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From the Voices of California Female Superintendents: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform Through the Lens of Activity Theory

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From the Voices of California Female Superintendents:

Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform

Through the Lens of Activity Theory

A dissertation by

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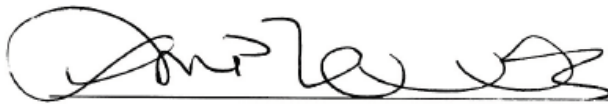
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ABSTRACT

From the Voices of California Female Superintendents: Examining Barriers and Support

Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform Through the Lens of Activity Theory

by Jennifer L. Martin

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the

barriers and support systems female California public school superintendents experienced

while attaining and serving in their current position in a new era of educational reform in

Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

Methodology: This qualitative study examined 12 female California public school

superintendents' experienced barriers and support systems. Convenience sampling was

applied to identify participants of specific criteria. The researcher collected and coded

data from in depth interviews; interview protocol directly correlated with the research

questions of this study. A variety of related artifacts were additionally gathered and

analyzed for the generated codes to triangulate the interview data.

Findings: Examination of qualitative data from the 12 female California public school

superintendents were organized by sub research question and aligned to the theoretical

framework of Activity Theory, identifying barriers and support systems experienced by

the participants in one of the following domains: *instruments, rules, community, division*

of labor. This study yielded a variety of findings but unexpectedly, support systems were

most frequently cited throughout this study, as compared to barriers. The most frequent

code was having a professional mentor as a support system. Moreover, the five most

frequent codes of the entire study were support systems in the domain of "*community*."

Conclusions: The study supported the conclusions that a continued male dominated culture of superintendents continues to exist and is documented as a relevant barrier; current hiring practices of superintendents exclude females; females perceive the role of superintendent will demand high amounts of time and expertise and the demands of home and child care are documented barriers; confidence plays a role in attaining and serving as superintendent; *"community"* supports provide the greatest support for females both while attaining and serving; LCAP/LCFF collaborative process aligns with the leadership style of female superintendents; and "*instruments*" provide supports for females aspiring and serving as superintendent.

Recommendations: 12 areas of further research were recommended to increase the body of literature related to these variables.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The role of superintendent of a public school system is a complex and challenging position of leadership. Superintendents are responsible for multiple facets of business and political impacts on a school district. Acting as Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of a school district, superintendents are expected to enhance the educational program of students; improve student achievement; enforce district, state, and federal policies; manage schools and departments; and act as liaison between the local board of education, district, and community (Spanneut & Ayers, 2011; Edwards, 2007). More recently, over the past few years, there has been a shift to closer align the responsibilities of superintendents and school effectiveness (Business, 2015; Thompson & France, 2015).

The superintendent's role has evolved in response to the changing demands of schools and society transitioning into the 21st century. Recent educational reform at national and state levels has brought modified role and responsibility expectations of superintendents of schools. Increased accountability of student achievement and local control provided in new federal laws, such as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, replacing No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act, requires superintendents to better understand and implement effective instruction, curriculum, and pedagogy to meet the needs of students in the 21st century (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Waters and Marzano (2006) claims the role of the superintendent does effect student achievement, as it is the responsibility of the superintendent to collaboratively goal-set, hold non-negotiable standards for student achievement, and effectively use resources, including time, money, personnel, and materials to positively impact student outcomes. In addition to traditional responsibilities, including management of departments within the district and

communicating with the district's elected Board of Education, superintendents are expected to serve as instructional leaders, knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction.

Mastery of effective instruction and curriculum implementation is the primary role of a classroom teacher. Instructional leaders, such as school principals, district level management, and superintendents, are generally promoted from the role of classroom teacher because of their background in educational instruction (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Currently, 72% of teachers nationwide are female, which has been relatively constant over the past decade (Bitterman, Gray, & Goldring, 2013; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Glass, 2000; Litmanovitz, 2010). Even though teachers are a majority female, more advanced leadership positions in education are being filled by males, especially at the secondary and district-level. Females tend fare best in leadership positions at the elementary level, with 54% of these jobs being held by females in the year 2012 (Domenech, 2012). Yet, statistics decline at the secondary school level to only 26% of principals being female, and in the lead role of superintendent, it is 24% female (Domenech, 2012). Females equate to near half, at 47%, of the entire U.S. labor force and 59% of the college-educated entry-level workforce (Khairuzzaman, Ismail, Jafar, & Al-Taee, 2012). One might assume a majority of superintendent candidates would come from this vast pool of educated, female teachers in the educational workforce, experienced in curriculum and instruction. Yet, in the female-dominated profession of education, females have fewer opportunities than males to serve in leadership positions, in the field of education (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009).

Statistics over the past century support the claim that females have fewer opportunities to service in these leadership positions, especially in the role of

superintendent. From 1919 to 1950, 10% of superintendents nation-wide were female (Blount, 1999). In the year 2000, 14% of superintendents were female (Glass 2000), which increased slightly to 22% in the year 2006 (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, Ellerson, 2011). Despite the increase to 22%, females continue to be significantly underrepresented in the position of school superintendent (Glass 2000; Gupton, 2009; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). It remains unknown as to why females serve in fewer educational leadership positions than males. Shakeshaft (1986) explained females "are likely to view the job of principal or superintendent as that of master teacher or educational leader while men view it from a managerial, industrial perspective" (p. 118). While 72% of educators are female, with the majority of them most likely holding a primary view of superintendent as a "master teacher," the mass of superintendent positions continue to be filled by males (Domenech, 2012; Lee Dowell & Larwin, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011; Skrla, 1999).

School superintendent statistics in California (CA) mirror national statistics. In the year 2006, 16% of CA superintendents were female, declining from 17% females in the year 1990 (Association of California School Administrators [ACSA], 2008). This means 84% of CA school districts are led by males.

Both the United States and the state of CA have undergone recent, immense educational reform, which has impacted the role and responsibilities of school superintendents. Recent federal and state legislation has changed district accountability measures, funding systems, and increased student expectations for learning in the 21st century (Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014). These educational reforms, both nationwide and in the state of CA, have placed greater

importance of school superintendents to produce effective teaching and positive student outcomes (Davis et al., 2010). Superintendents' role in this era of educational reform has shifted, requiring a more collaborative, instructional leader, emphasizing role modeling by personally engaging in professional development alongside principals and teachers (Dickson & Mitchell, 2014). The superintendent's role continues to evolve in response to demands of new educational laws and mandates to account for and produce increased student achievement (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014; Wilson, 2013). Although both male and female leaders must respond to these demands, a focus of females is necessary, since females have been significantly underrepresented in the position of superintendent both nationally and in the state of CA.

With a continued disproportionate percentage of females in the role of superintendent, coupled with recent educational reforms leading to shifting expectations of superintendents, there is a need to more thoroughly understand the females who, despite the odds, broke the glass ceiling to secure a position as superintendent of schools (Björk, 2000; Fuller, 2013; Glass, 2000; Gupton, 2009; Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010).

Background

History of Females in the United States Superintendency

From teaching in a one room school house to leading comprehensive school districts, females' role in education has evolved over the past century. The position of superintendent of schools has existed since the mid-1800s, when many large cities decided to hire a common manager to oversee daily operations of a collection of school buildings. Even though superintendents existed since the middle of the 1800s, it wasn't

until early 1900s that the United States had their first female superintendent. Ms. Ella

Flagg Young became the first female superintendent of Chicago schools in 1909

(Anderson, 2000; Blount, 1998; National Women's History Museum [NWHM], n.d.).

After achieving this accomplishment, Young believed in the future more women than

men would be in executive positions within educational systems. Young felt that

education was a woman's natural occupation and that women would no longer be

satisfied with secondary roles of teaching, aspiring to more advanced leadership positions

(Blount, 1998), including that of superintendent.

Underrepresentation of Female Superintendents

Despite the first female superintendent established in the early 1900s, females

have been underrepresented in the position of superintendent since this time. From 1919

until 1950, women held approximately 10% of all superintendent positions in the United

States (Blount, 1999). From the 1950s until the 1980s, the United States experienced a

decline in female superintendents to less than 1% (Gupton & Slick, 1996). During this

time, in the early 1970s, federal legislation was passed, which explicitly addressed

inequality and gender discrimination in the workforce. The Equal Employment

Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1972 was passed as an amendment of the Civil Rights Act to

prohibit workplace gender discrimination. The intent of EEOA was to further promote

equal employment opportunities for American workers regardless of demographic

information or religious background (California Department of Education [CDE]a, 2015).

Furthermore, in the same year, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was

initiated as a comprehensive federal law that more specifically prohibits discrimination

on the basis of gender in any federally-funded education program or activity (CDEa,

2015). Finally, national statistics began to climb to almost 6% female superintendents throughout the 1980s (Gupton & Slick, 1996). The percentage of female U.S. superintendents nearly doubled during the 1990s; however, the rate doubled from 6.6% female to 13.2% female superintendents (Brunner, Grogan, & Prince, 2004; Glass, 2000). Over the next decade, there was minimal growth of female superintendents to 14% in the year 2000 (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009; Glass, 2000) and then to 21.7% in the year 2006 (Kowalski et al., 2011). These federal laws and hiring practices have provided the underpinnings for gender equality in federally-funded education programs and institutions, yet "females remain […] a long way from equality in the workplace" (Shapiro, 2006, p. 54). Shapiro (2006) encourages women to hold leadership positions in major institutions of society, such as education, to share and encourage the adoption of special interests necessary to continue to support and encourage female leadership. Females in the position of superintendent have increased since the conception of the superintendency, yet most recent statistics reveal they remain significantly underrepresented.

Statistics in the state of CA mimic national demographics. In 1990, 17% of superintendents in CA were female. Almost two decades later, in the year 2006, the number declined to 16% (ACSA, 2008). A vast majority of CA superintendents, at 84%, are male. Table 1 illustrates national and state statistics of female superintendents. CA superintendents have consistently been predominately male, yet the state of CA and the nation as a whole have undergone recent, immense educational reforms since 2012, impacting the role and responsibilities of the school superintendent.

Table 1

Percentage of Female Superintendents Serving in the Year 1990 and 2006

Female Superintendents	Year 1990	Year 2006
United States	13.2%	21.7%
California	17%	16%

Note. Adapted from "The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study," by T. J. Kowalski, R. S. McCord, G. I. Petersen, I. P. Young, and N. M. Ellerson, 2011, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education; "Women's Leadership Network," by Association of California School Administrators, 2012, [website]. Retrieved from http://www.mbt 4schools.com/association-california-school-administrators-acsa-region-19-womens-leadership-network-meeting/

Recent Educational Reform, Post 2011

K-12 educational reform swept the United States since 2012, in response to underperforming school systems and a necessity to better prepare students to be globally competitive in the 21st century (Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014). Paul (2014) claims some of the major components emerging from the recent reform includes federal and CA state adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which outlines learning expectations of students in Mathematics and English Language Arts; adoption of a new student testing system fully implemented in 2015 called Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC); and a revamp of the school finance system in 2013, which produces Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) "to streamline local funding and increase support for disadvantaged students[,] also requires districts to set performance targets on a range of school and student success indicators as part of a district Local Control Accountability Plan" (Paul, 2014, p. 2).

Since 2010, a number of states in the United States adopted new CCSS for student learning, vertically aligning learning objectives from kindergarten through grade 12. CCSS are designed to increase the depth of learning and rigor of standards at each grade

level; the intent is to prepare students to be college and career ready by embedding skills to utilize and apply technology, collaboration, and critical thinking (CDEc, 2015). The state of CA adopted a gradual implementation of CCSS for English Language Arts and Mathematics beginning in 2012; the state's focus is to build 21st century competencies of students throughout these subjects (CDEc, 2015).

In 2014, CA underwent a significant overhaul of education funding formulas and accountability system. LCFF is a weighted funding system, allocating more money per student for secondary compared to elementary and additional funds for students of underperforming subgroups, including English Learners and Foster or Homeless Youth; this is all "based on the notion that students with greater need require more resources to have the same opportunities to achieve meaningful outcomes" (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015, p. 3). LCFF monies are strategically budgeted and monitored by local agencies (e.g. school districts) through a written vehicle of transparency, known as the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). These spending plans are to explicitly addresses the CA state's eight priorities, which incorporates stakeholder input in a three year strategic plan, monitored by effectiveness through specific goals, actions, and expenditures of the local agency (Affeldt, 2015).

Moreover, the year 2015 brought further educational reform. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed as national legislation by President Obama, which was enacted to replace the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2002. According to the United States Department of Education (USDE), ESSA includes provisions to support success for students and schools by focusing on America's disadvantaged and high-need students, increasing involvement of and communication to stakeholders, and provides

local control to tailor and implement evidence-based practices and supports based on unique needs of the local district (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], n.d.). These reforms shifted the role of the superintendent since 2012, increasing accountability of school districts to affect deeper achievement and increase student outcomes.

Recent Educational Reform's Impact on the Role of the Superintendent

Educational reforms at a national and local level place greater responsibility on school superintendents. The current era of educational reform in CA has amplified the importance of superintendents to ensure conditions and supports necessary to produce impactful teaching and produce positive student outcomes.

> Commensurate with this phenomenon is an increased focus on holding school leaders accountable for essential school outcomes. As a consequence, renewed attention has been directed by policy makers, scholars, and school districtleaders on the methods used to assess leadership competence […]. (Davis et al., 2010, p. 67)

Dickson and Mitchell (2014) researched the shifting role of superintendents across the nation. Their research concluded the primary role of 21st century superintendents is shifting away from managing and directing professional learning communities and toward the importance of leading the learning and role modeling. An example of leading the learning is participating in professional development training alongside subordinate instructional leaders, such as principals and teachers and engaging in professional conversations through collaborative forums (Dickson & Mitchell, 2014).

Equally important to increased student achievement across the board, is the responsibility of superintendent to narrow the achievement gap of underperforming

students and to increase cultural proficiency of students and staff. Wright and Harris (2010) found the personal beliefs of the superintendent were vital to leading the change of a school district to become more culturally proficient in an era demanding increased student achievement and proficiency. Overall, it was found superintendents need to create and maintain a vision for success and unity of all cultures, develop relationships with underperforming subgroups, recognize cultural differences and role model cultural proficiency in order to yield increased student outcomes in academics and in cultural proficiency for all students, especially for students in underperforming subgroups (Wright & Harris, 2010).

Subsequently, multiple studies concluded a superintendent's role does effect student achievement (Chingos et al., 2014; Petersen, 1999; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Wilson, 2012). One meta-analyses study gathered findings from 27 studies, involving 2,817 districts in the United States, concluded very specific factors that impact positive student achievement. These factors included superintendent's focus on "creating [a] goal-oriented district" (Waters & Marzano, 2006, pp. 3-4) by involving stakeholders in developing goals, holding "non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction," (Waters & Marzano, 2006, pp. 3-4) ensuring alignment of board priorities with district goals, continuous monitoring of these goals and outcomes, and implementing all necessary recourses of the district to implement goals; this also means eliminating initiatives not aligned with goals focused on student achievement and instruction (Waters & Marzano, 2006). A common theme of effective superintendents is one who creates and maintains focus on a vision built around student achievement for all, which aligns all resources and initiatives to support this vision (Chingos et al., 2014; Petersen, 1999;

Waters & Marzano, 2006; Wilson, 2012). These new demands on educational leaders, to produce outcomes and be held accountable for strategic plans, may serve as a deterrent for those considering the superintendency.

Barriers and Support Systems of Females Securing the Superintendency

Throughout history, females have faced career barriers. Barriers have been documented for females both obtaining and holding position as superintendent across the United States, especially in the state of CA. One documented barrier to holding position as superintendent is the challenge of balancing responsibilities of home and work, which includes caring for the home and child, which have predominantly been seen as a female's role (Gupton, 2009; McGee, 2010). Another document barrier relates to the superintendent selection process (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988); Boards of Education are ultimately responsible for selecting the superintendent from a pool of candidates, and based on historical gender stereotypes associated with leadership styles, males are generally offered the position of superintendent over females (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Wolverton, Rawls, Macdonald, & Nelson, 2000). One study illuminated the societal belief that males are more "capable" in leadership positions than are females, where this belief was held by both males and females alike (Shakeshaft, 1987).

Support systems assist females in overcoming perceived barriers in their quest to advanced leadership positions. A review of literature revealed support systems most utilized by women in leadership positions included professional and personal networking groups, district-level support, which included offerings of specialized training for women in leadership positions, and the support from their family unit (Eckman, 2004; Gupton,

2009; Kelsey, Allen, & Ballard, 2014; Muñoz, Pankake, Ramalho, Mills, & Simonsson, 2014). Other studies cite the importance of mentoring (between males and females and between females and females) and the quality of professional guidance from other females as effective support systems (Affeldt, 2015; Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010; Muñoz et al., 2014).

The perceived barriers and support systems of current female superintendents deserve further examination, as the literature continues to present a vivid picture of females actively involved and successful in various school roles, yet they remain underrepresented in the highest leadership position of school superintendent (Blount, 1998; Logan & Logan, 1998; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Since little research exists on the barriers and support systems of current female superintendents during this era of educational changes, further research is necessary to better understand the significant disproportionality of gender, which continues in the CA superintendency.

Statement of the Research Problem

The United States' school superintendency is the most gender-biased executive position in the country (Björk, 2000; Blount, 1999; Glass, 1991; Litmanovitz, 2010), as males 40 times more likely to advance to the position of superintendent of schools than are women (Skrla, 2000). Taking into consideration approximately 75% of K-12 educators are female (Bitterman et al., 2013; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Glass, 2000; Litmanovitz, 2010), it would be reasonable to assume a similar percentage of females would be serving in the role of superintendent. However, most recent statistics show only 21.7% of superintendents nationwide are female (Kowalski et al., 2011). Even less females hold position as school superintendent in the state of CA. From 1990 through

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2006, CA female superintendents remained relatively consistent, hovering between 16-17% (ACSA, 2008). Despite increased national representation of females in the superintendency since the turn of century, the United States and the Californian superintendency is far from comparable to the representation of females serving as teachers in K-12 education today.

Historically, females in education have been considered collaborative, instructional leaders, to the point that teaching as a profession was referred to as women's "true" profession in early American educational history (Lewis, 2009). Numerous studies have been conducted on the leadership styles and their impact among genders. Multiple studies conclude some leadership qualities differ among genders (Eagly, 2013; Khairuzzaman et al., 2012; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Szameitat et al., 2015; White & Özkanli, 2011), and females bring distinctive qualities necessary for effective leadership in modern organizations of the 21st century, especially to the field education (Aburdene, & Naisbitt, 1992; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Khairuzzaman et al., 2012; Williams, 2012; White & Özkanli, 2011). Eagly (2012) claims, "in research on transformational-transactional leadership: evidence [exists] that women do have 'better' leadership styles" (p. 5) than men. Furthermore, recent educational reform since 2012 has reshaped expectations for schools and those who lead these institutions, including superintendents (Chingos et al., 2014; Wilson, 2012), calling for collaborative, transformational leadership skills, which research shows are highly utilized by female leaders (Eagly, 2013; Martin et al., 2011; Parker-Chenaille, 2012). Moreover, studies show females at greater rates are enrolling and completing educational leadership and doctoral programs to prepare them to act as leaders in high-level positions

within educational organizations (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gupton, 2009). Yet, males continue to secure these high-level positions of superintendent over females at a national rate of nearly three-to-one (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Previous studies have been conducted in attempt to identify barriers and support systems of females either seeking or serving in the superintendency (Glass, 2000; Keating-Schiele, 2012; Violette, 2006; Wickham, 2007). Wickham (2007) conducted a similar study of female superintendents in CA. The study identified barriers, including demands of family, lack of ability to relocate, and exclusion from the "Good Old Boy Network" and support systems, such as visibility in professional networks, securing doctoral degrees, applying coping skills, and adhering to an action plan (Wickham, 2007). This data was collected through a survey and no follow-up questions were asked of the participants. Wickham (2007) suggests "further investigation as to the causes of the gender disparity in the superintendency needs to be explored" (p. 85). A deeper understanding of barriers and support systems can be gathered through interviews of the females living this experience. Moreover, these barriers and support systems of females in the superintendency, as identified in Whickham's study, was conducted prior to the educational reforms of 2012, whereas these recent reforms impact the instructional role and increased accountability of the CA superintendent. Furthermore, no study exists which aligns identified barriers and support systems of females seeking or securing a superintendency with a theoretical framework.

Since effective leadership begins with the superintendent (Chingos et al., 2014; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Petersen, 1999; Waters & Marzano, 2006; Wilson, 2013) and significant educational reforms since 2012 have reshaped the role of this position

(Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014), further research should be sought to examine the lived experiences of barriers and related support systems of females currently serving in the position of superintendent (Garn & Brown, 2008; Glass et al., 2000; Kawaguchi, 2014; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2000), during this newest era of educational reform.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the barriers and support systems female CA public school superintendents experienced while attaining and serving in their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

Research Questions

The following qualitative research questions will be addressed in this study: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers and support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining and serving in their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?*

1. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

2. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

3. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female California public school superintendents describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

4. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

Significance of the Problem

The significance of this study is that it provides greater depth on perceived barriers and support systems of those females who have secured a position as school superintendent. These females are serving in the pinnacle of educational leadership positions during momentous national and statewide shifts in expectations of education and accountability of educational leaders and institutions.

One impact of the research lies in its contribution to females aspiring to secure a position as superintendent. Although previous research exists on the barriers and support systems of female superintendents (Glass et al., 2000; Keating Schiele, 2012; Violette, 2006; Wickham, 2007), little is known about current female superintendents whose roles and responsibilities have shifted due to massive educational changes brought forth by the mandates of federal and state legislation since 2012. Since no study exists viewing these variables through the lens of Activity Theory, a study with a theoretical perspective of barriers and supports experienced by these current female superintendents is necessary to provide deeper insight on how female superintendents secured their positions, even

during this time of educational reform. This research brings an examination of specific barriers to potentially expect, and possible support systems to put into practice through the lens of the four aspects of Activity Theory for other females aspiring to the superintendency.

Another impact of this study is on school districts and school boards across the nation. School boards and human resource departments are responsible for the hiring of superintendents. For those seeking to bridge the gender gap during the hiring and fostering of superintendents, a deeper understanding of current barriers and support systems could produce refinement of hiring practices by providing greater awareness of the discrepancy of females in these positions and the potential barriers they must overcome to secure the superintendency. Moreover, school districts and school boards can adjust and create professional development opportunities for aspiring female leaders in education based on support systems used to secure superintendent positions.

Additionally, this research could provide a catalyst for further discussion on female supports at the collegial level. Even with a continued under representation of females in the position of superintendent, females continue to participate in and graduate from administrative degree and credential programs at a higher rate than males (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Since females are actively involved in higher education, a deeper understanding of perceived barriers and support systems of female superintendents could impact the development or adjustment of university course offerings and experiences in programs for administrative degrees and credential programs. Of equal importance, this study is significant since barriers and support systems for female superintendents have never been explored through the use of Activity Theory. All these reasons point to a

need to examine current female superintendents' lived experiences through a theoretical lens, as they lead in this time of intense change in education.

Theoretical Definitions

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

Activity Theory. A descriptive, theoretical approach, which analyzes factors impacting a person (subject) in achieving a particular outcome in a societal structure by categorizing such factors into one of the following four categories: Instruments (also known as tools or artifacts), Rules, Community, and Division of Labor; most appropriate for fields of inquiry, such as education (Engeström, 1999).

Operational Definitions

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

Superintendent. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a school system, composed of a number of schools and departments, hired by the school board to direct and manage the administrative affairs of the school district.

Unified School District. A school district that comprises elementary and secondary schools overseen by a single governing board and district-level administrative team.

Instruments. Also known as artifacts or tools in AT, instruments are factors that allow a subject to communicate and interact with their environment. Instruments can include, but are not limited to, strategic plans, books, internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics.

Rules. In Activity Theory, rules act as a mediating component between subject and community. These rules determine how the subject is to work within their community and rely upon cultural and societal expectations and roles in order to work within the AT framework.

Community. In AT, community refers to the social context and systems in which the subject functions as a part of a whole. The community is governed by rules that define the subject's role within the communal context.

Division of Labor. In Activity Theory, division of labor refers to the hierarchical structure of activity in an environment; also refers to the roles individuals execute within an organization.

Barrier. A circumstance that presents an obstacle for women's attainment of and service as superintendent.

Support System. A practice or network of people who provide an individual with practical or emotional support.

Era of Educational Reform. Major revisions to the NCLB Act of 2001, which imposed federal regulations on public education in the United States, which took place in 2015 resulting in greater funding control by state and local school districts. The Every Child Succeeds Act of 2015 replaced NCLB. Other reforms that have impacted public educational entities in CA include adoption of CCSS, LCFF, LCAP, College and Career Readiness Initiatives, and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Justice practices that address student behaviors.

Delimitations

Delimitations exist in this qualitative study. The delimitations include: the gender of superintendents (limited to females), the geographic region (two counties of southern CA), the working status of the superintendent (limited to currently employed superintendents), the type of school district (included only unified school districts), and the number of female superintendents interviewed.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I is an overview of the study, sharing background information and shares an identified problem, which advocates for further research on this topic. Chapter II provides an extensive review of historical and recent literature on variables identified in the purpose of the study. Chapter II additionally concludes the need for further research on this topic. Chapter III outlines the specific methodology and instrumentation selected to address the identified purpose and research questions. Then, in Chapter IV, an analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews is shared. Chapter V concludes the study with findings of such analysis, implications for practices, and recommendations for further research on the topic of female superintendents.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

We stand on the shoulders of the women who came before us, women who had to fight for the rights that we now take for granted. […] When the suffragettes marched the streets, they envisioned a world where men and women would be truly equal. A century later, we are still squinting, trying to bring that vision into focus.

—S. Sanberg, "Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead" (pp. 4-5)

In order to situate this study within existing literature pertaining to female superintendents, this chapter will provide a historical prospective on females in the American workforce and the leadership roles they played, as well as exploring seminal works that pertain to females in education and educational leadership. Despite the evolution of females' role in the workforce (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Freedman, 2002; Khairuzzaman et al., 2012), increased attention to females serving educational leadership (Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011; Williams, 2012), high numbers of representation of females in administrator preparation programs (Glass, 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Kowalski et al., 2011), and the effective leadership traits females bring to leadership (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Eagly et al., 2001; Shakshaft, 2011), there remains a significant underrepresentation of females serving in the position of school superintendent (ACSA, 2008; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011; McGee, 2010). A review of professional literature was conducted based on published scholarly journal articles, books, conference papers, empirical studies, and dissertations. This chapter includes a review of the literature that both describes a historical perspective

of females in the workforce and educational leadership, plus looks at some of the possible variables impacting the current underrepresentation of females in the superintendency.

