent and at the time of our interview she had served six years as a superintendent there. The 2013–2014 ODE Report Card data showed a variety of grades including a Performance Index of 83% earning a B, 92% of Indicators Met earning an A, and a Progress/Value-Added score of F.

Cheryl

I offered to meet Cheryl, a recently retired superintendent at her office in central Ohio. She currently was employed in a position that provided support to school

administrators and school districts. When I arrived Cheryl made me feel welcome by introducing me to some of her colleagues before we settled into her office to begin the interview. We sat at a small table next to a bank of windows that overlooked a wooded area bright with the greens, oranges, yellows, and reds of a fall day in October. After the informed consent was signed and Cheryl had agreed to the requirements for participation in the study, we began the interview (Appendices B and D).

Cheryl served as a superintendent in the Bronan School District which was identified by the 2013 ODE School District Typology Report as typology 7—Urban—High Student Poverty and Average Student Population, for seven years. The student population of Bronan was 1,456 with a 49% poverty rate and a 27% minority population. At 57 years of age, she identified racially as White and is Christian. Cheryl has earned her Master's degree. Cheryl served as Bronan's first female superintendent. The 2013–2014 ODE Report Card for Bronan showed middle to low grades with a Performance Index of 79% earning a C, 58% of Indicators Met at a D, and earning an F in Progress/Value-Added scores for that year.

Mia

Mia and I met for her interview in early October at a breakfast restaurant close to her home. Mia had arrived earlier and was seated at a small table away from the main dining room. She drank coffee while we chatted. Mia eagerly shared her experiences as a superintendent with me once informed consent was signed and requirements of the study were shared (Appendices B and D). At 52 years of age, Mia identified herself as a Black, Christian woman. Mia had earned her Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) before she

took her position in the Waybridge School District where she served as their superintendent for three years. “Numerous” women had served Waybridge as superintendents before her. The Waybridge School District was classified with a 2013 ODE School District Typology Report of typology 7—Urban—High Student Poverty and Average Student Population. The enrollment of the Waybridge School District was 1,956 with a 60% poverty rate and a 99% minority population. The 2013–2014 ODE Report Card data listed the Performance Index as 60% earning a D, 8% of Indicators Met earning an F, and a Progress/Value-Added grade of D.

Mia had left her first superintendency at the end of the previous school year due to pressure from the board of education and mayor of that first ring suburb. Her difficult ending with the Waybridge School District did not dampen her enthusiasm for her work in public schools. In fact, when I emailed her early in 2016, Mia was employed in another leadership position within the education field.

Louise and Denise

I met both Louise and Denise when their consulting firm conducted an executive search for my home school district. When I learned about both of their backgrounds as superintendents, I asked them to participate in this study. Louise and Denise also took time before our individual interviews to meet with me together to develop a list of other female superintendents in Ohio who might be interested in and fit the criteria for being a participant in this study. I drove to central Ohio to interview both Louise and Denise each individually on the same day in late November 2015. We met in the conference room of their former employer.

Louise. I sat next to Louise, a White, 69-year-old woman who described her faith as Christian. We began the interview with my explanation of the informed consent form and participant responsibilities (Appendices B and D). Easy conversation about a project that she was working on at the time and further small talk about her family provided a jumping off point to begin our interview. Louise served the Greagrove School District in central Ohio for seven years. Greagrove School District is identified by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) in its 2013 School District Typology Report as a 6—Suburban—Very Low Student Poverty and Large Student Population. The student enrollment listed in the same report was 2,472 students with 3% of students living in poverty and the minority population also at 3%. Educationally, Louise had earned 90 credit-hours beyond her Master’s degree. When hired, Louise was the first woman to serve as superintendent of the Greagrove School District. The 2013–2014 ODE District Report Card data indicated high ratings for Performance Index, Indicators Met, and Progress/Value-Added with letter grades of A for each.

Denise. Immediately following my interview with Louise, I welcomed Denise into the conference room. The three of us exchanged pleasantries before Louise left and Denise and I began her interview as the others with the informed consent and participant requirements (Appendices B and D). Denise served as Southington School District’s first female superintendent working in that district for over nine years until her retirement. At 64 years of age at the time of the interview, Denise had earned her Master’s degree plus her superintendent license coursework. Denise identified herself as White and of the Christian faith. Southington School District was classified by the 2013 ODE School

District Typology Report as a typology 7—Urban—High Student Poverty and Average Student Population. The student population at the time of the report was 7,398 with a 76% poverty rate and minority population at 37%. The 2013–2014 ODE Report Card showed that the Southington School District Performance Index was 70% earning a D, with 0% of the Indicators Met earning an F, but a Progress/Value-Added grade of A.

Ellen

Ellen was the only study participant who had served two different school districts as a superintendent. The furthest away from my suburban Cleveland location, I drove to southern Ohio to conduct this interview in late November, which turned out to be my final interview. Through email, Ellen invited me to meet her for our interview in her office where she served as a curriculum director in a public school district at that time. Ellen earned her Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) early in her PK-12 educational career and worked as a professor in Educational Administration and Leadership for a state university before she moved into the superintendency. Ellen identified herself as a White woman with a Christian background.

Ellen served for five years in her first superintendent position in the Belport School District which was identified by the 2013 ODE School District Typology Report as typology 7—Urban—High Student Poverty and Average Student Population. Prior to Ellen's hiring, one female superintendent had previously been employed by the school board. The 2013 Typology Report population of the Belport School District was 3,676 students with 71% of those students living in poverty and a minority population of 17%. Belport's 2013–2014 ODE Report Card earned mixed grades with a 76% Performance

Index resulting in a C, 46% of the Indicators Met earning an F, and the district earning an A in their Progress/Value-Added score.

The Mason School District was the site of Ellen's second superintendent position where she served in that capacity for five years. The Mason Board of Education hired Ellen as the district's first female superintendent. Mason's 2013 ODE School District Typology Report was reported as 5—Suburban—Low Student Poverty and Average Student Population Size. The enrollment was 2,232 students for the 2013 report with 25% of the students living in poverty and an 11% minority population. The 2013–2014 ODE Report Card for Mason listed a Performance Index of 86% earning a B, 92% of Indicators Met earning an A, with an A for the district's Value-Added grade.

Focus Group

Once all participants' data had been coded and analyzed, I contacted each of them via email to gauge their interest in participating in a focus group for another level of data verification through member checking and data collection around the themes and emerging theory from this study. The focus group was held in the professional development room for a state-wide school administration support organization on July 15, 2016. I provided lunch for the participants who could make the meeting. Connie, Cheryl, Louise, and Denise were all able to attend the focus group. Mia and Ellen were not able to attend. We began with introductions where needed and conversations as the four women knew each other through professional connections. All participants were introduced to my assistant, Forrest, who video and audio recorded the group discussion while he also took notes. I had an agenda and topics for discussion determined before the

meeting, but used much flexibility during the discussion allowing each member time for sharing opinions and answers (Appendices H, I, and J).

Current Educational Climate

In order to help provide context for readers of this study, I asked study participants what they thought the challenges in the educational climate surrounding them were when they led their school districts. Five participants responded individually through email to me, the sixth participant answered my questions over the phone (Appendix F). Further discussion of these areas took place with the four participants who met for the focus group at the end of the data collection phase of this study. The top issue facing these leaders has been inadequate funding for education and the financial strain on local communities in the state of Ohio, given the state's reliance on local property taxes for school funding. This has been compounded by the sharp declines in state funding for the state share of educational expenses to most local school districts that have occurred in Ohio over the past decade. Related to the overall funding challenges for public schools are the aging and overcrowded or inefficient school buildings and educational facilities in the districts served by the superintendents interviewed.

Three areas of the current educational climate that focus-group participants agreed were related to each other that were also brought up individually by more than one participant were: the state accountability measures and standardized testing of students, the adoption and alignment of the common core standards throughout their districts, and the overall nationwide negative political climate around public education. Other issues faced by school district superintendents were navigating the local politics and tricky

Table 2

Participant and School District Demographics

Participant (Pseudonym)	Date Interviewed	District Pseudonym	Age at time of interview	Race	Highest Degree Earned	# Years Superintendent	# Prior Female Superintendents in District	ODE District Type	ODE Enrollment	ODE % Poverty	ODE % Minority
Connie	9/23/15	Molington	64	White	Ed.D.	6	1	3	907	27	2
Cheryl	10/2/15	Bronan	57	White	Masters	7	0	7	1456	49	27
Mia	10/8/15	Waybridge	52	Black	Ed.D.	3	N/A	7	1956	60	99
Louise	11/19/15	Greagrove	69	White	MA	7	0	6	2472	3	3
Denise	11/19/15	Southington	64	White	Masters	9.5	0	7	7398	76	37
Ellen	11/25/15	Belpport/Mason	59	White	Ph.D.	5/5	1/0	7/5	3676/2232	71/25	17/11

Table 3

Participant and School District Report Card Data

Participant (Pseudonym)	District Pseudonym	2013-14 ODE Performance Index	2013-14 ODE Indicators Met	2013-14 ODE Progress/Value- Added	2013-14 4-year Graduation Rate	2013-14 ODE Attendance
Connie	Molington	83% - B	92% - A	F	95% - A	96%
Cheryl	Bronan	79% - C	58% - D	F	87% - C	95%
Mia	Waybridge	60% - D	8% - F	D	61% - F	91%
Louise	Greagrove	91% - A	100% - A	A	97% - A	96%
Denise	Southington	70% - D	0% - F	A	73% - F	93%
Ellen	Belport/Mason	76% C /86% B	46% F /92% A	A / A	83% D /95% A	93% / 96%

board of education relations that constitute a large part of the superintendent job. Finally, superintendents acknowledged the human relations issues they faced from addressing unqualified or underperforming administrators, teachers, and staff members and the dysfunctional team environments in which they worked.

During the focus group discussion, participants cited three other general challenges they faced as leaders and they surmised that other superintendents in our state face: preparing students for a global marketplace, diversity issues, a decline in female superintendents in Ohio in the past year, and a shortage of qualified female superintendents in Ohio. One participant also expressed her experience with women educational leaders lacking confidence in their competency (Appendix J).

Journey to Grounded Theory

“Coding is that first part of the adventure that enables you to make the leap from concrete events and descriptions of them to theoretical insight and theoretical possibilities. Grounded theory coding is more than a way of sifting, sorting, and synthesizing data, as is the usual purpose of qualitative coding. Instead grounded theory coding begins to unify ideas analytically because you kept in mind what the possible theoretical meanings of your data and codes might be” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 71). This section provides the reconstruction of those codes, categories, and themes in order to take readers through the lived experiences of the six women leaders who participated in this study on the path to theory. The first two emergent themes of the grounded theory are presented in this data analysis:

- A. *Leadership Disposition*, which is characterized by the importance participants placed on relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication.
- B. *Leadership Purpose*, which is grounded in participants' authenticity, internal drive, and empowerment from others.

I have broken down the journey to theory under the two above main component themes in order to help readers understand the process from start to finish; from analysis of interviews and coding to synthesis of theory. I then discussed how these two main themes work with other identified themes to form the derived theory. Additionally, each category under the two main components of *Leadership Disposition* and *Leadership Purpose* are organized by participant. The third main theme comprises the essence of the theory, which has emerged from the data that has been analyzed and presented:

- C. *Feminist Ethic/Feminist Approach to Leadership* manifested in the three ethics of care, justice, and critique.

The *Feminist Ethic/Feminist Approach to Leadership* has been discussed in the section on the emerging grounded theory.

Leadership Disposition

The first main component that emerged from analysis of participant data was *Leadership Disposition*, which was characterized by the importance participants placed on their relationships, their empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication.

Relationships. Each study participant cited numerous examples of how the relationships they built served their greater leadership strategies whether it was sharing

how they worked to build positive relationships with their colleagues and staff members or the challenges they faced when relationships became strained or worse, people actively worked against them.

Connie. Connie discussed relationships as an important component of her leadership. Connie emphasized building a collaborative environment in order to reach school district goals. Relationships are key to that collaboration. Connie believed that her goals couldn't happen:

Unless you grow the people around you. And you can't grow the people around you unless you do everything as a team because they need the model, the behaviors, and the comments, and the articulation of other people, the knowledge of other people.

Connie also recognized that her community is shifting in demographics. She described her community as not having much racial or religious diversity, with a growing poverty rate. Connie said that she could relate to the parents and caregivers in her community and worked to build better relationships with them all through professional development to reach out to the community in different ways together as a staff. To illustrate, Connie shared that a couple who identified as lesbian with children in the school system attended a board of education meeting in order to alert the board and administration to the growing gay community in town. Through the relationships Connie has built with her board, staff, and families in her school district, Connie has reached out to different populations of students and their families making sure that the teachers and staff can meet their unique needs while in school in Molington.

Although Connie had built relationships in a way that was relaxed and professional, she did need to approach her early relationship with the board of education with caution. The board of education had hired her on a four to one vote—not the unanimous vote that would illustrate the desired support and unity on the board. However, with that knowledge Connie was able to work toward understanding the board member’s position with the “no” vote and reached out specifically to him in the early days of her tenure.

Cheryl. Relationships also drove Cheryl’s leadership as evidenced by the banner reading, “Does this discussion positively influence children?” which hung in each principal’s office, administrative office, and in the board of education room. Additionally, Cheryl instilled the value that “everybody counts” within the school district, with students, their families, and staff members as well. “I had a graduating class of about a 100 to a 125 each year, I started in the fall and I’d bring lunch, and I’d invite them to eat lunch with the superintendent each Friday until I got through” all of the students. Because Bronan is a small school district, administrators wore many hats as they worked together to reach their district goals. Her relationships with others focused on giving everyone a voice and showing care for all. “When you have that few people, we all had a voice because we all were learning together, but everybody knew when you left, one voice.” Cheryl believed that she stood for relationships and communication and that it was her work to ensure that her staff members showed caring for students in their actions. Cheryl also believed that her staff, students, and their families knew that she cared. One of the first issues Cheryl worked to correct was the relationship that the

community and many staff members had with each other that supported the “good enough” attitude that permeated the school district. For example, she asked the question to staff and parents, “why weren’t [our students] going to four-year colleges?” She continued “you have children that are getting perfect scores on their ACTs that think their only option is to go to [community college]. But if you could have everything paid for you [at a 4-year college], why were my children going [to community college]?”

Mia. Mia also worked at building relationships by breaking down walls for her students, staff, families, and the board of education. In order to build relationships with her leadership team and staff members in Waybridge, Mia evaluated their needs.

I felt they really needed to be supported to do some of the tough things that I was going to ask them to do. So I did more pampering of them, so to speak. But I was kind and tough as well . . . I needed to show them that I care and that you are my arms and my feet on the ground, but I really pushed them because the district had been in academic watch and emergency for like a decade.

Mia felt very strongly about being called to Waybridge and that she “was selected to be—from the Lord above.” Mia learned about her new school district by immersing herself in the fabric of the community, reading past news articles and driving around town and the neighborhoods. She ate meals in the local restaurants and had her hair done in Waybridge, even though Mia didn’t move there when she became superintendent.

Mia wanted her relationships to be based on trust and commitment. “Everybody had left Waybridge. Everybody left. I mean good superintendents and not so good . . . And I said, I’m not doing that. I’m not going to leave Waybridge.” The only

African-American participant, Mia also spoke about the intersection of race and her efforts to build a strong leadership team when she became superintendent. In her previous school districts Mia did not notice color and race. Mia relayed the experience she had when she was hired in Waybridge. The board told her, “You’ve got two high profile positions—HR and business manager—we want them to be Black . . . and it didn’t work out that way . . . There was a mini backlash” but after time Mia’s board supported her hires because they were the strongest candidates and did a good job. In fact, in Mia’s third year as superintendent of Waybridge, a board member told her that he was wrong and that he was pleased that she hired the people she had, the best people for the jobs.

Louise. Louise believed that her “leadership style is very inclusive, very people oriented,” also commenting that, “I love people, and I really build relationships, and I build leaders. I think one of my strengths is, really encouraging people to be the best that they can.” Louise spoke of “getting a rush out of helping people improve and helping people get further in their careers.” However, when Louise did have to share negative performance reviews with staff members and even non-renew or fire her employees, she felt that people did not “go away totally devastated.” Louise shared the experience she had with a long-time friend who had been hired as a teacher late in her career but was not performing well in the classroom. The way Louise handled that and similar situations was to present the evidence showing that the employee was not a good fit for that job but also showed the compassion to be open to offering suggestions regarding what would be a better fit for the individual.

A self-described “people person,” Louise believed that her openness with her board members, staff members, and community members allowed her to better connect with them which resulted in stronger relationships than superintendents who remain guarded. For example, when a group of community members came out strongly against plans for building a new school and vocalized incorrect information about the district and Louise, she reached out to them and invited them to be on the committees that she ran presenting them with a way to work together to find common goals. Louise’s message to them was,

If you are going to criticize the schools, I need you to be a part of these committees. You can offer anything you want, say whatever you want, but you need to hear and understand what’s going on. And you need to understand the finances because I don’t think that you really do.

Those folks did “come into the fold.” Through her work building relationships, Louise showed her school community that these interactions would be based on trust.

Denise. People “made” Denise’s career as a superintendent. Denise focused on developing leadership in people in all of the roles represented throughout her school district while building relationships in a variety of ways. Visible in all of the district schools each week, Denise worked to ensure that her students knew who she was. Her high school students found ways to include her in their spirit challenges before football and basketball games.

They would always come over to tell me, because they wanted me to do the same. So when everyone dressed in Halloween costumes, I dressed in a Halloween costume. So I tried to keep a really close relationship with them.

Denise also created a practice of exit interviews for her graduating high school seniors that she conducted in groups of 10 to 12 students making sure that staff members saw the interview questions first. “It became a ritual that they really appreciated. It was kind of like their ‘right of passage.’ I really tried hard to make them know they were important and we were there for them.” That practice influenced her middle school principals who carried on the exit interviews with their eighth graders as they moved up to the high school.

Denise also hosted community dinners and community luncheons each month in order to build relationships with parents, caregivers, and senior citizens. “I first personally invited people to come. But then, after that, once it caught on, it was—you didn’t have to invite people.” With staff members Denise worked on relationships through providing great professional development opportunities and being present during those meetings. Denise began the Teacher Leadership Academy, which was a two-year commitment from the teachers. Teachers had to apply.

The first year, the first 25 that applied were all your most excellent teachers in the district, as you can imagine. But before I left, out of the 145 teachers [in the district] 125 had been through the Teacher Leadership Academy.

Ellen. Like the other study participants, Ellen cared very deeply about her students and became emotional when she talked about leaving them to move on to new

school districts. Ellen spoke about being student-centered in her work in each of the districts she served as a superintendent. This belief that “it’s not about all these adults and all the games that adults play” influenced Ellen’s work at building relationships with her students, staff, families, board members, and community as a superintendent.

Ellen’s relationship with her students was direct and caring. One year, after a state contest in which her show choir students performed, the students were disappointed. They said, “we didn’t do very well, did we?” Ellen gave a straightforward response, acknowledging the students and their expressed need for choir robes. Ellen promised them robes, engaging in fundraisers in order to buy robes for the choir. “That’s the kind of relationship that I have with my kids.” When talking about her students, Ellen had numerous stories about interactions with and her work to connect through relationships with her students: from the boys in the football stands who always reached out to her with a “high five” to the senior class officers who always cleared any “senior prank” with her before engaging in the sneaky business at the high school. Her strong connections to students showed.

Ellen described herself as not being popular but being respected and not shying away from conflict but instead addressing it head on. Ellen also admitted that her leadership has been becoming more about relationships as she gets older.

The older I’ve gotten, the more I’ve tried to have people think that their participation is as important as the decision is going to be, even if the decision is not the one that they would choose. But their participation is important because we learn and grow from that, and that’s that relationship building.

That participation was built over many years in her leadership role as a superintendent and as an accumulation of the “little things” that built momentum over time. For example, Ellen spoke of a 15-year teacher who brought her own deep negativity to the committee work in which she was involved. Ellen took this teacher aside after one meeting to ask about this negativity.

I don't understand your negativity. You've got really good kids; you've got really good classes; you work in a good place . . . you can't spend 15 more years like this. You cannot be so angry for 15 more years and make it.

This frank conversation flipped a switch and that teacher became a changed teacher, reaching out to lead the technology efforts that had originally spurred her negativity. Helping this one teacher find the positive in her work changed the entire dynamic, not only for her, but also for her students and the other staff members who didn't know how to speak up to their colleague's negativity.

Ellen also reached for ways to connect with and stay accessible to all parents and families regardless of income or comfort level with the schools. Ellen worked diligently with the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) office to be able to provide vouchers for her students' families so that they could remain together and be close to the new middle school. School personnel also provided parents with instruction and help in supporting their children through the academic programs.

Empowerment of others. An important component of study participants' relationships concerned their abilities to grow the individuals in which they interacted. According to Bass and Riggio,

Empowering leadership means providing autonomy to one's followers. As much as possible, followers are allowed and encouraged to enable, direct, and control themselves in carrying out their responsibilities in aligning their goals with the goals of their leader and of the larger organization. (2006, p. 193)

In the head leadership role for the school district, superintendents are expected to offer opportunities for staff members to grow. These superintendents also put great efforts into providing avenues for students, their families, and the community to be empowered through their interactions as well.

Connie. Describing the people that she led as “potentials,” Connie empowered her staff members through the many opportunities she created for them to work in team settings and through professional development. For example, in collaboration with her teachers' union, Connie created a labor relations team within her school district to encourage problem-solving at a higher level. In between the contract negotiations cycle, Connie contracted with the Office of Federal Mediation to have a trained mediator lead professional development sessions with the team focused on better ways for management and the union to work together in solving labor disputes. They also worked together to create a productive atmosphere around negotiating contracts. According to Connie, “I'd just like to increase their problem-solving skills a little more before we get [to contract negotiations].”

Connie also told me about one of the first waves of change she brought to her district. When Connie learned that 22 of her students with special needs were “outplaced” into other facilities for their learning, she said it broke her heart. “It bothers

me, pushing kids out because who are we—as educators—to say we can't serve this kid.” Connie did not feel that her students' needs were being met by having them spend so much time on a bus when her district had the resources to meet their educational needs. Empowering the staff, students, and their families, Connie bought them back to Molington. “That was my first year here and five years later I haven't sent a kid out anywhere.” As Connie puts it, “beginning with the end in mind—where do I want Joseph to be when he's 30 years old?” Placing this student with the right teacher back in his home school district gave him the opportunity to be part of a typical high school experience as a student with Down syndrome. “Two years later in tuxedo dancing at the prom and on his own. He lives at home but on his own and [with] an occupation.”

Connie also spoke about using the collective frustration that often arises with district and personal challenges and change to drive the processes of moving forward in her district. By providing professional development to individuals and groups within the district, Connie enabled her staff members the opportunity to grow alone and together resulting in a stronger organization. Connie talked about an interaction that took place at one of her board meetings.

One of the school board members . . . leaned down the table to the guys, and she said, “you ever notice how she pushes us?”—not in a critical way—“You really push us.” I said, “Hey, you hired me. It's my job to push you. It's my job to push you. If you want a status quo, you would have hired it.”

Cheryl. To Cheryl the superintendent position proved to be “a dream come true from the way that I could positively influence and mentor students and adults.” Leading

is about the others in an organization, not her own role as a leader according to Cheryl. She believed that it is better to “let people in” as a superintendent than to keep up her guard, something she has observed other superintendents do. In order to model this leadership behavior for leaders in the Bronan School District, Cheryl worked to eliminate the division between the varying levels of administrators, letting all administrators—assistant principals through central office administrators—have an equal voice in their regular meetings. Cheryl found that by giving up some of her authority her staff members were able to respond professionally and with ownership. Including staff in her ultimate decisions also positively impacted her administrator, teacher, and support staff treatment of students. Pushing herself as a leader while enabling those with whom she works, Cheryl has had two “three-hundred sixty” evaluations.

You have board members that evaluated you, peers—when you’re a superintendent, you don’t have a peer—but co-workers, subordinates, classified subordinates. So you had to get at least 10 people to go on and fill out a profile. And a profile comes out about you and I found that extremely helpful. Extremely helpful.

Cheryl also spoke out about ensuring that her students had better college opportunities than were encouraged in the district before she arrived, empowering students, their families, and staff members.

My perception was that the standards weren’t high enough, that the community as a whole did not have high standards. Therefore, we started programs such as

AVID which is Achievement Via Individual Determination . . . [for] school districts with a lot of first time college goers.

AVID was a framework that helped their teachers and staff members start students at a young age exploring topics such as: how note-taking is done, what are your expectations of growth, and what do you want to study in life? Further leading others to stay professional, Cheryl required that teachers “keep the child first” following through on expectations of administrator, teacher, and support staff positive treatment of district students and their staff colleagues. For example, Cheryl spoke of student discipline saying,

Zero tolerance is zero tolerance. I don't tolerate certain things. It doesn't mean everybody gets the death penalty . . . Say there was a drug offense, depending on what time of the year it was, was it early on in the school year and did it really have to devastate the entire year?

To make these tough decisions about discipline, Cheryl asked questions: were there other options that could be woven in to the student's consequences like drug testing, therapeutic care, or days in abeyance provided the student showed the intention to utilize these options to change behavior?

Additionally, looking beyond her school district to the state as a whole, Cheryl talked about her understanding and disappointment that women were still very underrepresented in the superintendency and that some women leaders were not taken seriously by others in the educational realm. This topic also was discussed during the

focus group with the participants agreeing that they need to mentor other women in leadership roles.

Mia. Wanting others' success and empathizing with challenges parents and caregivers in the school district faced, Mia believed that she empowered others through her actions as a leader and, thus, set high standards of behavior for her staff and students alike. Mia prepared her staff with support, mentoring, communication, and networking opportunities, while supporting relationships and using her high standards to create strong partnerships with them.

Although early on in her three years with the district, Mia had felt pressured by the board to hire according to race alone; by helping her board members grow as leaders in their own right, they were able to understand together that looking at credentials was as important to the instructional program and students as race when hiring leaders and that these hiring practices would lead to a stronger educational program for her students.

Empowering others to Mia meant tutoring and pushing them.

I did a lot of pushing and never asked them to do more than I was doing. If I'm everywhere for your school, you need to be at all of those functions. If it's after school, nights, weekends, holidays, you need to be there but still take care of yourself.

Additionally, Mia illustrated how empowering staff members in her district was sometimes precipitated by the negative consequences also used to push employees. Mia talked about holding principals accountable for not completing their evaluations. When she began in Waybridge, Mia asked her new Human Resources director to report on

teacher evaluations. Were they up to date? They were not, with the worst case being a teacher who hadn't been evaluated by her principal in 13 years. Mia worked with her principals by telling them that “the only way you can know how you're doing, and how to help” is through their knowledge of how their teachers were performing in the classroom—“mind you, this was pre-OTES.” Mia set a timeline for evaluations to be completed by principals and held them to that deadline. After the first year with a focus on teacher evaluation, two principals had not completed them. These principals received a letter of reprimand in their personnel files. The second year when the same principals had not completed their evaluations, they received a day off without pay because Mia felt that she needed “to go to another level. It was horribly hard to have stronger consequences that hurt their pocket.”

Through employment and human resources, Mia also cleared the way for those who did their work well by removing from the district's employment rolls those who put self-interest before the organization.

I had to get rid of a lot of support staff that were doing the wrong thing in the district. That's nothing you can put in a resume—“over the course of four years I had to let go of about 35 support staff members.” I'm talking bus drivers, cashiers, teachers' aides, assistants—all policy breakers [who were] stealing money, stealing food—cafeteria workers. They'd just been doing it for years. As Mia was aware, her employees who consistently worked hard and put the school district first needed to see that employees who were stealing at worst or underperforming at best all were held accountable to the same high standards.

Louise. By building leadership in others, Louise also worked to empower her students, their families, and staff members. Louise offered her support through her people-oriented leadership and by mentoring others.

I think that women . . . spend a lot more time with individuals. So if you have a problem with a teacher, or a principal, or a parent comes in, I think we're better listeners. I think we care and we really follow up with a solution.

This listening precedes empowerment. Because Louise likes to learn herself, she loves “to see other people learn and grow.” As she put it, “I’ve always been a huge professional development advocate and I have fought every district I’ve been—when they want to cut—because every district has done this—not to cut professional development entirely because people can’t grow and learn” without it. Louise wanted her staff and students to “love what they’re doing and have passion for what they’re doing as well.”

Louise specifically spoke about how she changed teacher practices around Advanced Placement (AP) classes so that more students were able to partake in this accelerated instruction.

When I came to the district, it was kind of like they thought they were a private school, instead of a public school, so we had a lot of doors that shut in kids’ faces. So for example, at the high school, if you want to get into an AP class, there were five or six things, hoops you have to jump through or else you couldn’t be in an AP class, and that’s not kind of how my ideals or thoughts go. I’m like we need to open doors for kids not close doors.

Louise also shared an experience she had with teachers who had come to see her about their concerns about a principal. According to Louise, she was thinking, “boy, they should not be here,” but she listened to them to provide them with an alternative to going to the board of education with the problems. “They substantiated what I knew and I never, ever broke that confidence.” The principal never knew that the teachers had reached out to Louise, but she was able to confront him soon after and put him on an intervention plan with which he did not comply with so she had to let him go. Interestingly they are still friends today. “That’s how I want to be treated and that’s how I treat other people,” illustrating how empowerment is tied closely to the relationships that Louise has built.

Denise. Setting up leaders in every role, but especially in high student impact positions, Denise established the Teacher Leadership and Principal Leadership Academies respectively during her first year in Southington as a superintendent. Louise believed that especially because her district was in continuous improvement status with the state of Ohio at the time, to become excellent she needed to put systems in place that would allow them to do that. The academies were a beginning and led to the district moving up to an excellent rating in only four years.

I was trying to . . . help each of them understand that no matter what their role was, they had to be a leader. If they were in the classroom, they had to be a leader. If they were the principal in the building, they had to be a leader. I also started a support staff team of people in each group.

Louise's goal that first year was to establish and build leadership throughout the whole system and to establish systems that would empower staff members in all roles "even after I was gone." Establishing a paid, teacher-leader position also provided opportunities for non-administrators to gain leadership experience.

Denise believed that being female has allowed students, especially girls, to be comfortable approaching her directly with serious issues. A decidedly emotional experience for Denise took place when she had a high school guidance counselor bring a female student who was a senior over to see her one afternoon. The nervous, distraught student proceeded to tell her about a male teacher at the high school who had been inappropriate with her. While he had not done anything physical, he was texting her at night and was embarrassing her in front of her peers in class. During the course of the two-year investigation, eight young women came forward saying that he had been inappropriate with them. In the end, the school district was able to terminate him and the state department of education took away his license for a short time. Denise felt a very strong sense of duty to these eight women "who had the courage to come and talk to me." Believing in them and bringing justice to their plight may have empowered the young women affected by the inappropriate teacher and provided them with the strength to continue to stand up for themselves in a substantive manner going forward.

Denise also told of the experience she had helping a female assistant principal and male principal work better together after the assistant principal approached her to file a complaint of bullying against the principal. The previous superintendent and board attorney had warned the principal, however, the bullying behavior had continued.

Through her interaction Denise empowered both the principal and assistant principal to work better together through improved communication. Denise's work centered on building a strategy for both. The principal learned that often when he responded to the assistant principal in an impulsive manner, she interpreted his words and actions as very critical of her and bullying. The principal used a strategy of counting to 20 before he made a comment to his assistant principal. Empowering the assistant principal, Denise worked with the assistant principal on her ability to speak up for herself to the principal if she felt his bullying behavior in the future. Denise followed up with both employees after two months and they had made improvements in their interactions and were able to continue to work together.

Ellen. Ellen learned early in her career that she could affect more lives positively in a superintendent position than in other educational roles. Ellen accomplished this by empowering others in both districts she served as a superintendent. Involving people in school district decisions, creating an inclusive school community, and connecting with others, Ellen built a district culture on allowing her colleagues to have the freedom and voice to make changes in their own right.

Teacher empowerment allowed Ellen's districts to move forward in academic achievement. One of the ways this happened was through the curriculum teams she developed.

We develop the curriculum as teams, teacher teams, not Ellen doing it . . . I guide it, but I don't do it . . . Then I step back and I allow the teachers to do that. And the teachers that have had that experience and that are doing it are wonderful.

Ellen also gave her teachers the resources to grow her students, many of whom come into her school district two years behind their peers from other districts. With the new phonics program instituted in her current district and the teachers were trained and enthusiastic about pushing the program with students. Ellen's kindergarten students grew a full year in reading scores in only four months. However, sometimes empowerment is not enough. For example, some of the teachers whose students were the lowest in reading did not keep up the momentum with their students once teachers received their value-added scores from the ODE in December. For those teachers who weren't doing their jobs, Ellen wished out loud that Senate Bill Five which limited bargaining rights for public employees and was passed by the Ohio Legislature in 2011 and later repealed by referendum vote in November 2011 had not been repealed.

Ellen worked to understand the plight of the families in her school districts. Homeless students are on the rise as well as students living in poverty. Often, connecting families who are struggling financially or emotionally with school district resources gave them the hand they need to pull out of a rough patch in their lives. Ellen treated all of her students and their families with respect ending many conversations with the question, "is there anything else that the school system can help you with?" Ellen also tried to make sure that her families understood that everybody was part of the school community and they all were valued.

Sometimes, as Ellen experienced, empowering her community resulted in the need for her to leave. After the Mason School District treasurer left the district for a treasurer position in another school district, Ellen faced an enormous discrepancy in the

previous treasurer's reporting of the finances for the district. Her board was informed and once an independent audit was completed, the district was placed in fiscal emergency which required Ellen, the new treasurer, and board of education to place a levy on the ballot and make deep cuts to replace funds from the general fund which were being used to make payments to the state for the \$2.5 million discrepancy. After the first levy failed, Ellen felt that, "if I left, maybe the levy would pass in November, and it did. It passed. They were able to pull out of fiscal emergency . . . in the fall of 2014" because of the cuts she made and the strategy she left the district with.

Collaboration. Empowerment of individuals within an organization allows those individuals to better work together collaboratively for the greater good of the school community. Collaboration showed up in participants' stories as a staple for building a stronger culture in educational settings whether the group interactions were within groups: staff, students, their families, and the greater community or among groups.

Connie. While she believed that leading is sometimes collaborative and sometimes bureaucratic depending on situation, collaboration was a topic to which Connie returned throughout the course of her interview. As Connie put it, "I'm collaborative because I don't want arguments. I don't want renters, I want buyers. I want ownership internally. I want the capacity of the organization to grow." Connie explained that there was far more to collaboration than just putting a team of people together.

I think the leadership I have is synergistic. I think I have a knack for putting individuals together in groups . . . that kind of rise to the occasion together. And

before you know it, they've created something new and [we] didn't even know that about ourselves.

Connie believed that “anyone can collaborate if the spirit and willingness are there.” However, the quality of the dialogue is very important and without that “you have a bunch of people.” Connie used a “begin with the end in mind” mindset as a foundation for all collaboration.

Connie set the stage for that high quality dialogue in her teams by giving them two main parameters for working together. First, using a Rubik's Cube for an analogy, Connie encouraged her teams to understand that they were together to solve a problem while they were also anticipating what the next problem might be.

We all have a Rubik's Cube in our hands. Let's spend our coming hours and days and meetings turning the cube, and let's see if we can get the cube to line up in our mind . . . can your cube and my cube line up, or do we even want them to?

The second condition Connie's teams worked under was deep thinking. “I'd like to land in a higher place than where we start, conceptually . . . Let's be the critical thinkers. The deeper thinking, the Webb's deeper thinking.” Connie then used the collective frustration with the inevitable challenges and change to drive the processes further much like an artist or musician needs to push through to the

Tipping point that they have to break through to get to the baritone, the compass and the brilliance of the composition. Our thinking is the same way. We just don't have a canvas when we're done. But we really do, we have a symphony when we're done.

As I discussed in the previous section, Connie created and trained labor relations teams for both the teachers' bargaining unit and the classified staff members' unit to encourage problem-solving at a higher level. While the negotiations were due to begin nine months after the interview was conducted, Connie illustrated what it took to "practice what she preaches" ensuring that this third round of negotiations that she conducted with both bargaining units resulted in a productive process and reasonable contract for both sides.

Cheryl. Cheryl's retirement festivities from the Bronan School District demonstrated the feeling of family that she had worked hard to achieve in the district. Her close-knit leadership team worked with Cheryl's husband to plan a surprise retirement party two weeks before her final day in the district with gifts from the heart that were still displayed in Cheryl's office when I interviewed her. This family feel created a culture in the school district that supported Cheryl's efforts to build collaboration among the Bronan staff.

One of the most important opportunities for collaboration within a school district can be bringing bargaining units together with administration to create a culture that allows true problem-solving. Cheryl believed that by relating to union leadership in her casual way she was able to work with the unions in Bronan creating solutions to issues that ultimately benefitted students first. Cheryl had a trusting relationship with union leadership in her first years leading the district. However, while Cheryl wanted to be collaborative, like most leaders, she was not always able to achieve that goal. In Cheryl's own words, "I don't want to be top-down, but there are some times where all the chatters

around the table and everybody's putting their two cents in and you have to say, 'Time out. We're going forward this way.'" In fact, Cheryl did speak about having a negative experience with negotiations before the end of her tenure in the district, digging her heels in, and standing her ground in the final cycle of negotiations for the best interest of district students when the union was asking for more than the district could afford. Regardless, Cheryl's strong relationship with the union president served to be a benefit when staff discipline situations arose.

In her own words, Cheryl's brand of collaborative leadership was "probably pretty demanding." Cheryl worked at steering conversations away from complaints to action and looking for ways that staff members could be included in decisions that were being made. This inclusion in the decision-making positively impacted the treatment of their students. Reflecting and debriefing became an important part of the collaborative process and helped staff through the change process and with moving forward.

The standards of behavior that Cheryl implemented in Bronan ensured that the teams collaborating remained functional. "We were part of a team . . . it was important that everybody behaved." Of course, with the nature of board of education elections, keeping that governmental body functional was "up and down." Cheryl worked with her board members to "enculturate them with professionalism, that they weren't there for their individual agendas, that they needed to be there for the school district and that they never could take off their [board member] hat." Cheryl also developed an interview protocol that included administrators and staff members in the district so that without a

human resources director, she was not making hiring decisions in a silo without staff member input.

Mia. Although collaborative in her leadership disposition, Mia believed that she needed to go into the district as a superintendent with a strong, research-based plan, issuing directives focused on taking the students and district out of their ten-year Ohio Department of Education (ODE) “academic watch” rating early on in her superintendency. Leading was, according to Mia, a balance of directives and collaboration, especially in an urban school district with a history of poor academic performance. Collaborating as a leader, Mia created the district mantra: “partners in education” with her staff, students, school board, and community in Waybridge.