Statistical data has been presented to provide evidence of gender discrepancy in the national and CA superintendency. Studies from various states across the nation have been cited, establishing previously perceived barriers and applied support systems of female superintendents in an attempt to better understand the inequality of gender in the superintendency. Moreover, a review of recent legislation mandates is presented, connecting this educational reform to the impact on American education and the role of the superintendent (Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014), which alludes to potential varied challenges of females obtaining and serving in current educational leadership roles. Lastly, Activity Theory is offered as a theoretical framework to classify tensions (Engeström, 1999) experienced by female superintendents both in attaining and serving in the superintendency.

Females in the American Workforce

Females have historically played a role in the American workforce. The past two centuries have transformed the role of females, both in the workforce and the lives of females (Freedman, 2002). As early as 1900, females left the home to pursue jobs that served a variety of purposes dictated either by financial need, social need, or the need to grow as an individual (Acemoglu & Autor, 2004; Freedman, 2002). However, they only constituted 18% of the workforce during that time (Acemoglu & Autor, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2003). Since the 1970s, feminism spread globally and across the United States continuing to transform the role of females in the workforce (Freedman, 2002). Then, in the 1980s as the United States shifted from an industrial to an informational society and

joined the global economy, females increased their representation in the labor force and became leaders of small and midsize firms (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Most recently, females account for 46.5% of the labor force but their representation at more senior corporate levels remains negligible by comparison (Khairuzzaman et al., 2012; Williams, 2012). In the year 2000, females represented 12.5% of Fortune 500 corporate line officers, while only 5.1% of the highest-ranked corporate officers and accounted for 11.7% of the membership of boards of directors. Moreover, females hold less than 3% of most senior management positions in major corporations in the United States. (Khairuzzaman et al., 2012, p. 17). A report by Lang (2010) corroborates females in Fortune 500 leadership positions remains primarily in the lower ranks and lower paying positions, reporting that females hold only 2.6% of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) seats for all Fortune 500 companies. Then from 2012 to 2014, this statistic increased to a mere 3.8% of Fortune 500 CEO positions filled by females (Paustian-Underdahl, et al., 2014; Sellers, 2012). Although the proportion of females in the workplace has increased within the past few decades, females remain "vastly underrepresented" at the highest of organizational management levels (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Female's progression in the workforce was constricted through the mid-20th century, and the term "glass ceiling" was coined in the title of the 1986 seminal work on females in leadership by Carol Hymowitz, journalist for the Wall Street Journal (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). In this historic article, Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) describes the glass ceiling as a covert and unspoken phenomenon that prohibited females from attaining executive positions. Eagly and Karau (2002) further clarify the glass ceiling metaphor eludes to a "barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes

women from higher level leadership positions" (p. 1). Bruckmüller and Branscombe

(2010) explain this phenomenon as a combination of status-quo bias and stereotypes

about gender and leadership. As females began to ascend to top executive positions more

frequently, the glass ceiling was debated as an appropriate metaphor for females who

have overcome the barriers that are inherent in rising up a corporate ladder despite gender

inequalities. Carly Fiorina, former Hewlett-Packard CEO and 2015 presidential

candidate, stated in 1999 "I hope that we are at the point that everyone has figured out

that there is not a glass ceiling" (as cited in Eagly & Carli, 2015).

Even though Hymowitz's (2015) report on females executives who have broken

through the glass ceiling asserts that the glass ceiling has in fact become a thing of the

past, the paths that females take to become leaders continue to be rife with challenges and

barriers (Hymowitz, 2015). While females began to enter the workforce at greater rates

in the late 20th century, historical data shows that there has existed a gender disparity in

positions of leadership perhaps due to societal expectations of leaders that speak to the

perceived masculinity of leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Frameworks such

as social constructivism and social role theory speak to the scholarly application of

gender psychology and societal expectations pertaining to leadership inequities (Eagly &

Carli, 2007; Walker, 2013). Early corporations entrusted the functioning of their

businesses to male leaders almost exclusively, and that pattern continues to highlight an

inequitable situation that exists in leadership as a whole. Currently corporations,

although many are led by females, perpetuate the pattern of a much higher percentage of

male leaders at top levels of government, business and finance (Gupton, 2009; US

Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). While females have made strides in positions of

leadership, Eagly and Carli (2007) assert, "even now the presence of females in elite leadership positions is unusual enough that it evokes a sense of wonder" (p. 1).

Female Leadership Traits

Despite the data, studies have shown that females possess skills and qualities that are valuable in leadership positions. Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) claim that "the possibility that women and men differ in their typical leadership behavior is important because leaders' own behavior is a major determinant of their effectiveness and chances for advancement" (p. 769). A 2010 study found that females are more likely to be chosen as leaders of organizations in time of crisis and that "stereotypically women interpersonal attributes were most predictive of who participants selected as a new leader for an organization in crisis" (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010, p. 447). This study concluded that participants perceived male candidates as lacking in the interpersonal skills needed to navigate an organization that is poorly performing (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). Grogan and Shakshaft (2011) summarize a variety of studies that characterize women's leadership traits as relational, spiritual, and balanced with a focus on social justice and continuous learning. Females have also been perceived as participating in organizational cultures that value participation, collaboration, and interpersonal relationships (Walker & Aritz, 2015). In a meta-analysis conducted by Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014) of 99 independent samples from 95 studies addressed the debate by quantitatively summarizing gender differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Results indicated when all leadership contexts are considered, men and females do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness, rating females as significantly more effective than men from the view of subordinates. In contrast, when

self-ratings were considered, men rated themselves as significantly more effective than females rated themselves (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Females have advantage over men in adapting their leadership behaviors that experts have shown are effective in most organizational contexts (Judge & Piccolo 2004; Wang, et al., 2011). Regardless of research showing that men may be perceived as better suited for and more effective as leaders than females (Riffkin, 2014; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992), some popular press publications have reported the opposite: that there may be a female gender advantage in modern organizations that require a "feminine" type of leadership (Conlin, 2003; Williams, 2012). Research indicates, therefore, that while women and men may not be substantially different in their approach to leadership, the perception of feminine leadership, as opposed to masculine leadership styles, does play a role in the construct of higher level of leadership in a number of domains (Cuadrado, Garc Ia-Ael, & Molero, 2015; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Jamiu Odetunde, 2013; White & Özkanli, 2011). Although females possess effective traits necessary for leadership in the workforce and in education, yet they remain underrepresented in leadership positions in all aspects of the labor force. Statistical data in education echoes that of corporate America, as historically and currently, leadership positions of educational institutions are underrepresented by females (McGee, 2010).

History of Females in the United States Superintendency

The current face of educational institutions have taken on a significant new look since its early conception. The one room schoolhouse model of the 1800s where females nurtured and took care children in the school room and were supervised by a male principal, whose primary role was to discipline the elder boys of the school (Hoffman,

2003), has developed into a more complex institution of school districts, composed of multiple schools and departments interweaving support for common interest of educating students (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). Expectations for student learning have also been standardized at the national and state level (Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014) to secure a more uniform approach to education across the country. Even though the position of superintendent of schools has existed since the mid-1800s, when a number of large cities decided to hire a common manager to oversee daily operations of a collection of school buildings (Glass, et al., 2000), the position of superintendent has been dominated by males since the start (Glass, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011). It was not until the early 20th century that a female was hired to serve as a superintendent.

First Female Superintendent of the United States

YWCA Women's Leadership Initiative (2007) stated "a career ladder can be climbed in heels" (p. 1). Ella Flagg Young climbed, making history by becoming the first female superintendent of Chicago Public Schools in 1909 (Anderson, 2000; Blount, 1998; Stephens, 2009). Flagg declared vision that:

> Women are destined to rule the schools of every city. I look for a large majority of the big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman for superintendent. In the near future we will have more women than men in the executive charge of the vast educational system. It is a woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership. […] It will be my aim to prove that no mistake has been made and to

show cities and friends alike that a woman is better qualified for this work than a man. (as cited in Blount, 1998, p. 1; see also Stephens, 2009, p. 50)

Young believed education was a female's natural occupation and that women would no longer be satisfied with secondary roles in education, whereas they would aspire to and attain more advanced leadership positions (Blount, 1998), including that of serving as superintendents of schools.

Statistical Perspective of Females in the American Superintendency

Young's belief that more females would secure upper level leadership positions in education began to become reality. In 1910, female superintendents nationwide increased to 9% (Blount, 1998). And over the next 20 years, as feminist advocates endorsed a greater breadth of female rights, the percentage of female superintendents increased to 11% nationwide in 1930 (Björk, 2000). Then, opposed to the vision of Young, rates of females in the superintendency steadily fell over the next few decades. The year 1950 reported 9% female superintendents (Björk, 2000; Blount, 1999) and the United States continued to experience a decline in female superintendents to less than 1% from 1950s until the 1980s (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

It was until the 1980s when national statistics of female superintendents was once again was on the rise. The United States experienced a height of nearly 6% female superintendents throughout the 1980s (Gupton & Slick, 1996). A report by the American Association of school Administrators titled *Women and Minorities in School Administration: Facts and Figures 1989-1990* states the end of that decade resulted in 4.6% female superintendents in 1989 (Nan Restine, 1993). This statistic then began an upward movement, reaching 13.2% female superintendents throughout the 1990s

(Brunner, et al., 2004; Glass, et al., 2000) and stayed nearly stagnant, reporting 14%

female superintendents in the year 2000 (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009; Glass,

2000). Continuing on the incline in the early 21st century, the year 2006 yielded 21.7%

female superintendents nationwide (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kowalski et al.,

2011). In 2010, American School Superintendent's 2010 decennial study reported an all-

time high of 24.1% of superintendent positions held by females (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Historical statistics show this profession is male dominated, yet an increase of female

representation is evident. Strides in females serving in this leadership role is in part

because of federal mandates advocating for gender equity and due to a shift in the

composition of school boards, who are ultimately responsible for the hiring of

superintendents.

Equal Opportunity Laws Impacting Females in Educational Leadership

Seeking equity in gender representation in the workforce, the 1960s and early 70s

brought significant federal legislation that explicitly addressed inequality and potential

gender discrimination across the United States. Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed by

President Lyndon Johnson and Title VII of this act prohibited discrimination of race,

religion, national origin, color, or gender when hiring (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

President Johnson continued advocating for civil rights, seeking opportunity for

underrepresented populations in the workforce, and passed an affirmative action policy

with Executive Order 11246, initially issued in 1965, which fines federal contractors who

discriminate based on such factors as gender or even gender identity (Brunner, 2004;

Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; CDEa, 2015). Furthermore, an amendment of the Civil Rights

Act produced the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1972 further prohibited

gender discrimination in the workplace. The intent of EEOA was to promote equal employment opportunities for American workers regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, and gender (CDEa, 2015). That same year, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was initiated as a comprehensive federal law that more specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in any federally-funded education program or activity (CDEa, 2015). The intent of these laws was to balance representation in the workforce, impacting the balance of gender in educational leadership.

School Boards Impact on Gender Equality in the Superintendency

The ultimate determining factor to representation of gender in the superintendency lies with the elected school board of education. These elected school boards for each district are responsible for the hiring of superintendents. Prior to the civil reform of the 60s and 70s, school boards were elected through special interests or based on long-standing relationships (Chapman, 1997; Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Glass, 2000). Then the composition of these boards began experiencing a change with the enactment of equal opportunity laws across the nation due to the attention brought to the underrepresentation of females in these leadership roles (Glenn & Hickey, 2009). During the 1970s and 80s, the general public was electing school board members based on a variety of backgrounds and experiences, which included homemakers, blue-collar workers, and those interested in changing the current educational system (Chapman, 1997; Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Glass, 2000). This change within school boards resulted in a changed system of hiring practices (Glenn & Hickey, 2009), where minorities, including females, began to fill more superintendent positions (Chapman, 1997; Kowalski et al., 2011).

"The superintendency traditionally has been a male-dominated profession and remains so" (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 16), in current times, despite attention given to the discrepancy of gender representation in the workforce and in the superintendency, a pinnacle role of educational leadership. Changes to educational hiring practices were initiated by federal equal opportunity laws, which provided underpinnings for increased gender equity in the superintendency. However, females remain quite a distance from equal (Shapiro, 2006). Shapiro (2006) encourages women to hold leadership positions in major institutions of society, such as education, to share and encourage the adoption of special interests necessary to continue to support and encourage additional female leadership. Similar underrepresentation of females is also experienced in the CA superintendency.

Females in the CA Superintendency

The state of CA mirrors the national evolution of females in the workforce and representation of female superintendents. Although the majority, at 58%, of educational administrators in CA and 72% of the state's teachers are female (EdSource, 2007), the position of superintendent of schools has historically and continues to be underrepresented by females. In the year 1990, 17% of superintendents in CA were females and nearly 20 years later, the percentage declined to 16% female in the year 2006 (ACSA, 2008). There is a lack of more current data on the representation of females in CA superintendent positions; the lack of current statistical data is a concern in itself. However, Table 2 compares national to CAs percentages of female superintendents with the statistical data available.

Table 2

Percentage of Female Superintendents Serving in the Year 1990, 2006, and 2010

Female Superintendents	Year 1990	Year 2006	Year 2010
United States	13.2%	21.7%	24.1%
California	17%	16%	Unavailable

Note. Adapted from "Women in Education Leadership," by ACSA [website], 2008. Retrieved from http://www.acsa.org/Functional MenuCategories/ ; "The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study," by Kowalski, T. J., McCord, R. S., Petersen, G. J., Young, I. P. and Ellerson, N. M., 2011. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

According to the most recent statistics, nearly 84% of school districts in CA are under the direction of males. Of those 16% of females who secured position as CA superintendent, it is generally for smaller districts, in more rural areas, or in areas of higher need (Glass et al., 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011). Specific instructional and managerial skills and training is necessary to support districts of various size and need, and research shows the experience preceding the superintendency varies by gender, concluding females have more instructional experience and training than males (Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014; Glass et al., 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Kowalski et al., 2011).

The Pathway to the Superintendency

Education is most known as a female's profession (Gupton, 2009; Hoffman, 2003), since the majority of teachers are female at approximately 72% nationwide (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013; Glass, 2000; Litmanovitz, 2010) and 73% in the state of CA (CDEb, 2015). Despite females representing the majority of education, leadership roles in this field continue to be led predominantly by males, thus resulting in disparity between who is leading schools and who is teaching under their direction.

Although the majority of superintendents are male, those serving in the role of superintendent have each taken a different path to their position, but research indicates there are commonalities of like gender and differences between the two genders of the path taken to the superintendency (Glass et al., 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011). According to a 10 year study of superintendents by Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2011), 99% of all superintendents served as a teacher at some point along their career path. Furthermore, male superintendents serve an average of five years teaching, compared to females who teach for almost double that length of time at an average of 10 years teaching (Kowalski et al., 2011; Glass, 2000). Females, with longevity in their instructional experience as teachers, fill the need for effective instructional leaders, which is a necessary experience in the education system of today (Björk et al., 2014). Moreover, one might assume with a majority of teachers being female, an equal representation might be seen in upper management of education.

In addition to female superintendents holding more extensive teaching experience in their background, a majority of female superintendents serve in multiple administrative roles prior to obtaining their superintendency (Glass et al, 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). The most common position served directly prior to the position of superintendent is that of a district-level administrator, including assistant/associate superintendent of curriculum and instruction (Glass & Franceschini, 2007) or district director/coordinator (Kowalski et al., 2011). More males, at 52.5%, than females, at 25.5%, go directly from site principal to that of superintendent (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 36). Females incur additional challenges by generally having to work longer in their career, obtain more variety of experiences, and work at the district-level in some administrative

capacity before securing their role as superintendent, than do males (Glass, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011).

Not only do females serve in prerequisite positions to superintendent longer than males, they are underrepresented in some of the most critical positions necessary on the path to the superintendency. Seventy-five percent of all superintendents in the year 2000 reported having some secondary administrative experience (Glass, 2000), yet females are significantly underrepresented in secondary administrative positions as well, especially that of high school principal. In 2011, females represent 63.8% of elementary principals, but only 42% of middle school principals and 30.1% of all high school principals (Goldring et al., 2013). Females have been considered at a disadvantage if their principalship experience has been at the elementary level instead of the high school level (Sharp & Walter, 2004).

Females also tend to stay more current in professional development and participate in higher education opportunities at a greater rate than males. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported in 2009-2010 females earned the majority of graduate degrees, at 62.6% of all master's degrees and 53.3% of all doctorate degrees in the United States. Looking at superintendents, females are more highly educated than their male counterparts (Glass, 2000), as 52% of female superintendents hold doctoral degrees in comparison to only 41% of male superintendents (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). However, only 10% of females in doctoral programs are electing to complete a superintendency credential along with their educational specialist or doctoral degree (Glass, 2000), potentially further limiting opportunity to the superintendency. Research indicates female superintendents

participate in more professional development opportunities than male superintendents (Glass, 2000), especially in the area of curriculum and instruction (Kowalski et al., 2011). Grogan and Brunner (2005) shares the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development reported 73% of their superintendent participants for were female. Brunner and Kim (2010) claim "the variation and concentration on curriculum and instruction during career path development may render women better prepared than men" (p. 276). However, regardless of the significant number of females engaging in professional development and higher education necessary for leadership roles in education, females historically and currently continue to be underrepresented in administrative positions in schools systems, including representation in the superintendency (Björk, 2000; Blout, 1999; Glass, 1991; Kowalski et al., 2011; Litmanovitz, 2010; McGee, 2010).

Education systems and the culture surrounding these institutions has transformed significantly since 2012 with the passing of a breadth of legislative actions, creating a new era of educational reform. This reform impacts both the role and responsibilities of superintendents leading schools today (Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014). Understanding the new political initiatives and their impact on education and the role of the superintendent may shine brighter light on current barriers of females obtaining educational leadership positions.

Educational Reforms in Recent Decade Impacting the Role of the Superintendent

"California is in the midst of the nation's most significant current overhaul of a state school funding and accountability system" (Affeldt, 2015, p. 1). It was in response to underperforming school systems and a necessity to better prepare students to be globally competitive in the 21st century that prompted enacting four major initiatives of

educational reform (Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014), which

have significant impact on the role and responsibilities of superintendents serving

educational institutions across the nation and in the state of CA (Menefee-Libey &

Kerchner, 2015; Russell, 2015). Paul (2014) claims some of the major components

emerging from the recent educational reform includes (a) federal and CA state adoption

of Common Core State Standards, which outlines learning expectations of students in

Mathematics and English Language Arts; (b) adoption of a new computerized SBAC

student testing system, which was fully implemented in 2015; (c) revamp of the school

finance system in 2013, which produced the LCFF "to streamline local funding and

increase support for disadvantaged students" (p. 2), and (d) requirement of districts to set

performance targets for a range of school and student success indicators, as part of a

LCAP. These educational reforms impact accountability of educational institutions lead

by superintendents (Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2016; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul,

2014).

Common Core Standards

Initiated in 2010, 46 of states in the United States adopted new CCSS of

expectations for student learning. These standards are vertically aligned from

kindergarten through grade 12 to better prepare students for transition to college and

career (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). CCSS were designed to increase the depth of

learning and rigor of standards at each grade level, while building skill of problem

solving, critical thinking, communication, and application of technology (CDEb,

2015). Superintendents are charged with leading this change of increased rigor in

learning outcomes and accountability for student achievement (Harvey, Cambron-

Mccabe, Cunningham, & Koff, 2013). Even though the state of CA adopted a gradual

implementation of CCSS for English Language Arts and Mathematics beginning in 2012,

the state's focus is to build 21st century competencies of students through these subjects

with urgency (CDEb, 2015). It is imperative instructional leaders, beginning with the

superintendent, adjust instructional approaches and strategies to address the new

expectations for student learning (Harvey et al., 2013; Jackson, 2014). The adoption of

new learning expectations for students was pursued by a new system of assessment of

student learning, resulting in the first computerized summative student assessment.

SBAC

SBAC was created to measure new, rigorous expectations for student learning

outlined in CCSS. SBAC is an adaptive, computerized assessment administered annually

for students grades three through 12; it was the first electronic standardized assessment of

its kind first piloted in 2014 and fully implemented in CA in 2015, bring additional

challenges to district leadership and to students (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul,

2014). Since SBAC results represent core accountability of student achievement,

superintendents are ultimately responsible for tracking data and "holding schools

accountable for the progress of students" (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015, p. 14).

Governor Jerry Brown of CA noted that "the Common Core and the SBAC tests would

supersede the existing state curriculum standards and the annually administered

California Standards Tests" (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015, p. 5). Moreover, as

expectations for student learning increased, thus did the accountability of funding and

providing detailed district plans to support CCSS and SBAC initiatives (Affeldt, 2015;

Paul, 2014). The LCFF and the Local Control Area Plan were the direct result of CCSS

and SBAC creating a new world of increased accountability for student achievement and application of resources.

LCFF and Plan

In 2014, CA underwent a significant overhaul of education's funding formulas and monetary accountability systems, impacting the manner in which superintendents allocate resources and supports. LCFF dramatically changed the way district received funding and "the ways in which the state expects districts to make programmatic decisions and allocate resources" (Knudson, 2014, p. 1). LCFF is a weighted funding system, allocating more money per student for secondary compared to elementary and additional funds for students of underperforming subgroups, including English Learners and Foster or Homeless Youth (Jackson, 2014; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). Dollars are allocated to school agencies through tiered base grants, based on grade level of students, providing additional supplement and concentration dollars for major, underperforming subgroups (Affeldt, 2015). Moreover, LCFF will fund up to 20% for economically disadvantaged, English Learner and foster care or homeless youth students, and concentration grants will fund an additional 50% for each of the disadvantaged students up to 55% of the district's enrollment (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). LCFF is based on the notion that students with greater need require more resources to have "similar opportunities to achieve meaningful outcomes" (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015, p. 3). This alteration of conditions and funding require superintendents and school leaders to be instructional leaders, and at times, make budgetary and program decisions that in the past were not their responsibility (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015).

LCFF monies are to be strategically budgeted and monitored by local agencies

(e.g. school districts) through a written vehicle of transparency, known as the

LCAP. These spending plans are to explicitly address each of the state's eight priorities,

incorporate stakeholder input, and document initiatives with a three year projection

strategic plan with monitoring indicators, using evaluative measures (Affeldt, 2015;

Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). These LCAP documents are required to include

specific, measurable goals, specific actions for certain subgroups, and explicitly describe

expenditures of the local agency (Affeldt, 2015; Russell, 2015).

Superintendents are charged with shifting their mindsets when developing LCAP

programs of support and LCFF resource allocation at a local level, "whereas decisions in

the past often reflected the requirements of categorical funding streams, decisions now

must align with the district's priorities and goals for curriculum and instruction,

simultaneously addressing eight broad priorities set by the California" (Knudson, 2014, p.

2). Moreover, superintendents must diligently monitor this strategic plan for

effectiveness related to student outcome to determine appropriateness of resource

allocation (Knudson, 2014). Superintendents provide a crucial link between the

community and the district (EdSource, 2007), necessary for developing decision-making

relationships required of the LCAP, securing input from internal and external

stakeholders (Knudson, 2014).

LCAP eight state priorities. Eight priorities and up to 19 performance indicators

were identified by the state of CA, requiring each local agency to address each of these

areas explicitly in their LCAP (CDEb, 2015; Paul, 2014). The main eight priorities

include Basic Conditions of Learning, State Standards, Parental Involvement, Pupil

Achievement, Pupil Engagement, School Climate, Course Access, and Other Pupil

Outcomes (CDEb, 2015). These priorities of LCAP "launched a far more complicated,

ambiguous, and diverse set of standards" (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015, p. 6) for

school districts, creating greater difficulty for districts to focus on the improvement

process for students (Paul, 2014). Similarly, Russell (2015) contends the LCAP ended

CAs "reliance on a single numerical indicator based on [CST] standardized tests, and

instead ushers in a new multiple-indicator accountability system" (p. 3). LCAP and

LCFF fundamentally changed the politics of finance and accountability, by enacting

specific state mandates and compliance reviews (Paul, 2014; Russell, 2015), placing

significant responsibility on the superintendent to monitor accountability and

effectiveness of every implementation of program, policy, or person within their school

district.

ESSA

Moreover, the year 2015 brought further educational reform across the nation and

in the state of CA. ESSA was passed as national legislation by President Obama in

December of 2015, diverging from NCLB act of 2001 and the most recent reauthorization

of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (CDEb, 2015; Grant, 2015;

Hiler & Erickson Hatalsky, 2015; Knudson, 2014; USDE, n.d.). ESSA provides latitude

for increased state and local control, which embedding provisions to ensure student

success by focusing on America's most disadvantaged and highest-need students,

increasing involvement of and communication to stakeholders, and provides local control

to tailor and implement evidence-based practices and supports based on unique needs of

the local district (Fránquiz, & Ortiz, 2016; Grant, 2015; USDE, n.d.). These provisions

require superintendents to focus on outcomes of particular subgroups of students, which includes English Learners and Economically Disadvantaged, ensuring growth of all students overtime (Grant, 2015; Hiler & Erickson Hatalsky, 2015). ESSA also required a reworking of the state's academic standards, and moved away from the federal oversight of state standards, whereas NCLB required states to submit their plans to the Department of Education for approval (Grant, 2015; Hiler & Erickson Hatalsky, 2015). ESSA has charged states and district superintendents with greater accountability and monitoring of their local plan and funding formulas (Knudson, 2014). Due to the recent passage of this initiative, research has yet to be completed as to the expected or actual impact this act will eventually have on superintendents and their effectiveness. However, the act itself does define new foci for superintendents, in terms of ensuring student academic success, fiscal responsibility, and expanding of course offerings of a district (Hiler & Erickson Hatalsky, 2015). Superintendents ultimately need to navigate their organization through paradigm shifts that have occurred as a result of the new educational accountability measures (Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2016; Macias, 2014; Paul, 2014).