Forming this partnership with parents and caregivers did prove difficult. Initially parents were afraid to go into the schools to volunteer so Mia built systems that would encourage that interaction. Mia believed that parents and caregivers were important partners in students’ school successes; yet, some of the district parents’ own school experiences, dating back to when they were students, were extremely negative. The reality was that the vast majority of parents and caregivers were not involving themselves in the schools. Mia used discretionary funds to hire a volunteer coordinator. This coordinator recruited, trained, and placed volunteers into the schools. The district also thanked them with a ceremony attended by the mayor and school board. Free admission to school events was given to all volunteers. Mia also worked through the principals to make sure that volunteers were welcomed into the fold of the school.

Mia believed that partnerships could be and needed to be grown for future generations of our students. However, Mia often had to fight against the culture of division that permeated her district and so many other urban school districts. The division created when school personnel put up unreasonable barriers to parents and caregivers being welcomed into the schools. Even more difficult, too often Mia found that prior to her leadership, parents had been banned from their children's schools. This made no sense to Mia, who eliminated that practice. Mia described her concern about teachers and administrators pushing parents away: "You're banning the partner to the child's education because they raised their voice? How is this working for us?" Mia worked with her administrators and staff members offering safe venues for meeting volatile parents, but kept the focus on keeping a partnership with parents and caregivers regardless of situation.

Another aspect of collaboration in her leadership was the work that Mia did with her board of education, self-described "micro-managers," who, she felt, were too involved in the day-to-day operations of the administrative work in the district. When Mia was first hired she realized that her board members needed training to be able to work collaboratively and more effectively with the superintendent and treasurer of the school district. Mia provided a series of Saturday meetings where the board, superintendent, and treasurer learned about each other's jobs in a facilitated setting and became a much more cohesive group because of these meetings. The board and the administration worked well together until some internal board of education and city politics resulted in two new board of education members battling with Mia about large

and small issues at each board of education meeting toward the end of her time in the school district. “Everything I brought to the board was a battle, was a 15 to 20-minute discussion, and I had 20 items on the agenda!”

Although Mia’s leadership resulted in successes, when a new mayor and the two new board members’ terms began one and a half years into her employment in the district, Mia began to sense, as she put it, her “demise” as the Waybridge district leader. Mia voiced concern and was troubled by the new mayor’s lack of collaboration with the school district and how that influenced the two new board members and other district staff members. Mia resigned after three years with the district.

Louise. Louise described herself as a collaborative, inclusive leader with a democratic leadership style. Believing that collaboration results in better outcomes, Louise worked on her connections with teachers, staff members, administrators, board members, parents, and community members, attending school and community events every night of the week. Louise believed that regardless of their interest in the school system, people want to be encouraged. They want to help, so listening to staff, parents, and students enabled her to build an inclusive school community. In Louise’s words, “I don’t care what your role is, you are important to [the] organization and somebody needs to know who you are and what you’re doing and recognize you for doing that.”

Louise worked in a “very contentious district, because it’s very liberal in the middle of a very large...Republican county in Ohio.” This made bringing folks together on common goals challenging but even more important. Louise kept an open door policy and believed that she was less guarded than other superintendents. One such issue that

caused discord within the community was the school district's effort to secure land to build a new school. Land was purchased outside of town for the school but when the school district asked for water and sewer, they were denied. Thus began a year and a half long conflict between the school district, village township trustees, city council, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which resulted in community members at odds with one another and the school district. Through it all, Louise kept the school message about the need for the new school clear and concise. Louise worked with all involved, from the pro-school folks working to unseat the city council members who had voted no on allowing city water and sewer services to the schools, to the EPA, to folks on both city council and the village township board to eventually reach an agreement that allowed the schools access to water and sewer services from the city. Louise found that even when conflict broiled between the factions, her persistence and collaboration were the only things that would bring a resolution. Louise also spoke about how that experience helped her to include and collaborate with the previously mentioned "subversive" group of non-school people. Louise wouldn't give them a free ride, continuing to invite them to participate in decision-making committees in true collaborative form until they did. True collaboration required input from all parties.

Denise. Collaboration was not always easy, but collaborative leadership was worthwhile according to Denise. Denise believed that building relationships and gathering input from district teachers, staff members and community members before making her decisions led to the district's success and academic improvement. The

climate set during Denise's tenure in Southington was that, "We all must be collaborative. We all must be leaders."

Denise described herself as a servant leader and she developed leaders in each district role through her Teacher Leadership and Principal Leadership academies as well as through her one-on-one interactions with staff members. During her first year in the school district, Denise worked through her principals to make sure that each school had an updated Continuous Improvement Plan that staff, students, parents, and caregivers developed together and that tied into the full district's goals for the year.

Collaboration outside of the school district also was important to Southington's success. Denise worked with other superintendents to build camaraderie, collaboration, and networking opportunities in her county outside of the golf course interactions that were among the traditional ways that her male colleagues met to network. The only female superintendent in her county at the time, Denise set up a regular breakfast meeting with county superintendents. Denise also was elected by the superintendents throughout the state to represent them as the president of the state administrator association.

Sometimes, however, Denise did find that working collaboratively meant that others would not be willing participants in the process. A Southington family requested that Denise consider changing girls' basketball games from the "non-prime time" game time they had always been assigned to the same "prime time" slots which included games on Friday or Saturday evenings as was afforded to the boys' basketball teams. Denise discussed this request with the members of the conference in which they played and was told by the conference representatives that the time would not change for the girls'

games. The family filed a formal complaint with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission (OCRC) in which Southington and the conference were both named. Denise called together a meeting of the conference athletic directors and superintendents so that the OCRC representative could present the ramifications of the conference not complying with the request. Although the outcome was a new schedule that put girls' games in the prime time slots and the complaint was dropped, Denise found herself having to answer to some conference members who "verbally assaulted" her because they falsely claimed that she was behind the family's complaint with the OCRC because Denise was a woman.

Ellen. Ellen described her leadership as situational: democratic, autocratic, and participatory depending on the circumstances, however, she found that collaboration and involving others in decisions could and did lead to better outcomes. Collaboration for Ellen meant building connections to others: parents, students, social service agencies, administrators, and staff members.

Working closely with the local housing authority, Ellen built relationships with families in order to help place them in housing that was closer to the Belpport Schools they were attending using housing vouchers. Ellen met with parents, caregivers, and students over meals in the subsidized housing development close to her district to provide reading support for primary school students and instructional support tips for parents. Ellen and her staff also began the Destination College foundation for first generation college students.

The connections Ellen made with her families were genuine because of her background, which she shared openly. Ellen's father did not graduate from high school and her mother did not attend college. As Ellen put it to the Destination College groups she spoke with,

My sister and I went to college on grants and loans, and we lived paycheck to paycheck. That's how I was raised. I'm not from a family of wealth. I'm just normal, and I got an education . . . and now I can stand here in front of you as your superintendent and talk to you. Was it easy? No it was not.

Ellen believed that these down to earth connections she made as a leader opened the door and created opportunities for teachers, administrators, students, families, and community members to collaborate more productively with each other to help students.

Communication. The theme of communication connected closely to and was woven into the interaction among the previous themes discussed under the heading of Leadership Disposition: relationships, empowerment of others, and collaboration. Communication as a theme included how communication took place, what was communicated, along with who was communicating and to whom communication was intended. All participants used traditional forms of communication to put their information in front of the correct people: emails, newsletters, personal communications, face-to-face meetings, large group presentations, recorded audio and video messages, and board of education meetings. Study participants all also talked about networking and being recruited to further leadership jobs throughout their careers.

Connie. As I waited to begin my interview with Connie, I had the opportunity to read the Molington School District newsletter that went out to residents of the community that month. Front and center on this publication was the “thank you” from Connie and the district for the community’s support and passage of the spring operating levy which allowed the district to keep services to their students, including busing. Promises kept to the community, like returning busing to families, were among the most important physical indicators that the school district was listening to all of their stakeholders—parents and non-parents alike. It communicated trust and it was an important way to communicate with parents, staff members, and the community.

During our interview, Connie also spoke about a communication issue that occurred the evening she was offered her current superintendent position by the board of education. Approximately three months after being hired in Molington, Connie met the search consultant who had facilitated the process for lunch and a follow-up conversation. Regarding the board’s decision to hire her, the consultant told Connie, “You know, it was a four-one vote.” That information caught her off guard, “then it stung.” As unusual as the conversation was in that it took place *after* Connie had worked in the district for three months and had even passed a levy for them, it did deepen her understanding of the board of education members and the community. Connie wondered if having the knowledge about the vote earlier would have influenced her or not in accepting the position. Connie thought not because she felt the strong support from people in the district and the community as evidenced by the win at the ballot box. However, Connie did learn that the vote technically was four to zero with one abstention. Technically the abstaining vote

had been used incorrectly according to district policy, but the information gave her a better understanding of the relationship she had with that board member and the knowledge has helped her form a stronger bond with him.

Communicating with actions and words, Connie could be spotted on the corner in front of the board of education office handing out hats and mittens weekly in the winter to students who were cold. Connie also spoke about recently attending the prayer around the flagpole circle before school in the morning. Connie spent a great deal of time in the schools and in the community, communicating the school district's good news as well as the challenges and opportunities for community support.

Cheryl. Believing that she stood for relationships and communication, Cheryl used her leadership to keep the communication channels clear throughout the school district and to share her high expectations for the treatment of all district students. Cheryl had the ability to be in the buildings often because of the small size of the school district. Cheryl's presence communicated the importance she placed on quality instruction and respectful treatment of all students. Through banners as visual reminders of Cheryl's message, "Does this discussion positively influence children?" which hung in every administrator's office, she communicated that when the conversation moved away from a student focus, individuals could hold themselves and their colleagues accountable.

Improving communication between the schools and the city, Cheryl began to attend city council meetings on a regular basis, "so that if somebody wanted to ask a question instead of making up their own story, they could ask me." Cheryl also took care to communicate her vision of consolidation and improved facilities for students to her

leadership team, staff, and community members. Cheryl described the schools in her district before the bond issue passed.

We had a middle school that was built in the early '20s, that was still being used. So, you couldn't plug in another computer without losing a lightbulb, or you couldn't plug—we want to have projectors in every classroom—well, you can't do this.

Like all of the study participants, Cheryl talked about networking and being recruited to future leadership jobs. Cheryl also felt compelled by the family feel she created in her district to let the board and administration know of her retirement early on allowing them plenty of time to plan.

Mia. While learning the idiosyncrasies of her new school district, a district that was very different from her previous districts, Mia balanced listening and hearing people's perspectives with giving supportive, but direct feedback. Mia did not live in Waybridge, but as she told the board when they hired her, "you will think I live in Waybridge because I will be everywhere." Mia made herself very visible, communicating the school district's importance to her and the community's importance to the school district.

When Mia had a decision to make she worked to hear all voices showing care, compassion, and supportive communication to all involved. To Mia, having an open-door policy meant that she would get the facts and hear from all of the parties involved. "If you were telling me about Suzie, I'd be chatting with Suzie as well" unless the matter required confidentiality.

Mia's direct approach and advocacy for students meant that she communicated the need for respect and two-way communication to all her constituencies. For example, Mia continually received complaints from parents and caregivers about a principal in her district. According to Mia, the principal "had the right thought, but the wrong attitude." The principal had a difficult time making parents into advocates because of her dismissive attitude whenever a parent from her school approached her. Parents would call Mia and say, "She doesn't listen to me. I'm trying to tell her why I'm upset with the teacher or her. She's just, 'I don't have time for this.'" After numerous conversations with the principal, Mia finally told her mid-way through that school year, "If I get another call, we're going to have a different talk." The principal's behavior with parents improved.

As I discussed in the section on collaboration, Mia's final year and a half were wrought with communication challenges with the newly elected mayor. A former professional athlete, the mayor took office and worked under the guise of promoting a city and school partnership until a financial dispute came to light. Reflecting upon their interactions, Mia talked about how inspirational their first combined State of the City address together was with the mayor announcing, "We are together in this. This is my hometown, and together we are going to make a difference." It was only later that Mia noticed that the mayor really "did not care to listen" to what she had to say. As their regular meetings continued, the mayor's dismissal of her became worse.

When the mayor and Mia met with the other two mayors of the communities served by her school district or when talking to the mayor and other men who were not mayors, Mia realized the lopsided nature of their working relationship.

So when we were chatting, I can see the difference as to how he interacts with the other mayors maybe as their equals. But then even when we were chatting with other men, not his level, not mayors, and how he would just—I just never had had that. It's like, "okay, here's another new experience, I'm a woman, and you really don't give a darn" . . . I just never was disregarded about my opinion [like that].

When Mia learned of a large sum of money that the city owed the school district she knew that she owed it to the community to make sure that the school received that money. Unfortunately, the mayor did not see it the same way and when talks began between the attorneys, Mia was called to the mayor's office. The mayor spoke angrily to Mia because she had started the process to reclaim the money owed to the district, he indicated, without asking him personally. Mia believed that this meeting "was the straw that broke the camel's back" regarding her time in Waybridge. Later, Mia found out that the mayor had already been meeting behind the scenes with a person he wanted to fill her superintendent role in the district.

Louise. Louise spoke about the importance of communication for any school district and that she was very fortunate that the former superintendent had created numerous venues for communication that had served the community well before her arrival. These venues merely needed "tweaking" when Louise joined the Greagrove School District.

Louise delivered difficult information with care, listening to staff members, parents, and students in order to build, preserve, and mend relationships. Louise spoke of the numerous people that she had had to discipline or non-renew throughout her seven years as a superintendent. Louise always worked to present evidence to support the non-renewal or disciplinary actions along with care. By spending time with employees and showing her respect to them, Louise wanted them to walk away knowing that while they were being fired or non-renewed, that she had dealt with them in an honest and ethical manner.

One of the most difficult communication issues that Louise faced was connected to the stakeholder groups involved with the water and sewer dispute. These groups included community members, city council, the city manager, and the village township trustees. Even when every effort was made to communicate in an honest and transparent manner, words could be misinterpreted and messages could be distorted.

Louise shared her experience of an exceptionally stressful, well-attended community meeting when the communication of incorrect information hurt the credibility of the board of education and Louise. The meeting included the village council, the city manager, Louise, and the board of education in attendance. With about 300 concerned community members in the audience, village council members shared “erroneous and untrue information” about the water issue after the council had voted against extending water and sewer for the school district’s land. Louise was told by the board president not to answer during the meeting, but later regretted not speaking up because neither the board president nor the city manager, both of whom had the correct information, spoke

up during the meeting to set the record straight. Later, the city manager apologized to Louise and wrote a letter to the editor in the local newspaper supporting her integrity and ethics along with the school district's planning.

Louise explained how she managed and communicated through the on-going and lingering conflict.

I felt it was imperative to be kind to every person and not discuss people [to] other people but discuss only issues that we were trying to resolve. I needed to preserve as many relationships as possible as it was a small town and everyone was involved in this in one way or another.

Ultimately, the community divided over the water issue and land that was used for construction healed and the community opened the new school.

Denise. Open communication is the key to a strong organization according to Denise, so after a November levy defeat in Southington, she conducted an analysis of the communication in the district and determined that improvement was needed in that area. In the January newsletter to community members, Denise wrote, "we still have areas in which we could improve," and then asked them to fill out a survey. Denise also invited parents and community members to attend one of a series of luncheons and dinners that would provide results of the survey and communicate "improvement initiatives and successes" going on at the building level. The dinners and lunches proved to be an important part of the efforts to improve two-way communication in the school district.

Denise also kept communication a priority by being visible in the school buildings and visiting them each week. Denise stayed involved throughout the community by

attending every school event possible and creating opportunities for businesses and other area leaders to meet at and participate in school happenings.

Denise had an open door to communicating with students, listening to them as she conducted exit interviews of her high school seniors. Denise asked questions such as, “Have you been in the district all 12 years? What do you think is the biggest strength of the district? Were teachers able to address your learning style?” Students also reached out to Denise to try to advocate for their causes such as loosening restrictions on the student dress code. Denise described the school district’s extremely conservative views in all areas, especially dress. Prior to Denise’s joining the school district, a committee of staff and community members had addressed the dress code, and it had stayed the same. Acknowledging that some items in the dress code were not fair, because earrings were allowed for girls, but not for boys under any circumstances, for example, Denise explained her view to students directly.

I have a boss. They have rules and regulations, I follow those. This is one of them. And when you have a boss, they’ll have things that maybe you don’t really believe or want to follow, but you will if you want to keep your job.

A very difficult issue to communicate to the staff and community took place in the context of levy elections and preparing them for the possibility of a levy failure and the resulting cuts in classified and certified positions. Denise had met with the union, board of education, and board attorney to share the list of teachers who would be cut if the levy did not pass. The levy was scheduled in May and the teachers’ contracts

required that if they were cut, teachers would be notified by April. Denise couldn't allow that to happen. She needed to tell them sooner.

I was concerned, because if the levy didn't pass in May, those teachers on the cut-list might not have the opportunity at jobs other places if they so desired . . . I didn't want them to pass up an opportunity at a job because they all have families, children, and it could be devastating for them.

With the board's approval, Denise met with every person on the cut list in February. Most told her that they were "going to wait and see if the levy passed."

Ellen. Ellen described that when communicating with others, from employees to board members, individuals and groups alike, she believes in being direct. As Ellen shared when she spoke of staff members' negativity,

I don't do well with that. That's part of my personality. If I believe that you are angry about something, I will say, "have I done something to cause you to be angry?" I've always been that way. I don't ignore it. I don't love conflict, but I don't avoid conflict.

This quality may have been key in addressing the fiscal challenges Ellen faced in the Mason School District.

As with the other study participants, the challenges Ellen faced in her superintendent positions required careful communication. In the section on empowerment of others, I shared the difficulty Ellen and her board faced when the previous treasurer had left them in fiscal emergency. Ellen tried to communicate her concerns about the district finances to the board 18 months prior to the initial audit that

uncovered the “financial mess.” As Ellen put it, “the president chose not to listen to me, so the rest of the board either didn’t know or didn’t want to do anything at that time either.”

Further compounding the situation, the board of education president did not want to follow Ellen’s recommendation to “let the public know sooner rather than later because of the probable severity of the situation.” The president disagreed and did not trust the auditor. His stance created a divide in the board around the issue. While two of the board members disagreed and fought against the auditor’s findings, the other three agreed that the district needed to tell the public and present them with a plan for recovery. A series of six meetings were scheduled with each meeting bringing in large audiences. Communication likely to be the key to gaining community support, an agenda and Power Point presentation were prepared and used at each meeting. Only two of the board members attended these meetings, letting Ellen answer most of the questions. However, when the final meeting grew hostile toward Ellen and the board, a senior board member then took over the meeting.

In the end, due to the emphasis on communication, the majority of the community understood the issue and the plan for recovery. “Many did not like it, but they accepted it.” While a very stressful time for Ellen, the Mason school district did follow the plan she implemented and they were able to come out of fiscal emergency seven months ahead of her predictions. Proactive communication served to enhance the probability of their success.

Leadership Purpose

The second main theme that emerged from my analysis of participant data was leadership purpose, which was grounded in each participant's authenticity, internal drive, and empowerment from others.