Educational Reform's Impact on the Role of the Superintendent

"The increased demand for educational reform and accountability has resulted in a renewed focus on the relationship between building […] district leaders, particularly on how district leaders can support […] the academic success of students" (Thompson & Garcia France, 2015, p. 5). The research available has alluded that the expected role of the superintendent has shifted from that of a manager to more of an active leader, specifically in the area of curriculum and instruction (Bredeson, 1995; Wright & Harris, 2010). Research on the superintendent's impact of student achievement is not as

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comprehensive as the research on principal's role in this area. However, the literature is expanding in these areas (Schaaf, 2008). Most recent research indicates the superintendent directly influences the effectiveness and direction of education delivered within a school district (Benzel & Hoover, 2015; Business, 2015), referring to the "responsibility to give service and assistance for the teachers and headmasters, which will affect the improvement of learning quality in school" (Business, 2015, p. 103). In addition to executing academic directionality, superintendents must also effectively supervise managerial operations and maintain collaborative relationships with key stakeholders, including elected school board members, parents, local business owners, and additional community members (Business, 2015; Björk, 2005; Björk et al., 2014; Dickson, 2014). Superintendents must balance the desires among their constituencies, "while keeping foremost in their minds the goal of providing a quality education to every student in their district" (EdSource, 2007, p. 2). A superintendent's role is complex and intense (EdSource, 2007; Wright & Harris, 2010), even more so in the current era of educational reforms, requiring a diverse set of skills and application to support an even wider range of economic, social, and political impacts at the national, state, and local level (Björk et al., 2014; Dickson, 2014).

As the Chief Executive Officer of the school district, the superintendent is ultimately responsible for ensuring legislated mandates, policies and regulations are implemented properly (Benzel & Hoover, 2015; Björk et al., 2014; Parker-Chenaille, 2012; Wright & Harris, 2010). Since 2012, educational reform has had a "profound effect on the nature of schooling in the nation but also contributed to defining then redefining superintendents' work" (Björk et al., 2014, p. 1). Björk et al. (2014) claim

superintendents leading in this current era of educational reform must demonstrate competencies in the multiple areas, which are a combination of previously required roles of a superintendent since the mid-1800s, claiming superintendents must be proficient as a "teacher-scholar," "organizational manager," "democratic leader," "applied social scientist," and "communicator" (p. 9). Multiple studies found superintendents who share strong visions for the future, align resources to visionary initiatives, and execute collaborative practices are the most effective in achieving student growth and closing the achievement gap necessary between various subgroups (Minckler, 2014; Thompson & France, 2015), as outlined in the federal ESSA of 2015. These leadership qualities combined improve practices and procedures at a district-level to launch and sustain necessary initiatives to support students across a district (Björk et al., 2014; Minckler, 2014; Thompson & Garcia France, 2015). The literature shows the role of the superintendent today is more complex due to recent educational reform, requiring a balance of instructional and managerial skills (Björk et al., 2014; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Paul, 2014). As it is necessary to discuss the impact of the external forces of recent educational reform has had on the duties and responsibilities of the superintendent, a closer look at more specific barriers of females in this role should be given attention, due to the underrepresentation of this gender in the pinnacle of educational leadership.

Barriers Experienced by Female Superintendents

Throughout history, females have faced a variety of career barriers. Derrington and Sharratt (2009) claim "recognizing a barrier [...] is the first step toward overcoming it" (p. 1). Barriers have been documented for females seeking and serving in the highest

of leadership positions, including that of the superintendency, across the United States (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009; Glass, 2000; Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Gupton, 2009; McGee, 2010; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009) and in the state of CA (McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998; Wickham, 2007).

This review of literature discovered three published works that speak to barriers female superintendents face. First, Glass et al., (2000) in their book, *The Study of the American School Superintendency, 2000*, seeks to explain the superintendency in the new millennium through a 10 year examination of the profession. The analysis of this data lends insights on the lack of better representation of females in the superintendency. In their study, 297 female superintendents responded to a 90 item survey, identifying barriers to females serving in the position. The study unveiled seven key barriers female superintendents face. They are:

- females do not choose career positions normally leading to advancement,

- females prefer not preparing for the superintendency,

- females hold less interest in fiscal management,

- personal relationships hold females back,

- school boards opt not to hire females superintendents,

- females enter the field of education for different reasons today, and

- females enter administration at an older age.

Second, Glass (2000) cited American Association of School Administrators (AASA): The School Superintendents Association's meta-analysis of books and doctoral dissertations that the two most widely cited barriers of the new millennium to females serving as superintendent are that females are discouraged from preparing for the

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superintendency and school boards will not hire them. Thirdly, with a continued

underrepresentation of females in advanced educational leadership positions, Grogan and

Brunner (2005) were commissioned by AASA to conduct a comprehensive study of

females in the American superintendency and in other educational central-office

positions. Using the AASA membership database and data from Market Data Retrieval,

surveys were sent to over 5,500 potential participants. Responses from 723 female

superintendents and 472 female central-office personnel were collected and analyzed,

equating to nearly 30% of the total population of female superintendents at the time. The

study cited barriers of female seeking and serving in the superintendency, which included

that of professional networks being male-dominate, lack of other females as role models

in the position, view of school boards, and balancing responsibilities of family and work.

"There is a certain amount of truth to these reasons even though they are not supported by

substantive data," (Glass, 2000, p. 29), as most of what exists on this subject consists of

case studies and qualitative studies that describe the individual experiences of female

superintendents or those aspiring to the position. An analysis of literature in the past six

years revealed three widely cited barriers among multiple studies of females in the

superintendency, which includes the selection and hiring process, a lack of mentorship,

and the stereotyping of females in leadership positions (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Elmuti,

Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Gupton, 2009; Jia, & Davis, 2009; Lane-Washington & Wilson-

Jones, 2010; McGee, 2010; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009).

Selection and Hiring Process

One specific documented barrier of female superintendents is the selection and

hiring process (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988). Elected Boards of

Education are ultimately responsible for selecting and hiring of the superintendent from a pool of candidates (Benzel & Hoover, 2015; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Wolverton, Rawls, Macdonald, & Nelson, 2000). In fact, superintendents are the only employee directly hired by the elected school board and are responsible for making recommendations to the board and executing board decisions (EdSource, 2007). Based on historical gender stereotypes associated with leadership styles, males are generally offered the position of superintendent over females (Benzel & Hoover, 2015; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Wolverton et al., 2000). The perception held by members of the Board of Education impacts superintendent employment offerings to females (Benzel & Hoover, 2015; Glenn & Hickey, 2009). Research indicates a multitude of misunderstandings exists as it relates to a female's ability to lead a school district (Brunner & Kim, 2010). Brunner and Kim (2010) inquire:

> In no small measure, an enduring question remains: are women prepared to be school superintendents? And, are board members, and others involved in the selection of a superintendent, biased in favor of men because they are misinformed or lack understanding about women's preparedness for the role? (p. 279)

In a qualitative study of 270 female superintendents nationwide, Lane-Washington and Wilson-Jones (2010) cited the Board of Education impacts the hiring practices, creating a barrier for females, noting responses from participants such as "A board member felt a divorced woman was a bad role model for students" and "Realizing the [Board of Education] did its work outside of the meeting and had a lack of care about policy" (p. 5). Similarly, in a study of CA female superintendents prior to recent educational

reform, Wickham (2007) found of the 112 participants 73% reported that gender bias in the screening and selection process was a barrier they experienced while obtaining their superintendency. The same survey found gender discrimination and an exclusion from informal socialization networks (mainly male dominated networks) were barriers connected to perceived biases of the selection process and were all barriers experienced by the majority of female superintendents in CA at the time of the study (Wickham, 2007).

Gender Stereotyping

Shakeshaft (1987) reported from his research that both males and females alike hold the societal belief that males are more "capable" in leadership positions than are females, creating misperceptions and hiring barriers for females. Decades later, Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, Pilar, and Martos (2012) found this misperception to still ring true, reporting gender stereotyping exists, stating "women are mostly viewed as occupying communal/feminine occupations, whereas men are viewed as occupying agentic/masculine occupations" (p. 98). VanTuyle and Watkins (2009) surveyed and interviewed 39 sitting female superintendents in Illinois and found a similar identified barrier of gender discrimination exhibited by particular members of school boards. The same study also noted familial responsibilities and lack of self-confidence as other major barriers to securing their position (VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009).

Another exploratory study conducted by Elmuti, Jia, & Davis (2009) examined barriers of 400 business leaders (193 females, 204 males, plus three who did not indicate their gender) inquiring on industrial and organizational barriers of females, including those serving in education, through a questionnaire. Elmuti et al. (2009) found similar

findings of significant barriers females encountered in the study, which included

discrimination, prejudice, and gender stereotyping. These researchers reported a finding

that a majority of males indicated they feel females "do not have equal opportunities in

[…] upward mobility in organizations" due to gender stereotypes "diminishing" females'

leadership abilities (Elmuti et al., 2009, p. 180). McGee (2010) found similar data in a

study of 21 female superintendents in the state of Florida, finding the number one

identified barrier is anxiety of balancing demands of work and family.

Lack of Mentors

Several researches found lack of mentorship, especially female to female mentors,

is a significant barrier for females in high level leadership positions (Brunner, 1999;

Gupton, 2009; Griggs, 2014; Martin, 2011; McGee, 2010). Litmanovitz (2011) reiterated

that there currently is a lack of role models for female administrators in upper level

educational management, highlighting the importance of mentorship for females who

aspire to leave the classroom for positions in administration. Mentorship is a strong

support for females because they naturally want to help other females grow in their

careers, yet in a study conducted of 1,000 female executives found only one in five

females have a mentor (Chang, 2012). Of the 21 female superintendents in McGee's

(2010) study, a majority indicated "they are not mentored or encouraged and once they

get [the position of superintendent], they are once again on the outside" (p. 16). McCabe

and Dobberteen (1998) concluded similar findings in their mixed-methods study on the

barriers of female superintendents in CA, comparing them to female superintendents

nationwide, almost 20 years ago. They found females experience difficulty of "breaking

into existing organizational networks, […] indicating that this a constraint more critical

for the national group of superintendents than those superintendents from California"

(McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998, p. 26). McCabe and Dobberteen (1998) also found lack

of mentors both inside and outside the organization as a significant barrier for females in

CA and across the nation, citing the work of Northcraft and Gutek (1993) who addressed

the importance of increasing females in other leadership positions to allow for additional

network and mentoring. In the same study, the perceived barrier of the "belief that men

are more able than women to handle the political aspects of the superintendency"

(McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998, p. 27) was present for CA and national superintendents.

Overall, barriers still exist with a continued underrepresentation of females as

superintendent in the nation and in the state of CA, but it is recorded that some females

have broken through the "glass ceiling," potentially utilizing support systems to

overcome these identified barriers.

Support Systems Experienced by Female Superintendents

"Paths to the top exist, and some women find them" (Eagly, 2007, p. 6). Those

females that shatter through the glass ceiling to achieve the superintendency report the

aid of support systems (Anderson, 2000; McGee, 2010; Sharp et al., 2004). A review of

literature revealed support systems most utilized by females in the superintendent role

includes mentors, professional and personal networking groups, and support from their

family unit, including close personal friends (Björk, 2000; Gupton, 2009; Kelsey et al.,

2014; McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998; McGee, 2010; Pecora, 2006; Reed & Patterson,

2007). Anderson (2000) stated an aspiring female superintendent should "examine her

family coping skills, use of a mentor, political savvy skills, understanding of the selection

process, training opportunities, and her understanding of the workings of a school board"

(p. 32) to achieve her aspirations.

Mentorships

Mentoring has served as a powerful influence on human potential and is a key

component of successful induction programs (Björk, 2000). Relationships with other

colleagues, particularly with colleagues in similar roles, were cited as important support

systems for females in educational leadership positions (Pecora, 2006; Griggs,

2014). Tripes (2004) agrees, stating "women administrators need support […] a sense of

connection with others who understand the world in which they live" (p. 2). Reed and

Patterson (2007) interviewed 15 female superintendents in New York to discover

mentorship and maintaining support relationships both inside and outside the

organization was an applied support system. Mentors are "specially regarded as a solid

source of help in the face of adversity" (Reed & Patterson, 2007, p. 96). It is important to

represent females in leadership positions, especially at the superintendent level, because

this begins the mentoring process for other females (McGee, 2010). However, adversity

in female-to-female mentoring has been documented (McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998;

Reed & Patterson, 2007). Reed and Patterson (2007) shared what one superintendent

stated in an interview, "Females don't know how to mentor other females. It becomes a

competitive thing. Our generation of mentors was all males" (p. 96). McCabe and

Dobberteen (1998) found similar findings that male mentors were reported as more

"helpful in introducing and sponsoring" (p. 18) female superintendents into existing

networks. Björk and Kowalski (2005) suggest there is a responsibility to develop the

next generation of female leaders through mentorships and through encouragement of networking, since these are a successful support structure for aspiring female leaders.

Networking

The advantages of networking are clear, particularly for the novice, networking is essential (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Gupton (2009) shares that networking is not just for job advancement, but networking should also be used to collaborate, to learn, and to maintain professional friends for female leaders. Networking supplies necessary knowledge and insight from other superintendents, along with general advice. Gupton (2009) reflected on his 1993 study of 150 female educational leaders and reported that engaging in network groups allows females to give and receive support was a major support system, which strengthened the bond of mentorship for everyone involved.

Dana and Bourisaw (2006) state that:

Through networks, the novice can become acquainted with school superintendents who can provide knowledge and insight for them in their efforts to maintain positive and supportive board of education relationships as well as succeeding in other contexts in which the novice works. (p. 203)

Ultimately, collaboration with mentors and involvement in networking systems serve as supports for females advancing in educational leadership.

Familial Supports

Recent studies also cite personal, family support as an invaluable support for females seeking and serving in the role of superintendent (Floey & Webb, 2015; Eckman, 2003; Griggs, 2014; McGee, 2010). Griggs (2014) interviewed 15 female superintendents in Pennsylvania, identifying barriers and support systems experienced

along the way. Griggs concluded family support from spouse, extended family, and personal friends were most helpful to the participants of the study, mostly relieving duties of childrearing and housekeeping duties. Floey and Webb (2015) looked closer at the support systems applied by female superintendents in the state of Maine, finding they too utilized mentors and networking, but the tensions of serving as a superintendent was eased by the support of their family, mainly by their spouse. McGee (2010) in her study of females in Florida serving various educational leadership roles, from site principals to superintendent, reported using familial supports; relying on one's spouse, which transcended all leadership roles, was the most utilized support system of the participants. Eckman (2003) addressed the tension of family-work balance when he cited Nahpolz's 1995 study, finding that females who commit to both career and family, without choosing one or the other, experience more role conflict than women who do make a choice. However, multiple studies conducted on support systems of females in leadership roles indicate that this tension is decreased when adequate familial or communal support systems are in place (Floey & Webb, 2015; Gupton, 2009; McGee, 2010). The literature emphasizes the need for support systems as a way to mitigate the effect that barriers have on a female's ascension to the superintendency.

As educational institutions function in this new era of accountability measures that call for leadership that is marked by the ability to transform institutions rather than simply manage them, the females who have experienced the essential supports towards serving school districts as superintendent provide insight into how barriers can be overcome by support systems, in order to thrive in a career dominated by males.

The Gap in Literature

A review of the literature pertaining to female superintendents indicates well-documented underrepresentation of females in this position (ACSA, 2008; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2011; McGee, 2010). In addition, barriers experienced by female superintendents are unique to their gender, such as the selection and hiring process, lack of mentorship, and stereotyping (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009; Glenn & Hickey, 2009; Gupton, 2009; McGee, 2010; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009). Additionally, support systems unique to females have been documented, which includes mentors, professional and personal networking groups, and support from their family unit, including close personal friends (Björk, 2000; Gupton, 2009; Kelsey et al., 2014; McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998; McGee, 2010; Pecora, 2006; Reed & Patterson, 2007). There are a number of studies that examine the experience of the female superintendents through a social or feminist lens (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Tallerico & Blunt, 2004; Young & Skrla, 2003). However, examining this experience through the lens of AT has not been addressed in any literature pertaining to female superintendents. Activity Theory lends itself to a discussion of barriers and support systems through an investigation of tensions, categorized by main four domains, as factors in the relationship between subject (females) and object (the superintendency) (Engeström, 1999). Additionally, limited research has been documented regarding the current era of educational reform, related accountability, and how this reform impacts the role of the superintendent. Therefore, a gap in the literature exists revealing a need for examination of the lived experiences of female superintendents currently serving school

districts during this time of educational reform, using Activity Theory as a theoretical framework.

<div align="center">**Activity Theory: A Theoretical Framework**</div>

For purposes of this study, Activity Theory will provide a descriptive theoretical framework (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009) to categorize and analyze barriers and the support systems experienced by female superintendents.

Historical Overview

Activity Theory is an "object-oriented, artifact-mediated collective activity system," which allows for analysis of factors impacting outcome and bridges "the gulf between the individual subject and the societal structure" (Engeström, 1999, p. i). Activity Theory was initially pioneered by three Russian psychologists: Lev Vygotsky, Alexei Leontev, and Sergei Rubinstein in the early 20th century. Vygotsky and these scholars desired a model of psychology to better understand the intricate relationship between individuals and their social environment (Cole, 1985). The first generation model, adapted from the work of Vygotsky et al. (1978), known as the "meditational model" (Figure 1), illustrates impacts of social and systematic situations on human activities; this model was later introduced in the context of a hierarchical model of human activity, developed by Leontiev (1978).
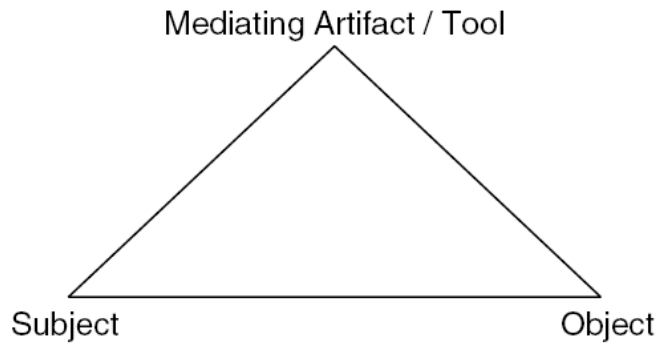
Figure 1. Visual representation of Vygotsky's first generation Mediational Model. Adapted from "A Cultural Historical Approach to Distributed Cognition," In G. Salmon (Ed.) "Distributed Cognitions: Psychological and Educational Considerations," by M. Cole and Y. Engeström, 1993, p. 5. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This theoretical framework was later expanded by Yrjö Engeström. Engeström's

model weaved social and cultural aspects into the model of human activity, suggesting a

more complex system of interrelated processes between possible tensions, which

ultimately impact the relationship between subject and outcome (see Figure 2). These

social tensions are categorized as Instruments (also known as Tools or Artifacts), Rules,

Community, or Division of Labor (Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work

Research, 2009; Engeström, 1999).
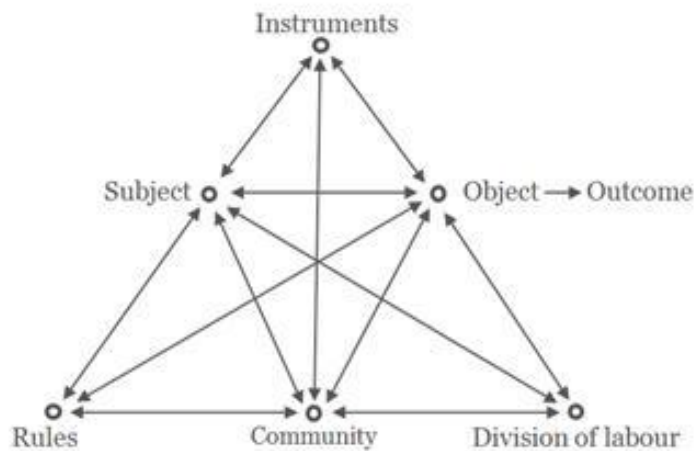
Figure 2. Visual representation of Engeström's Activity Theory framework. Adapted from "Perspectives on Activity Theory," by Y. Engeström, 1999, p. 31. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

This activity model is based on the dynamic relationship between a subject and an outcome, where tensions aid or impede that process and one another, thus forming an activity system. Instruments, also known as artifacts or tools, allow a subject to communicate and interact with their environment. Instruments can include, but are not limited to, strategic plans, books, internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics. Rules act as a mediating component between subject and community. These rules determine how the subject is to work within their community and rely upon cultural and societal expectations and roles in order to work within the social structure. Community refers to the social context and systems in which the subject functions as a part of a whole. The community is governed by rules that define the subject's role within the communal context. Division of Labor refers to the hierarchical structure of activity in an environment; also refers to the roles individuals execute within an organization (Engeström, 1999). This system is a complex web of interactions, and AT offers a systematic approach to identify barriers in an activity system.

Applicability of AT to Qualitative Research

Activity Theory is more descriptive than predictive and has had increased impact in "fields of inquiry, such as learning and teaching" (Engeström, 1999, p. 1). This approach allows researchers to organize qualitative datasets of complex human interactions, appropriate for social constructs such as interactions within educational organizations, by categorizing tensions and their impact on an activity within a social system (Engeström, 1999). More specifically in this study, the Activity Theory framework will enable the categorization of identified barriers and support systems

impacting females in attaining and currently serving as superintendents in this new era of educational reform.

Previous Application of Activity Theory to Research

Activity Theory has been applied to range of social-structured, qualitative research (Bourke, Mentis, & O'Neill, 2013; Lee & Sparks, 2014; Yamagata-Lynch & Smaldin, 2007). One such study, conducted by Lee and Sparks (2014) investigated the tensions of youth in rural Nepali villages to utilizing government-funded telecenters, providing internet and technology access to the local community. Lee and Sparks conducted individual and small group interviews, observations, and took field notes. Activity Theory was the primary vehicle used to share the collected qualitative data from their ethnographic study, categorizing complex tension of this specific cultural situation (Lee & Sparks, 2014). Predominate and less frequent social tensions were specifically identified of Nepali youth accessing advanced technology, which allowed for a summary of findings and recommendations to better support this social activity.

Similarly, researchers Bourke, Mentis, and O'Neill (2013) analyzed the impact of using narrative assessments in professional learning communities of teachers in high-risk, high-needs classrooms. This educationally based study used Activity Theory to show how various tensions across the activity system of classroom teachers, which included forces such as "roles of those involved, the narrative assessment approach, and the rules of the initiative" (Bourke et al., 2013, p. 35). Activity Theory framework captured the complex qualitative data set of professional learning community initiative on the role of using narrative assessments in teaching.

Another education-centered qualitative research on the relationship between K-12 schools and university systems applied the Activity Theory framework to analyze the datasets of complex human interactions (Yamagata-Lynch & Smaldin, 2007). Yamagata-Lynch and Smaldin (2007) yielded new evaluative measures for relations between K-12 schools and universities, in addition to identifying strategies for overcoming difficulties in these relationships.

Murphy and Rodriguez (2008) described how Activity Theory can be used as a guide when researching educational technology. As a descriptive tool, Murphy and Rodriguez (2008) contend that Activity Theory is useful when examining and describing the contradictions, often termed as tensions, that present themselves in "any study of information and communication technologies in educational contexts" (p. 442). In quoting, Engeström (1999), the authors describe Activity Theory as "the best kept secret in academia" (Murphy & Rodriguez, 2008, p. 442). As a lens through which to view human activities, Activity Theory provides a complex and in-depth structure by which to analyze interactions within environments that are marked by contradictions or tensions produced either by rules, tools, community or division or labor. Despite the application of the Activity Theory framework in previous qualitative studies, even focused in the area of education, this model has yet to be applied to examining the barriers and support systems of females obtaining leadership positions, including that of superintendent. Activity Theory provides a framework for understanding the tensions or barriers within an activity system in a systematic way, thus inviting research to also investigate the support systems for some of those barriers. As a framework, Activity Theory explores how the rules of society, the educational community and the division of labor within the

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school system interact to provide the female superintendents with a unique and challenging professional journey. The activity that will be examined through this theoretical framework is attaining the role and serving as a CA superintendent of a public school district in this current era of educational reform.

Summary

This chapter explored a historical perspective and review of literature on females in the American workforce, superintendency, and the initiatives creating a new world of educational reform. A synthesis matrix aided the researcher in organizing published literature and identifying key variables and seminal works for this study (see Appendix A). It was discovered that inclusion of females in the workforce continues to be pivotal, as educational leadership roles continue to reveal a clear underrepresentation of females in the superintendency. Perceived barriers to this attainment and the support systems applied by females who successfully secured a position as superintendent was examined. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that gender continues to influence scrupulous barriers and systems of supports to attaining a position as superintendent of schools. Lastly, a theoretical foundation was determined appropriate to provide validity and significance of this phenomenological research. The application of a framework of Activity Theory will provide a theoretical lens to represent each tension experienced by female superintendents both in attaining and serving in the superintendency. An evident gap of research on female superintendents serving in CA in a new era of educational reform was established, providing relevance and value of this study which seeks to share the lived experiences of these females. Chapter III thoroughly describes the qualitative study's methodology. Chapter IV shares the voices of female

participants in this study, reporting results and findings, and conclusions and

recommendations of the study are provided in the final chapter, Chapter V.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions being answered through this study. This chapter additionally outlines and explains the methodology utilized for this research study, including detailed information on population, selection of the sampling, and method for collection of data and data analysis. The study seeks to add to the body of literature on female educational leaders by gathering and describing the perspectives of female superintendents in CA. Through personal, in-depth interviews, this research will examine the perceptions and share the voices of female superintendents on barriers and support systems they experienced as public school superintendents in a current era of educational reform. The chapter concludes with limitations of this qualitative study and a summary of the chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the barriers and support systems female CA public school superintendents experienced while attaining and serving in their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

Research Questions

The following qualitative research questions will be addressed in this study: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers and support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while*

attaining and serving in their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino

Counties?

1. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

2. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

3. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female California public school superintendents describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

4. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

Research Design

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was selected for this study. An emotion, state of being, specific act, or even a career can be classified as a phenomenon, and viewing these acts through the lens of phenomenology "aims to capture the essence of program participants' experiences" (Patton, 2015, p. 116) with such phenomena. In this study, the phenomenon is the females who

accomplished attaining the position of superintendent in the United States. This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of females in the position of public school superintendent in CA by collecting and analyzing data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2015).