Authenticity. As I analyzed codes derived from interviews, writing samples, and journal entries, authenticity showed up clearly in the ways in which participants described who they are and why they are drawn to the work of educational leadership and the superintendency. An individual's authenticity is the window into how comfortable persons are in their own skins; acting upon their own deep beliefs and willingness to risk creating disruption in order to move the organization forward.

Connie. "The person that each of us have become very much establishes the lens through which I look." Connie expanded that thought,

I think that how each of us have arrived and what our beliefs are personally, and not even in terms of religious beliefs and life's philosophies, the wisdom, not the knowledge that we have, but the wisdom that we have becomes the lens that you look through.

Connie believed that she had gained her wisdom through age but also understood that there are "old souls" too. "People always told me I was an old soul, and I was very disenchanted with that comment as a young person. To me it wasn't flattering. To me it was stodgy."

Although Connie acknowledged that others had commented on her wisdom, even in her early 20s, she did credit much of what she considers to be her knowledge and

wisdom to her current age. “I am more bold. I am less conforming. I would say a bit reckless, not in a stupid way. I don’t know how to put that. I take wise risks, I think.” Risks that Connie believes other younger, male superintendents cannot take because of the stage of life they are in with families to support. “The stakes are high. And the stakes get less high the older you get, and I think it empowers you to be more confident and more bold with your statements.”

During each interview, I asked participants whether they found that their role as a superintendent ever went against their grain. Connie did not feel a discrepancy between the expectations of her as a superintendent and decisions that she made because of the “good mix and a good match for us, for [the board of education] and for me . . . because of that, I never feel that my role, like what I do and what I am, I don’t feel are separated.”

Cheryl. Embracing a role authentic to her, Cheryl also did not find that being a superintendent went against her grain. As Cheryl pointed out,

Not the way I embraced it . . . I didn’t become the superintendent to become the boss. I was blessed to be able to have authority and responsibility and opportunity to affect change by being the superintendent, not the opposite.

Cheryl shared her humility about her role. “It was embarrassing to me sometimes. When we’d go places or my husband we’d be out and someone would say, ‘What are you doing?’ ‘Oh, I’m a school administrator,’ and he’d be like, ‘She’s the superintendent!’” Cheryl wanted to be approachable, not to be looked at just for her role. Further, Cheryl said, “but I was real, so I think that was part of it.” Cheryl only knew how to lead by caring and felt blessed to be in the position to affect change.

Cheryl hated expulsions of students and would get emotional about them sometimes. “I didn’t become an educator to deny somebody the opportunity to have an education.” However, Cheryl recognized that she had the “responsibility and the authority” to ensure the safety of the entire school. Cheryl recognized there were “certain intolerable offences . . . I couldn’t save certain kids, and that was just awful. Those were the worst days, those my worst struggles.”

Cheryl also fully accepted the authority, influence, and responsibility she possessed as a superintendent to effect change through her interactions with staff members. When disciplining adults who had made bad choices Cheryl often felt as if she had expelled them. In her superintendent role, Cheryl used district policy and protocol for investigations with serious staff issues. Cheryl’s close relationship with the union president served as beneficial when those staff members required disciplinary action. As a superintendent, Cheryl believed herself to be successful because she remained approachable and understanding of others, knowing that leading is about the other person regardless of the situation.

Mia. Authentic in her leadership roles in education, accomplishing Mia’s mission meant that she would be advocating for academics first and always improving a district’s culture by raising standards around hiring, policy enforcement and laws. When I asked Mia if she had ever felt as if her role had conflicted with who she was as a leader, Mia talked about a time when she did feel that she was expected to make a hiring decision to appease a board of education member when she served as an assistant superintendent. Mia had made her decision about whom to hire for two administrative positions and had

chosen candidates who were the most highly qualified, but the superintendent and this board member wanted to meet with Mia to discuss her choice. Thinking that the superintendent and board member would be intent on hiring another candidate, an individual that the board member wanted in the district, Mia brought a pair of real “bright red, legitimate” boxing gloves to the meeting. When asked about the gloves, Mia told the men that she thought she might need them. “I’m here to defend my position.” Mia presented the individuals whom she would recommend to be hired as well as their qualifications. Mia also presented the reasons that the candidate that the board member supported did not have the specific qualifications needed for either of the jobs. While Mia spoke about being scared because that was the first time she thought she might lose her job for standing her ground, she also knew that she needed to “stick to [her] guns to say, ‘no, I’m not following some person who is not here for the kids’ academics.” Mia also offered, “I had to dig deep. I was so scared, but it all worked out. Those two people [were] hired, and they’re there . . . to this day.”

Louise. Louise believed that who she was definitely influenced her work as a superintendent.

Everybody wants people to like them. I want people to respect me. So if they don’t like me, I’m sorry about that, but I want them to respect me as a person and as a professional . . . I think that influences my work a lot.

Louise described a time when the board of education expected her to go against her better judgment in order to support and campaign for a large levy early in her superintendent career. During the board of education discussion about the district’s needs and wants,

two of the newer board members led the rest down that path. Louise leaned over to the board president and whispered, “We can’t do this.” The president responded that he understood but since the majority of the board were going in that direction, Louise would need to “go with the flow,” which she did. The levy did not pass, but because, like all superintendents, Louise worked at the will of the board, her job was to carry out the board’s direction and it is in those circumstances that a leader may need to go against her beliefs and risk her authenticity. Looking back Louise remembered saying, “I can’t believe that I’m doing all this levy stuff for six months knowing that it doesn’t have a snow ball’s chance” of passing. Other than that decision over which she was not happy, Louise couldn’t think of another decision she was forced to make. However, for the most part, Louise did believe that she was successful as a superintendent, because of her strong moral compass. According to Louise,

I just think if you really truly do in your heart what’s right, and sometimes that’s tough because people will beat you up over it . . . I always could look myself in the mirror and say, “I still think you did the right thing.”

Knowing when to move on from a school district is another piece of authenticity in leadership. Louise believed that many “superintendents don’t know when to leave, but you have to leave when you’re riding the crest of the wave before it crashes.” Louise practiced this policy in numerous positions.

Denise. Denise remembered that her first year as a superintendent she was “just overwhelmed by all the things . . . which were required of a superintendent.” With gratitude, Denise attended the new superintendent support meetings held by a state

association for administrators. Utilizing that support, Denise survived that first year and during that time implemented a number of systems that would lead the district to improved leadership and instruction setting her up for a more manageable second year saying, “after the first year, it was easy for me.”

Denise led in a way that jibed with who she was inside. “I had to lead differently [than the men that I knew] . . . And what happened to people and what their circumstances were was important to me.” Denise talked about observing many “great male leaders” but she felt that some of the ways in which they made decisions or delivered information illustrated a lack of care for the other. “Some of the decisions they made, I could never make. It just wouldn’t have happened for me to wait until the last minute to tell someone something that was going to happen to them that I had no control over,” contrasting the advice she received from her male mentors, “just wait until the end, the contract says” we can. It had never occurred to Denise to put contract language above her heart.

Being very “kid-focused,” Denise spent a great deal of time in the buildings talking to students and listening to their concerns. One issue that Denise described as going against her grain as a leader was her inability to make a change to the dress code. Because Denise did believe that the dress code was unfair in some ways upholding it bothered her. However, as described in a previous section, Denise felt that it was her duty to carry out the will of the board who answered to the community. The dress code reflected what the community and the board desired. Denise did understand, however,

that there were other ways for her to move forward with her students. As Denise said, “They knew that I cared.”

Ellen. From early on in her career, Ellen knew that as an administrator and working to ensure that teachers understood “what we were supposed to be doing in the classroom,” she would be able to positively affect the lives of more students. For Ellen, working authentically meant that she may show her emotion occasionally when deeply moved by her students. However, Ellen’s experience serving in two different school districts as a superintendent showed her that often, “if you show any emotion about kids at all, you are perceived as being weak.” Ellen knew that she shouldn’t be concerned about feeling and showing emotion as a human being and as a leader. However, Ellen understood that the male-dominated, androcentric school districts in which she worked identified the showing of emotion, that is, tears, by leaders as atypical as best and weak as worst, challenging her need to be authentically herself as a leader. “There are times that my kids would perform, whether they won a game, or a big game, or whether they performed a song, and it would—I mean, look at me. It’s stupid,” Ellen said as she began tearing up. Ellen’s connection and care for her students showed in the emotion that she allowed during our interview. Ellen did feel that she “could be about the kids” in her superintendent and other leadership roles. Further saying, “for the most part, I think I proved that you can be about the kids in that role if you choose to be. If you choose to fight that fight.”

Ellen believed that while she was not popular, she was respected and even feared by some. Ellen also hoped out-loud that,

The real me shows up in the decisions that I make, but sometimes the sensitivity, the humor, can't show because of the role you play. I'm not sure how much my personality has—I mean, how much it does show up and affect things.

Ellen also spoke about leading during difficult times especially when the district was placed in fiscal emergency by the state auditor.

When I had to make those [cut] lists, and I had to tell those people, and I had to make those cuts, I didn't like myself very much. But I had to do it and I had to stand up in front of the community multiple times and explain what happened without throwing [the treasurer] under the bus.

Internal drive. What makes superintendents persevere in the face of the challenges that plague the high profile position of school district CEO? Each study participant was eager to tell her secret to surviving in that high pressure and greatly scrutinized position—accountable to the board of education and community members. The data collected from the superintendents who participated in this study indicated that each had similar reasons for their high-energy approaches to their work.

Connie. Connie felt a divine guidance and inspiration in the form of “just knowing” that she had a “divine hand on my back pushing me.” Connie understood that this description of an internal drive that is divinely inspired did not provide concrete evidence but as she said, “I wish I could tell you, because I'd probably create some believers. But I just—I don't know how I know. I just know.”

Another theme throughout Connie's words that she addressed about her choices to stay or leave a district was her statement regarding the level of her happiness in a

position. More than once Connie said, “security’s one thing, thriving’s another.” With her drive to effect change in the world, Connie was not content to stay in a “safe” job that had no “personal growth” opportunities. Connie described her drive in terms of a “tapestry” that she wove with each thread of experience professionally and personally. At the time that a person is living the work,

All you see . . . are the threads. Then when you get older you see, holy cow, there’s a tapestry there. I was able to do that because I gleaned that expertise from these different stops along the way . . . It just blows my mind. And I see that over and over, and that’s what motivates me.

Connie also talked about the commonalities that she saw between all of her responsibilities from work, home, church, and outside volunteering. “I kind of integrate all of them and see the commonalities.” Connie didn’t turn off her brain. The internal drive for Connie meant that she perseverated and thought about everything all the time.

Cheryl. Cheryl described herself as being “pretty driven” when she was asked about what compels her. “I’m pretty tough on myself. I like things done the right way.” Cheryl also credited being driven as the characteristic that got her health back after a very serious automobile accident. Cheryl’s internal drive and perseverance also enabled her to get others on board for the consolidation efforts and building a one-campus elementary school for the entire district. Cheryl used that drive toward her vision to gain support district-wide for making this new school building a reality for her students.

Driven also by her childhood, Cheryl remembered that her father who has now since passed away, always said, “no one will ever take your education away.” Both of

Cheryl's parents were very supportive growing up. Cheryl's mother is now 82 years old and has a master's degree that she earned when Cheryl was in junior high. Cheryl's mother served as director of nursing at a hospital. "Maybe some of that I got from her."

Mia. In each of her educational roles, Mia has felt a sense of strong purpose and commitment; even referring to this purpose as a calling from God. This deeply felt purpose allowed Mia to feel blessed in her work regardless of her role in a school district. As Mia explained, "I did not pick Waybridge, I was selected to be—from the Lord above."

Before she became a superintendent, Mia served as an assistant superintendent in a position for which she was recruited. Having also worked as an interim superintendent, after serving under three different superintendents in three years and teaching them as superintendents, Mia believed that it was time to apply for her own superintendency which she found in Waybridge.

Although the politics of Waybridge did not allow her to continue in that school district, Mia wanted "to stick it out." Mia felt very deeply that she was supposed to be there. Yes, there was a great deal of "wailing and gnashing of teeth" as Mia did her job and worked to help her students, but in the end, Mia did have to leave the dysfunctional district and the divided board of education. Mia believed in academics first and that "we are all here for the kids and we should be able to meet in the middle."

Louise. Having a strong sense of "what is right," both morally and ethically along with her orientation to being goal-driven, compelled Louise as a superintendent. Louise knew from a young age that in school leadership, the superintendency was the

apex. When contemplating the movement from assistant superintendent to superintendent, Louise described herself as “frightened to death” to do it, however, she knew her work ethic and her relationship skills, so she thought, “well, I think I can do this . . . What’s the worst thing that could happen? You either succeed or you don’t.” Louise had self-confidence in her skills and she was well-prepared for the superintendent position. Louise worked in the superintendent role because she deeply cares about “doing what’s right for her students and others.”

Louise’s inner drive not only pushed everyone in the school district, including board of education members, but also allowed her success over time when the school district had issues with acquiring water and sewer for their new building. Regardless of how difficult a town hall meeting, or negotiation session with the village council could become, Louise described herself as a “tomorrow is another day” sort of person who knows the value of moving forward.

Denise. Denise’s parents influenced her very deeply as a child; therefore, Denise had a strong drive to be successful. Denise’s father passed away when she was 12, also impacting her later decisions. As Denise described, “My parents were very kind caring people . . . who were insistent that my brother and I do something that made the world a better place” to explain where her internal drive originated. Denise’s father had not graduated from high school in order to provide money to his family growing up so it was very important to him that Denise and her brother graduate from college.

Competition drove Denise as a superintendent. Denise watched other superintendents, so when she began considering the superintendent position as a next

step, she had the sense that she could be successful. Denise tapped into this competition and drive through the interview process for her superintendent position. Along with mentors who encouraged Denise to apply for the opening, she had a county-level superintendent actively working against her and trying to intimidate her into not applying and proceeding with the interview process. As Denise described,

The day before I was to interview [he] again graced my door. I assumed he was there to wish me luck in the interview. Absolutely not! He first asked me what I was going to wear to the interview—to which I answered that I had been so busy preparing I hadn't given that a thought. He proceeded to tell me not to dress like a woman because they did not want a woman for their superintendent position. WOW! I expressed that I was a woman and would dress accordingly. Then he reassured me that I didn't have a chance—which made me more determined than ever to be prepared to give a great interview. I did get the job and worked for the district for nine years.

Ellen. Ellen's emotions gave her an internal drive to succeed and take care of students and staff. This internal drive fueled by care, commitment, and concern for others impacted her decision-making. Knowing that she wanted to become a superintendent at some point in her career, Ellen knew that not only would she need her required superintendent license, but she also would need to obtain her Ph.D. "I knew that to be a superintendent in Southwestern Ohio that as a woman, I would need my doctorate.

Driven from a young age even as a child and then as a young administrator early in her career, Ellen "wanted to move up the ranks of administration because I thought I

could affect more kids' lives." Yet, Ellen did not know what drove her, but she still will "get whatever needs to be done, done." As I have seen with the other five participants when the impetus of their internal drive is putting children's learning, and their social, emotional, and physical needs first, each participant, including Ellen, has had the ability to be "firmly able to hold people accountable" and drive for the adults in the organization to focus their work on improving student learning along with providing a supportive school environment for students.

Empowerment from others. The empowerment that study participants felt from others permeated their stories. Whether it was during participants' individual paths to the superintendency or as they worked to navigate the challenges of leading an entire school district, each participant had positive experiences with people who helped them succeed. Some individual participants also encountered challenges with people whom they thought would support their efforts but didn't.

Connie. As Connie told me, "your resume gets the job, but the networking gets the opportunity for the job." That was the case for Connie's trajectory through the administrative positions she has held during her career. These opportunities for networking allowed her to be recruited for numerous positions. For example,

The Northern Local School District superintendent happened to know me because we worked in school districts next to each other, and went to meetings together.

We grew to have some common philosophies and we sort of hit it off . . . I had no idea that he's the cousin of the fellow from Pittsburgh, where I grew up . . . so a

lot of it is the serendipity of the job's opening with somebody retiring as I'm moving.

Connie also believed that the process of her being recruited was not only serendipitous, it was "divinely inspired" having to do with "the big chess game in the sky." Connie's mentors influenced her success throughout her career, beginning when she relocated to Ohio from Pennsylvania for her husband's job. In order to be able to move up the career ladder required the correct experience, education, and certifications, all of which Connie had achieved by the time she was twenty-seven years old. Connie also earned her Ed.D. in her early 30s. Connie was encouraged to pursue her doctorate by her county supervisor when she worked at a county educational service center. Connie's supervisor, "was very nurturing, very uplifting of all of us as young professionals and encouraged us to further our education, so I started to apply to doctoral programs." Connie was also recruited and mentored up through her positions as a curriculum director, curriculum and business director, and assistant superintendent.

Cheryl. Also recruited by others before she became a superintendent and even after she retired from the superintendency, Cheryl understood the value that mentors play in an educational leader's career. After Cheryl's early years initially as a speech pathologist, then as a teacher of deaf education she earned her licensure to become a high school principal and continued her work supervising regular education teachers who had fully included special education children in their classrooms. Planning to become a high school principal, a friend from a suburban school district called her and encouraged her to apply for their open Director of Pupil Services position. Cheryl was hired the same day

and stayed for six years. There she was encouraged by a female assistant superintendent to pursue her superintendent license as they worked together to change the culture of that district from compliance to “caring for all kids.” During her final year in that district, the educational service center superintendent encouraged her to begin to apply for superintendent positions but none of them panned out. It was then that Cheryl was approached by the interim superintendent of a small northern Ohio school district to make a lateral move into his district, knowing that he would be retiring in the next few years.

He was a wonderful mentor, a wonderful person. I could just tell from the beginning he was a hands-off leader, . . . and I could tell that in an afternoon. I just could tell he was such a good soul.

Only three years after making that move to Bronan, the superintendent retired and the board asked her to take over as their superintendent without doing a search.

Mia. As Mia prepared to graduate with her undergraduate degree, her academic advisor told her about an internship that would allow her to complete her master’s degree at no cost. Being young, Mia wasn’t interested until her parents, who had struggled to pay for her college education, encouraged her, knowing the value of having this degree. After completing her master’s degree and teaching for five years, Mia completed an administrative internship under two different principals. These principals were instrumental in opening her eyes to the challenges faced by principals and the different ways that the position could be approached. “They were like night and day . . . One just

taught me about that care and compassion and concern for kids . . . and I knew how to organize a building and had run a tight ship” because of the other.

With that internship experience under her belt, Mia had her choice of schools for her first principalship before being recruited again by the new superintendent who insisted that Mia join her and the central office team as an assistant superintendent. Mia worked well with that superintendent and later was approached by the board of education to serve as their interim superintendent, an offer she accepted with the understanding that she was not interested in a full superintendent position at that time. These positions, complete with people recruiting Mia and supporting her work as a school district leader, might not have been possible had Mia not been open to trying new experiences of leadership.

Louise. Like the other study participants, Louise was recruited as she moved through her positions in administration. Louise found it interesting that her mentors in educational leadership tended to be men and she believed that their support served her well. Louise’s initial administrative position was serving as the pupil services coordinator in a central Ohio school district. From there she was promoted to the assistant superintendent in charge of technology, curriculum, instruction, testing, all the pupil and all of the services issues. Louise also shared that she had never served as a school principal on her trajectory to the superintendency. Louise had numerous interactions with mentors along her path to becoming a superintendent. As Louise said, “I would have never applied for the Director of Pupil Personnel . . . if I wasn’t encouraged to do so,” by her mentors. That mentor also gave Louise great advice to

prepare for upcoming interviews. “Go talk to directors of pupil personnel and superintendents that work with them and find out what superintendents are expecting from pupil personnel.” All five who Louise called met with her giving her an unprecedented amount of courage going into that position.

Denise. Like Louise, Denise also found it unusual that all of her mentors were men. As a teacher, Denise was approached by an educator working out of the educational service center who said, “you have far too many talents to not share them with someone else. You need to go back and get your degree, a master’s degree.” Denise took that advice, which started her administrative path focused on curriculum and instruction, which was what her master’s degree was in. Denise worked at the educational service center while she also earned her assistant superintendent license and then her superintendent license. Denise had no intention of leaving curricular work, but was recruited away by a superintendent who liked her work, to join his central office team full time in curriculum. “One of the last things he said to me before he retired—and he passed away shortly after he retired—was, ‘promise me you will become a superintendent’ and I said, I’m not sure I can promise that.” Not long after that conversation, a superintendent position opened up. The district was looking for a strong curriculum expert to lead their schools, and Denise was hired.

Ellen. Ellen also moved up through the ranks of educational administration and leadership with a combination of having a strong work ethic, a “can do” attitude, and the encouragement and guidance from others mentoring her in her field. At the same time, Ellen, encouraged by her dissertation chair, completed her Ph.D. Ellen spent some of her

years in leadership teaching administration at the university level before she was recruited back into the prekindergarten through grade 12 public school realm as a curriculum director.

While most of her mentors in the superintendency were male and autocratic, Ellen was able to discern the advice they gave her from the advice that would be the right fit given her educational philosophy. Ellen served in two superintendent positions. Her first superintendent position was in a very male-dominated school district and Ellen was surprised to have been selected because of that. However, once her board saw that she got the job done and could lead the district in a no-nonsense way, they supported her. Ellen was able to turn the culture of, “you’re a woman, and you can’t do this” around. Board members thought she was a strong leader.

Having mentors and support is not only important when finding a position, it’s also important while leading. Ellen was able to garner that support even when her board became divided over the financial crisis in Mason. Two board members steadfastly stood by her side as she explained the situation to the community in a series of six meetings. Ellen also was able to get the support of the state Attorney General because of her strong plan for pulling the district out of fiscal emergency.

Theoretical Coding and Analysis.

As I explored extant research on the three areas of this study’s contextual framework for my review of the literature: women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership, I learned that the most appropriate tool for expanding my understanding of the concepts presented by the intersection of these three areas would be

a grounded theory study. The research tool of grounded theory allowed my genuine inquiry into study participants' words and experiences. With grounded theory, the researcher will not know what she is studying until a significant amount of analysis has been completed (Charmaz, 2011). Therefore, and perhaps not surprisingly, my favorite part of conducting this qualitative study was my interaction with and privilege of sharing the stories of these women superintendents through all stages of the study's development: initial coding, focused coding, theoretical coding, and analysis. The analysis began with my first line-by-line code and continued through the interactions of codes and themes to one another, and finally emerging into the finished product of the findings I've shared throughout this chapter.

As researcher, I first interacted with each participant through my interview with her. I heard about experiences through each leader's own words and listened carefully to hear her truth. I broke the story down into its component parts all the way down to the resultant phrases of the initial, line-by-line coding. My early focused coding of participants' words consolidated the information into the more manageable essence of the categories generated by those codes. And, finally into the 10 common themes that resulted from my comparisons of the themes that had been teased out of each individual's codes: authenticity, care, challenge/critique, collaboration, communication, drive, empowerment of others, empowerment from others, relationships, and social justice (Appendix G). These common themes among all six participants became the building blocks for the resulting grounded theory which answered the original research question:

How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate?

As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, my analysis of data resulted in the following three emergent themes:

- A. *Leadership Disposition*, which is characterized by the importance participants placed on relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication.
- B. *Leadership Purpose*, which is grounded in participants' authenticity, internal drive (self-efficacy), and empowerment from others.
- C. *Feminist Ethic/Feminist Approach to Leadership* manifested in the three ethics of care, justice, and critique.

As I conclude this chapter, I delineate how these themes evolved into a theory grounded in this study data and validated extant literature about women in upper levels of educational leadership. Figure 3 illustrates the path to theory I followed.

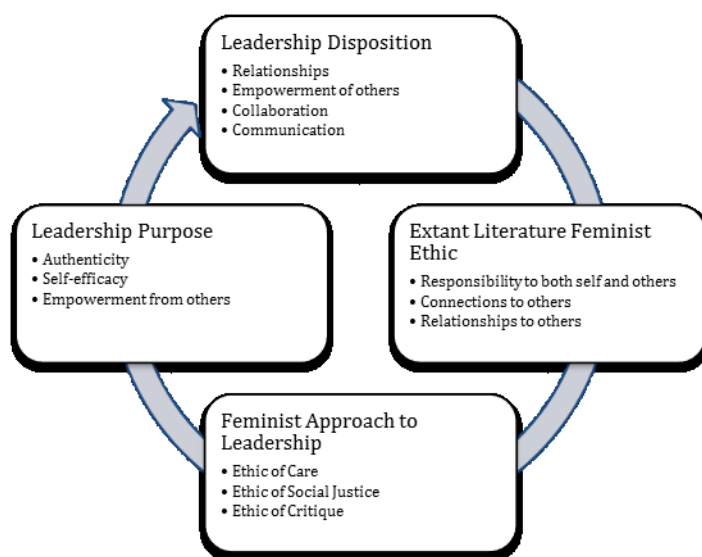


Figure 3. Data analysis to theory development

Themes of Leadership Disposition

My process of theoretical coding, using Charmaz's (2011) approach, resulted in the understanding of individual participants' descriptions and illustrations of their relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication that characterized the emergent theme of *Leadership Disposition* in this study. I learned of the importance these women leaders put on relationships in how they supported their star players as well as in how they fired employees and disciplined students with dignity. The relationships allowed these women superintendents to support and empower others with whom they worked, sometimes by giving up control so that others could share their leadership, and other times by holding their employees to standards of instruction, treatment of others, and professionalism that improved upon their predecessors. This opened up better learning opportunities for the students that they served. Setting up a working and learning environment that enabled all levels of collaboration from new networking opportunities, to building partnerships between the schools and social service departments, to including "subversive," anti-school groups in the fold of planning created the foundations for their school environments. Finally, these women superintendents used their strong communication skills and systems to strategically improve instruction, achievement, and family engagement.

Integration of Study Findings With Current Research

Current general theories of leadership have diminished the role of gender and ethnicity in organizational leadership and even have suggested that they may be inconsequential to leading organizations. However, the intersection of research on

feminist theory and leadership theory has offered a different perspective. The literature on the feminist ethic as a set of moral principles and a guiding philosophy provided an alternative backdrop to the study of leadership, a backdrop that has been validated by this study.

These findings suggested that study participants' leadership was underpinned by the importance they put on: relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication. These characteristics provided a link between the study participants' experiences as leaders with the conclusions offered by my review of current literature on women superintendents, gendered understandings of leadership, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership theory. In Chapter 2, I offered my extrapolation of the feminist ethic from extant literature as a set of moral principles and guiding philosophy conceptualized by three characteristics:

1. Responsibility to both self and others (Belenky et al., 1997; Beard, 2012; Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983);
2. Connections to others (Belenky et al., 1997; Boatman, 2007; Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983); and
3. Relationships with others (Belenky et al., 1997; Gilligan, 1982, Katz, 2006; Lyons, 1983).

Constructed on three ethics:

1. Ethic of Care as applied beyond the family unit (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Noddings, 1995, 2003; Starratt, 1991, 1994); and

2. Ethic of Justice in response to treatment of others, oppression, and inequality (Starratt, 1991, 1994; Swigonski & Raheim, 2011); and
3. Ethic of Critique of the systems and theory that omit non-majority perspectives (Donovan, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991, 1994).

The analysis of data collected from the interviews, writing samples, journal entries, and member-checked by a focus group of participants in this study provided individual participants' stories which were woven with experiences highlighting the moral principles and guiding philosophy described by responsibility to both self and others, connections, and relationships. Participants had clear interactions with the three ethics of the feminist ethic: the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of critique as they led their districts. And leading their school districts, these women superintendents all created better educational opportunities for students who wouldn't have otherwise had them by opening doors to Advanced Placement classes, firing employees for poor instruction, abuse of power, and even theft, challenging the status quo that said community college was the best option for their graduates, visioning school facilities that created inspired learning spaces that communities could afford while fighting to make them a reality, and addressing the challenges that poverty places on students and their families.

Emerging Model of Leadership Theory

My analysis found that the first main theme of *Leadership Disposition*, which was characterized by the importance study participants put on their relationships, their empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication connected readily to current

research literature that suggested a feminist ethic based on the characteristics of a leader's responsibility to both herself and others, connections to others and her relationships with others. These connections, born of a constructivist grounded theory approach, led to the further development of a theory, grounded in study data, that answered the research question: What is the interaction of the feminist ethic with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate (Charmaz, 2011)? Table 4 illustrates the connections between study findings and literature review conclusions.

Table 4

Moral Principals and Guiding Philosophy of Leadership Disposition

Literature Review	Study Themes
Responsibility to both self and others	Empowerment of others/collaboration
Connections to others	Communication/collaboration
Relationships with others	Relationships

The connections between extant research and this study's findings under the first main theme, *Leadership Disposition*, characterized how the six women leaders who participated in this study led their school districts. The subthemes of the second main theme of *Leadership Purpose*: Authenticity, internal drive, and empowerment from others, provided another third of the study findings and provided the themes that built the theory answering the research question about the interaction of women superintendents,

the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership. As identified by the subthemes listed above, a theory formed that was grounded in the data that was collected and analyzed.

Authenticity

Starratt posited that, “Real leaders are authentic. They bring themselves, including their deepest convictions, beliefs, and values, to their work” (2004, p. 65). Starratt also found that, “Despite the authority and power of his or her office, the leader insists on both the human respect and the civil respect that are due of his or her colleagues” (2004, p. 79). Working to maintain their authenticity, these study participants stood up to critics and detractors alike, whether they were part of the school leadership team, school board, or larger community. However, participants’ authenticity didn’t cause them to purposely create waves with others who raised questions about their actions and decisions. Instead, the authenticity I heard in the data allowed each woman to stand tall, and stand up for her deep ideals all the while working to bring critics together into the process of improving the achievement and quality of life for her students. As Louise commented, “I always could look myself in the mirror and say, ‘I still think you did the right thing.’”

Internal Drive and Self-Efficacy

During my continuing analysis, I have changed the internal drive subtheme of *Leadership Purpose* used throughout my coding and analysis to the term self-efficacy, which has provided a more specific description of the experiences of study participants and the resultant coding. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as an individual’s perception that she has a general belief in her personal capabilities and cognitive

resources to perform the tasks necessary in her life. In the case of these women superintendents, the “tasks” were the thousands of daily decisions along with their leading the conceiving of and movement toward a school district vision allowing all students to achieve and succeed after graduation. This common thread emerged throughout the study data that these women discovered and identified their self-efficacy early in their lives. Some described it as “God” or their faith in a higher power working through them. Others spoke of watching so many others in educational leadership and just knowing that they possessed the preparation and skills to be successful in the superintendency.

Empowerment and Affirmation From Respected Others

Just as these women superintendents sought to empower their followers in order to transform their school districts while leading them, participants of this study found themselves on the receiving end of empowerment and affirmation as they moved toward the superintendency. “At the heart of transformational leadership,” offered Bass and Riggio, “is the development of followers, with much of this occurring through effective empowering of followers by leaders” (2006, p. 193). Bass and Riggio, as did these study participants, understood that, “empowerment is a product of individualized consideration, but it also involves elements of intellectual stimulation . . . empowerment of followers by a leader involves delegating important tasks and responsibilities to them” (2006, p. 193). Whether it was during participants’ individual paths to the superintendency or as they worked to navigate the challenges of leading an entire school district, each participant had positive experiences with others who empowered them through their leadership and

interactions. As Cheryl described, the superintendent who hired her as his assistant superintendent gave her the power to become the superintendent she later became. “He said, ‘I’m not going to be here forever, I’ll give you enough rope, but it’s up to you.’” Cheryl described this superintendent as a “hands-off leader” who asked tough questions, but when given the data to support an idea, let her “go with it.”

I found that each woman’s identity intertwined with her *Leadership Purpose*, which was characterized by the authenticity with which they led, their self-efficacy that allowed them to “thrive as opposed to survive” as Connie described, and the empowerment that grew inside each of them as they received recognition and affirmation from respected others in the field of education as well as from their own parents, families, and strong support systems of friends and colleagues. These women leaders were able to meet the demands of leading a school district in the educational climate of the times in which they led through the tensions, structural restrictions, and personal and political attacks using the power of the feminist ethic to manage the work.

The third main theme that emerged included the components of the feminist ethic which provided the essence for how these women have led and provided the foundation for the emerging grounded theory: *Feminist Ethic/Feminist Approach to Leadership* manifested in the three ethics of care, justice, and critique.

Theory of Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership

Based upon the data analyzed in this study a grounded theory has emerged: When authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment are present, women superintendents are

better able to succeed in the masculinized culture of school district leadership and the current climate of educational reform. The essence of women's leadership is manifested in the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique, which allows leaders to bring better outcomes for the individuals and the organization under their stewardship.

These six women, to a person, followed a path atypical for the average male superintendent. These women spent more time in the classroom as teachers, speech pathologists, and counselors. Three of the participants spent months to years away from the Prekindergarten through grade 12 environment, working instead in higher education teaching or on sabbatical achieving further degrees. These participants were highly reflective and self-aware of their strengths and challenges as leaders and able to encourage and role-model this behavior for their followers improving the quality of life for the students, families, and staff members in their care.

Conclusion

The challenges and obstacles inherent in the job of superintendent did sometimes hurt and the assaults did, other times, bring these leaders to their knees. However, each woman told of a calling so strong that she was able to keep validating herself while looking at external criticisms head-on and for what they were. The six study participants gave their detractors and critics just enough credence that even with a feeling of doubt, these superintendents' intense sense of mission implored them to go back to the work of connecting with, inspiring, and leading others toward wholeness. The findings of this study and the emerging theory based upon a grounded theory approach I used answered the research question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women

superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate? Through the process of initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding of the data gathered in interviews, writing samples, journal entries, and a focus group of participants, I formulated this theory grounded in substantive data. In the next chapter I have discussed the implications of this study and findings, my recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The feminist ethic and organizational leadership theories, along with the realities of the practice of women superintendents formed the framework for this study. Kowalski et al. (2011) reported in the American Academy of School Administrator (AASA) study that women make up approximately 24% of school superintendents nationally, an increase from the 13% reported by Glass et al. (2000) but still lower than the 51% of the general population, the 76% of the teaching force, and the 50% of U.S. principals who are women (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009; “Documentation to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data,” n.d.; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; “U.S. Census Bureau,” n.d.; *Women in the Labor Force*, 2013). This study has provided a platform for women’s voices by illuminating their unique experiences of leadership as individuals whose gender has been long underrepresented in the ranks of the superintendency. This exploration of participants’ lived experiences as leaders illustrated their utilization of the feminist ethic and organizational leadership theory to positively impact the common good of students in their public schools.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate the leadership of women superintendents as they reflected upon the work of leading their school districts. This grounded theory study has added research findings to the current scholarship based upon a purposeful sample of six women leaders who currently serve or formerly served as superintendents in a variety of school districts in Ohio. The findings and recommendations also have informed the theoretical body of knowledge related to

educational leadership, gender studies, and women's leadership. Finally, this study has added women's voices to the currently underrepresented voices of women superintendents in the on-going discussion and research of the issues surrounding the challenges of running a public school system in the state of Ohio. The findings of this study answered the question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate?

In the previous chapter, I described the findings of this constructivist grounded theory study. Using Charmaz's (2011) approach, I immersed myself into the data generated by the participants of this study with the goal of using the substance of this data, these women's words, to build a leadership theory. The data collected through face-to-face interviews, follow-up emails and phone calls, journal entries, writing samples and a focus group discussion, formed the substance of the theory. I broke the data analysis down into two main steps as recommended by Charmaz, initial coding and focused coding. Line-by-line coding formed the initial coding phase. Focused coding included creating a list of focused codes from the line-by-line coding, followed by the categorization of focused codes under broad themes. Next, I compared the focused codes across categories by individual participant resulting in themes that named the relationships among categories. Finally, those themes were compiled and compared in order to find common themes among participants. These resulting 10 collective themes formed the foundation for an emerging theory of leadership (Appendix G).

This chapter discusses this study's findings and integrates this information with extant literature on women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership. I also offer my recommendations based upon study findings and conclude with an expanded explanation of how this theory was constructed and how it can be used in practice and research.

Discussion of Findings

As I presented in Chapter 4, a model of leadership theory emerged from the data analyzed in this study: When authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment are present, women superintendents are better able to succeed in the masculinized culture of school district leadership and the current climate of educational reform. The essence of women's leadership is manifested in the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique, which allows leaders to bring better outcomes for the individuals and the organization under their stewardship. In the following section I have discussed how this theory and my analysis of data are relevant to the current body of literature on each area of the study.

Women Superintendents

This section addressing women superintendents and the relationships between the findings of this study and research literature has been constructed into two sections. First, I've described the connections between my study and research on general aspects of women's leadership. The second section extends the discussion to women superintendents and educational leaders specifically.

Women in leadership. Research on women in leadership has continued to evolve and currently explores leadership approaches of women along with individuals

from minority populations. Shakeshaft et al. (2007) found that while the United States conducts more research on women leaders than do other countries, most research remains on descriptions of women's career paths and barriers to women seeking upper-level executive positions. In comparisons of men and women's leadership, quantitative studies generally have shown no difference between women and men while qualitative studies acknowledge and describe the different approaches taken by each sex as leaders (Shakeshaft, 2007). Also, women remain underrepresented in the top leadership positions in business, politics, academia, and education and still earn less than their male counterparts at all levels of the U.S. workforce ("Knowledge Center | Catalyst.org," n.d., "Women in the Labor Force: A Databook 2012," 2013). Women currently hold 24% of superintendent positions nationally (Kowalski et al., 2011). Additionally, according to study participant, Cheryl, who currently works in a role that supports superintendents state-wide, in Ohio during the 2015–2016 school year, less than 15% of superintendents were women.

Each study participant verified the current underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, citing their experiences of being the only woman or one of the few women superintendents attending support and networking meetings, educational and professional development conferences, as well as regional athletics and Educational Service Center and county meetings. Also, while half of the participants appeared to downplay their underrepresentation as women superintendents throughout the state and discussion of gender differences, Denise did write about her observations regarding

gender differences with her four female and seven male principals as she reviewed nine years of evaluation material (Table 5).