Qualitative methods have become "important tools within this broader approach to applied research, in large part because they provide valuable insights into the local perspectives of study populations" (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 7). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection and is able to focus on collecting the experience of the participants through stories or words (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, Patton (2015) contents a phenomenological approach can focus on more deeply exploring how humans "make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 115). This is confirmed by Seidman (2013), as he explains:

> Phenomenological theory leads to an emphasis on exploring the meaning of peoples' experiences in the context of their lives. Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience […]. It allows both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning. (p. 20)

Lived experiences, from the voices of females currently serving in the position of superintendent, can be captured and more intensely examined by utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological methodology.

Subsequently, Merriam (2009) contends researchers should strive to examine and explain meaning of social phenomena "with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). In-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in an environment selected by the participant will allow the participant to share her story in a natural environment, while the researcher will have increased flexibility with the proposed questions to derive additional experiences based on how the participant responds (Merriam, 2009). The most appropriate deign for this study is a phenomenological qualitative design, which will utilize in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allows for the collection of data in the respondent's natural environment and provides a form to share insight into her thoughts, inner feelings, and lived experiences (Patton, 2015) of barriers and support systems to attaining her position and while serving as superintendent.

Population

The population of any study is the group of interest, identified by the researcher (Roberts, 2010). The intended population of this study is designed to include all public school superintendents, especially those serving in CA amongst most recent educational reforms since 2012. In the 2015-16 school year, CAs education system was composed of 526 public elementary districts, 77 public high school districts, and 343 public unified school districts, totaling 946 potential public school districts (Ed Data, 2016). With one superintendent serving each district, the total population of this study is approximately 946 public school superintendents in the state of CA.

Target Population

A target population is the narrowed group of individuals of interest for study, from which the sample can be drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). The target population for this study is the homogenous group of female superintendents serving public school districts in the state of CA. Recent data from the state of CA is not available to determine the exact number or percentage of female superintendents serving as superintendent of public school districts either currently or for the past 10 years. Additionally, the data on gender of superintendents is variable, ultimately dependent upon attrition factors, which could include retirement, illness, death, job change, release from the position, etc. The most recent documented data available, for the year 2006, indicates 16% of CA superintendents are female (ACSA, 2008), which generically applied to current public school superintendents in the year 2015-16 would equate to approximately 151 female public school superintendents in CA.

Sample

Sampling is a process in which individuals are selected to represent the larger, target population of the study (Gay & Airasian, 1996). To conduct this qualitative study, a small, convenience sampling was utilized in a specific geographical area. Convenience sampling permitted the researcher to focus on particular variables presented in the research questions, in this case barriers and supports systems, of a specific sample (female public school superintendents) in proximity and of accessibility to the researcher.

A comprehensive list of all CA public unified, elementary, and high school districts in the 2015-16 school year was created from the Ed Data Education, Partnership's website to gather potential participants. This list of districts, reflected

potential participants of superintendents was then narrowed to only female school

superintendents, currently employed in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties of

Southern CA. These two counties of CA are in proximity to the researcher creating

convenience for face to face, in-depth interviews. Moreover, for the purpose of this study,

alternative districts, such as charter, private school (nonpublic and nonsectarian schools),

and county office districts were omitted from the sampling. Table 3 illustrates the

amount of public school districts by type in CAs Riverside and San Bernardino Counties

for the 2015-16 school year, collected from Ed Data Education Data Partnership's.

Table 3

Public school district totals by type in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties (2015-16)

2015-16	Riverside County	San Bernardino County
Elementary School Districts	4	11
High School Districts	1	2
Unified School Districts	18	20
Total Public School Districts	23	33

Note. Sum of both counties = 56 public school districts. Adapted from "District Type:
California Public Schools," by Ed Data Education Data Partnership [website], 2015.
Retrieved from www.ed-data.org/state/CA

Since one superintendent serves each public school district, there are

approximately 56 public school superintendents in Riverside and San Bernardino

Counties, composed of males and females. In the 2016-2017 school year, six females in

Riverside County (RCOE, 2016) and 12 females in San Bernardino (SBCSS, 2016) were

seated as superintendents between these 56 public school districts. Table 4 illustrates the

gender composition of superintendents employed in each county.

Table 4

Gender of superintendents in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties of CA (2016-17)

2016-17	Riverside County	San Bernardino County
Total Public School Districts	23	33
Male Superintendents	17	21
Female Superintendents	6	12
Percentage of Female Sups.	26%	36%

Note. Sum of female superintendents from both counties = 18 female public school districts. Adapted from "School District Listing" by Riverside County Office of Education [website], 2016. Retrieved from http://www.rcoe.us/school-districts/ and "District Sites and Information," by San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools [website], 2016. Retrieved from http://www.sbcss.k12.ca.us/index.php/2011-10-26-18-00-05

The 18 female public school superintendents serving these two counties are the sample for this study. Twelve of those female superintendents will be identified to participate in this study. Patton (2015) contends "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample depends on what you want to know" (p. 311). The intent of the sample size and population, based on purpose of the study, is to better understand and share the lived experiences of female superintendents, both in obtaining and serving in their current position as it relates to the barriers and support systems they experience through in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

Sample Selection Process

The study focused on females currently seated as a superintendent in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties of Southern CA. A list of all current superintendents of public school district was secured from Riverside and San Bernardino's county offices of education's website for the 2016-2017 school year. The list was narrowed to only females in Riverside and San Bernardino for the purpose of this study. From this set of

potential participants, email addresses from related district websites were secured and

these female public school superintendents were contacted via electronic mail, sharing

the purpose and research questions of the study and request their participation in the study.

For all participants who agreed to participate in the study, an invitation letter (Appendix

B), and a consent for participation with assurance of confidentially (Appendix C) was

subsequently sent via electronic mail. Then, for each participant who completed the

biographical questionnaire and consent for participation, a separate electronic letter

and/or personal phone call was made to arrange a date, time, and location for interview.

The interview protocol was electronically mailed to the participant at least one week prior

to the interview date. The goal is to interview at least 12 female superintendents for

participation in this study, based on their gender, current service as a public school

superintendent, and willingness to share their story.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection

for the study, as the researcher defines the parameters and processes of data collection,

analysis, and interpretation (Merriam, 1995; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The

primary method of data collection in this qualitative study was the phenomenological in-

depth interviews of female superintendents. To validate the collection and analysis of

data, the researcher utilized qualitative inquiry processes to decrease internal and external

threats and optimize validity and reliability. The researcher initiated these processes with

a convenience sampling, interview questions directly correlated to the purpose and

research questions of this study, and analyzed data on barriers and supports through the

use of the Activity Theory model.

Instrument

In this phenomenological study, the researcher serves as the central instrument of data collection (Merriam, 1995; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) in this study. The researcher ensured steps were taken to address and reduce the effect of researcher bias, so as to produce a reliable, credible study (Merriam, 1995). One such step was directly correlating interview questions with the purpose and research questions, which yielded an interview protocol used to gather data from research participants (see Appendix D). The interview protocol was developed in May 2016 by the researcher to provide a more in-depth discussion of each broad research question. The protocol consisted of 16 interview questions, including background and follow-up questions. Patton (2015) indicates that the sequence of interview questions, beginning with experiential or contextual questions regarding the subject's activity in the area being researched produces a desirable introduction to the more probing questions that are designed to pertain to the study's research questions. Questions ranged from demographic questions to open-ended questions designed to elicit honest responses that provided the researcher with a clear picture of the lived experience of each female participant's barriers and support systems in attaining and serving as superintendent. The researcher ensured all interview questions were meaningful to the respondent and directly related to the research questions, use of biased or leading language was avoided, and standard language rules were applied (Fink, 2009).

The researcher will contact each participant via electronic mail to set up an initial interview appointment. A follow-up phone call will be made the week and then the day prior to each interview to ensure the participants are willing to engage in face to face, in-

depth interview for the study. The face to face interviews will be conducted in September and October of 2016 at a location selected by the participant. These locations can include participant's natural environment, such as their district office or an off-campus location preferred by the participant. The researcher will use the Rev Transcription program to record the interview, which will then be remotely electronically transcribed by Rev Transcription and returned to the researcher via electronic mail. For addition assurance of accuracy, the researcher will electronically send the entire transcription of the interview to each participant to check for accuracy in meaning and content. Once the transcription is approved by each participant, the researcher will analyze each interview question for emerging themes and align data with the Activity Theory model.

Reliability

While one of the hallmarks of the research process lies in the expectations of its objectivity, the issue of reliability and validity must be addressed. The researcher will take measures to ensure reliability and credibility of the study, which includes triangulation of data, maintaining an audit trail, conducting a field test prior to any data collection (Merriam, 1995), and utilizing the process of intercoder reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004).

Triangulation of data in this study will include evidence of interviews of female superintendents, in addition to gathering of a variety of related documents as artifacts to supplement the interview data. An audit trail will ensure accurate documentation of interviews and artifacts, such as electronic recordings of interviews and archiving of verbatim transcriptions. The researcher will also review and document artifacts such as

district funding plans that establish district priorities in this new era of educational

reform, job descriptions and postings for public school superintendents, and agendas and

minutes from support structures, such as the Women's Leadership Network for San

Bernardino or Riverside County chapters of the ACSA. Besides maintaining an audit

trail of records of data collection, a procedure known as "member checking" will be

utilized in an attempt to limit researcher bias and self-reporting errors, where each

participant of this study was asked to check the accuracy in content and meaning in the

interview transcriptions (Creswell, 2002). In this study, as is true of all qualitative

research, the researcher is the most complex and pertinent data collection instrument,

who analyzes the data that will, in turn, inform the study itself (Merriam, 1995). The

researcher in this study approached the topic of this study based on her interest in the role

and experiences of female superintendents, so to increase internal reliability the

researcher worked collaboratively with another researcher to design the study and

interview questions. An external audit of the study's methodology, data collection, and

coding process will be also completed throughout and at the conclusion of the study to

gain feedback on strengths and weaknesses of the study (Brantlinger, Jiminez, Klinger,

Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Creswell, 2002; Patton, 2015). As a part of the external

audit process, the researcher applied a process known as intercoder reliability, where a

peer researcher codes a portion of the data until a common conclusion is reached

(Lombard et al., 2004; Tinsley and Weiss, 2000).

Intercoder reliability indicates that at least 10% of the data will be double coded

by a secondary research to result in 80% or higher agreement of the coding (Lombard et

al., 2004). Intercoder reliability will be utilized to address and solidify validity of the

analysis of the collected data. In order to ensure that the data is analyzed in a manner that reflects accurate results, the process of intercoder reliability will be conducted in the following sequence:

- Step 1: Primary researcher will select 10% of collected data from interviews and related artifacts.

- Step 2: Primary researcher will code 100% of the collected data using Nvivo software.

- Step 3: Primary researcher will give the themes developed in the coding process to secondary researcher/coder.

- Step 4: Secondary researcher/coder scans the data (before coding) to validate the themes already identified by the main researcher. If more or fewer themes are identified by the secondary coder, a discussion will be held to consider coding themes.

- Step 5: Secondary researcher/coder will then code the information using themes developed.

- Step 6: After coding data, the secondary researcher/coder will give coded information back to primary researcher to compare primary researcher and secondary researcher/coder data frequencies (# of references) for each theme. (Lombard et al., 2004)

Validity

Patton (2015) claims reliability and validity are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analyzing results, and judging the quality of the study. To address internal and external validity, an external

audit of the study's design, interview questions, data collection processes, and data coding will be conducted (Creswell, 2002). The study's research questions were validated by an expert in the field and research questions were created in collaboration with another research to directly align to the research questions in this study. This external audit process also addresses the issue of interviewer bias and validity of interviewing skills through expert feedback from another researcher. External audits will precede the field test and collection of any data, thus resulting in potential revisions of the interview questions, which will be resubmitted in order to limit leading language and eliminate the potential for biased question presentation. To address credibility and dependability of the findings, impacting the validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), intercoder reliability will be used, where an expert researcher will double code a portion of the data to reach consensus of findings at an accuracy rate of 80% or better (Lombard et al., 2004).

To additionally strengthen internal and external validity of this study, data for this study will be aligned to the ideals of Activity Theory, used as the theoretical framework through which to view the barriers and support systems that have been experienced by female superintendents. Engeström's (1999) theoretical approach of Activity Theory allows researchers to organize qualitative datasets of complex human interactions, appropriate for social constructs such as interactions within educational organizations. Activity Theory is a descriptive, theoretical approach, which analyzes factors impacting a person (subject) in achieving a particular outcome in any given societal structure by categorizing factors into one of the following four categories: Instruments (also known as Tools or Artifacts), Rules, Community, and Division of

Labor (see Figure 3); this framework has been identified as being most appropriate for fields of inquiry, such as education (Engeström, 1999). For the purposes of this study, Activity Theory Instruments might include district funding plans, job descriptions of superintendents, or agendas for professional groups that give evidence of external support, specifically designed for women in educational leadership. The researchers will also use existing literature on Activity Theory to analyze Rules, Community, and Division of Labor factors that serve as barriers or support systems for female superintendents. Activity Theory has been used in previous research studies to analyze a variety of social settings (Bourkea, Mentisb, & O'Neille, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch & Smaldino, 2007) and to describe the processes by which subjects achieve outcomes (Engeström, 1999). Furthermore, Bourkea et al. (2013) describes Activity Theory as a means by which researchers can evaluate professional learning in the use of narrative assessment. Therefore, the study will use the theoretical framework of Activity Theory to increase validity in the analysis of the experiences of females who have secured a position in leading public school districts, despite existing barriers.
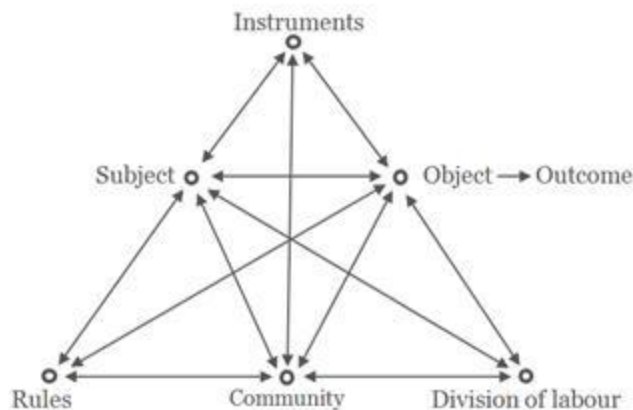
Figure 3. Visual representation of Activity Theory Framework. Adapted from "Perspectives on Activity Theory," by Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, and R.-L. Punamaki (Eds.), 1999. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Field test. A field test of the interview protocol will be conducted prior to the collection of data. The interview protocol, developed by the researcher, was designed to directly correlate to the research questions of this study. The protocol will be field tested with an informed and experienced test group of voluntary participants, composed of retired female superintendents during the month of August 2016. The field test will be conducted to ensure accuracy of correlation between interview questions and research questions and to limit biased language or gestures of the researcher. Pilot interviews were also recorded using the Rev Transcription program. Following the field test, feedback will be solicited from each field test participant on the researcher's methods of interviewing, interview questions, length of interview, nonverbal and verbal gestures, and the recording process. The interview protocol will be field tested in order to decrease any external on internal threats to the validity of the study. Adjustments to the interview protocol and process will be made based on feedback prior to interviewing of any participants for this study.

Data Collection

Prior to collection of any data from human subjects involved in this study, permission will be requested and obtained from Brandman University's Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) of for data collection of human subjects for the purpose of research. No data will be collected for this study until approval is received from BUIRB.

The sampling will consist of 12 female superintendents of public school districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties in the state of CA. Alternative districts will be eliminated from this study, as the most common type of school district in CA is the public school district. Only currently employed (non-retired) superintendents will be

included in the sample to produce most relevant data possible, especially as it relates to the purpose of understanding female superintendents in an era of new educational reform, which is defined the educational environment created from educational initiatives and laws enacted since 2012. All participants were electronically sent an assurance of confidentiality, formal consent for interview, and an outline of the purpose of this study, at least two week prior to the interview. Additionally, the interview protocol was electronically sent to the all participants at least one week prior to the interview. Each participant's identity will be protected by using a pseudonym rather than factual names. Signed consent forms, and data and research records will be stored in locked cabinets at the researcher's residence, and will be shredded and disposed of following the defense of the study.

Data collection is the pivotal crutch to this qualitative phenomenological research study. The research process will rely on in-depth interviews, accurate transcriptions of participants' responses, triangulation of data, and peer review of data analysis to ensure accuracy of the findings (Merriam, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In-depth interviews will be conducted in a face to face manner within a two month timeframe in the months of September and October of 2016 using a semi-structured interview process. Interviews will be conducted in an environment selected by the participant to ensure comfort and confidentiality of the participant, with a desire to yield the most honest responses possible. All interviews will be recorded using the Rev Transcription IOS application for an iPhone. Following the interview, the recording will be submitted to the Rev Transcription service via the application, which will yield an electronic text document of verbatim interview proceedings. Interview transcriptions will then be

electronically mailed to each participant to review for accuracy, providing opportunity for clarification or correction by the participant. After transcriptions are reviewed and approved by each participant, the researcher will analyze the data utilizing NVivo coding software to identify themes that correlate to barriers and support systems, as proposed in the research questions. Moreover, interview transcriptions and coded synthesis will be double coded in a process known as intercoder reliability (Lombard et al., 2004) and peer reviewed for accuracy of coding to increase validity and reliability (Creswell, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

The researcher will also collect documents as archival data to further delineate emergent codes that respond to the research questions. The researcher will ask the participants for permission to access documents that pertain to the study as outlined in the previously electronically mailed consent form. Artifacts will also be analyzed using the NVivo research and coding software for related themes and then peer reviewed. Archival data and peer review will provide necessary triangulation to support the study's validity (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

Lastly, a thank you card and small gift of appreciation will be sent to each participant following the interview session and gathering of archival data, offered as a small token of appreciation for sharing her lived experience as a female superintendent in attaining her current position and serving in the newest era of educational reform.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis "examines a story, a case study, a set of interviews, or a collection of field notes" (Patton, 2015, p. 570) to interpret meaning and draw conclusions. In this quality study, human beings are the primary focus of study and the

primary instrument of data collection and analysis, so interpretations or reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews (Merriam, 1995). Since the primary focus of this study is to better understand the lived experience of female leaders in education, data was collected through in-depth interviews and archived artifacts, which were analyzed for the purpose of drawing conclusions, based on the research questions of this study.

The interview with each participant will be recorded using the Rev Transcription IOS application, in addition to a hand held digital recorder. After each interview, the researcher will submit the interview recording to the Rev Transcription Service. Additionally, related artifacts of barriers and support systems experience by these female leaders will be requested to supplement the interview. Once the verbatim transcription is complete and it has been reviewed by the participants for accuracy and related artifacts are secured, the data analysis process will begin. Coding is the process of synthesizing data for themes, ideas, and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so data can be counted to determine high frequency themes (Patton, 2015). Coding of data will be completed for each interview transcription and analyzed for frequency of themes using NVivo coding software. Although NVivo software will assist the researcher in organizing and sorting themes (Patton, 2015), the researcher will be responsible for actively reading, analyzing and identifying emergent themes (Merriam, 1995). NVivo will be the vehicle by which the researcher stores the data that is gathered. All data collected for this study will be coded for emergent themes (Patton, 2015) within the stories of the lived experiences of female superintendents and related artifacts. Coded transcriptions and emergent themes will be peer reviewed for accuracy

of coding analysis (Merriam, 1995). Each of the interview questions correlate with the broader research questions. The codes that emerge after the interviews will be analyzed will correlate to the study's research questions. As codes emerge for each research question, this qualitative analysis will result in the study's findings (Patton, 2015).

Moreover, Activity Theory was utilized as the theoretical framework through which the data was analyzed. The researcher discussed the emergent themes in terms of the four categories that mirror the ideals of Activity Theory. These are: instruments (also known as tools or artifacts), rules, community and division of labor. These ideals created either barriers or support systems with which the subject (female superintendents) interacted to obtain the outcome of securing their current position. As a theory, this lens provided a valid and reliable source by which to analyze data gathered in a study of a phenomenon. The collected data was analyzed to align with Activity Theory's domains through which the phenomena of female superintendents can be described. Ultimately, the researcher will describe the female superintendent's lived experience using Activity Theory as a manner in which to explain the impact of barriers and support systems on the activity of becoming a female superintendent in a male dominated field. These findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV of this study.

Limitations

Limitations of a study are characteristics of design or methodology that "negatively affect the results or […] ability to generalize" (Roberts, 2010, p. 162) the study. The limitations of this study includes the limited sample size and selection of participants, limited geographical area of participants, moment in time of data collection,

and self-reported data by the researcher. These factors limit the sampling, making it difficult to generalize the study to the larger population.

The results of this study are also limited to the level of open, honest, and accurate sharing of experiences during interviews of the participants involved in this study. More explicitly, since contracted search firms nominate candidates and Board of Education members ultimately hire and release superintendents, there can be an unwillingness of participants to speak out about the hiring practices of both boards members and search firms. However, sharing the lived experiences of these select female superintendents from their own voices is the purpose of the study. An additional limitation is the inherent bias of the researcher who currently serves as a female elementary principal, as the topic was selected based on its personal appeal to the researcher and the consideration that superintendent is a potential career of the future for the researcher. Moreover, the study design involved the use of self-reported data and self-coding, which can inherently generate variable and biased results. A process will be instituted to mitigate these limitations.

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

The primary goal for any qualitative researcher is to ensure credibility of data of findings and relative analysis through triangulation, which strengthens a study (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2015). This chapter explained the population, process for selection of participants, and methods of data collection and analysis. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, a purposeful sample of current female superintendents was selected to participate in in-depth interviews. The interview protocol was designed by the researcher, in collaboration with another researcher, and additionally field tested prior to

administration. The researcher applied triangulation of data through collection of in-depth interviews and audit of related artifacts. All data was coded for emerging themes based on variables addressed in the research questions; common themes of barriers and supports experienced by female superintendents were aligned to the framework of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1999). Data collection, coding analysis, and alignment to the social research theory were peer reviewed and debriefed by another researcher. A variety of methods were applied to ensure the utmost of credibility and validity to the findings of this phenomenological study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from the study, which intended to examine the experienced barriers and support systems of female superintendents, both while attaining and while serving in their current position. Chapter IV reviews the purpose of this study, research questions, methodology, population, sample, and concludes with a presentation of the data, organized by research question and by the framework of Activity Theory.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female CA public school superintendents experienced while attaining and while serving in their current positions throughout Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The purpose of this study was derived from the foundation that the school superintendency is the most gender-biased executive position in the country (Björk, 2000; Blount, 1999; Glass, 1991; Litmanovitz, 2010), where males are 40 times more likely to advance to this leadership position than are women (Skrla, 2000). Taking into consideration that approximately 75% of K-12 educators are female (Bitterman et al., 2013; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Glass, 2000; Litmanovitz, 2010), one might assume a similar representation of females would also be serving in the role of superintendent, as teaching is the most frequently identified preliminary job for superintendents (Griggs, 2014). However, most recent statistics share only 21.7% of superintendents nationwide are female (Kowalski et al., 2011) and CA superintendents range between 16-17% female (ACSA, 2008). Despite increased national representation of females in the

superintendency since the turn of century, the United States and the CA

superintendency is far from comparable to the representation of females serving as

teachers in K-12 education. With continued underrepresentation of females in the

superintendency, despite high rates of females graduating from education programs

and professional development for this position and significant educational reforms

enacted since 2012, the researcher designed the study to expand the literature on

females currently serving as superintendent, viewing their experienced barriers and

support systems through a theoretical lens of Activity Theory, categorizing barriers

and support systems into one of four Activity Theory domains: Instrument, Rules,

Community, or Division of Labor.

Research Questions

The following primary qualitative research questions was addressed in this

study: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers and support*

systems do female California public school superintendents describe they

experienced while attaining and serving in their current position in Riverside and

San Bernardino Counties? This question was then divided into four sub research

questions, as follows:

1. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female

    California public school superintendents describe they experienced while

    attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?

2. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do

    female California public school superintendents describe they experienced

while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino

Counties?

3. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female

    California public school superintendents describe they experience in their

    current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and

    San Bernardino Counties?

4. As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do

    female California public school superintendents describe they experience in

    their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside

    and San Bernardino Counties?

Methodology

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was selected for this study in order

to share the lived experiences of females in CA who secured and serve in the position of

K-12 public school superintendent. Since this study sought to examine the lived

experiences of these females, it was deemed most appropriate to share their stories

through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and triangulated with related

artifacts. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with 12 female

superintendents, six from Riverside County and six from San Bernardino County of CA.

The location, date, and time of the interview was selected by the participant; all

interviews were held in the month of September 2016 and were either conducted in the

office of the participant or a public coffee shop. All participants were provided the list of

interview questions in advance of the interview and each participant signed a statement of

consent and confidentiality prior to interview. Interviews were recorded by two

electronic devices and then transcribed by Rev Transcription service, submitted through

the Rev Transcription IOS application. Following the interview, all participants received

verbatim transcriptions of the interview to review and edit the records as deemed

necessary by the participant; these transcriptions were shared with participants through

their email as an editable Google document. All participants were asked to review the

transcripts to ensure accuracy of content and meaning. Additionally, artifacts were

gathered during and post interview. Following approval of the transcriptions by each

participant and collection of artifacts, coding of collected data was completed using

NVivo coding software. The data was analyzed for frequency of themes, and the codes

that emerged were correlated to the study's research questions, resulting in the findings of

this study. Any code with a frequency of one or two was not included in the findings of

this study. To increase reliability of the study, the researcher applied a process known as

intercoder reliability (Lombard et a., 2004), in which a peer researcher coded a portion of

the data until a common conclusion was reached. Moreover, the framework of

Engeström's (1999) Activity Theory was applied to organize the findings, where

emergent themes were classified into four different categories (Instruments, Rules,

Community or Division of Labor). Ultimately, the researcher viewed the lived

experiences of these 12 female superintendents through the lens of AT in order to

examine the barriers and support systems they collectively experienced, as shared in their

stories.

Population and Sample

The population of this study was designed to include all public school

superintendents, especially those serving in CA. In the 2015-16 school year, CA's

education system was composed of 526 public elementary districts, 77 public high school

districts, and 343 public unified school districts, totaling 946 potential public school

districts (Ed Data, 2015). With one superintendent serving each public school district, the

total population of this study is approximately 946 public school superintendents in the

state of CA. More narrowly, the target population for this study is the homogenous group

of female superintendents serving public school districts in the state of CA. Recent data

from the state of CA is unavailable to determine the exact number or percentage of

female superintendents currently serving as superintendent of public school districts.