Table 5

Gender Differences in Principal Evaluations

Female Principals	Male Principals
Goal-oriented, goal-driven	Difficulty writing goals and action plans
Data collection was to an excess—far more than required or needed	Resisted data collection and were far less organized in presenting data.
Were collaborative in their approach to goal attainment	Felt goal attainment was solely their responsibility
Focused on instructional leadership	Were less comfortable with instructional leadership and required additional training in the area
Had difficulty with staff discipline and gave staff member several attempts at improvement due to relationships established with staff members	Disciplined staff fairly and promptly. Gave action plans for improvement but not multiple attempts for staff member to make changes (followed the rules and contracts strictly)
Respected diversity in staff and students	Respected diversity in staff and students
Provided celebrations for staff when building goals were met	Provided celebrations for staff when building goals were met but delegated celebrations to a committee of which they were not a member

Eagly and Karau (2002) addressed the “double-bind” that they suggested exists for women leaders with their “incongruity theory” (p. 574), which was supported by the work of Chin (2011) and Carli and Eagly (2007). Incongruity theory suggested that a double-bind occurred when women are perceived to have the qualities that make them strong leaders, yet those same qualities cause them to be evaluated poorly because of the discrepancy between masculinized leadership roles and society’s perceptions of women

through the lens of traditional gender stereotypes. These stereotypes and society's social role expectations continue to negatively impact women's access to the top leadership positions when leadership characteristics infuse the evaluations of leaders even though these qualities don't have an actual impact on leader effectiveness (Chin, 2011).

Additionally, the body of literature on top leaders still underrepresented explorations of women and other minorities because these groups are viewed as special populations due to their smaller numbers in upper-level leadership (Chin, 2011). However, even with the smaller numbers of studies representing marginalized individuals, current research suggested that regardless of societal stereotypes, personalities have more to do with leadership than does gender (Chin, 2011; Crump, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Two out of the six study participants reported that while it is preferred and even typical for a superintendent to be hired by the board of education unanimously, they both were hired with dissenting votes. Connie's board hired her with a four to one vote while Louise's board hired her on a three to two vote. Connie's dissenting vote came from a male board member while Louise's dissenting two votes were cast by the only two women on the board. Both superintendents and their respective board members worked to build relationships after these non-unanimous votes. It is possible that the incongruity theory presented by Eagly and Karau (2002) may have been a factor in these dissenting votes. As Chin (2011) suggested, the double-bind that women are often subjected to resides beneath consciousness.

Participants in this study also addressed the double-bind and aspects of incongruity theory. An illustration of Denise's experience reflecting research literature

occurred when she applied for a superintendent position. The county superintendent appeared intent upon undercutting Denise's confidence through his aggressive interactions with her. Initially he told Denise not to apply for the position. After Denise had been chosen to interview for that position, the ESC superintendent visited her the day before the interview and told her specifically that she should not dress like a woman because they wanted a man in the position. Prior research also warranted a deeper look into Mia's experience being asked to step down from her role as superintendent by the board of education. The mayor had a practice of showing Mia disregard and disrespect when meeting alone with her and with others. The behavior shown by the mayor with his lack of eye contact when Mia spoke to him and his focus on the other people in the conversation who were males follow the characteristics of incongruity theory and also may suggest his adherence to the traditional gender schemas that work to disadvantage women in leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Valian, 1999).

Women as superintendents. Tyack and Strober (1981) studied the lines of research used in understanding women as educational leaders for the National Institute of Education in order to highlight the "structuring of opportunity by sex" that occurs throughout society and also to provide information that would result in an increase in women educational leaders (p. 149). The three lines of research used historically in the study of women mirrored the research on women in educational leadership. Tyack and Strober concluded that these three areas of research: cultural heroes who made significant contributions to public education, women as victims, and bonds of sisterhood that created strength in numbers, could be used to further the goal of promoting better representation

of women in leadership positions in the field of education. These findings set the stage for further research as women continued to find ways to attain those leadership positions and also helped us understand the context of gender inequality in the educational world (Tyack & Strober, 1981).

Study participants shared instances of discrimination in the world of educational employment but usually downplayed the impact on them or others because speaking out was not valued by the mainstream community of people in the hiring positions. For example, following the line of research above, “women as victims,” Louise described that she had experienced some “big bumps in the road as far as being female (Tyack & Strober, 1981). And you have to make wise decisions when those things happen to you because you can derail your career if you make the wrong decision.” Louise elaborated by telling me about the district that hired her as one of the two associate superintendents with equal levels of responsibility. Louise and the other associate superintendent had similar levels of experience yet he made \$5,000 more than her. Louise felt it was “grossly unfair” and hired a lawyer who advised her that she could go after the district for the money difference, but that it was likely that the school board would “ruin” her career. Louise chose a less confrontational approach and, with her compensation research in hand, made her case alone with the board of education in executive session. The board held to their belief that it was within their rights to pay different salaries to their different employees even when those employees have the same title and responsibilities citing that banks don’t pay all of their vice-presidents the same rate.

The barriers that women have faced provided further information about women in the superintendency. Kim and Brunner found a large discrepancy between the percentage of women in their study who aspire to the superintendent position—40%—and the 18% of women who served as superintendent nationally at the time of the study. This study suggested a glass ceiling that effectively has kept women out of the top position due to the invisible aspect of “using criteria of inherent personal characteristics and the dominant cultural boundaries” (Kim & Brunner, 2008, p. 103) that illustrate the “double-bind” that Eagly and Carli (2002, p. 547) suggested keep women out of the top positions of leadership. Additionally, Kim and Brunner (2008) found no evidence that the time lapse between teaching and administration impacted superintendent performance. They also found that the difference between men and women superintendents in the years of teaching experience they possessed was five years, a reduction from the 10 years in their previous study (Kim & Brunner, 2008). Both women and men spent approximately 10 years in administration before their first superintendent position.

All participants in this study took less traditional paths to their superintendencies than male superintendents traditionally follow. Cheryl spoke of her experience with being poised to move from a central office leadership position to the superintendency after six years. Cheryl interviewed for five different superintendent positions and ended up placing second in all of those positions. As Cheryl recounted, “The first time I was devastated. The second time, I was devastated. By the fifth time, I thought, ‘I’m being used.’” So Cheryl decided to stay in her position in central office and was not going to

pursue a superintendent position until she received a call to talk to the interim superintendent in Bronan about the district's need for a pupil services director. Cheryl credited his mentorship and leadership with giving her the opportunity that turned in to the superintendent position that she loved.

Brunner and Grogan's (2007) nation-wide descriptive study of women in educational leadership found twelve common barriers that women perceived as they aspired to the superintendency. The top four barriers that women who participated in the study cited were:

- (1) Women perceived as weak managers by school board members (50%);
- (2) Women perceived as unqualified to handle budgeting and finances (48.5%);
- (3) Women perceived to allow emotions to influence administrative decisions (46%);
- (4) Women not recruited by school boards (45.5%). (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 61)

The participants of this study all addressed barriers they have had to face down to attain the highest school district leadership position. For example, Ellen talked numerous times about how she does sometimes show her emotions: tears, happiness, anger, but that she did need to always be aware that others, both men and women, will often equate those emotions with weakness as a leader. Ellen worked to be her authentic self and to show others, through her actions, that strength did not manifest itself in only one manner—that of the leader with no emotion. Other participants told of similar examples and how they focused their energy not on what others thought as much as what they

needed to do to reach personal and district goals, allowing those observing to see the alternate ways of leading from the masculinized, traditional norm.

Additionally, the participants of this study defied traditional stereotypical leadership behaviors and were rewarded as Ellen was as she resigned from each of her superintendent positions. Not wanting to lose a strong leader, both of her boards offered financial incentives to entice her to stay. Ellen did not accept these incentives to stay as she moved on to her next positions as a leader.

Regarding superintendent performance, Halloran's (2007) quantitative study found no differences between the perceived leadership practices of male and female superintendents as well as in their performance ratings. Kolb's (2009) quantitative study suggested that female superintendents were more likely than male superintendents to show behaviors that were commonly associated with effective leaders and managers. This finding verifies other research in the field. Previous studies suggested that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders, and that male leaders used the less effective modes of transactional and laissez-faire leadership than women who were more likely to be engaged in the transformational behaviors (Bass et al., 1996; Burns, 1978; Eagly et al., 2003). Katz's (2004) conclusions suggested that women in her study viewed relational leadership as an important part of their leadership approaches. Further, Boatman (2007) found that women used their own personal power rather than the positional power used by their male educational leader counterparts. While men tended to be more hierarchical and competitive in their approach as leaders, the women Boatman studied used a team-oriented and cooperative approach.

Examples of study participants embracing a transformative leadership approach filled their interviews. Transformational leadership included emphasis on leaders using communication, collaboration, and relationships as the key to leading for organizational success (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978). Additionally, Burns believed that the secret of transformational leadership was to lift people out of their everyday lives and help them move “into *their* better selves” (p. 462, emphasis in original). Each of the six participants in this study discussed their focus on helping their followers grow. Louise’s enthusiasm mirrored each of the other participants as they all spoke about providing opportunities for others to evolve, “I get such a rush out of helping people improve . . . I like learning myself, and I love to see other people learn and grow.” I also saw the natural way that transformational leadership was woven into the teacher leadership academy that Denise began in the first year of her superintendency and continued throughout her tenure and Connie’s labor relations team which brought together union leaders and administrators to develop their collaborative and negotiations skills.

Feminist Ethic

The discussion of the interaction of the feminist ethic and these study findings has been broken down into three sections. The historical perspective of the feminist movement has provided the foundation for understanding the consciousness of the feminist ethic used in the contextual framework of this study. Moral theory and epistemology has added another layer to the framework. Finally, the relationship of this study’s findings to the connections I have illustrated among components of the feminist

ethic and organizational leadership, have completed the discussion of these women's experiences and have led to the leadership theory that I have proposed.

Historical perspective. First wave feminism coalesced with the Seneca Falls, New York, women's rights convention which pulled together the collective voices of women advocating for their rights in both the private and public spheres but left out many non-majority voices in the movement including women of color and White women living in poverty (hooks, 1981; Kinser, 2004; Lerner, 1993). And, although some women recognized that racism was a feminist issue because has always been connected with "sexist oppression" a split grew in the women's movement between Black and White feminist efforts that continued into the next stages of feminism (hooks, 1984, p. 53).

Second wave feminism, borne of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, expanded beyond the personal and professional worlds and into academia with the feminist phase theory used to evaluate university courses and programs on a continuum of stages in thinking about women (Thompson Tetreault, 1985). Also included are the explorations of Marshall (1998) regarding feminist critical theory and its implications for expanding gender equity and policy analyses that impact women's abilities to access the top leadership positions in our country. The third wave has carried the body of research and knowledge of second wave gains and losses forward into the 21st century to the call for the continued change needed for women and minorities to gain equity in our society (Kinser, 2004).

These six study participants have benefitted from the early work of feminists paving the way for them to attain their upper level leadership positions and they

recognized these contributions: the first wave's consciousness raising, the second wave's expansion of feminist thought and research, and the third wave's attempts to embrace a wider definition of the meaning associated with being a feminist. Each participant spoke about helping their students, especially those from marginalized populations, gain a better foothold into educational and economic opportunities. All participants showed, through their experiences, that their work had a significant impact on providing opportunities for the poor, minority, and other marginalized groups of students.

The intersection of race and leadership data also has required discussion here. Although falling outside of the parameters of this study, the multiple identities that individuals may carry with them into their work such as race, sex or gender, sexual preference, ability, or socioeconomic status may have impact on their leadership and warrant further exploration. Often racial bias and disadvantage, like other biases and disadvantages, remain invisible to the majority population or those with power and privilege due to race. Mia was the only participant who self-identified as African American. The other participants identified as White. Mia spoke about herself, her leadership experiences, and about being a Black leader in school districts, which were predominately White, and her superintendency in the first ring suburb with an African American population of 99%. The five other participants did not address their race or other identities as they may have interacted with their roles as leaders.

Mia told of her first principalship, when she was placed by the superintendent at a school with a limited minority population. As Mia described, she had a "rude awakening" because the White families were asking why she was placed in their building

because they didn't believe she could relate to them. Additionally, the Black educators of the school district felt that Mia should have been placed by the superintendent at a school in the school district with a larger minority population. Mia wondered why White students and families *shouldn't* learn from her. Mia stayed as principal in that building for a successful eight years until she was promoted to a central office position in the same school district.

When Mia took the superintendent position in Weybridge, she faced a different set of racial expectations when her board of education members made it clear that they were not pleased that she had hired some individuals who were not Black for key administrative positions her first year. Mia worked with the board as she built relationships with them over time and through the professional development that they completed together as she held strong to her belief and practice of hiring the most highly qualified individuals for her open positions.

While I have addressed here the possible multiple identities that Mia may have carried with her to this study and my exploration due to both race and sex, I did not address other possible identities that she and other participants may have experienced, such as the intersection of leadership theory and the feminist ethic with sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, ability, or socioeconomic status.

Moral theory and epistemology. Belenky et al. (1997) used the work of Gilligan (1982), Lyons (1983), and Perry (1970) as the starting point for their study exploring the development of women's understandings of the world. Gilligan (1982) studied the moral development of women and Lyons (1983) studied an expanded concept

of a responsibility orientation. Gilligan's (1982) and Lyons' (1983) findings suggested that those whose conceptions of self were more rooted in connections and relatedness to others found the concept of a responsibility orientation to be central. Those who possessed a rights orientation tended to define themselves in terms of separation and autonomy. The Belenky et al. (1997) study built upon a flaw that they perceived in the Perry (1970) study design, which didn't allow the themes, which were more prevalent for women to be revealed. Belenky et al. (1997) built upon Perry's (1970) work in order to expand the voices in his developmental framework. The Belenky et al. (1997) study suggested five epistemological positions with the final two developmental stages illustrating the connection that their participants needed for a more fully developed sense of knowing. The "connected knower" and the "constructed knower" were attached to and cared about the objects they worked to understand. The highest level of knowing, "constructed knowers," moved beyond the epistemological stage of the procedurally sufficient "connected knowers" to be able to expand their knowing through the integration of care, reflection, reason, intuition, context, the expertise of others, and their own voices and perceptions into their knowing position (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 149).

While I did not directly ask about participants' epistemologies, participants all spoke to the collaborative, relational, communicative nature of their leadership with staff, students, and families. Participants' actions and experiences indicated that from the standpoint of the qualities of constructed knowers: knowing through care, reflection, reason, intuition, context, the expertise of others, and the confidence of using their own voices and perceptions into how they know, all would be identified as constructed

knowers (Belenky et al., 1997). This level of knowing, inherently relational, illustrated the power of flexibility in decision-making while allowing the knower to move between the good of the individual and the common good in order to make the most informed decisions.

Starratt's (2004) work on ethical school leadership combined the study of organizational leadership theory, ethics and public administration but also overlapped with the feminist ethic as defined by this study. Starratt (2004) made the case that educators must move beyond the mere focus of attaining the technical aspects of student instruction. Instead, they must infuse an understanding that the learning process is "a profoundly oral activity that should engage the full humanity of learners and their teachers" and that school leaders also must understand that their leadership is a "moral activity that engages the full humanity of the school community" (p. 9). Starratt (1991, 2003, 2004) used a framework of "virtue ethics" which consisted of responsibility, authenticity, and presence, which fit under the "three-dimensional map of the ethical terrain" of the ethic of care, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of critique which I have also identified as encompassing the feminist ethic (p. 7). In the next section I have explained each of the ethics identified: care, justice, and critique, from the combined perspectives of feminist theories, leadership theories, and organizational culture theories in order to help the reader understand the connection of the framework used with the findings of the study.

Ethic of care. Noddings (1995, 2003) described the ethic of care in terms of five characteristics. The ethic of care:

1. Focused on the moral importance of meeting the needs of the others for whom we take responsibility;
2. Valued rather than rejected emotion;
3. Valued rather than rejected that the person in the caring relationship is acting for the self and the other together and that the well-being of a caring relation involved the well-being of those in relation and the relationship itself;
4. Re-conceptualized the traditional norms of the public and private;
5. Offered the understanding that people are relational, interdependent, both morally and epistemologically rather than the self-sufficient independent individuals of the traditional moral theories (1995).

The ethic of care espoused the work of leaders as in “relation” to others and that those relationships matter as opposed to the traditional moral theories that offered a “rights” orientation that rejected “involvement with,” instead promoting as the ideal a “distance from,” when rendering decisions and judgments. This ethic of care was also addressed in the early work of Burns (1978) in his conceptualization of transformational leadership and Greenleaf (1977) in his theory of servant leadership, both of which promoted the growth of others and development of followers as leaders in their own right as the ideal.

All participants addressed the ethic of care in their leadership through the relational approach they took in decision-making, strategic planning, and the development of others included in their realm of responsibility: students, employees, families, and community members. I heard Connie’s care in decision-making when she

told me about bringing back her students with special needs from being educated in county programs to be included in her school district's program. Cheryl dismantled the hierarchical mindset at her cabinet meetings in order to allow more voices to be heard regardless of the leader's position of authority, which showed care as an ethic. Mia empowered parent volunteers and eliminated the practice of banning student families from school buildings by teachers and administrators in order to better address the schools' relationships with families.

Ethic of justice. The ethic of justice described by Starratt (2004) had roots as a feminist ethic in the work of Griffiths (1998a, 1998b) and has been carried forward by Adams (2007), Fine (2009), and Swigonski and Raheim (2011).

Feminist theorists call for beginning theories from the lives of those who are marginalized, grounding the search for truths within lives that have been hidden. No theory that fails to recognize the importance of including the lives and voices of those who are marginalized . . . can any longer be taken seriously. (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011, p. 19)

This view has been perpetuated through the deepening of feminist theory over the past 30 years. Fine (2009) further pointed out that when leaders do use a feminist understanding of words associated with success in leadership, such as ambition which has been broadened to mean a desire to do good things for others and create community, it is not always recognized positively by the traditional views of individual ambition still more highly regarded in some organizations. That view, however, has been changing with more general leadership theorists including the movement toward the common good of

our society as an important component of the work of organizations. The leadership theories offered by Burns (1978), Bass and Riggio (2006), Greenleaf (1977), Starratt (2004), and Sergiovanni (1992) provided examples of leadership that included, as a main component, this value. Consciousness raising and value-driven action, two components of the feminist ethic of justice, formed the basis for the transformational leadership and values-driven leadership mentioned above.

Working for justice, Ellen used her influence and political capital in order to secure housing vouchers for the families that needed housing security in her school district. Ellen also began a program that provided food and instruction for parents and families of struggling readers, knowing that families understanding how to support their struggling reader better would have a positive impact on student success in school and in the community going forward. Mia also found ways to better include parents and families in the work of the schools with the addition of a staff member to promote and train parents to help in the schools building strong partnerships. Cheryl fought for new and modern school buildings on one campus for her district's children from working class families.

Ethic of critique. The ethic of critique required individuals and groups to be able to reason critically, and throughout history it had been a beacon for the marginalized and minorities among us to be heard and engaged in the work of improving lives through making public policy. This public policy has allowed the socio-economic and political advancement and opportunity of those individuals living the realities of systemic disadvantage due to poverty, gender, race, religion, and ethnicity. Donovan (1994)

offered an historical look at the early feminist works of 18th-century author and activist Mary Wollstonecraft and Sarah Grimke's 19th-century work that promoted equal access to education, public life, and economic independence for women. Each writer in her own time pushed for encouraging the acquisition of the critical thinking necessary for advances in women's rights to be made through education and the ability of women to speak out about the denial of rights by the men in power.

As with the other two feminist ethics of care and justice, an ethic of critique can be found in the respective theories of Burns (1978), Bass and Riggio (2006), Greenleaf (1977, 1998), Sergiovanni (1994), and Starratt (2004): transformational, servant, ethical, and moral leadership. Questioning, speaking out, and generally exploring the impact of one's leadership and thus, the organization's impact on society supported the ethic of critique.