However, with the most recent documented data available (from the year 2006), indicates

16% of CA superintendents are female (ACSA, 2008), which generically applied to

current number of public school superintendents equates to approximately 151 female

public school superintendents in CA.

To execute this qualitative research, convenience sampling was utilized in a

specific geographical area of CA. Convenience sampling permitted the researcher to

focus on particular variables presented in the research questions, in this case barriers and

supports systems, of a specific sample (female public school superintendents) in

proximity and of accessibility to the researcher (Riverside and San Bernardino counties).

Of the 56 public school superintendents between these two CA counties, in the 2016-

2017 school year, six females served Riverside County (RCOE, 2016) as superintendent

and 12 females in San Bernardino (SBCSS, 2016), totaling a potential sample of 18

female public school superintendents. Twelve of those 18 female superintendents served

as participants for this study. Of the 12 participants, six were employed with Riverside

County and six from San Bernardino County of CA. With a limited population of female

superintendents in CA, and particularly small sample, every effort was made to maintain

confidentiality and anonymity to the participants. Thus, names and indicting or leading

information was omitted from the presentation of the findings. The 12 participants were

numerically identified in the findings by numeral, from 1 to 12 (e.g. Superintendent-1;

Superintendent-2; etc.).

Presentation of the Data

To answer the primary research question, the researcher coded emergent

themes from the data into the four main domains of Activity Theory. These four

domains are considered social tensions, which are categorized as Instruments (also

known as Tools or Artifacts), Rules, Community, or Division of Labor (Engeström,

1999). By using the Activity Theory framework, the researcher was able to

organize the tensions of barriers and of support systems within this system of

activity. Additionally, these findings were further sorted by timeframe of "while

attaining their position" or "while serving in their position," to more specifically

answer each of the four sub questions of the research. The findings of this study are

presented by sub research question and aligned to the Activity Theory framework,

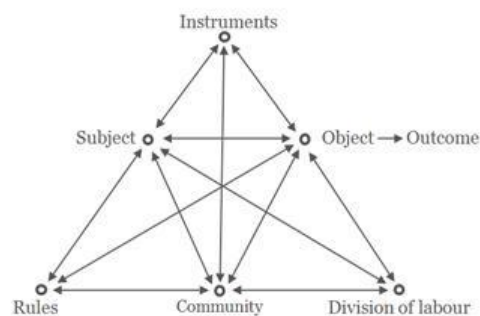illustrated in the form of triangle (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Visual representation of Engeström's Activity Theory framework. Adapted from "Perspectives on Activity Theory," by Y. Engeström, 1999, p. 31. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

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Research Sub Question 1: Barriers While Attaining the Position

The first sub question of this study seeks to answer: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?* Five barriers were identified among the 12 participants, which ranged in a frequency count from six to four. Table 5 illustrates the identified themes with related Activity Theory domain and by frequency counts for the barriers experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position.

Table 5

All identified barriers experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position, in descending order from most frequent to least frequent barrier

Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
Superintendent search firm practices that exclude candidates from interview opportunities	Rules	6
The self-perception that she would not be able to balance the workload of the position with the responsibilities of home	Division of Labor	6
The self-perception that she was not capable of the job responsibilities of superintendent due to perceived lack of work experience	Division of Labor	6
An unspoken male dominated culture that excludes females ("Good Ol' Boys" network)	Rules	4
The Board of Education's perception that a female superintendent's social role would negatively impact the responsibilities of superintendent	Division of Labor	4

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

These thematic barriers are further illustrated in Figure 5 to visually organize each barrier by Activity Theory domain.

Instruments:
• None identified

Subject:
Female

Outcome:
Female serving as
Superintendent

Division of Labor:
• The self-perception that she was not
capable of the job responsibilities of
superintendent due to perceived lack of
work experience (6)
• The self-perception that a female
superintendent would not be able to
balance the workload of the position
with the responsibilities of home (6)
• The Board of Education's perception
that a female superintendent's social
role would negatively impact the
responsibilities of superintendent (4)

Rules:
• Superintendent search
firm practices that exclude
candidates from interview
opportunities (6)
• An unspoken male
dominated culture that
excludes females ("Good
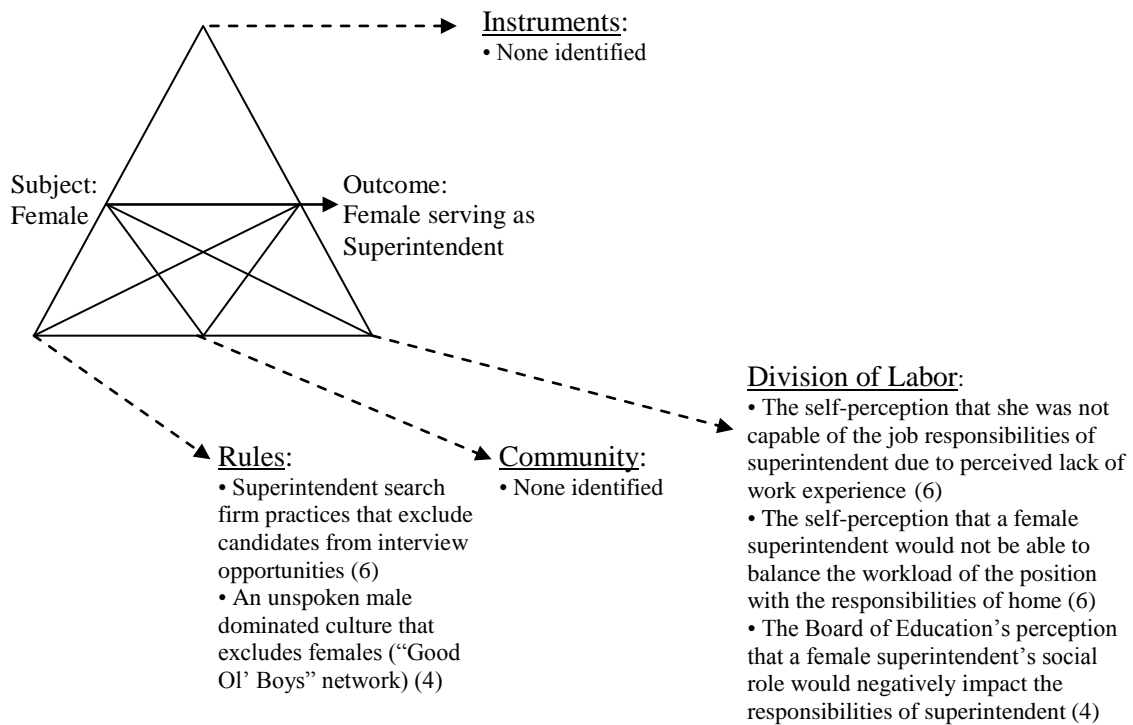Ol' Boys" network) (4)

Community:
• None identified

Figure 5. Visual representation of all identified barriers while attaining their position, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Instruments. Within the Activity Theory framework, Instruments, also known as artifacts or tools, are factors that allow a subject to communicate and interact with their environment. Instruments can include, but are not limited to, professional development courses, strategic plans, books, internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics. No instruments were identified as a barrier to attaining the superintendency among the 12 female participants.

Rules. In Activity Theory, rules act as a mediating component between subject and community. These rules determine how the subject (female superintendent) is to work within their community and rely upon cultural and societal expectations and roles in order to work within the Activity Theory framework. Two of the identified barriers while attaining the position were categorized as Rules, but the barrier was experienced by the

participants at a frequency of 6. Table 6 outlines the barrier categorized as Rules;

followed by Figure 6, which illustrates the identified barriers within the Activity Theory

framework.

Table 6

Barriers experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position related to Rules

Rules Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
Superintendent search firm practices that exclude candidates from interview opportunities	Rules	6
An unspoken male dominated culture that excludes females ("Good Ol' Boys" network)	Rules	4

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Subject: Female

Outcome: Female serving as Superintendent

Rules:
• Superintendent search firm practices that exclude candidates from interview opportunities (6)
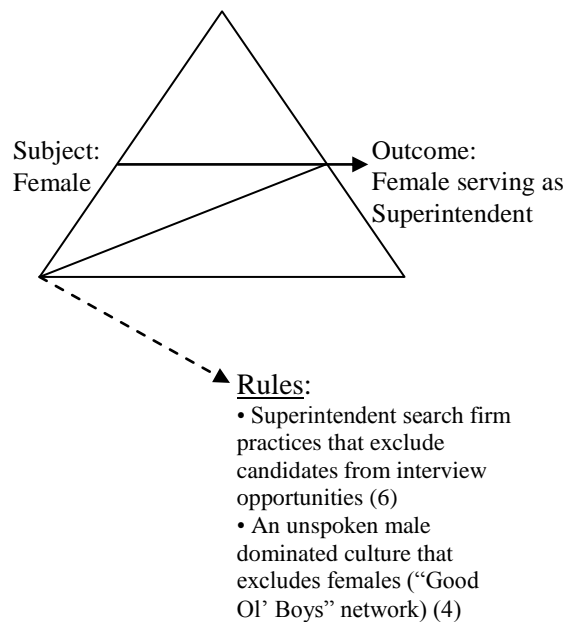• An unspoken male dominated culture that excludes females ("Good Ol' Boys" network) (4)

Figure 6. Visual representation of identified Rules barriers while attaining their position, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Superintendent search firm practices that exclude candidates from interview

opportunities. In education, school districts seeking a new superintendent will

often use a search firm, either a contracted agency or the local county office of education, to secure and present candidates to the local Board of Education to interview for the available position. Although these agencies are considered third-party, non-biased organizations, the practices of some superintendent search firms were found to be a barrier by half of the participants. Search firm's biased practices seem to limit female candidates from an opportunity to interview for a Board of Education.

Superintendent-1 shared her experience with biased practices of the search firm, as she labels these practices as "stabling:"

Districts, nine out of ten, are going to use some sort of search firm because boards of education have been convinced that this is the best way to find a superintendent. […] What I've learned about search firms is that […] they develop a stable; many of them, but not all of them. What happens when you have a stable, and this is what's frustrating about our educational system and leadership, is that some of these groups hold professional cadres or leadership seminars where superintendent candidates pay to go. They develop relationships with the consultants and become part of their stable. Then when jobs become available, these search firms only put forward those they know. Some search firms won't show the boards of education all the applications; they'll just show them their top five favorite candidate. Well, if you're not known to them, how do you get into that top five? […] The barrier for many females is absolutely search firms and building of stables. I don't know the background in every single position, but I know that there are jobs that I would never apply for if particular search firms are doing the search because it's predestined. I've been pretty accurate, I'm going to

tell you, when that search firm does positions. I can tell you what kind of person is going to go to that district. It's horrible.

Superintendent-7 concurs with this barrier, sharing "*there's one search firm that everybody says they do not put women in the interview. They just don't do it. I had thought about [applying for] another district, but people were saying, 'It's not going to happen.'*" Superintendent-6 agrees that search firms are "*gatekeepers of this position. [...] One of the issues with search firms is when they want you to apply, if you don't apply, then they lose interest in you.*" Superintendent-11 shared her experience with perceived biased practices of a search firm:

> [When I applied for the position of superintendent,] what happened was the search firm had like five or six applicants that I think they really wanted the board to interview. The search firm in many ways, often times, has a top two favorite. Sometimes, depending on if any of the members are professors in different universities; there's one university in particular they really want to place their people. […] I ended up getting an interview, but what I later found out was the search firm had said to the board, "We think that you should just interview these five [excluding me]," but the board members said, "We really want to interview this one [meaning me]." The search firm tried to give the members of the board only five or six candidates without my application. The board was strong enough to say, "No, we really want this one to interview."

In this case, the board of education interviewed Superintendent-11, despite the initial vetting process of candidates by the search firm. Articles related to CA school district's use of contracted search firms are presented in Appendix E as related artifacts. Biased

practices of placing preferred candidates due to social connections (personally or professionally) by search firms were presented as a barrier in this study.

An unspoken male dominated culture that excludes females. Another Rules barrier while attaining their current position was identified as that of an unspoken male dominated culture that exists which excludes females (a "Good Ol' Boys" type of network). The practices of males promoting, advocating, and even hiring other males into the superintendency is prevalent. It is generally implicit, not spoken of, but this culture is visible to females seeking the superintendency. Four participants in this study identified this as a barrier while trying to attain the position of superintendent. Superintendent-1 explains:

> The culture of the golf course [is] so prevalent. I see the connections and the relationships that have been built between men in our industry. When you try and connect you're like, 'How does that person know that person?' You can trace them back to where they got their degrees or that they connected on the golf course. At conferences […] you'll see a lot of the women inside, [asking] 'Where are the boys? What are they doing?' The men are outside on the golf course. Relationships are being built out on the golf course.

Superintendent-2 shared a similar story:

> When I came up, it was still a good, old, little boys network. […] I witnessed numerous times when I would apply or other friends would apply for superintendent that a man would get the job, and sure enough, that man usually had strong connections to other men in the district or with the search firm.

"*There's just this innate mistrust of women by men in education,*" so men tend to promote other men in the industry, reflected Superintendent-3. Moreover, Superintendent-10 explains she sees males aligning and hiring other males "*all the time in [the position of] superintendent.*" She continues, "*These men are friends; they know each other well. [...] I think there's a level of comfort for themselves if they know what they're getting.*" An unspoken male dominated culture that excludes females presented as a barrier in this study.

Community. In AT, community refers to the social context and systems in which the subject functions as a part of a whole. The community is generally governed by rules that define the subject's role within the communal context. In this social structure, no "Community" barriers to attaining the superintendency were identified by these female participants.

Division of Labor. The majority of identified barriers in this study were within the Division of Labor domain. In Activity Theory, Division of Labor refers to the hierarchical structure of activity in an environment; also refers to the roles individuals execute within an organization. Three barriers were identified by participants, in which they experienced while attaining the position of superintendent, within the domain of Division of Labor; these barriers are listed in Table 7 and illustrated in Figure 7.

Table 7

Barriers experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position related to Division of Labor

Division of Labor Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
The self-perception that she was not capable of the job responsibilities of superintendent due to perceived lack of work experience	Division of Labor	6
Note. AT = Activity Theory.		(continued)

Table 7

Barriers experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position related to Division of Labor

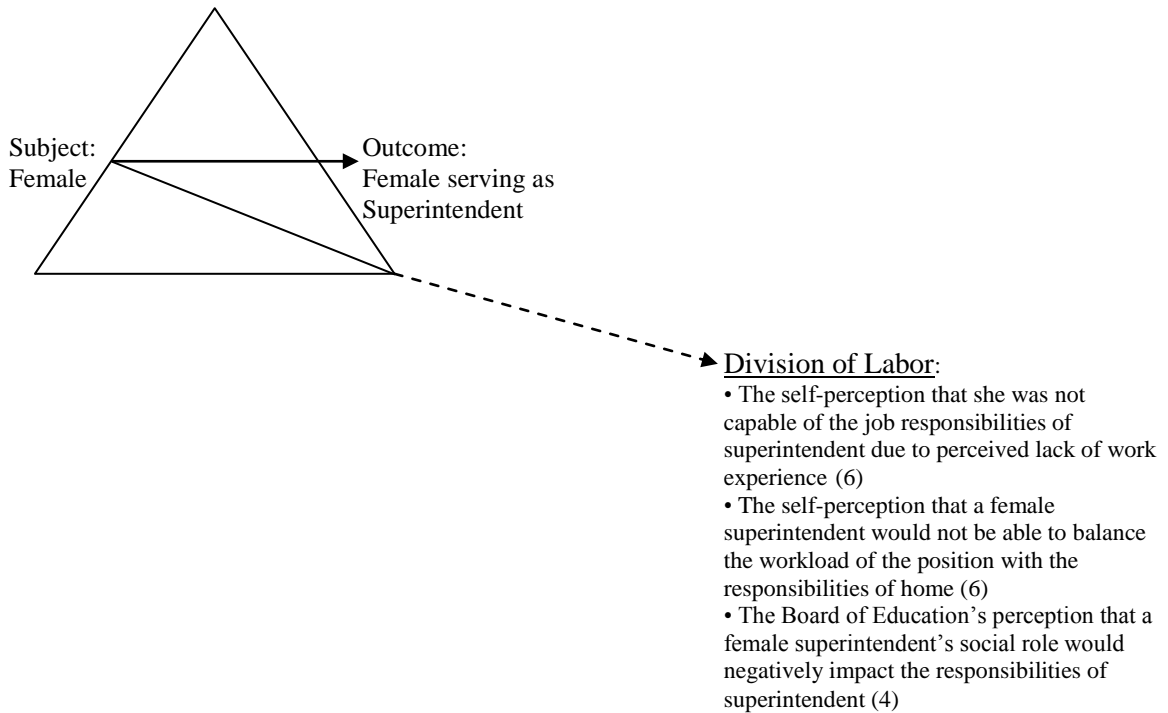| Division of Labor Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
The self-perception that she would not be able to balance the workload of the position with the responsibilities of home	Division of Labor	6
The Board of Education's perception that a female superintendent's social role would negatively impact the responsibilities of superintendent	Division of Labor	4

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Figure 7. Visual representation of identified Division of Labor barriers while attaining their position, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

The self-perception that she was not capable of the job responsibilities of superintendent due to perceived lack of work experience. Some female participants in this study identified their self-perception as a barrier to attaining the superintendency, in as much as they perceived themselves not capable of the job

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responsibilities of superintendent due to their perceived lack of work experience, skill, or ability. Half of the participants, at a frequency of 6, shared similar stories of how they questioned their ability, their skill set, and their previous work experience, believing "*it was not enough*" (Superintendent-6) to secure them a position as superintendent. One participant, Superintendent-4, voiced, "*The barriers that I feel […] is being pigeon holed into [Human Resources] HR. I even experienced, 'You're an elementary person.' When they're looking for a superintendent, people want to know that you're well rounded.*" Superintendent-4 also shared that her doubt in her ability to serve as superintendent developed from these comments made by coworkers. This perception of limited experience also related to experiences among multiple school districts. Superintendent-5 claimed, "*I was pretty naïve because I had been in one place my whole career. My connections were all insular. I felt I wasn't connected to the right people, nor did I have the right kind of background"* to be a superintendent. Perceived lack of experience in various positions or among school districts was identified as a barrier to attaining a position as superintendent.

     The self-perception that a female superintendent would not be able to balance the workload of the position with the responsibilities of home. Similarly, a self-perception that the female participant would not be able to balance the workload of the position of superintendent with that of the responsibilities of home (work-life balance) was experienced by half of the participants. The commonality emerged from the participants that they were the primary parent responsible for maintaining the home; this included the responsibility of cooking, cleaning, and rearing children. With the self-perception that the position of superintendent demands significant time away from the

home, these females shared concern about seeking a superintendency because of fear of not being able to balance time demands of a potential superintendency with that of the time already demanded with the responsibilities in the home. "*It's different for women who are married and have children. It's a reality of needing to balance. I was fearful I would not have that balance as a superintenden*t," explained Superintendent-7. "*It just tugs at your heartstrings as a mom. […] Even though my husband was there, [I] just wanted to be there too*," said Superintendent-12. In terms of gender roles, Superintendent-7 stated, "*I believe that it's easier for a male [to balance work and home responsibilities], and maybe it's my perception because I'm not a male, but these family dynamics are demanding for women*." Traditional social roles related to gender, where females are primarily responsible for the home and children and men are responsible for earning an income outside of the home, transcend as a barrier within this study and weighed on the decision of these females while attaining a superintendency.

> ***The Board of Education's perception that a female superintendent's social role would negatively impact the responsibilities of superintendent***. In education, Boards of Education conduct interviews to hire, they evaluate, and they are responsible for releasing superintendents; in short, board members are the direct supervisor of the superintendent. In this study, another barrier within the Division of Labor domain, is that of the Board of Education's perception that a female's social role/responsibility in the home would negatively impact the responsibilities of that required of the superintendent. This manifested in the study as board members asking questions and making comments to female candidates during interviews that directly related to a woman's traditional social role in the home. Superintendent-6 shared her story of interviewing for one

superintendent position in district that was over three hours from her home. She shared the male board president inquired during her interview:

> "We just don't understand how you're going to leave your husband and come [...] here." I was shocked that they would even mention my husband in an interview because I didn't know that was legal. Our agreement [between my husband and myself] was I would get a superintendency wherever, and he would follow. [...] This board member had a real issue with me leaving my husband. While another board member in the interview turned to him and said, 'I'd be really upset if my wife just went off.' At that minute, as soon as they asked that, I knew I wasn't going to get the job. (Superintendent-6)

A similar incident occurred to Superintendent-11 when being interviewed for superintendent position for a district two hours from her home. Again, a male board member engaged her during an interview, asking her to "*Tell us about your husband, and how do you think that you're going to be able to live apart? Because we want somebody who's really going to be a part of the community.*" Superintendent-11 later in the interview heard one of the board members say, "*You know what? Her husband is a physician. She lives [far away]. How long do you think she'll be here really?*" The common barrier was the board members perception on the role of the woman in a relationship, sharing very traditional values for these gender roles in our society. This perception, held by some board members, was identified as a barrier to attaining the superintendency.

Research Sub Question 2: Support Systems While Attaining the Position

The second sub question of this study seeks to answer: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?* Support systems experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position were identified in Table 8, representing each support system by Activity Theory domain, in descending order of frequency.

Table 8

All support systems experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position, in descending order from most frequent to least frequent support system

Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Professional mentor	Community	14
Supportive spouse	Community	9
Professional conferences	Instruments	9
Diversified work experience within education	Rules	7
Positive relationship with board of education in desired district	Community	7
Networking with professionals in similar field	Community	7
Professional references (books, magazines, online blogs)	Instruments	4
Self-confidence	Community	3
County Office of Education conducting superintendent search	Instrument	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

These thematic support systems are further illustrated in Figure 8 to visually represent each support system by Activity Theory domain.
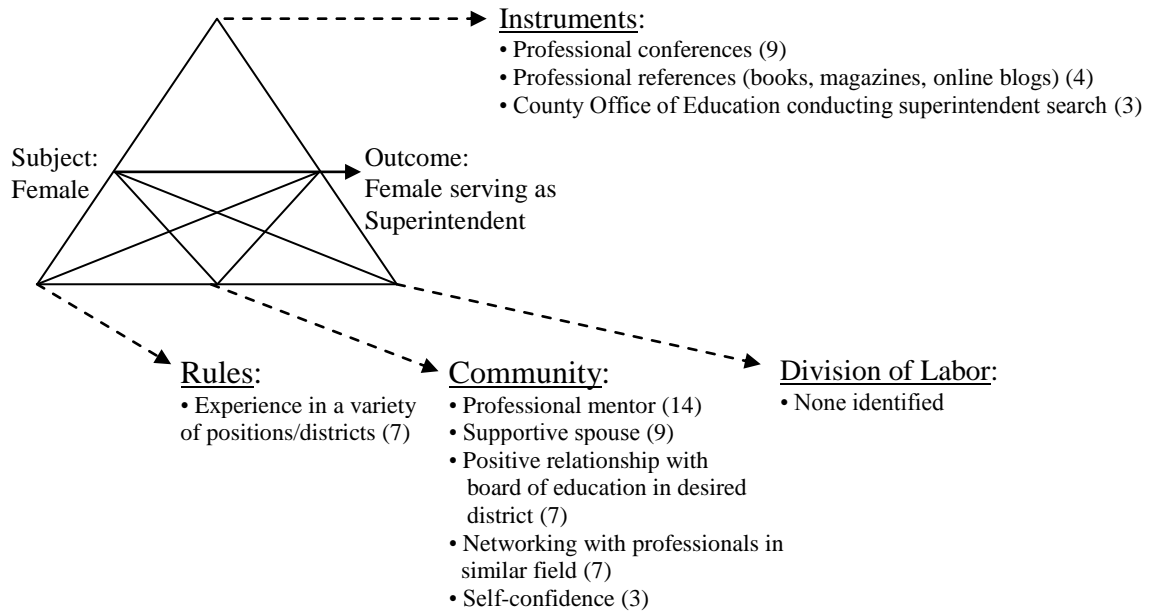
Figure 8. Visual representation of all identified support systems while attaining the position of superintendent, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Instruments. Three of the support systems for females attaining the

superintendency were within the Activity Theory domain of Instruments (see Table 9);

Figure 9 illustrates these Instrument support systems within the Activity Theory

framework.

Table 9

Support systems experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position related to Instruments

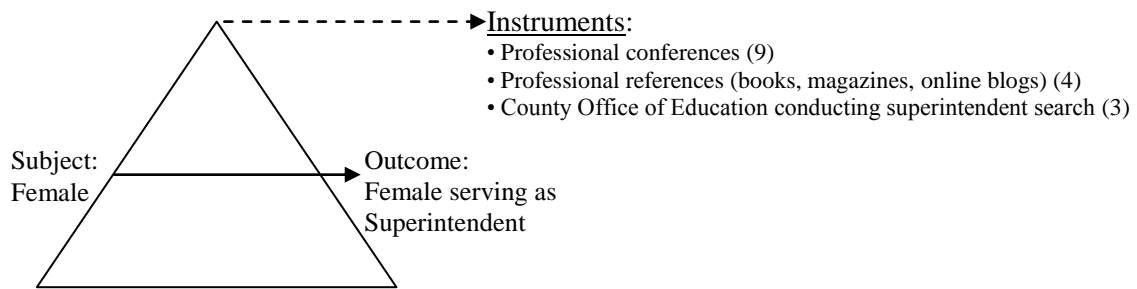| Instrument Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Professional conferences	Instruments	9
Professional references (books, magazines, online blogs)	Instruments	4
County Office of Education conducting superintendent search	Instrument	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Figure 9. Visual representation of identified Instrument support systems while attaining the position of superintendent, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Professional conferences. At a frequency of 9, professional conferences were experienced by these females as a support system. Participants referenced attending training and conferences, provided by educational leadership organizations at the county, state and national level, as a supportive vehicle to gain knowledge for interviewing, for serving in the position of superintendent, and for increased networking opportunities. One such organization in particular, ACSA, was frequently mentioned (at a frequency of 9) for their explicit offerings of women leadership conferences, superintendent conferences, and specialty trainings for aspiring superintendents and for divisions of education, such as business and human resources (a related artifact from ACSA's Women in School Leadership Conference is attached as Appendix F, outlining the agenda and speakers for the 2016 conference, held in September). Superintendent-1 explained:

> ACSA started sponsoring a women's leadership conference. […] I've gone to every year […] it is a phenomenal experience. […] some of the speakers were previous female superintendents or current female superintendents. It's all women, and the whole idea was networking and supporting one another.

Professional conferences are useful because "*they're places of connection and […] what has been the most valuable are those informal and formal networks*" (Superintendent-3). Professional conferences were additionally valued for the content knowledge and the opportunity to network with other professionals as they were seeking a position as superintendent. "*ACSA's Superintendency Academy was a great support system, more for its content and for networking and connecting with people*" (Superintendent-11). Superintendent-9 explained, "*Each year, I took on a different learning course…CBO training, superintendent's academy…in preparation [for the superintendent position.]*" While Superintendent-12 concurred, "*The classes were great because they are typically experienced superintendents, attorneys, people who are in the field that are sharing experiences and information.*"

Professional references (books, magazines, and online blogs). Professional readings, such as topical books on leadership, education magazines, and related online blogs were identified as a support system while attaining the superintendency. "*I read a lot*" shared Superintendent-9, "*They're books that I based my leadership around, but it's helpful as a woman to have knowledge and have a plan.*" Likewise, Superintendent-5 related, "*I always have books I'm reading. I have always read, even online blog forums for women in leadership. I find it therapeutic and helpful.*" Some of these referenced professional readings are included as Appendix G, which presented as a support for females while attaining the superintendency.

County Office of Education conducting superintendent search. Riverside and San Bernardino county schools directly report to a relative County Office of Education, which provides services and supports to districts as an entity and to their employees. One

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such service provided by the County Office of Education is to assist a school district with conducting a superintendent search. The county office will recruit and attain potential candidates for the superintendent position; this service was found to be a support for females in this study. With a frequency of 3, female superintendents felt County Offices' processes for recruiting and presenting candidates were more "*equitable to women,*" since county office's initial paper screening was "*based on credentials and presentation of the application,*" (Superintendent-10), rather than potential biased relationships ("stables") that are potentially formed with contracted search firms. Superintendent-1 shared her story about her current district conducting their search for a superintendent:

> [My current district] used the county office of education. […] I was like, "You know what? I feel I have a fair shot because I'm not in anybody's stable; I'm not known. It will just be paper to paper to paper because that's how the county's going to handle a search." It was the first time I had made it through the paper screen, and so here I am interviewing in front of a board. This was my first interview with a board of education, and I was hired.

Rules. One convention which supported females attaining the superintendency was that of diverse work experience in education. Table 10 outlines this support system, noting the frequency, and Figure 10 illustrates the support system within the Activity Theory framework.

Table 10

Support systems experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position related to Rules

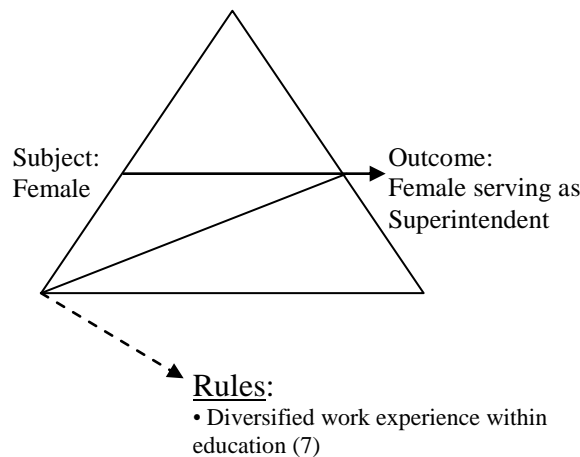| Rules Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Diversified work experience within education	Rules	7

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Figure 10. Visual representation of identified Rules support systems while attaining their position, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Diversified work experience within education. Diverse experiences in various positions in the field of education, either within a single district or between school districts, surfaced as a support for these participants with a frequency of 7. These positions were noted as serving as a teacher, education specialist, coordinator, director, or assistant superintendent. Additionally, experience in these positions in different districts and at different education levels (elementary, middle, and high school) played a role in supporting these females. The collective experiences gained from these various positions in education created background knowledge in which these females were able to reference during interview and during other recruiting processes for the superintendency. "*For women, the more leadership roles they take, it helps them to stay in a leadership role, building their skills and confidence; it helps them to survive. I found I was able to speak from the point-of-view of many different positions during my interview, which I believe got me the job [of superintendent],*" according to Superintendent-7. Superintendent-9 shared her experience of teaching in one district, leaving for site level

administration, and returning back to the initial district to secure a position as an assistant

superintendent and later a superintendent. She explained:

> I was lucky enough to get experiences. I did staff development, so I worked at
>
> seven schools. I had elementary experience and then I went to the middle school,
>
> […] which was all wonderful background. I met a lot of people along that way
>
> that I still call upon. I'm still friends with administrators from my previous
>
> district and they provide a different perspective. (Superintendent-9)

> This variety of work experience in different educational positions, among

different levels and districts was an experienced support system for females while

attaining the superintendency.

Community. Community was the largest domain for identified support systems

while attaining the superintendency. Table 11 outlines the Community Support Systems

and Figure 11 illustrates the support systems in the Activity Theory framework.

Table 11

Support systems experienced by female superintendents while attaining their current position related to Community

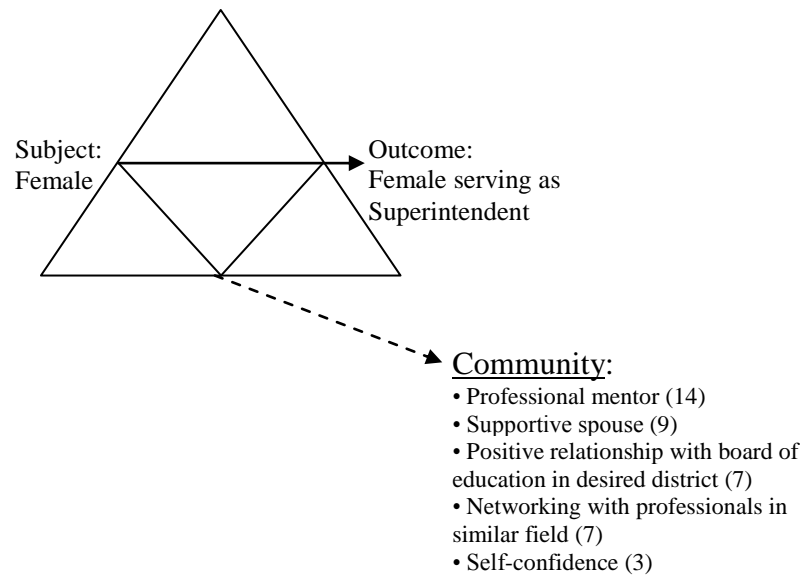| Community Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Professional mentor	Community	14
Supportive spouse	Community	9
Positive relationship with board of education in desired district	Community	7
Networking with professionals in similar field	Community	7
Self-confidence	Community	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Figure 11. Visual representation of identified Community support systems while attaining the position of superintendent, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Professional mentor. Professional mentors were the most frequently referenced support system while attaining the superintendency. Participants shared they often contacted and met with currently seated superintendents, retired superintendents, or other educational leaders prominent in the industry, seeking advice and guidance. While seeking a position as superintendent, Superintendent-11 "*would call [her male mentor] who was very connected because he would probably know some things that I wouldn't even think about. He'd think in a different way than I would, which was a great support.*" Seven references were made to female mentors and seven were made to male mentors. Superintendent-7 shared:

> I've had more male mentors than I've had female. Some of the things that the
>
> male mentors say to me [on] why they want to mentor me, are traditional,
>
> stereotypical male type reasons. "Oh, you're not emotional." "You don't show
>
> fear." All the things that we say that we say about boys and girls.

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Some participants referenced having multiple professional mentors, such as Superintendent-4, who shared, "*I was working closely with two mentors, who I considered critical friends*," who provided varied perspectives on the hiring process and strategy for securing a position as superintendent.

Supportive spouse. The next most frequent support system while attaining their current position was identified as a supportive spouse. Female participants voiced the support from their spouse was in the form of encouragement to pursue a superintendency and reassurance to assist with responsibilities in the home and with the children. When one superintendent would doubt herself during the hiring process, her husband would say to her "*Knock it off. You're good at what you do. People connect with you, that's why people love you*" (Superintendent-9). Superintendent-6 shared her husband was also in education but was willing to move wherever she may secure a superintendency, sharing in an interview for superintendent, "*My husband came out with me. It's like a road trip. He was there to support me through the entire process.*" A supportive spouse was the second most frequently cited support system of females for attaining the superintendency.

Positive relationship with board of education in desired district. With a frequency of seven, participants felt having a preexisting, strong relationship with members of the board of education, from the district they desired to be hired, significantly assisted them in securing the position. All of the participants who shared of their positive relationships with the seated board members (prior to being hired) were all employed for that district as a cabinet member; they were hired from within. Superintendent-3 shared that she did not hold aspirations to be a superintendent, but while serving as Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources:

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The board asked me [to consider the position of superintendent] and I thought

about it and I said, "I will try it." I was really uncertain. […] I became

superintendent, and I've never looked back. Best decision I ever made. I still

have tons of support from my board.

In fact, three of the participants (Superintendent-8, 9, and 12) never engaged in

the formal hiring process for superintendent, as they were appointed to the

superintendency from within the district by the board of education, mainly due to an

established relationship, where the board already knew their work ethic and ability as a

leader. Positive, existing relationships with board members were a support for females in

this study.

Networking with professionals in similar field. Another significant support

system was networking with other professionals in the field of education. At a frequency

of 7, female participants shared other males and females colleagues, not necessarily

considered a mentor, served as emotional and professional support. Networking during

conferences, county level superintendent meetings, political or social events, and

informal luncheons provided the foundation for valuable relationships to leverage when

seeking the superintendency. These females utilized other professionals to offer verbal

and written recommendations or provide advice during the hiring process.

My biggest support system was individuals. […] I will tell you that the value of

the ACSA conferences was not necessarily from the content alone but because of

the people that I met. Those individual connections helped with issues or

questions I may have had. (Superintendent-4)

Superintendent-11 iterated:

I would watch people who would make strategic moves and sit in different places, so that they can meet all the different people, and they were great networkers. I found that my best support system was really a few really strong women, who weren't competitive, but who really cared. We really did share a lot of similarities, and we really shared a love of curriculum instruction, and also we were able to empower each other.

Networking with professionals in similar field was a support system for females attaining a superintendent position.

Self-confidence. Holding confidence in oneself emerged as a support while attaining the superintendency. Female participants in this study tended to doubt their ability, their balance of work and home, and their strength to serve in the capacity of superintendent. Overcoming that self-doubt is imperative, as having confidence is a "*big part of it*" (Superintendent-11). Superintendent-6 concurred, who shared "*I think it's really about confidence. I felt it took me a long time to realize that, [but] knowing it was more about remembering what skills I had and that I was capable of the job.*" Females seeking the superintendency need "*to know that you can have it all […] kids, a healthy marriage, and a successful career. It takes being a confident professional.*" Holding confidence in oneself was an experienced support system for females in this study.

Division of labor. Of the identified support systems while attaining the position of superintendent in this study, none were categorized in the domain of Division of Labor.

Research Sub Question 3: Barriers While Serving in the Position during the Newest

Era of Educational Reform

The third sub question of this study seeks to answer: *As examined through the*

lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female California public school superintendents

describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational

reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties? While serving as superintendent

during the newest era of education reform, five barriers with a frequency of greater than

two were identified. Table 12 illustrates the identified themes, ranging in frequency from

six to three, and notes the related Activity Theory domain. This table is sorted by

frequency count in descending order for these barriers experienced by female

superintendents while serving in their position during the newest era of educational

reform.

Table 12

All identified barriers experienced by female superintendents while serving as
superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, in descending order from
most frequent to least frequent barrier

Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
Feeling of being overwhelmed with demands of a new federal and state accountability system	Division of Labor	6
The lack of other female superintendents/male dominated culture	Community	5
Balancing the responsibilities of work with home life	Division of Labor	5
Perception of gender personality traits	Division of Labor	5
Social media and press publicizing negative stories	Instrument	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

These five thematic barriers are further illustrated in Figure 12, organizing each

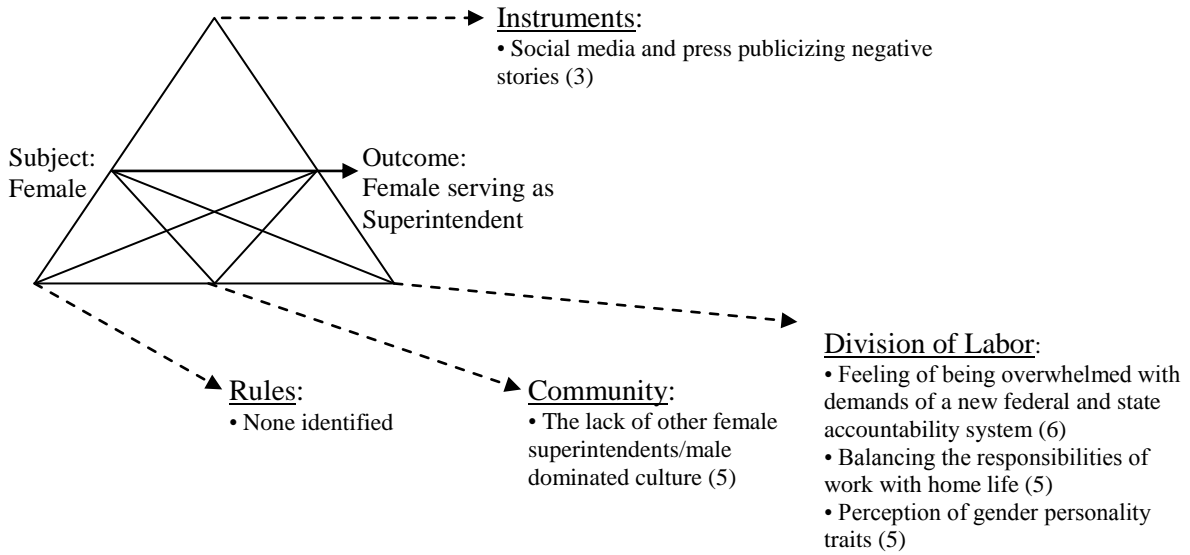barrier by Activity Theory domain.

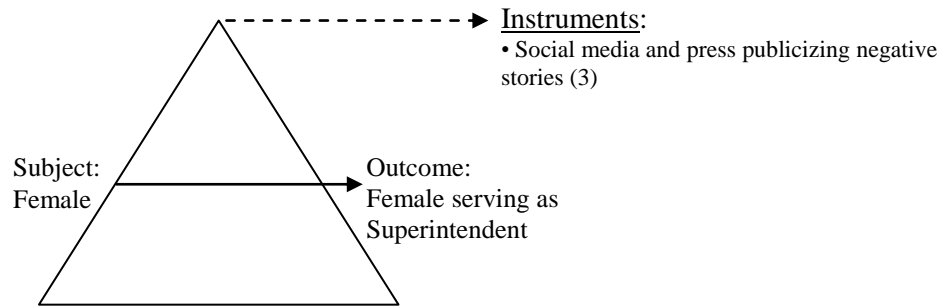*Figure 12.* Visual representation of all identified barriers while serving as superintendent
during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of Activity Theory
(followed by frequency count).

Instruments. One barrier was identified in the domain of Instruments for females

serving in the position of superintendent during the newest era of educational reform.

Table 13 outlines the Instrument barriers and Figure 13 illustrates this barrier as

visualized in the Activity Theory framework.

Table 13

*Identified barriers experienced by female superintendents while serving as
superintendent during the newest era of educational reform related to Instruments*

| Instrument Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
Social media and press publicizing negative stories	Instrument	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Figure 13. Visual representation of identified Instrument barrier while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Social media and press publicizing negative stories. One tool that posed as a barrier was that of social media and the press publicize negative articles about the district or the female superintendent. Social media forums, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, allow for any party to post comments about the superintendent or district, "*even if it's not true and then it [can go] viral*" (Superintendent-10). "*It's hard as the superintendent because there are times you want to feed into that to give factual information, but then if you do, it can explode on* you," continued Superintendent-10, *"I think social media probably is one of the toughest challenges today"* while serving as a superintendent. Superintendent-2 shared an experienced barrier with a newspaper:

> I was being interviewed by [a newspaper reporter] and this guy was talking about
>
> some of the horrible things that have been said about me and he said, "*Does that*
>
> *hurt your feelings?" I said, "You know, would you ask me that if I was a male?*"
>
> He said, "*Well, I like to think I would.*" I said, "*But I don't think you would.*"

Superintendent-2 continued to share this was an "*eye-opener*" for her, as she realized the power of the press and the assumptions that were made about female leaders. Female participants shared of being negatively publicized in the news, which created negative stigmas for them as leaders.

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Rules. No rules were identified in this study as a barrier while serving in the position of superintendent, during this time of newest educational reform.

Community. One barrier while serving in their position was identified within the domain of Community. This community barrier is noted in Table 14 and illustrated in the Activity Theory framework in Figure 14.

Table14

Identified barriers experienced by female superintendents while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform related to Community

Community Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
The lack of other female superintendents/male dominated culture	Community	5

Note. AT = Activity Theory.
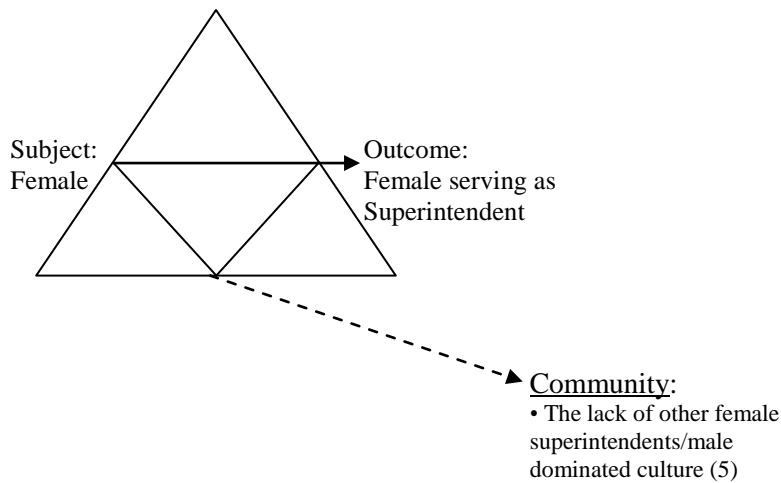
Figure 14. Visual representation of identified Community barriers while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

The lack of other female superintendents/male dominated culture. In this study, participants referenced a lack of other female superintendents in the superintendent community as a barrier while serving. Females noted males in this position tend to socialize inside and outside of work with other males. The females often feel excluded

from conversation during these social or professional meetings of superintendents and other leaders of education, which is highly male-dominated. Superintendent-7 expressed her frustration during a recent county superintendent meeting:

> The men just wanted to talk about hunting. I'm not a hunter. It's a conversation that they chose. Often, they choose not to change the conversation topic to accommodate the presence of women. They want to still talk about hunting and they know that the women in that group usually weren't hunters. I think that they had those conversations, to me, sometimes they were purposely to say, 'We're going to make you uncomfortable with what we're talking about and maybe you'll walk away or maybe we can just keep it to ourselves.' (Superintendent-7)

Situations such as these and a limited number of other female superintendents create a barrier for females serving in the superintendency, leaving female superintendents feeling excluded from social and professional priorities.

Division of Labor. The largest area of identified barriers (for females serving in the position) was in the Division of Labor domain. Three barriers within this domain are listed in Table 15 and illustrated in Figure 15, through the lens of Activity Theory.

Table 15

Identified barriers experienced by female superintendents while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform related to Division of Labor

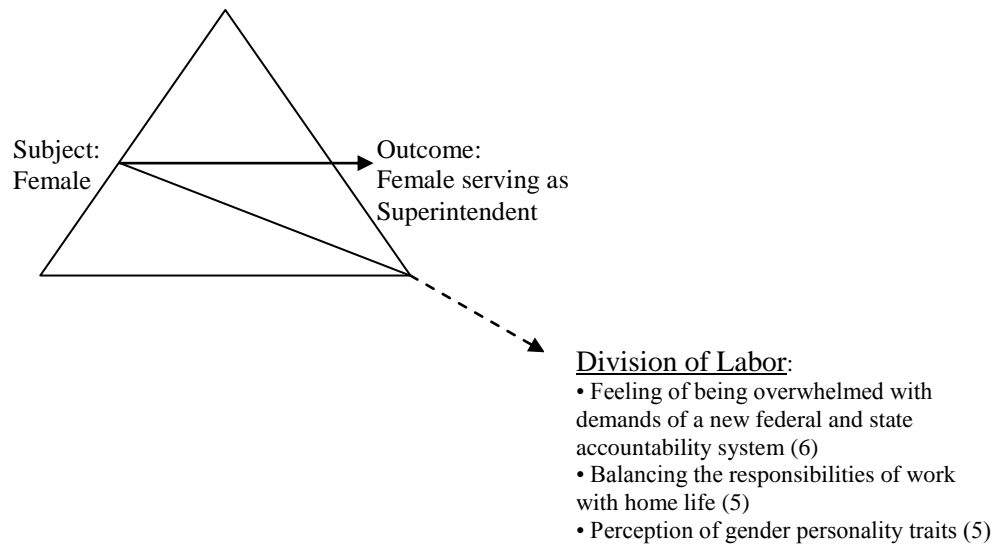| Division of Labor Barrier	AT Domain	Frequency
Feeling of being overwhelmed with demands of a new federal and state accountability system	Division of Labor	6
Balancing the responsibilities of work with home life	Division of Labor	5
Perception of gender personality traits	Division of Labor	5

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Figure 15. Visual representation of identified Division of Labor barriers while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Feeling of being overwhelmed with demands of a new federal and state accountability system.

LCAP and other educational initiatives since 2012 have increased the accountability of school districts, thus increasing the accountability of their leaders (the superintendent). Female participants in this study, at a frequency of 6, shared the increased accountability and workload has begun to feel "overwhelming at times," causing a barrier while serving. LCAP initiatives and plan monitoring require time and expertise. Even though many participants shared support in collaborating and networking, the demands of meeting with district and community divisions are time consuming and involved. Superintendent-3 concurred:

> I don't have free nights, I don't have free weekends and there are so many events and meetings […] you're expected to attend for the district and community. Even though you can send your assistant superintendents, it's not the same. The community thrives on seeing their leaders.

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Overall, the time and monitoring demands in the new educational accountability system presented as a barrier to females currently seated as a superintendent.

Balancing the responsibilities of work with home life. Another identified barrier in the Division of Labor domain is balancing the responsibilities of serving as a superintendent with that of the demands of home (cooking, cleaning, childrearing). Similar to the barrier presented while attaining the position, the barrier continued while serving in the position. Female participants noted they were the "primary" parent to coordinate care for the children, cook meals, and clean the home. Since there are high demands of time, both during the work day and outside the work day for social and community events, females found it difficult to balance without guilt. Superintendent-4 illustrates this point with her story:

> I don't want to harm my marriage or the relationship with my kids because I am very driven. All that's to say I cause my own chaos sometimes. It's very important for me that I'm keeping my house clean, I'm doing the laundry, I'm cooking the meals. […] None of that is expected of me, I do that because I feel like I need to provide that to them just because I want to be a good wife and I want to be a good mom. However, sometimes it makes me grumpy. (Superintendent-4)

Perception of gender personality traits. Female participants feel their actions are sometimes perceived inaccurately, based on traditional gender personality traits. Female superintendents feel as if they have to be "very aware" of their behavior and reaction, as they will be more "harshly judged" than males if they are "too emotional or extreme" with their response. These participants describe it as

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a double-standard. For example, "*You say [something] as a female, you sound like a bitch. You've got be very careful of that. If a man said it, he would sound assertive*" (Superintendent-3). Another participant shared, "*It's like a Catch-22. If you're not as strong as a man, you are considered weak, but if you show that you're too strong, you not going to survive*" (Superintendent-7). The perception that others may hold on female leaders' personality surfaced a barrier in this study.

Research Sub Question 4: Support Systems While Serving in the Position during the Newest Era of Educational Reform

The fourth sub question of this study seeks to answer: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?* Fifteen support systems were identified directly related to this research question. The emergent themes, corresponding Activity Theory domain, and related frequency count for each support system are represented in Table 16.

Table 16

All identified support systems experienced by female superintendents while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, in descending order from most frequent to least frequent barrier

Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Professional mentor	Community	14
Formal, professional networks	Community	11
Self-confidence	Community	11
Supportive spouse	Community	10
Informal, professional networks	Community	8
Division of responsibilities at home among spouse and/or contracted homecare employee	Division of Labor	7

Note. AT = Activity Theory.   (continued)

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Table 16

All identified support systems experienced by female superintendents while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, in descending order from most frequent to least frequent barrier

Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Division of responsibilities among cabinet members	Division of Labor Rules	6
Collaborative process of LCAP		5
Transparency and open communication with board of education	Community	5
Collaborative leadership style	Community	4
Professional conferences	Instrument	4
Contracted support for homecare (cleaning, childcare)	Instrument	4
Electronic devices to connect with other professionals and family	Instrument	4
Reading books and articles related to leadership	Instrument	3
Visibility in the community and at school sites	Community	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Of the 15 identified support systems, more than half (eight) were in the area of

Community supports for these females. The 15 thematic support systems are further

illustrated in Figure 16, categorizing each support system by Activity Theory domain.
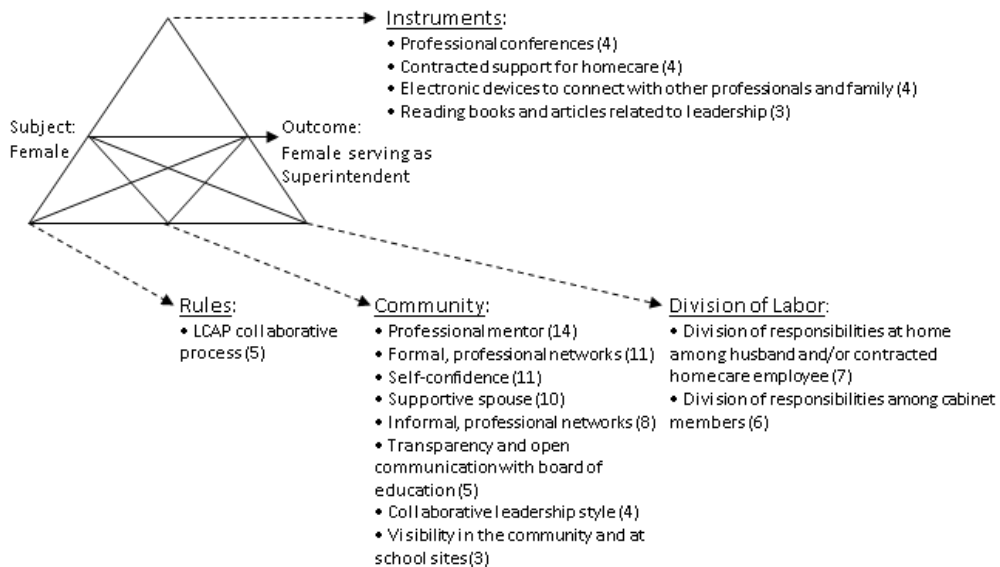
Figure 16. Visual representation of all identified support systems while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Instruments. Four supports while serving were identified in the area of

Instruments, which are listed in Table 17 and illustrated in Figure 17, as viewed through

the lens of Activity Theory.