Critique required speaking up and speaking out about individual and systemic injustice. Each participant included the practice of critique as a leader. Connie spoke up for her students with special needs and their families when she advocated for them to return to the district for their education. Cheryl argued that the "community college is good enough" culture could be and needed to be changed to provide better college and scholarship opportunities for the children in her community. When the city manager did not speak up on her behalf when city council members lied about her actions, Louise spoke to him and ensured that he would make the situation right by publicly supporting the schools and her actions. Mia fought a culture of division from her first conversations with the school board over her hiring practices, in conversations with her mayor, and

when leading her staff members to embrace relationships with parents and the community. Denise held her male colleagues accountable for the title nine issue of discrimination for the girls' basketball teams that their athletic council did not want to address. Ellen took on the challenge of leading her board and school district through the financial crisis caused by the previous treasurer, needing to answer to the board and community for issues that were beyond her control.

Feminist ethic, organizational leadership, and organizational culture.

Relationships and connections have created the adhesive for all three ethics of the feminist ethic: care, justice, and critique. Both Senge's (1990) and Schein's (2010) theories described that organizational culture and leadership rely on understanding how the relationships among people impact the organization. Senge (1990) theorized that management systems must embrace and encourage collaborative work, that changes could only happen when they occurred at both the individual and organizational level, and organizations must become learning organizations. According to Senge, leaders could enable their organizations to be successful by leading them to become "learningful" by developing together the five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Systems thinking kept the other disciplines connected and allowed individuals and groups within the organization to look beyond their own individual interests to the organizational vision (p. 4).

Like Senge (1990), Schein (2010) focused his work on the entire organization theorizing that the success of an organization was determined by its culture. Leaders ultimately began creating the culture of an organization by creating the groups that

become the organization. When elements of an organization's culture become dysfunctional the leadership must take actions to speed up culture change even though such change will create a disequilibrium and disruption to the working environment. Adding another layer on to this discussion of organizational culture and leadership, Chin (2007) suggested that organizations still are often masculinized cultures and thus women as leaders must navigate this reality and the double-bind they face when they are expected to behave within traditional gender-role expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

I saw evidence of Senge's (1990) systems thinking and Schein's (2010) organizational culture in each participant's leadership and experiences as a superintendent. Participants built strong organizational cultures contingent upon the strength of the relationships they encouraged throughout their school districts and the vision and goals, both individual and collective, that together with staff, families, communities and students were set.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggested a model of leadership theory answering the question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate? This leadership theory answered the research question posed due to its discovery from within the data using the tool of constructivist grounded theory offered by Charmaz (2011). The following theory emerged: When authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment are present, women superintendents are better able to succeed in the masculinized culture of school district leadership and the current climate of educational

reform. The essence of women's leadership is manifested in the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique, which allows leaders to bring better outcomes for the individuals and the organization under their stewardship.

The questions remain, however: How do we ensure that other women leaders embrace the authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment from their respected others—both men and women—that is necessary to lead as a female voice in the masculinized culture of school leadership and the current educational reform culture? How do we bring equity to the ranks of all superintendents, by sex, race, ethnicity, religion, culture? This section offers recommendations to answer these questions with the purpose of improving students' lives by improving access to educational leaders willing and able to embrace the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique that will perpetuate our democratic society. Just as leadership using the feminist ethics of care, justice, and critique overlap and enhance one another, the recommendations I have offered based upon my analysis of these findings complement and interact with one another.

Women Hold Up Half The Sky—Increase Numbers of Women Superintendents

As Helgesen explained offering the Chinese proverb:

Women hold up half the sky. . . . Half the work and half the thinking in the world is done by women. For the sky to be complete, both halves must work together; nothing can be truly human that excludes one half of humanity. Until recently, the half of the sky assigned to women has been the private half; the public half has been ceded to men. But as women assume positions of leadership in the

public realm, they are bringing their values with them, and the ancient dichotomies—between male and female, between public and private—are dissolving. (1990, xli)

I ended Chapter 1 with the Helgesen quote above because it framed the reasons why my study of women superintendents was relevant not only to those concerned with educational leadership, but also for the many who understand that with women still underrepresented in the upper tiers of leadership throughout our country in education, business, academia, and politics, our society is missing out. Our society is missing out on the inclusion of too many of the unique individuals who possess the creativity, skills, talent, and desire to improve our world by leaving out such a large percentage of women from top levels of leadership. It's not enough to boast that 76% of the teaching force, and 60% of U.S. principals are women when women make up only 24% of school superintendents nationally (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009; "Documentation to the NCES Common Core of Data," n.d.; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Kowalski et al., 2011; "U.S. Census Bureau," n.d.; *Women in the Labor Force*, 2013).

The call for equal representation of women in the ranks of superintendent is not new. Tallerico (2000) offered five reasons that our nation, states, counties, and school districts should be engaged in "improving the access of women and people of color to every level of administrative leadership, including the school superintendency" (p. 148):

- (1) Education deserves the benefit of the diverse perspectives and experiences that different kinds of educators can bring to school administration.

- (2) We are currently underutilizing the diversity of talent and potential among our teaching ranks.
- (3) Equal opportunity in employment is guaranteed by federal law.
- (4) All children, no matter where they live, should see both genders and all colors in leadership roles in every occupation and institution, including education.
- (5) It is morally objectionable to ignore inequities in the attainments of men, women, and people of color. (Tallerico, 2000, p. 148)

Eleven years later, with women and minorities still not achieving equity, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggested starting a movement, and that movement would bring equitable numbers of women to the superintendency. “We need the strength and power of numbers *and* a variety of lived experiences. If we really care about addressing the gross inequities in educational opportunity and outcome in this country, we’ve got to mobilize now” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 106).

With the current large discrepancy between the numbers of men and women serving as superintendents across the nation, Tallerico’s (2000) case study of board members, superintendents, and superintendent search consultants provided an important outline of suggestions for increasing women and people of color in the ranks of superintendents. These recommendations are still relevant in 2016 and I have offered them with additions based upon my study findings.

Create and share baseline data. We must examine existing employment patterns regarding numbers of males, females, and people of color in leadership, along with their salaries and positions held in the region, state, and nation to provide important

baseline information (Tallerico, 2000, p. 141). While some of this information exists, it is not consistent throughout the country. Currently in Ohio, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) does compile that information on an informal basis. Additionally, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducts periodic studies of the superintendency. The most recent decennial study conducted in 2010 was published in 2011. The resulting superintendency reports should be analyzed for patterns in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity and shared with school boards, hiring consultants, educational preparation programs, and state and national administrative support organizations.

Set target numbers for female superintendents. Although controversial, Tallerico (2000) called for targets to be set for improving diversity among the top educational leadership (p. 141). As Sojo, Wood, Wood, and Wheeler (2016) found in their international study of women's representation in leadership positions in parliaments and on boards of directors, higher goals and targets for women in these leadership roles has led to an increase in female representation in leadership in those areas. The study suggested that, "targets and quotas were more clearly associated with higher female representation on boards of directors and in parliaments" (Sojo et al., 2016, p. 534). Sojo et al. concluded that entities

Seeking to increase female representation should consider quotas or targets with strong enforcement mechanisms and be mindful that, as in most areas of endeavor, the level of representation achieved will be directly related to the level

of challenge in the goal set and how much the goal has been accepted by the key stakeholders” (p. 534)

The challenge with setting targets here in the U.S. is determining who would be responsible for setting those employment targets and gaining the political will to make these targets happen in a political and social environment resistant to affirmative action type initiatives. For example, in Ohio, the logical body to oversee such targets would be the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) at the request of the State Board of Education. Challenges to overcome would be the political nature of the state board of education with eight of the 19 school board seats appointed by the governor, the current practice of local control by locally elected boards of education, and the reality that each local board of education operates currently with little collaboration between other local boards. Enforcement of targets would be another challenge.

Create systems for preparing female candidates. Creating systems for grooming diverse individuals who possess high potential for leadership talent allows the candidate pool to grow. Tallerico (2000) suggested a system of strategic mentoring and boards of education and their administrative teams creating succession plans (p. 142). Tallerico also suggested that boards of education, state school administration support organizations, and colleges and universities attend to the “feeder pools” of potential candidates, providing institutional support for administrative coaching and mentoring, along with paid internships that support the increased numbers of women in university administrator preparation programs (Tallerico, 2000, p. 141). Currently the state of Ohio requires an internship for administrative licensure at all levels. Expansion of paid

internship and leave-time to gain this important preparation for aspiring administrators may positively impact the numbers of women in those programs.

Professional development programs can also be offered by school districts, county educational service centers, and state support organizations such as the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA), the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators (OAESA), the Ohio Association of Secondary School Administrators (OASSA), the Ohio School Board Association (OSBA), and national support organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the National School Board Association (NSBA). Education and professional development topics that would promote equity are relevant for both men and women and include: the impact of gender schemas on leadership, inequities in representation of women and minorities in the superintendency, barriers faced in achieving these positions for women and people of color, the rationale for equity in top leadership positions, and accessing the superintendency.

Another method of supporting the increase of female superintendents is to improve induction systems and mentorship programs for superintendents providing targeted support for early-career women superintendents. Collaboratives can be formed with county educational service centers, state administrative support organizations, universities, state departments of education, search consultants, and boards of education (Tallerico, 2000, p. 146). These collaborative efforts for supporting equity in the

superintendent ranks help support organizations and school boards share scarce resources for enabling new systems of support.

Screen applicants equitably. As Tallerico (2000) suggested, “Who gets recruited into, or screened out of, applicant pools is a key institutional responsibility” (p. 144). Boards of education and search consultants must be educated in the need for diversity in candidates for superintendent positions regardless of the racial and ethnic diversity in a community. Anecdotally, my experience, as an elected local school board member on a five-member board of education, which consisted of three men and two women, all White, involved in two superintendent searches. During both of those searches, I advocated strongly for the inclusion of women and people of color in the pool of applicants given my understanding of their underrepresentation in our state. Had I not spoken up in support of this inclusion, would the other board members have insisted on a diversity of candidates? I don’t know the answer to that question, but in my eight years of board of education service and attending and reviewing many professional development offerings from the Ohio School Board Association, I have not, yet, seen a professional development session that addressed gender or racial inequities in our school administrators in general or in our superintendents specifically.

Along with education and professional development, search consultants, board members, and administrators must re-shape belief systems around incorrect information and negative myths surrounding the superintendency and applicant pools. Because of the increase in the number of applicants who are women and minorities for superintendent positions, board members, superintendent candidates, and search consultants alike have

suggested that applicant pools do not possess the quality candidates necessary for the job (Tallerico, 2000, p. 147). This is often not based upon factual information. Instead, as illustrated by the participants in my study of women superintendents as well as in Tallerico's (2000) study, candidate pools now contain a wider diversity of candidates from the traditional White, male candidate. This diversity of candidates brings with them their diversity of gender and race along with a variety of experiences and paths to and through administration to their candidacies. As hiring agents, local boards of education must become open to the research that has suggested a movement away from their deeply held beliefs that may be clouded by the inaccurate gender schema that often rule their views about women leaders and ultimately their decision-making.

Future Research

The findings from this study have indicated that more research is needed to answer questions around women and the superintendency with further research necessary in the areas of the multiple identities school leaders experience such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and socioeconomic status. The continued marginalization of students along these same identities requires us to include just such diverse leaders.

Tallerico's (2000) case study of school board members, search consultants, and superintendents and the "unwritten rules" around accessing the superintendency for women and minorities needs to be updated and expanded (p. 2). It would be beneficial for school boards, national and state organizations, and university and college leadership preparation programs to understand the latest data regarding women accessing

superintendent positions. Would the findings in 2020 be the same as in Tallerico's 2000 study?

Additionally, my literature review did not uncover any longitudinal studies of women's movement through the educational ranks up to the superintendency. This longitudinal information may provide further and updated insight into women's and society's perceptions as these aspiring leaders navigate the "labyrinth" of education and school leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 6).

Finally, the theory that emerged from the data presented, coded, and analyzed in this study warrants further study as I discuss in the next section.

Theory of Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership

Grounded theory rightly depends upon the data that comes from study participants' experiences, stories, feelings, and words. Charmaz's (2011) approach to developing grounded theory has offered the researcher the ability to interact with data and become part of the theory's construction. Charmaz believed that "we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (p. 10, emphasis in original). Charmaz finished the explanation of her beliefs about grounded theory from a constructivist approach by offering that, "Research participants' implicit meanings, experiential views—and researchers' finished grounded theories—are constructions of reality" (p. 10). I have found through this constructivist, grounded theory analysis and theoretical process that the immersion of myself as the

researcher in my study participants' experiences, emotions, stories, and words has been similar to the ways in which these women led their school districts—connected to the other; in relationship with each of them and the group of them; collaborating through coding, analysis, and theory formation. These study participants and I have truly constructed this theory of women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and organizational leadership, together.

The path that emerged from my analysis of the data grounded in study participants' experiences began with the theoretical coding that resulted in 10 common participant themes from my comparisons of the themes that had been pulled from each individual's focused coding categories and relationships among one another (Appendix G). In true, grounded theory form, and upon closer analysis, the 10 common themes fit easily into three areas that were further compared among each other and with extant research:

- A. *Leadership Disposition*, which is characterized by the importance participants placed on relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication.
- B. *Leadership Purpose*, which is grounded in participants' authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment from others.

A third theme that emerged included the components of the Feminist Ethic, which provided the essence for how these women have led:

- C. *Feminist Ethic/Feminist Approach to Leadership* manifested in the three ethics of care, justice, and critique.

Leadership Disposition and *Leadership Purpose* were broken down by each component in Chapter 4 and discussed in terms of each participant's data, which supported each component of the first two main themes. *Feminist Ethic/Feminist Approach to Leadership* was skimmed off of the figurative "top" of the 10 common themes as the components of care, justice, and critique permeated the data collected on the women who were studied and their leadership.

Figure 4 illustrates the path from my data analysis to the grounded theory. I explored the first study theme that emerged from the common themes, *Leadership Disposition* which was characterized by the importance participants placed on relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication by returning to the study participants' words and experiences in order to further deepen the data grounding the theory's emergence. These women superintendents' experiences validated the connections between the characteristics of their leadership dispositions: relationships, empowerment of others, collaboration, and communication and how they actually led.

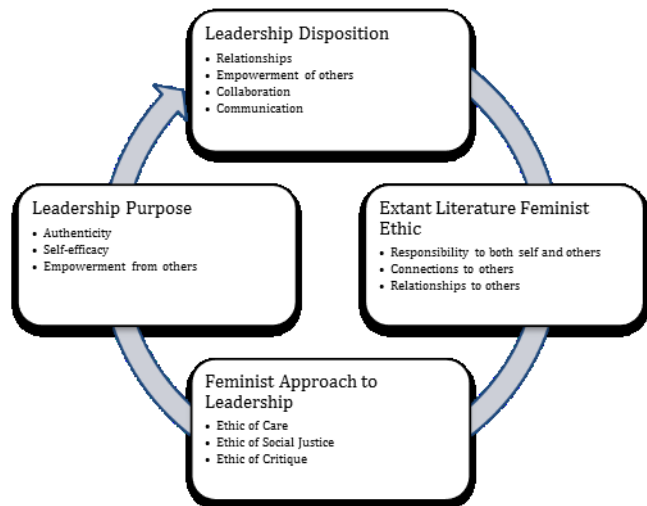


Figure 4. Data analysis to theory development

Next, I found that the study participants' experiences about which I had written illustrated the characteristics of the theme of *Leadership Disposition* and also validated the findings from my review of the literature on the *Feminist Ethic*, which could be conceptualized by the characteristics of: responsibility to both self and others, connections to others, and relationships to others. As I further explored the *Feminist Ethic* as it was defined in Chapter 2 of this dissertation along with how it overlapped with the *Feminist Ethic* emerging from the data analysis, I recognized that this *Feminist Approach to Leadership*, or *Feminist Ethic*, described the essence of these women's leadership work. Following and building upon the understanding of the connections among the first three steps toward grounded theory, was the final piece of the theoretical puzzle. The authenticity that these women leaders felt, the self-efficacy that drove their efforts, and the empowerment they received from respected others fueled their *Leadership Purpose* and could be combined with the other themes into a substantive theory.

Based upon the data analyzed in this study and the process described above, a substantive theory, grounded in study data emerged: When authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment are present, women superintendents are better able to succeed in the masculinized culture of school district leadership and the current climate of educational reform. The essence of women's leadership is manifested in the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique, which allows leaders to bring better outcomes for the individuals and the organization under their stewardship.

Further exploration, study, and testing of this theory may provide women and men with a better understanding of what qualities and conditions are necessary to increase equity in the superintendent ranks and thus increase variety in the ways that educators address the needs of our students.

Conclusion

Researchers have studied the U.S. superintendency for more than a century; however it has only been in the past 25 years that gender and women in the superintendency have been examined. Current research on women in the top leadership role has remained limited due to the consideration of women as a special population. The purpose for this grounded theory study exploring women superintendents' lived experiences as they interact with the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique was to give voice and illustration to the unique manner in which these top school district female leaders led their school districts using the feminist ethic and organizational leadership theory to positively impact the common good of students in our public schools.

The data from this study formed the substance of an emerging theory that I have offered as a springboard for action and research that may afford educational leaders of both sexes the confidence and validation for their unique experiences along the path toward the superintendency, ultimately bringing equity to the ranks of superintendents throughout the United States. As these findings suggested and the theory offered: When authenticity, self-efficacy, and empowerment are present, women superintendents are better able to succeed in the masculinized culture of school district leadership and the current climate of educational reform. The essence of women's leadership is manifested

in the feminist ethic of care, justice, and critique, which allows leaders to bring better outcomes for the individuals and the organization under their stewardship.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

Appendix A

IRB Approval

From: Richmond, Aileene **On Behalf Of** RAGS Research Compliance

Sent: Tuesday, June 10, 2014 10:06 AM

To: Hackney, Catherine

Subject: IRB Level I, category 3 approval for Protocol application #14-327 - please retain this email for your records

RE: Protocol #14-327 - entitled “Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership”

The Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level I/Exempt from Annual review research. Your research project involves minimal risk to human subjects and meets the criteria for the following category of exemption under federal regulations:

- Exemption 3: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, Public Behavior Observation of PUBLIC OFFICIALS

This application was approved on June 10, 2014.

****Submission of annual review reports is not required for Level I/Exempt projects.*

If any modifications are made in research design, methodology, or procedures that increase the risks to subjects or includes activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, those modifications must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation.

Please contact an IRB discipline specific reviewer or the Office of Research Compliance to discuss the changes and whether a new application must be submitted. <http://www.kent.edu/research/researchsafetyandcompliance/irb/index.cfm>

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP); [FWA Number 00001853](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at Researchcompliance@kent.edu or by phone at [330-672-2704](tel:330-672-2704) or [330.672.8058](tel:330.672.8058).

Respectfully,
Kent State University Office of Research Compliance
224 Cartwright Hall | fax [330.672.2658](tel:330.672.2658)

Kevin McCreary | Research Compliance Coordinator | [330.672.8058](tel:330.672.8058) | kmccrea1@kent.edu
Paulette Washko | Manager, Research Compliance | [330.672.2704](tel:330.672.2704) | Pwashko@kent.edu

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

Appendix B

Informed Consent



Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Carol L. Winter

September 1, 2015

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with information on the research project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose

The theories of the feminist ethic and related organizational leadership theory may provide us with the multiple perspectives necessary in examining women superintendents as they negotiate the daunting educational issues facing students in public schools today. My proposed study will add to the theoretical body of knowledge that informs school leadership, gender studies, and women's leadership. It will also add volume to the current underrepresented voices of women superintendents in the on-going discussion of school reform, student achievement, and other factors affecting the leadership of our public school districts. This study will investigate the interaction of women superintendents, the feminist ethic, and the demands of leading U.S. public school districts.