Table 17

Identified support systems experienced by female superintendents while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform related to Instruments

Instrument Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Professional conferences	Instrument	4
Contracted support for homecare (cleaning, childcare)	Instrument	4
Electronic devices to connect with other professionals and family	Instrument	4
Reading books and articles related to leadership	Instrument	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Instruments:
• Professional conferences (4)
• Contracted support for homecare (cleaning, childcare) (4)
• Electronic devices to connect with other professionals and family (4)
• Reading books and articles related to leadership (3)

Subject: Female

Outcome: Female serving as Superintendent

Figure 17. Visual representation of identified Instrument support systems while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Professional conferences. Professional conferences were identified as a tool of

support for females leading school districts in the current era of educational reform. Local,

statewide, and national forms allow female leaders to connect with other professionals

and stay current on legislation and trends. Conferences are "*really great places to*

connect with other people. I feel like I have a network of support and a place to find out

if something's going on," (Superintendent-2). These professional conferences are offered

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to superintendents by heterogeneous and homogenous groupings, such as ACSA's Superintendents Symposium, Southern California's Superintendents Group, and ACSA's Women in School Leadership Conference. As triangulated artifacts, evidence of ACSA's Women in School Leadership Conference 2016 was provided; Appendix H outlines the goal and agenda of ACSA's Superintendents' Symposium 2016; and Appendix I is ACSA's Region XIX's Women's Leadership Network, Changing Mindset through Coaching Dinner Conference 2016 Agenda for Riverside County. These professional conference offerings for superintendents and female school leaders were identified as a support system for the participants while serving in this new era.

Contracted support for homecare. Four participants shared they contract services to support them at home, including a nanny and/or a housekeeper. The contracted support might care for their children, do laundry, clean their home, or cook meals in their absence. The high time demands of the superintendency take away from time in the home, so female participants hire additional support to balance this need.

Electronic devices to connect with other professionals and family. Electronic devices, such as phone, text, and computer to email, were referenced as a support system. These devices allowed them to connect with other professionals in the industry to collaborate and request advice. Additionally, since these females spend a large portion of their day at work, they also use these devices to connect with home and friends, assisting in balancing work with home. Moreover, these devices allow them to share about their lives to their employees, such as through Facebook. Superintendent-11 explains:

I accept people [from my district] on Facebook. I can see about their lives, whose

kids are in our district, and their prom pictures. You get to see and understand

each person. They can also see my life and who I am.

Superindent-4 added, "*FaceTime has been huge for my family and my husband. I do

have my phone constantly, so I'm constantly on email. It's how I stay connected.*"

Electronic devices have supported these females in their role as superintendent.

  Reading books and articles related to leadership. Professional books, articles in

print, and electronically, and social media forums (blogs, Twitter, Facebook) are supports

for females superintendents serving in the position in the current era of education. These

professional readings assist females with leadership strategies, strategically plan for their

district, assist them with understanding the needs presented in their district. Online blogs,

articles, and books are an instrumental support systems experienced by female

superintendents. Professional books referenced by the participants have been included

and Appendix J offers two online forums for accessing articles and information for

women in educational leadership.

  Rules. One support system was categorized as Rules, which is listed in Table 18

and outlined in the Activity Theory framework in Figure 18.

Table 18

*Identified support systems experienced by female superintendents while serving as
superintendent during the newest era of educational reform related to Rules*

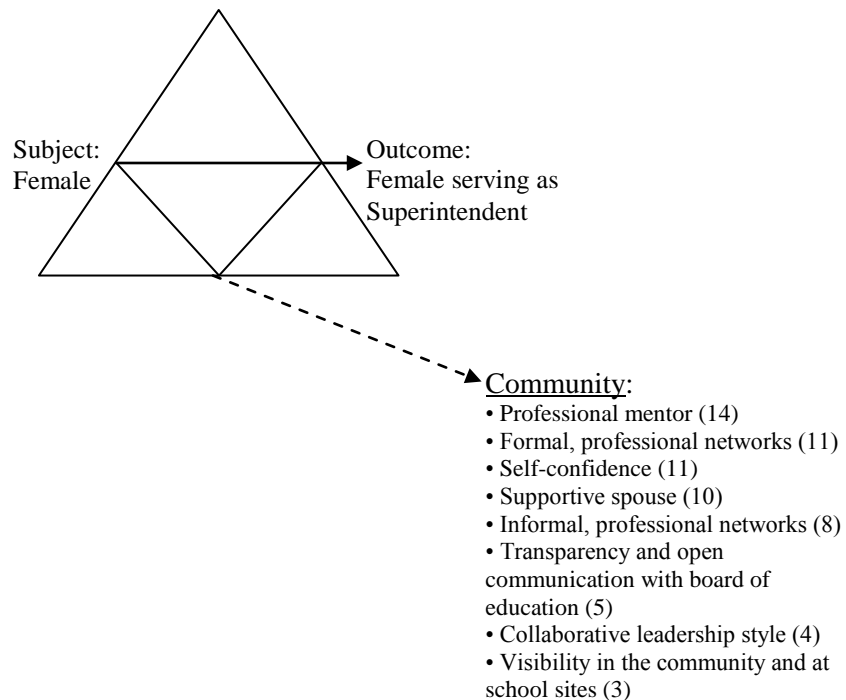| Rules Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Collaborative process of LCAP	Rules	5
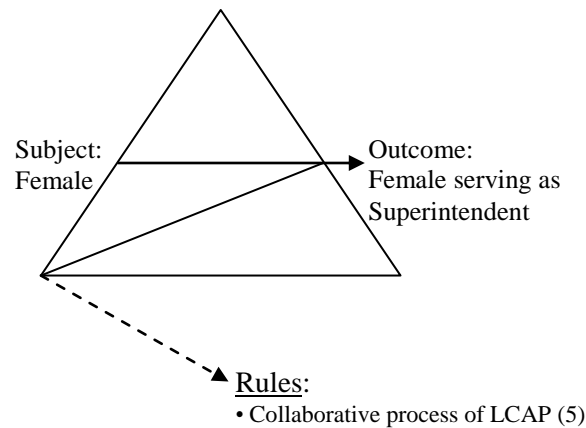
Figure 18. Visual representation of identified Rules support systems while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Collaborative process of LCAP. LCAP is the required strategic plan that was developed by the state of CA in response to increased accountability measures. LCAP is a multi-year plan, which requires stakeholder input and vetting prior to implementation, "*opening the door to having more conversations*" (Superintendent-1). The collaborative process of LCAP, in needing to gain feedback from various groups, including community members, district employees, and students, has presented as a support to these female participants, while in their position. The process plays to their strengths of building relationships, networking, shared leadership, and increased collaboration between stakeholders. "*The LCAP has really helped me as a leader soar because it actually built on my strengths of my journey*" (Superintendent-7). Superintendent-8 expressed, "*LCAP fits my style so well. [...] We are not top-down here, as I believe in shared leadership and it is complemented by LCAP.*"

Community. Most documented themes throughout the study fell into the category of Community supports. Eight different support systems were referenced in this domain, experienced by these female participants while serving as a superintendent, at a total

frequency of 66 (see Table 19). Figure 19 illustrates the Activity Theory framework for

Community support.

Table 19

Identified support systems experienced by female superintendents while serving as
superintendent during the newest era of educational reform related to Community

Community Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Professional mentor	Community	14
Formal, professional networks	Community	11
Self-confidence	Community	11
Supportive spouse	Community	10
Informal, professional networks	Community	8
Transparency and open communication with board of education	Community	5
Collaborative leadership style	Community	4
Visibility in the community and at school sites	Community	3

Note. AT = Activity Theory.

Figure 19. Visual representation of identified Community support systems while serving
as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of
Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Professional mentor. Professional mentors (in the form of retired or current superintendents) were the most frequently referenced support systems of female participants. Mentors were found to be both male and female, but male mentors were more often utilized while serving at a rate of 10 frequencies, compared to a frequency of four referencing female mentors. It was commonly noted, "*I've been really lucky […] to have a mentor that I can call anytime, as that has made an enormous difference*" Superintendent-2. Female participants not only called upon their mentor for professional advice (e.g. how to handle a situation while serving as a superintendent), but they would also connect with their mentor to inquire with how they were being perceived by various stakeholders, just to vent, and to gain reassurance. In one of the two counties, the county superintendent has a standing practice to connect all new superintendents with a professional mentor for one to two years. Superintendent-7 shared her story of when she started as superintendent, and the county superintendent connected her with a retired superintendent, as a professional mentor. The county superintendent stated "*I know this is your first superintendency and there's going to be things that you're going to learn on the job that people can't prepare you for. So, I want to offer support through a mentor.*" Superitendnet-7 shared she met monthly, and the mentor "*let me control what I needed to talk about and then he had experience and words of wisdom that helped me survive.*" Professional mentors were found to be a significant support system for the majority of superintendents while serving during this new era of educational reform.

Formal, professional networks. Formal networks of professionals, coordinated by educational organizations (e.g. ACSA) and county agencies (e.g. County Office of Education), were experienced as a support system with frequency of 11. These formal

networking opportunities allow seated superintendents to build relationships with other professionals, collaborate to solve problems, seek answers to needs related to serving as a superintendent, and engage in conversation regarding similar responsibilities. With the passing of ESSA and the initiation of LCAP, female superintendents in this study use other professionals to assist in guiding them, answering questions, and gaining reassurance related to these initiatives. Both County Superintendents in this study regularly host a meeting for all their superintendents in the county, providing a forum for networking and collaboration. Superintendent-8 shared, "*as a countywide group of superintendents […], our county superintendent for schools sets up a meeting every other month for us. It helps us to stay connected with each other and what's happening in our area*" (Superintendent-8). Seven of the female superintendents report they are actively involved in ACSA and regularly attend ACSA's Women's Leadership Network meetings and annual conference. These formal, professional networking opportunities are supports for female superintendents.

  Self-confidence. Another significant support system, in the domain of Community, was holding confidence in herself. At a frequency of 11, females shared they need to believe in their ability and not question themselves. "*I'm going to make the next move and nothing is going to stop that. I do my job with integrity and confidence, nothing's going to stop that*" said Superintendent-1. As one leads, "*followers look for a strong leader,*" and being confident in this line of work is "*imperative for females, so others will follow your direction*" (Superintendent-3).

  Supportive spouse. At a frequency of 10, a supportive, encouraging spouse was a significant support system for females while serving in the superintendency.

Female participants voiced support from their spouse was emotional comforting, an

ear to listen to their stories, reminding them of their ability to lead successfully, and

aide with responsibilities in the home (cooking, cleaning, childrearing).

> My husband is very, very supportive of me. Just anything I need to do to
>
> make [serving as a superintendent] work, he's very open to that. Part of that
>
> is he sees the purpose of what I'm doing. He realizes that it's not about me,
>
> that I really have a need to serve and to give back and to help provide
>
> opportunities for children that they may not otherwise have. (Superintendent-
>
> 4)

Superintendent-2, 8, and 12 shared their spouses now cook and clean more

often at home since they became a superintendent, and Superintendent-4, 7, and 12

stated their spouses help with dropping off and picking up children from school and

take them to extracurricular activities. The emotional and physical support of a

spouse was an experienced support system of nearly all the participants.

Informal, professional networks. Informal networks of professionals were

referenced at a frequency of eight. These informal networks were generally groups of

other superintendents (male and female) or other district-level administrators gathering in

informal locations for lunch, coffee, or over the phone to discuss current challenges and

happenings of education, as it relates to serving as a superintendent. "*As a […] group of*

superintendents [in a similar area], we meet monthly for lunch. We have a lot of support

by meeting regularly and calling upon each other" (Superintendent-8). Five of the

female participants noted they meet on a regular basis with one or two other female

superintendents to discuss issues around females serving in the position, including

political dynamics, stressors, and the lack of other females in similar roles. Informal

networks of similar professionals are experienced support systems of female

superintendents while serving.

Transparency and open communication with board of education. Five

references were made to the need to be transparent and open with the related board of

education. Since a board of education is the direct supervisor of the superintendent, some

female participants found is a support to have open dialogue with their supervisors,

keeping the board members apprised to happenings in the district, in the community, and

in trends for education. Board members are elected officials and aren't necessarily from

the field of education, so board members may need additional training or inside

information to understand the direction of the district and how education (as a business

entity) operates. Superintednent-10 advocated:

> Communication is really key with board members, and I think a lot of
>
> superintendents may want to hide things because they're new and they think
>
> they'll get in trouble. Reality is they need to know; you need to keep them in the
>
> loop.

Transparency and open communication with board members resulted in positive

board relationships, which was a significant support system for females currently serving

as a superintendent during the newest era of educational reform. "*Connectedness to your*

board, if your board members really believe in you, sees that passion in you, and have

that trust, I think that it supersedes gender," explained Superintendent-11.

Collaborative leadership style. Four female superintendents agreed their

collaborative leadership style was an experienced support during this newest era of

educational reform. Leading together, in a collaborative fashion, has aided them in

building strategic plans to address the needs of the district, while honoring the philosophy

of national ESSA and state LCAP initiatives. Superintendent-9 captured this support

when she said:

> I believe we lead equally. I'm very collaborative. That may be different than
>
> some males, as I would think that would be a difference probably between female
>
> and male superintendents. I never for one minute think I'm in charge, although I
>
> probably am. It's not ever about that. We lead together and that's what makes us
>
> so good, I believe. (Superintendent-9)

Collaborative leadership styles emerged as a support for females serving as a

superintendent in CA.

Visibility in the community and at school sites. Female superintendents in this

study shared being visible in the community and on school sites serves as a support

system. The visibility provides valuable inside knowledge to the happenings of the

schools and surrounding community. Visibility also provides a forum to build necessary

relationships with key stakeholder. One superintendent shared how she spends time in

classrooms to hold conversations with teachers and visit with students "*because [she]*

wants them to see education as an important thing" (Superintendent-11). Of the three

participants who shared this common support system of visibility, each of them also serve

on organizations around the community, such as the local library board, Rotary Club, and

Kiwanis Club. Visibility in the community and on school sites was a code that emerged

three times as a way to build relationships and keep pulse on the happenings of the

surrounding area.

Division of Labor. Table 20 outlines the codes of support systems within the

Division of Labor domain for female superintendents while serving as superintendent

during the newsiest era of educational reform. Figure 20 illustrates these support systems

in the AT framework.

Table 20

Identified support systems experienced by female superintendents while serving as
superintendent during the newest era of educational reform related to Division of Labor

Division of Labor Support System	AT Domain	Frequency
Division of responsibilities at home among spouse and/or contracted homecare employee	Division of Labor	7
Division of responsibilities among cabinet members	Division of Labor	6

Note. AT = Activity Theory.
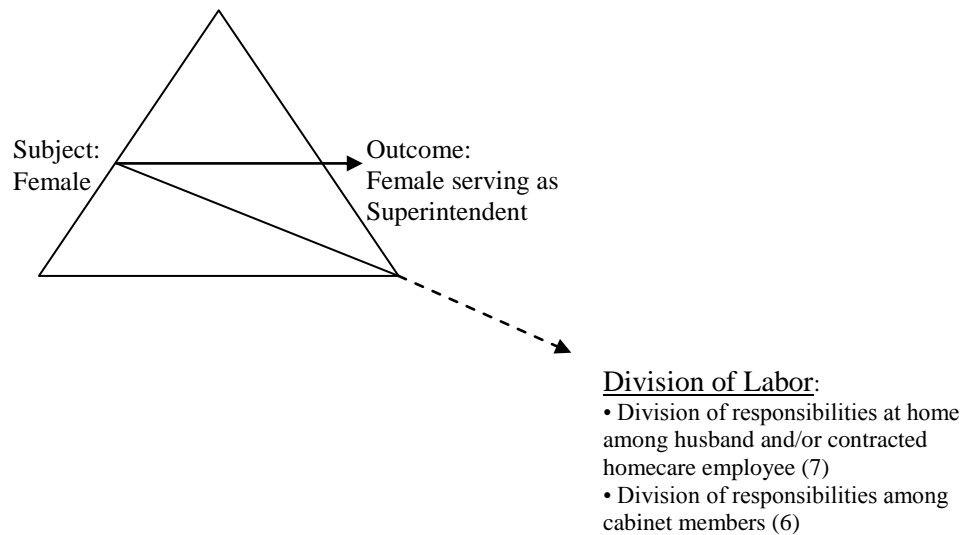
Figure 20. Visual representation of identified Division of Labor support systems while
serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform, through the lens of
Activity Theory (followed by frequency count).

Division of responsibilities at home among spouse and/or contracted

homecare employee. In the domain of Division of Labor, the responsibilities

of home began to shift from the female superintendent to that of the spouse and/or

contracted homecare provider. The responsibilities and time demand of serving as

superintendent are high and in order to address the barrier of imbalanced between work and home, female participants shared that their spouse or contracted services (housekeeper or nanny) absorbed more of the responsibilities of the home, taking on more, if not all, of the cooking, cleaning, and childrearing. This was a significant support for female participants.

   Division of responsibilities among cabinet members. Another Division of Labor support system is delegating responsibilities to cabinet members. Female participants shared their workload is heavy as a superintendent, and each Assistant Superintendent brings a specialty and differentiated perspective. Superintendent-12 stated,

   I have an exceptional cabinet. My assistant superintendent of personnel is gifted

   in people skills, negotiations, and personnel. He brings a lot of support in that

   area, and a clear head, and great ideas. My own internal team is a great support to

   me.

   Utilizing these strengths within their cabinet members served as a support system while serving in the newest era of educational reform.

Most Frequent Codes

   Table 21 synthesizes the top five most frequent codes that emerged from throughout the entire study. The tables outlines the code, along with the Activity Theory domain, frequency count, barrier or support, time frame (while attaining the position or while serving in the position), and the correlated research question.

Table 21

Five most frequent codes that emerged from the entire study, in descending order from most frequent to least frequent code

Code	AT Domain	Frequency	Barrier/ Support System	White Attaining/ While Serving	Research Question
Professional mentor	Community	14	Support	Serving	R4
Professional mentor	Community	14	Support	Attaining	R2
Formal, professional networks	Community	11	Support	Serving	R4
Self-confidence	Community	11	Support	Serving	R4
Supportive spouse	Community	10	Support	Serving	R4

Note. At = Activity Theory.

In this study, community based supports were most frequently experienced by female superintendents, with a total frequency count of 60. Four of the five support systems were experienced while serving in their position as superintendent, and one of the support systems was attaining their position. With a tie for most frequent, at a count of 14, professional mentors (retired or current superintendents) play a significant role both while attaining and while currently serving as a superintendent during the newest era of educational reform. Following professional mentors was experiencing formal, professional networks as a support while serving in their current position, which was tied at a frequency of 11 with emitting self-confidence while serving. Additionally, a supportive spouse was reported while serving in their current position as the fifth most popular code at a frequency of 10. Supportive spouse was also a frequently referenced support used while attaining their current position, at a frequency of nine. Support systems emerged as the most frequent codes from the entire study.

Summary

This chapter presented the collected data and findings of this qualitative study. The study sought to examine the lived experiences of female superintendents, which is a gender subgroup that is underrepresented in this educational leadership position. The study focused on the barriers and support systems which they experienced while attaining their position and while currently serving during the newest era of educational reform in California and across the nation. The population was superintendents across CA, and the target population was that of female superintendents serving in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, located in Southern CA. A sum of 12 female superintendents, six from Riverside and six from San Bernardino counties, participated in this study.

The primary research question guided the study, which asked: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers and support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining and serving in their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?* Four sub research questions further delineated the study, to differentiate between barriers and support systems and between the periods of while they were attaining and while they were serving. An interview protocol was developed with 2 background questions and 10 primary questions that directly correlated to each sub research question. Every participant engaged in an in-depth, face-to-face interview, which was recorded using the Rev Transcription application. All recorded interviews were sent for verbatim transcription; in turn, the verbatim transcriptions were then sent to and reviewed by each participant for accuracy before coding of the data. Additionally, artifacts were gathered related to the research questions of this

study. The complete set of data was then coded for emergent themes using NVivo

coding software. To increase reliability of the study, the researcher applied a

process known as intercoder reliability (Lombard et al., 2004), where a peer

researcher coded a portion of the data until a common conclusion was reached.

Findings of the study were applied to the framework of Engeström's (1999)

AT, categorizing emergent codes from the study into one of four categories:

Instruments, Rules, Community or Division of Labor. Findings of this study

indicated the most frequent codes emerged as support systems while serving in their

current position. These support systems were mainly categorized in the domain of

Community. In Activity Theory, Community refers to the social context and

systems in which the superintendents functioned as a part of the entire organization

and surrounding community. The most frequent Community support systems for

female superintendents in this study were professional mentors (in the form of

current or retired superintendents); formal, professional networks; holding self-

confidence; and a supportive spouse. The most frequent barriers were of similar

frequency between while attaining their position and while serving in their position.

The most frequent barriers experienced, at a frequency of six were:

- Superintendent search firm practices that exclude candidates from
  interview opportunities.

- The self-perception that she would not be able to balance the workload
  of the position with the responsibilities of home.

- The self-perception that she was not capable of the job responsibilities of
  superintendent due to perceived lack of work experience.

- Feeling of being overwhelmed with demands of a new federal and state accountability system.

Three of four of the most frequent barriers were categorized in the Division of Labor, while attaining their current position. In Activity Theory, Division of Labor refers to the hierarchical structure of activity and responsibilities in an environment; also refers to the roles individuals execute within an organization.

Artifacts were additionally collected to support the interview data. Artifacts in this study included professional development offerings, networking opportunities, agendas, program, newspaper articles and social media postings for women in educational leadership.

Chapter V of this study will present conclusions based on these findings. Furthermore, Chapter V will offer implications for action and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

This phenomenological study intended to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female CA superintendents experienced while attaining and while serving in their current positions, as viewed through the lens of a social, theoretical framework. The following overarching research question guided this study: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers and support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining and serving in their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?* Four sub research questions were further developed to delineated between experienced barriers and experienced support systems and then even further delineated by timeframe of "while attaining" and "while currently serving" in their position. This qualitative study was designed to examine the experiences of female superintendents through the sharing of their stories, so in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. Additionally, artifacts were gathered to triangulate the findings. The population of this study was designed to include all public school superintendents, especially those serving as superintendent in CA amongst most recent educational reforms since 2012. The target population was that of female superintendents in CA, and 12 of those female public school superintendents from Riverside or San Bernardino Counties of Southern CA served as the sample for this study. Findings of this study were organized through the lens of Activity Theory, a social framework to categorize identified barriers and support systems into one of four domains: Instrument, Rules,

Community, or Division of Labor. The major findings, drawn conclusions,

implications for action, and recommendations for future research are included in

this chapter.

Major Findings

The major findings of this qualitative study are organized by each research

sub question.

Research Sub Question 1

Research sub question 1 inquires*: As examined through the lens of Activity Theory,
what barriers do female California public school superintendents describe they
experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino
Counties?*

In this study, barriers that female superintendents of Riverside and San

Bernardino Counties experienced while attaining their position were categorized in two

of the Activity Theory domains: Rules and Division of Labor. In the domain of Rules,

participants felt particular practices of independent superintendent search firm companies

excluded females from opportunities to interview for Boards of Education, thus resulting

in fewer opportunities for females to secure a position as superintendent. Also in the

domain of Rules, a barrier was identified with the practices of males promoting other

males in upper management in education and that excluded females from conversation

and networking opportunities. Then, three additional barriers were identified in the

domain of Division of Labor. Lacking confidence in oneself was identified in two of

these barriers. First, a self-perception that was held by female participants, alluding to

the finding that she would be unable to balance the high demand of the position of

superintendent with the responsibilities of home, secondly, that she was not capable of executing the job responsibilities of superintendent due to perceived lack of work experience. Furthermore, a barrier was identified in the perception held by some Board of Education members that the demands of a female's home life would negatively impact the role of superintendent; she would be unable to balance both home and work, as a superintendent. Instrument and Community barriers while attaining a superintendent position were not identified as major findings in this study.

Research Sub Question 2

Research sub question 2 inquires: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?*

Support systems while attaining a position as superintendent were identified in three Activity Theory domains, including Community, Instruments, and Rules. In the domain of Community, the most experienced support system was that of connecting with a professional mentor for female participants in this study. These professional mentors were primarily current or retired superintendents and included both female and male mentors. Other Community-based supports for females included a supportive spouse, positive relationships with Board of Education members in the district they desired employment, networking with other professionals in the field of education, and holding high self-confidence for their ability to eventually serve as a superintendent. Two of the support systems for while attaining their position were categorized as Instruments, which included attending professional conferences, which provided networking opportunities

and skills or knowledge on relevant topics, and that of reading professional references, such as books, magazines, and online blogs about leadership. Diversified work experience within education was experienced as a support, which included serving in various positions from site administration to different district office management positions; various experiences was also a support when females were employed in different districts. These diverse work perspectives were supportive when speaking to interview questions and for knowing other professionals when seeking a superintendent position. No support system while attaining was identified in the domain of Division of Labor.