Procedures

Study participants will be asked to do the following in order for investigators to have access to the data necessary to comply with the approved study design:

1. Interview (Face-to-face or via Skype/FaceTime or another agreed upon video conferencing platform) – The interviews will be unstructured, responsive interviews. All interviews will be digitally audio recorded and will last approximately sixty minutes. I will ask that participants choose the site of the

interview, and in the case of interviewees who live more than five hours away I will let them choose the type of platform used to conduct the distance interview which also will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim by the on-line transcription service, Verbal Ink.

2. Follow-up phone interview – The follow-up phone calls will be digitally audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim by Verbal Ink.
3. Journal – Participants will be asked to reflect in a written journal regarding three professional issues, decisions, or dilemmas they have faced within a one-month period that is mutually agreed upon between the investigator and participant. The participant will decide when the entries will be made during the month identified for the journaling. This journal can be handwritten or typed. When complete, the participant will email a copy of the journal with all entries to the investigator. Participants will be asked to reflect upon a difficult professional issue, decision, or dilemma faced within the defined time-period and then address three prompts:
 - a. Please describe a professional issue, decision, or dilemma that you faced.
 - b. How does this issue, decision, or dilemma interact with each of the following components of the feminist ethic as defined:
 - i. Ethic of Care – 1) Involves different moral concepts emphasizing responsibility and relationships rather than rules and rights. 2) Situational rather than abstract and informal; thus, morality is tied to social practices and customs and to people’s feelings and opinions. 3) Moral activity; it is about the “activity of caring” rather than a set of principles which can be followed (Tronto, 1993).
 - ii. Ethic of Social Justice – 1) Whereas legal justice concerns how individuals conform to society’s rules, social justice concerns how those rules are distributed (Sadurski, 1985). 2) A movement to a fairer and less oppressive society. 3) Involves working for the common good; the good for each and the good for all in an acknowledgement that one depends upon the other. 3) The good depends on there being a right distribution of benefits and responsibilities (Griffiths, 1998a, 1998b).
 - iii. Ethic of Critique – 1) Encourages leaders to investigate who really benefits from the status quo of social, economic, and political arrangements. 2) Allows exploration of which groups dominate in a given social, economic, and political relationships and who defines what is valued and disvalued in a given situation. 3) Critique of systems is necessary to overcome systemic injustice (Starratt, 2004).
 - c. To what extent, if any, did an ethic of care, an ethic of social justice, and/or an ethic of critique influence and/or support the manner in which you addressed the issue, decision, or dilemma described above?
 - d. Other thoughts?

4. Submit a writing sample – Participants will be asked to submit a professional writing sample that documents a situation that has taken place under the superintendent’s leadership of the district and was difficult for the participant and/or for those under her leadership. Because this will be self-selected by the study participant, there will be flexibility regarding the type of written work used. Examples include but are not limited to: published article, school district or community newsletter, letter to faculty and staff, to students, or to families.
5. Focus Group – Participants will be invited to meet together as a focus group to provide the means of verification and interpretation of data. This will occur after all interviews have been conducted. Efforts will be made to include participants not able to travel from their home district to the focus group and adjustments, such as using Skype for out of town participants, will be made.
6. Investigator Design Journal – The investigator will keep a design journal in an electronic blog format. She will share the link with study participants who will have access to see how the study progresses and what my thoughts and informal musings around my work factor in to the research.

Audio and Video Recording and Photography

1. The following data collection activities will be audio recorded: individual face-to-face or Skype interviews, follow-up phone interviews, and the focus group.
2. The initial interviews and follow-up phone interviews will be transcribed verbatim.
3. Participants will be given the option to listen to the recording of the individual, follow-up, or focus group interviews.
4. The data gathered from these recordings may be used in other research, published articles, books, professional meetings, or presentations.
5. The focus group will be recorded and notes will be written from the recording since this is a verification meeting.
6. Recordings will be destroyed after the study has been completed. Transcripts will be saved with no identifiable information of the participants.

Benefits

The potential benefits of participating in this study may include the following: Your participation in this study may help school leaders and aspiring leaders to better understand the nuances associated with your personal experiences as a female superintendent leading a school district and thereby help them grow as leaders. Readers may also find that the conclusions drawn and the theory developed from the combination of data from all participants will be transferable to their professional or personal situations. Additionally, as a participant in this study, you may also experience personal and professional growth due to the reflection that you will experience through the interview, follow-up questions, journal entries, and writing samples you will be submitting to the researcher.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life. However, if you are not comfortable with any of the questions asked, for any reason you may skip the question(s).

Privacy and Confidentiality

Confidential refers to data collection that can be linked to an individual subject but is kept private. Care must be taken to protect the subject's names and any other details that would allow them to be identified.

Anonymous refers to data collection that cannot be linked to the individual subjects. No identifying information is collected and once the data has been collected it cannot be connected to a subject.

No identifying information will be collected. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from your study data, and responses will not be linked to you.

Your study related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. Any identifying information will be kept in a secure location and only the researchers will have access to the data. Research participants will not be identified in any publication or presentation of research results; only aggregate data will be used.

Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Confidentiality may not be maintained if you indicate that you may do harm to yourself or others.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Carol Winter, Doctoral Candidate and Investigator at 440-781-1504 or Dr. Catherine Hackney, Associate Dean Administrative Affairs and Graduate Education and Principle Investigator at 330-672-0552. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330-672-2704.

Consent Statement and Signature

I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Study Title: Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Carol L. Winter

August 26, 2015

Dear _____,

_____ suggested that you may be willing to serve as a participant in the research study that I'm conducting for my dissertation that will begin September 2015.

I am studying women superintendents in a qualitative, grounded theory study that will be addressing the question: *How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current climate of educational reform?*

The feminist ethic is defined to include: Caring as an ethic applied beyond the family, social justice in response to oppression, and critique of systems and theory which have historically omitted non-majority perspectives. It is an ethic used by men and women alike and can be summed up in the way Belenkey et al. (1997) described as "an affinity for the world and the people in it" (pp. 149 – 150).

I am looking for women superintendents who have represented or are currently representing a variety of school district types and sizes across the U.S. These superintendents will be selected to participate based upon their leadership actions that illustrate at least one of the tenets of the feminist ethic described above.

The data collection will take place from September 2015 through December 2015. Data analysis will begin with the first transcribed interview and will continue beyond December until a theory is uncovered and findings are complete. As a participant, you will be asked to provide the following:

1. Sixty-minute Interview (Face-to-face or via Skype/FaceTime or another agreed upon video conferencing platform)
2. Follow-up phone interview
3. Journal – Participants will be asked to reflect in a written journal regarding three professional issues, decisions, or dilemmas they have faced within a one-month period that is mutually agreed upon between the investigator and participant
4. Submit a writing sample – Participants will be asked to submit a professional writing sample that documents a situation that has taken place under the

superintendent's leadership of the district and was difficult for the participant and/or for those under her leadership.

5. Focus Group – Participants will be invited to meet together as a focus group to provide the means of verification and interpretation of data.

As the researcher, I will provide you with a link to my on-line design journal. This will document my process, progress, thoughts, and informal musings as I work through the data collection and analysis of this study.

Please consider letting your unique voice be heard through this important study. I'm happy to discuss this research further and answer any questions you may have. I've also attached the Letter of Informed Consent that offers more details regarding the design of the study. Thank you for your consideration!

Best regards,
Carol Winter
440-781-1504 (cell)

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT TASKS

Appendix D

Participant Tasks



Study Title: Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Carol L. Winter

Data Collection: September 2015 – December 2015

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study! The details of this study are described below. If you have any questions regarding the required activities do not hesitate to call, email, or text

Carol's cell: 440-781-1504

Carol's email: cwinter5@kent.edu

Procedures

Study participants will be asked to do the following in order for investigators to have access to the data necessary to comply with the approved study design:

1. Interview (Face-to-face or via Skype/FaceTime or another agreed upon video conferencing platform) – The interviews will be unstructured, responsive interviews. All interviews will be digitally audio recorded and will last approximately sixty minutes. I will ask that participants choose the site of the interview, and in the case of interviewees who live more than five hours away I will let them choose the type of platform used to conduct the distance interview which also will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim by the on-line transcription service included with the NVivo software (September 2015 – October 2015).
2. Follow-up phone interview – The follow-up phone calls will be digitally audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim by NVivo Transcription Services (September 2015 – October 2015).
3. Journal – Participants will be asked to reflect in a written journal regarding three professional issues, decisions, or dilemmas they have faced within a one-month period that is mutually agreed upon between the investigator and participant. The participant will decide when the entries will be made during the month identified for the journaling. This journal can be handwritten or typed. When complete, the participant will email a copy of the journal with all entries to the investigator.

Participants will be asked to reflect upon a difficult professional issue, decision, or dilemma faced within the defined time-period and then address three prompts (September 2015 – November 2015):

- a. Please describe a professional issue, decision, or dilemma that you faced.
 - b. How does this issue, decision, or dilemma, as you experience it, interact with one or more of the following components of the feminist ethic as defined:
 - i. Ethic of Care – 1) Involves different moral concepts emphasizing responsibility and relationships rather than rules and rights. 2) Situational rather than abstract and informal; thus, morality is tied to social practices and customs and to people’s feelings and opinions. 3) Moral activity; it is about the “activity of caring” rather than a set of principles which can be followed (Tronto, 1993).
 - ii. Ethic of Social Justice – 1) Whereas legal justice concerns how individuals conform to society’s rules, social justice concerns how those rules are distributed (Sadurski, 1985). 2) A movement to a fairer and less oppressive society. 3) Involves working for the common good, the good for each and the good for all in an acknowledgement that one depends upon the other. This good depends on there being a right distribution of benefits and responsibilities (Griffiths, 1998a, 1998b).
 - iii. Ethic of Critique – 1) Encourages leaders to investigate who really benefits from the status quo of social, economic, and political arrangements. 2) Allows exploration of which groups dominate in a given social, economic, and political relationships and who defines what is valued and disvalued in a given situation. 3) Critique of systems is necessary to overcome systemic injustice (Starratt, 2004).
 - c. To what extent, if any, did an ethic of care, an ethic of social justice, and/or an ethic of critique influence and/or support the manner in which you addressed the issue, decision, or dilemma described above?
 - d. Other thoughts?
4. Submit a writing sample – Participants will be asked to submit a professional writing sample that documents a situation that has taken place under the superintendent’s leadership of the district and was difficult for the participant and/or for those under her leadership. Because this will be self-selected by the study participant, there will be flexibility regarding the type of written work used. Examples include but are not limited to: published article, school district or community newsletter, letter to faculty and staff, to students, or to families (September 2015 – October 2015).

5. Focus Group – Participants will be invited to meet together as a focus group to provide the means of verification and interpretation of data. This will occur after all interviews have been conducted. Efforts will be made to include participants not able to travel from their home district to the focus group and adjustments, such as using Skype for out of town participants, will be made (January 2016).
6. Investigator Design Journal – The investigator will keep a design journal in an electronic blog format. She will share the link with study participants who will have access to see how the study progresses and what my thoughts and informal musings around my work factor in to the research (September 2015 – March 2016).

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

1. How long have you worked in education?
2. Tell me about your path to the superintendency. (women superintendents)
 - a. What does it mean to you to be a superintendent? (women superintendents)
 - b. Why did you want to be in this position?
 - c. Were there any particular incidents that sent you down this path?
3. Describe your leadership. (organizational leadership)
 - a. Why do you lead this way?
 - b. What compels you?
4. How does who you are impact your work as a superintendent? (women supt., org. leadership, feminist ethic)
 - a. How are you different from other superintendents
5. Tell me about your perceptions of the culture and climate of the district you lead? (org. leadership)
 - a. What are your goals for the culture and climate of your district?
6. Do you ever find that your role as a superintendent goes against your grain? (women supt., org. leadership, feminist ethic)
 - a. Does it always feel right to be in the position you are?
7. Tell me a story of when you struggled in your position. (org. leadership)

- a. Maybe with a difficult decision or a time when your role conflicted with who you are.
8. Talk about your interactions with the families and students, and staff you serve. How do you think about decision-making in the context of the community, families, staff, and students? (feminist ethic)
9. Tell me about how you left the district.
10. Now that you've read about the feminist ethic and are familiar with it, is there anything else you would like to add that would help my study?

Superintendent Demographic Data:

Superintendent Pseudonym: _____

School District Pseudonym: _____

District Type as defined by National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Institute of Education and Sciences (IES): _____

Number of years in District: _____ **Number of Districts served as Superintendent:**

Racial self-identification _____

Ethnic self-identification _____

Religious self-identification _____

Number of total years in Superintendency: _____

Circle One: Current Superintendent Former Superintendent

Study Information:

Study Title: Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Carol L. Winter

Co-Directors Dissertation Committee: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Jennifer Kulics, Dr. Rosemary Gornik

Research Question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading their school districts?

Research Participants: Snowball sampling beginning with a sitting superintendent from a small-town school district. Target participants are women superintendents from a variety of types of school districts as delineated by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Institute of Education and Sciences (IES).

This document will serve as a guide for my interviews but not be read verbatim nor given to study participants to fill out.

Introduction to interviews:

My goal with this interview and my study is to have you “step me through” different aspects of the demands of leading your school district (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p. 108).

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

Appendix F

Interview Follow-Up

Study Title: Women Superintendents, the Feminist Ethic, and Organizational Leadership

Principal Investigator: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Co-Investigator: Carol L. Winter

Directors Dissertation Committee: Dr. Catherine Hackney

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Jennifer Kulics, Dr. Rosemary Gornik

Research Question: How does the feminist ethic interact with the leadership of women superintendents as they address the demands of leading in the current educational climate?

Date _____

Name _____

Pseudonym _____

Superintendent in:

District _____

District Pseudonym _____

District _____

District Pseudonym _____

District _____

District Pseudonym _____

1. **Age at time of interview** _____

2. **Highest Degree Earned** _____

3. **In general, what were the biggest challenges and demands of the educational climate in which you led?**

APPENDIX G

ANALYSIS OF THEORETICAL CODING THEMES

Appendix G

Analysis of Theoretical Coding Themes

Connie	Cheryl	Mia	Louise	Denise	Ellen	Collective Themes
Authentic	24/7	Authentic	Authentic	Authentic	Authenticity	Authenticity
Care	Accountability	Care	Care	Care	Care/Compassion	Care
Challenge/Critique	Approachable	Challenge/Critique	Challenge/Critique	Challenge/ Critique	Challenge/Critique	Challenge/Critique
Collaboration	Authentic	Collaboration	Collaboration	Collaborative/ Empowerment	Collaborative	Collaboration
Communication	Care	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication
Contextual	Challenge/Critique	Drive	Drive	Communication/ Relationships	Drive	Drive
Deep Work	Collaboration	Empowerment	Empowerment	Drive	Emotional Connections	Empowerment of Others
Drive	Communication	Feedback	Relationships	Empowerment	Empathy	Empowerment from Others
Empowerment	Contextual	Gut Feeling	Social Justice	Relationships/ Critique	Empowerment	Relationships
Humility	Drive	Race		Relationships/ Empowerment	Relationships	Social Justice
Improvement	Emotional Connection	Reflection		Servant Leadership	Social Justice	

Influence	Empowerment	Relationships	Social Justice	Student Centered
Momentum	Family Feel	Social Justice	Social Justice/Critique	Trust
Proactive	Fostering Opportunities			
Professional Growth	Generosity of Spirit			
Reflection	Humility			
Relationships	Leading by Example			
Social Justice	Open Hearted			
Striving	Other Focused			
	Proactive			
	Raising Standards			
	Relationships			
	Responsibility to Children			
	Silence			
	Social Justice			
	Student Advocate			
	Student Discipline			
	Visible			

APPENDIX H
FOCUS GROUP OUTLINE

Appendix H

Focus Group Outline

1. Lunch, Welcome, Thank You, and Introductions
2. Warm up activity: Describe yourself as a flower; don't have to share, but I will share first
3. Share Demographic Information and Individual Themes (Encourage their notes and musings on this sheet)
 - a. Check for accuracy
 - b. Make changes
 - c. Add details
 - d. Another Question: What is the number of female superintendents who have/had served in your district prior to your employment?
 - e. Collect this handout
4. Share Coding Process, Participants' Views on Biggest Educational Challenges, Overlapping Themes, and Emerging Theory
 - a. What about this information resonates with you? Why?
 - b. What does each category or theme mean to you? Use the THEMES handout to guide the discussion through each category and the individual and group meaning assigned to each.
 - Authenticity
 - Care
 - Challenge/Critique
 - Collaboration
 - Communication
 - Drive
 - Empowerment
 - Relationships
 - Social Justice
 - c. Other thoughts?
5. Collect both handouts

APPENDIX I

FOCUS GROUP INDIVIDUAL VERIFICATION

Appendix I

Focus Group Individual Verification

Date of Interview: 9/23/15

Participant Name:

Pseudonym: Connie

Participant District:

District Pseudonym: Molington

Age at time of interview: 64 years

of years served as superintendent: _____

2013 ODE School District Typology: 3 – Small Town – Low Student Poverty & Small Student Population

What is the number of female superintendents who had served in your district prior to your employment? _____

APPENDIX J

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROMPT

Appendix J

Focus Group Discussion Prompt

BIGGEST CHALLENGES AND DEMANDS OF THE EDUCATIONAL CLIMATE IN WHICH YOU SERVED AS A SUPERINTENDENT

Inadequate Funding

Accountability/Testing

Inadequate, Overcrowded, or Old Facilities

Adoption/Alignment of the Common Core Standards

Small Town Politics

Board of Education Relations

Unqualified Administrators/Staff Members/Dysfunctional Leadership Team

Nationwide Political Climate Around Education

COLLECTIVE CATEGORIES/THEMES

Authenticity

Care

Challenge/Critique

Collaboration

Communication

Drive

Empowerment

Relationships

Social Justice

TWO THEMES AS A BRIDGE

Through this study I share your voices as I guide readers through the path on which your data led me.

Two themes bridged my journey from your words, to the coded data, to an emerging grounded theory:

1. Professional and personal purpose
 - a. Authenticity
 - b. Critique and Challenge of the Status Quo
 - c. Internal Drive
 - d. Empowerment From Others
 - e. Social Justice

2. Leadership disposition
 - a. Collaboration
 - b. Communication
 - c. Empowerment Of Others
 - d. Relationships
 - e. Social Justice

A THEORY EMERGES

Women superintendents who have a strong sense of authenticity, calling, values, beliefs, and feminist ethic are able to meet the daily demands of leading a district in the current educational climate through attacks, tensions, and structural restrictions using the power of the feminist ethic to manage the difficulties because they love their work, the students, staff, families, and the school community.

Further, there is deep authentic integration of the feminist ethic and a depth of purpose. When difficulties do arise, it is not that the challenges and attacks inherent to the job do not hurt or that the assaults do not sometimes bring these leaders to their knees. Instead, their calling is so strong that these women superintendents keep validating themselves and looking at external criticisms head-on and for what they are. They give the detractors and their critiques enough credence that even with a feeling of doubt, their intense sense of mission implores the strongest women leaders to go back to the work of connecting with, inspiring, and leading others toward wholeness.

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