Research Sub Question 3

Research sub question 3 inquires: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what barriers do female California public school superintendents describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?*

The major findings for this research sub question included five barriers that were experienced by female superintendents while serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform since 2012. These five barriers were categorized in three Activity Theory domains, including Division of Labor, Community, and Instruments. The most frequent barrier was the feeling of being overwhelmed with demands of new federal and state accountability systems, which requires superintendents to gather continuous feedback from stakeholders and closely monitor the effectiveness of the strategic plan of the district. Similarly, female superintendents of this study found difficulty in balancing the responsibilities of being a superintendent with that of demands

of their home. Also, the perception of gender personality traits was a barrier, inasmuch as female participants feel their actions were often perceived inaccurately, based on traditional gender personality traits. Female superintendents felt as if they have to be very aware of their behavior and reaction to situations at work because of their gender, as females were more harshly judged on their actions, identifying them as "too emotional," "overreacting" or "bitchy." Within the community of superintendents, an experienced barrier was a male dominated culture with few other female superintendents. Females expressed males in this position tend to socialize with other males inside and outside of work, which excludes females from conversation during social or professional meetings and conferences. Lastly, the publicizing of negative stories about the district and/or about the female superintendent on social media or in the press was the only experienced Instrumental barrier, especially while currently serving as superintendent during the newest era of educational reform. No barriers while serving were identified in the domain of Rules.

Research Sub Question 4

Research sub question 4 inquires: *As examined through the lens of Activity Theory, what support systems do female California public school superintendents describe they experience in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties?*

Overwhelmingly, support systems while serving as a superintendent in the newest era of educational reform were the most frequently identified themes within this study. In fact, 15 support systems were cited as major findings that directly correlate to this research sub question.

Eight of the 15 support systems while serving were identified as Community-based supports. The most frequent Community support was experienced as networking with professional mentors, whom were generally, but not explicitly, male retired or current superintendents. Also, networking with other professionals in formal and informal settings emerged as a significant support system while serving. Females keeping communication with mentors and networking afford them opportunities to build relationships and seek advice from others serving in a similar role or in a similar field. Other Community supports included females holding confidence in themselves to executive the responsibilities required of a superintendent, including attending social and political events, speaking to large crowds, creating district-wide strategic plans, ensuring effective instruction and curriculum for students, and managing multiple departments. Supportive spouses were also an experienced support system, as these spouses are encouraging, provide emotional comfort, and assist with the responsibilities of the home (e.g. cooking, cleaning, or childrearing). As well, female participants shared open communication with Board of Education members in their district was a significant support system, as these board members are a superintendent's direct supervisor. Open dialogue, keeping the board members apprised of happenings in the district, in the community, and of trends for education, builds trust between the superintendent and her supervisors. Moreover, exercising a collaborative leadership style during this newest era of educational reform was an experienced Community-based support system. Leading together, in a collaborative fashion, aided female participants in building collaborative strategic plans to address the needs of the district, while honoring current philosophy and practices encouraged by national legislation and state initiatives. The final Community

support was visibility of the female superintendent at school sites and in the community. This visibility provides valuable inside knowledge to the happenings of the schools and surrounding community, while building necessary relationships with key stakeholder.

Four Instrument support systems emerged. The most frequent Instrument support was attending professional conferences as a superintendent. The support of attending conference provided valuable networking opportunities with others in the industry and provided imperative knowledge of trends, legislation, or effective strategies for leading as a superintendent. Paying for contracted help at home to elevate the responsibility as a mother or wife was a significant Instrument support; this included hiring of a housekeeper and/or nanny. Electronic devices emerged as an Instrument support because cell phones, internet, and computers were all utilized to connect with other professionals and family while working. Lastly, reading professional books and articles related to leadership was an Instrument support for these participants, while serving during the newest era of educational reform.

Two support systems were categorized in the domain of Division of Labor. First, dividing the responsibilities of home among herself and her spouse and/or contracted help in the home was a cited support system. Secondly, delegating responsibilities of the job to cabinet members, especially tasks related to developing the district's strategic plan, was another support system while serving as a superintendent.

Lastly, one support system while serving was categorizes as a Rule. This was the collaborative practice and process of developing the LCAP. This process plays to the strengths of the female participants with building relationships, networking, executing a shared leadership model, and increasing collaboration between stakeholders.

Unexpected Findings

Two unexpected findings emerged from the data collected in this study. First, support systems were more frequently cited throughout this study, as compared to barriers. This was true of while these females were attaining the position and while they were serving as superintendent. In this study, 24 support systems overall were experienced, at a total frequency of 155, where only 10 barriers emerged from the study, with a total frequency of 50. This study was initiated based on the continued discrepancy between percentage of females serving as teachers in education and females serving as educational leaders, more specifically in the role of superintendent. One might assume with the continued underrepresentation of females in the position of superintendent, barriers would have been experienced more often than support systems by female participants, either while aspiring or while serving in the position. Moreover, the five most frequently coded themes throughout the entire study were all support systems, categorized in the domain of Community. This unexpected finding is optimistic for those females aspiring to be superintendent, as support systems, especially in the domain of Community, were more frequently experienced by females while attaining and while serving as superintendent.

The second unexpected finding comes from barriers while attaining the position of superintendent. Of the five barriers experienced while attaining, two of those barriers were of self-perception. These two barriers were coded as the self-perception that the female would not be able to balance the workload of the position of superintendent with the responsibilities of home, and the self-perception that the female was not capable of the job responsibilities of superintendent due to perceived lack of work experience. This

too is an unexpected finding of optimism; if females realize they can control a portion of the experienced barriers while attaining the position, a female alone could elevate two of the barriers by simply by changing her mindset.

Conclusions

Conclusions were derived based on the findings of collected data in this study and supported by a review of the literature. The literature complimented this study in identifying that a continued male-dominated culture of superintendents is a relevant barrier for females aspiring to the superintendency. This male-dominated culture excludes females from conversation and in representation, thus limiting females' interaction with most represented gender in the superintendency (males). This conclusion highlights the importance of needing to increase representation of females in the position of superintendent.

Review of previous literature and this study both concluded current hiring practices of superintendents tends to exclude females. First, Board of Education members interact more often male superintendents than they do females, based on statistics of those serving as superintendent. This study found some Board of Education members hold a perception that the demands of a female's role in the home (cooking, cleaning, and childrearing) would negatively impact the responsibilities of a superintendent, making an assumption that men are a better fit for the job. Since Board members are ultimately responsible for hiring a superintendent, this barrier has limited the number of females in the superintendency. As the literature also concluded, in the newest era of educational reform, there is a need for educational leaders who hold experience in curriculum and instruction, due to the increased accountability on districts

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to produce positive student outcomes in academics. According to the literature, female leaders possess these qualities and skills necessary to lead education systems in this new era of education reform. This, coupled with the findings of this study, it can be concluded that elected Board members' perception of a female's social role limits their access to the superintendency, thus Board members should be educated on most effective leadership skills, strategies, and traits when hiring a superintendent. Board members should additionally be routinely educated on federal gender discrimination acts and appropriate hiring policies/practices of the district to increase equity in the hiring process.

Secondly, the hiring practices of some contracted search firm companies, hired by school districts, exclude female candidates. A finding emerged in this study that the creation of "stables," or networks of preferred candidates (mainly males), by superintendent search firms limited female candidates from being presented to Board of Education for consideration of hire. It can be concluded that search firms are a barrier to females serving in the superintendency. School districts should consider the practices of search firms before contracting their services to, again, increase equity in the hiring process.

As supported by the literature and findings of the study females hold unrealistic expectations for the role of superintendent, perceiving it will demand high amounts of time and expertise. It can be impart to the fact that females continue to lack exposure to males seated as superintendents. If females believe the perceived high demands of a superintendent, females then doubt their ability to execute these responsibilities and may be unable to balance this work role with the needs of their spouse, children, and/or home.

It can be concluded that this self-perception, which is a lack of confidence, limits female candidates from applying to secure a position as superintendent.

A conclusion supported by the majority data findings that Community supports provide the greatest support system for females attaining and serving in the superintendency. Community support systems in this study were experienced as male and female mentors, professional networks, informal networks, and a supportive spouse. In order to increase female representation in the superintendency, community systems, such as structured mentorships and networking opportunities should be created explicitly for females aspiring to the superintendency.

Consistent with these community supports and based on the most frequently coded themes amongst the entire study, it can be concluded that most females experienced the greatest support while serving as a superintendent. This support was derived from relationships while in the role of superintendent, which included mentors, networking, and one's spouse. This conclusion highlights the importance of creating explicit mentorships and structured networking opportunities for females serving as superintendent. Furthermore, since males are the most represented gender in the superintendency and in this study 'a male dominated culture of superintendents' was experienced as a barrier both while attaining and while serving, it can be concluded that increased equity in hiring practices still needs to be refined.

The research findings concluded that confidence, or lack of, played a role in attaining superintendency. Lack of confidence while aspiring to be superintendent was evident as a barrier; yet, females serving as a superintendent noted their confidence to execute the roles and responsibilities demanded of the job was an experience support. A

complimentary support for building confidence was a Division of Labor support, experienced as serving in various roles and for different districts prior to interviewing for a superintendency. Females found this variety of job roles provided them with knowledge and created valuable relationships that ultimately assisted in securing a position as superintendent. It can be concluded that variety of experience within the field of education, coupled with self-confidence, aide females both aspiring and serving as superintendent.

Related specifically to serving in the new era of educational reform, females in this study felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities of serving as a superintendent, in order to meet the requirements of national and state legislation related to accountability of a school district and its leader. However, females felt their collaborative leadership style and delegating tasks to their cabinet were experienced supports while currently serving as a superintendent. It can be concluded that females serving as a superintendent should rely on those around them, both in their district and outside their district, delegating tasks and responsibilities to provide support with tasks and guidance on how to manage the demands of a superintendent in this new era of educational reform.

Furthermore, it is concluded that Instrument supports played a role while attaining and while serving for female superintendents. These supports included professional conferences, reading of literature and blogs on leadership, hiring help in the home (nanny, housekeeper), and utilizing technology (such as emails, phones, and texting) to connect with other professions. Increasing access to these instruments, such as professional conferences explicitly for females, in addition to female forums for communication and

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female leadership in education (blogs or websites), are necessary offerings for females aspiring and serving as superintendent in the newest era of educational reform.

The literature reviewed in this study, correlated with the findings of the research, indicate barriers continue to exist for females obtaining and serving in the superintendency. Supportive communities, increased representation of female educational leaders, equitable division of labor, and structured tools to capitalize on females' strengths will allow females to demonstrate their ability and lead as a superintendent. It is imperative that education systems from a national, state, and local level consider and reevaluate their current hiring practices, which currently considered support an unspoken rule of favoring males most often in the highest of education leadership positions. It is evident females rely heavily on relationships created in their community, from mentors to coworkers, from spouse to friends. However, females, as indicated in the findings, are reluctant to initiate or create opportunities to interact with large groups of males, mainly the males who are currently seated as superintendents. Relationships with these males tend to be formed on a singleton level by females either aspiring or serving as a superintendent, but rarely in larger groups of males. This suggests an urgency to create opportunities for increased networking of females to interact with groups of males, providing explicit structure to provoke conversation and build valuable relationships between these two genders, who ultimately are serving in the same industry, in the same community, for the same students.

Implications for Action

Based on this study, implications for action are directly correlated with the derived conclusions from the major findings. Two implications for action were

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developed, relevant to the major findings of the validity of relationships serving as a support system. The first implication for action was developed from the single most frequent support system, both while attaining and while serving as a superintendent – a professional mentor. Females found significant support in having a mentor guide them, answer questions, provide feedback, and be a sounding board. These mentors were mainly retired or current superintendents. School districts and/or local county offices of education should consider the practice of explicitly connecting all females who aspire to be superintendent or serve as a superintendent with a designated mentor. The mentor can act as a coach, guiding the female to prepare or serve most effectively as a superintendent, similar to CAs current practices for student teaching and the induction program for new teachers. In this study of two counties in CA, one of the counties had an informal mentorship for new superintendents, which was reported as a support by female participants in that particular county, but the other county did not have a similar practice. However, mentorship programs for seated superintendents are not consistent between counties or even between school districts, and furthermore, mentorships for aspiring females is current nonexistent. All mentor programs should additionally afford females aspiring or serving as superintendent an opportunity to job shadow current superintendents to better understand the expectations, role, and responsibilities of a superintendent. Moreover, universities or professional development programs which prepare leaders of school systems can assist in developing mentorship programs for aspiring superintendents and can educate female students on the importance of engaging in this type of support system.

The second implication for action is based on the collective conclusions related to utilization of developed relationships. School district, local county offices, universities, and professional programs should develop structured networking opportunities that connect females and males with the similar interest of leading school districts. These networking opportunities should include both formal and informal forums to discuss the role of a superintendent, strategies to be successful with managing time and task as a superintendent, and time to build more personal relationships amongst males and females. Moreover, the entities should also create opportunity for aspiring female superintendents to connect with school board members. Females need to create relationships with board members and understand how to navigate these board members, since the current hiring practices of superintendents offer these members the primary responsibility to hire and supervise the superintendent.

A third implication for action requires school districts in CA to reevaluate their current hiring practices of school superintendents. Currently, elected School Board members hire the superintendent and districts generally secure an agency, either a contracted, private search firm or the local county office of education. Various school district stakeholders should have a part in the hiring of superintendents, similar to the hiring process of a school principal, where certificated, classified, management, and parent representatives are a viable part of the process. With recent education legislation calling for an increase in stakeholder input and feedback to guide district goals and initiatives, the hiring of a superintendent (to lead and execute this vision) should include the input and feedback of the stakeholders of the district. Moreover, School Board members of CA should be required to attend regular training on current research on

leadership/management, updated laws and related practices, and equitable hiring practices. Ultimately, hiring practices should directly align with the vision, mission, and needs of the school district and mitigate any personal or political agenda to promote based on personal preference, rather than on ability, regardless of gender.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations were made for further research based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

- Examine the barriers and support systems of male CA superintendents both while attaining and while serving as superintendent during the newest era of education reform. Furthermore, a comparison can be made between the experienced barriers and support systems of female to that of male superintendents.

- Compare the lived experiences of barriers and support systems of CA school superintendents with that of superintendents in other states, either male, female, or both genders.

- Examine the hiring practices of superintendent search firm companies, comparing contracted, private companies to county offices of education.

- Explore the role of school board members in the hiring of superintendents.

- Examine alternative hiring practices of superintendents in other states to consider more equitable practices for CA.

- Examine why stakeholders (community members, classified and certificated staff, management) not directly involved in the superintendent hiring process.

- Explore perceived confidence of female superintendents and compare to those who desire but have yet to serve as superintendent.

- Examine and compare counties or states with formal mentor models for superintendents and those without.

- Examine and compare barriers and support systems of superintendents serving in the newest era of educational reform based on district type - elementary district, high school district, unified district; size of district based on student enrollment; and/or location of district – rural, urban.

- Examine females in cabinet or district level management positions to determine their interest in a position as superintendent and perceived barriers.

- Examine candidates who attempted to become a superintendent but were unsuccessful.

- Examine how to successfully enter a "stable" of candidates created by a search firm to nominate superintendent candidates.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

As a female serving in education as a teacher, elementary assistant principal, elementary principal, and most recently middle school principal, I have personally witnessed the gender discrepancy increase, representing far fewer females within the higher leadership positions I secure, as I climb the ladder toward superintendent. Understanding people, regardless of gender, have contributed significant positive impact to the field of education on a daily basis, I wonder why gender discrepancy continues to exist decades after females have joined the workforce and serve in such a female-dominated profession. I was highly interested in hearing the stories of females that have

successfully secured a position as superintendent. Executing this study allowed me to personally examine the lived experiences of barriers and support systems for 12 female CA superintendents who overcame odds that were stacked against them. Furthermore, in this research, all identified barriers and support systems were systematically viewed through the lens of a socially-influenced theoretical framework, known as Activity Theory; this framework allowed me (the researcher) to explicitly organize the tensions that pulled on or aided females in attaining and serving as superintendent. It is my desire for this research, which was organized into four Activity Theory domains of tensions, to inform readers who are interested not only in the examination of these lived experiences but also to stimulate change in the education system to provoke greater equity in the superintendency.

After 12 interviews of current CA female superintendents, conducted over the course of one month in the fall of 2016, collective trends of these interviews were evident. Females spoke and shared in great length about support systems they experienced far more often than they spoke about the barriers they encountered. Two of the participants even phoned me prior to the interview to share they felt they were "lucky" and had experienced no barriers to attaining their position, unsure if they were even a good fit for this study. Agreeing to be interviewed to share whatever experience they lived, these two female superintendents realized there were barriers in their lives, but they had focused on their support systems so heavily that the barriers were not as noticeable. Relying on support systems was a theme; in total, 24 support systems were identified in this study (9 supports from while attaining their position and 15 supports from while currently serving). Compared to 10 identified barriers, support systems was definitely the primary focus of

many of these female participants. Even though these females shared collective themes of barriers and support systems, each shared an interesting and unique story of their path which led to the superintendency. Moreover, while serving in a similar area of Southern CA, each shared distinctive experiences to each female. These 12 females provided great insight, aiding to build on the literature of female superintendents, who continue to be underrepresented not only in their relative county of CA but amongst the entire state of CA and across our nation.

This study represents what I stand for in education – equity and accessibility for all. After 12 years serving public education, the process of engaging in qualitative research and writing a doctoral dissertation is a prominent and pinnacle experience as a professional and as a person – who serves as a mom, wife, daughter, and friend. The teachings from my experience in education, both as a teacher and as an administrator, coupled with the insight and knowledge from my doctoral program and dissertation have forever changed how I will lead in education, to ensure equity and accessibility for all those I serve.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

Sources↓ Variables→	Females in American Workforce	Leadership Traits of Females	History of Female Superintendents	Equal Opportunity Laws	School Board's Impact on Sups.	Pathway to the Superintendency	Educational Reform 2012-Current	Recent Ed. Reform's Impact on Sups.	Barriers of Female Superintendents	Support Systems of Female Sups.	Gap in Literature	Activity Theory	Methodology
Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992	✓												
Acemoglu & Autor, 2004	✓												
ACSA, 2008			✓								✓		
Affeldt, 2015			✓				✓	✓					
Anderson, 2000			✓							✓			
Anderson, 2000			✓										
Benzel & Hoover, 2015								✓	✓				
Björk & Kowalski, 2005									✓				
Björk, 2000			✓			✓				✓	✓		
Björk, 2005								✓					
Björk, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014						✓		✓					
Blount, 1998			✓										
Blount, 1999			✓										
Bourke, Mentis, & O'Neill, 2013												✓	
Bourkea, Mentisb, & O'Neille, 2013												✓	✓
Brantlinger, Jiminez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005													✓
Bredeson, 1995								✓					
Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007											✓		
Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010	✓	✓											
Brunner & Kim, 2010						✓				✓	✓		
Brunner, 1999										✓			
Brunner, 2004			✓	✓									
Brunner, Grogan, & Prince, 2004			✓										
Business, 2015								✓					
CDEa, 2015			✓	✓	✓								
CDEb, 2015							✓						
Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009												✓	
Chang, 2012										✓			
Chapman, 1997			✓		✓								
Cole, 1985												✓	

Conlin, 2003		✓									
Creswell, 2002											✓
Creswell, 2007											✓
Cuadrado, Garc Ia-Ael, & Molero, 2015		✓									
Dana & Bourisaw, 2006			✓	✓				✓			
Derrington and Sharratt, 2009							✓				
Dickson, 2014						✓					
Eagly & Carli, 2003	✓										
Eagly & Carli, 2007	✓										
Eagly & Carli, 2015	✓										
Eagly & Johnson, 1990		✓									
Eagly & Karau, 2002	✓										
Eagly, 2007					✓			✓			
Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Engen, 2001		✓									
Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992		✓									
Eckman, 2003								✓			
Ed Data, 2015							✓				✓
EdSource, 2007			✓			✓	✓				
Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009							✓		✓		
Engeström, 1999									✓	✓	✓
Fink, 2009											✓
Floey & Webb, 2015								✓			
Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2016					✓						
Freedman, 2002	✓										
Gay & Airasian, 1996											✓
Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009			✓								
Glass & Franceschini, 2007			✓		✓				✓		
Glass, 1991					✓						
Glass, 2000			✓	✓	✓			✓			
Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000			✓		✓						
Glenn & Hickey, 2009			✓	✓				✓	✓		
Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013					✓						
Grant, 2015					✓						
Griggs, 2014							✓	✓			
Grogan & Brunner, 2005					✓						
Grogan and Shakshaft, 2011		✓			✓						
Gupton & Slick, 1996			✓								
Gupton, 2009	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓		
Harvey, Cambron-Mccabe, Cunningham, & Koff, 2013					✓						
Hiler & Erickson Hatalsky, 2015					✓						
Hoffman, 2003			✓		✓						
Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986	✓										
Hymowitz, 2015	✓										
Jackson, 2014					✓						
Jamiu Odetunde, 2013		✓									
Judge & Piccolo 2004		✓									
Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999							✓				
Kelsey, Allen, & Ballard, 2014								✓	✓		
Khairuzzaman, Ismail, Jafar, & Al-	✓										

Taeep, 2012													
Knudson, 2014							✓						
Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, Ellerson, 2011			✓		✓	✓					✓		
Lang, 2010	✓												
Lee & Sparks, 2014												✓	
Lincoln & Guba, 1985													✓
Litmanovitz, 2010						✓			✓				
Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004													✓
Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, Pilar, & Martos, 2012									✓				
Macias, 2014							✓						
Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005													✓
Martin, 2011									✓				
McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998									✓	✓	✓		
McGee, 2010			✓						✓	✓	✓		
McMillan & Schumacher, 2009													✓
Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015			✓										
Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015							✓	✓					
Merriam, 2009													✓
Minckler, 2014								✓					
Murphy & Rodriguez, 2008												✓	
Nan Restine, 1993			✓										
Northcraft & Gutek, 1993									✓				
Ortiz & Marshall, 1988									✓				
Parker-Chenaille & Fisher, 2012								✓					
Patton, 2015													✓
Paul, 2014			✓				✓	✓					
Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014	✓	✓											
Pecora, 2006										✓	✓		
Reed & Patterson, 2007										✓	✓		
Riffkin, 2014		✓											
Roberts, 2010													✓
Russell, 2015							✓	✓					
Schaaf, 2008								✓					
Seidman, 2013													✓
Sellers, 2012	✓												
Shakeshaft. 1987									✓				
Shapiro, 2006			✓										
Sharp & Walter, 2004						✓							
Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004										✓			
Stephens, 2009			✓										
Tallerico & Blunt, 2004											✓		
Thompson & Garcia France, 2015								✓					
Tinsley and Weiss, 2000													✓
Tripes, 2004										✓			
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011	✓												
U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009						✓							

US Department of Labor Statistics, 2011	✓											
USDE, n.d.							✓					
VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009								✓		✓		
Vygotsky, 1978											✓	
Walker & Aritz, 2015		✓										
Walker, 2013	✓											
Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011		✓										
White & Özkanli, 2011		✓										
Wickham, 2007								✓				
Williams, 2012	✓	✓										
Wolverton, Rawls, Macdonald, & Nelson, 2000								✓				
Wright & Harris, 2010							✓					
Yamagata-Lynch & Smaldin, 2007											✓	
Young & Skrla, 2003										✓		
YWCA Women's Leadership Initiative, 2007			✓									

APPENDIX B

Invitation Letter

**RESEARCH STUDY INVITATION LETTER
FOR FEMALE CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
IN RIVERSIDE AND SAN BERNARDINO COUNTIES, CA**

August 2016

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, California. The main investigator of this study is Jennifer L. Martin, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a female superintendent of a public school in Riverside or San Bernardino Counties, California. Approximately 12 superintendents will be enrolled in this study. Participation should require about one hour of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the barriers and support systems female California public school superintendents experienced through the lens of Activity Theory while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. This study explores the lived experiences of research participants and captures the essence of their experiences to better understand the barriers and support systems they experience to obtain and serve in their current position.

PROCEDURES: In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in an interview. The interview will take a minimum of 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. The interview will take place at a location of the your choosing. During this interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your lived experiences as a California female public school superintendent. Additionally, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire that will include questions that capture your background information.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. The session will be held at a location of your choosing to minimize inconvenience. Some interview questions may cause you to reflect on barriers and support systems that are unique to your lived experience and sharing your experience in an interview setting may cause minor discomfort.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but a potential may be that you will have an opportunity to share your lived experiences

as a female superintendent. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of the barriers and support systems that female superintendents experience.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact the investigator, Mrs. Martin, by phone at (909) 499-3838 or email jmarti18@mail.brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Very Respectfully,

Jennifer L. Martin
Principal Investigator

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: From the Voices of California Female
Superintendents: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational
Reform through the Lens of Activity Theory

Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Jennifer L. Martin, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Research Participant's Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is
to examine the barriers and support systems female California CA public school
superintendents experienced through the lens of Activity Theory while attaining and
serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside
and San Bernardino Counties. This study explores the lived experiences of research
participants and captures the essence of their experiences to better understand the barriers
and support systems they experience to obtain and serve in their current position.

In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in an interview. The interview
will take a minimum of 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. The interview will take place
at a location of the your choosing. During this interview, you will be asked a series of
questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a California female public
school superintendent. Additionally, you will be asked to fill out a demographic
questionnaire that will include questions that capture your background information.

I understand that:

a. There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. The
   session will be held at a location of my choosing to minimize inconvenience.
   Some interview questions may cause me to reflect on barriers and support systems
   that are unique to my lived experience and sharing my experience in an interview
   setting may cause minor discomfort.

b. There are no major benefits to me for participation, but a potential may be that I
   will have an opportunity to share my lived experiences as a female California
   public school superintendent. The information from this study is intended to
   inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of the barriers and support
   systems that female superintendents' experience.

c. Money will not be provided for my time and involvement; however, I will receive gift of appreciation from the researcher following the interview.

d. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Jennifer L. Martin, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Ms. Martin may be contacted by phone at (909) 499-3838 or email at jmarti18@mail.brandman.edu.

e. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

f. I understand that the study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project.

g. I understand that the audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interview. Once the interview is transcribed, the audio, interview transcripts, and demographic questionnaire will be kept for a minimum of five years by the investigator in a secure location.

h. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call of the office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party	**Date**

Signature of Witness (if appropriate)	**Date**

Signature of Principal Investigator	**Date**
Brandman University IRB August 2016	

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Interview Script:

[Interviewer states:] *I truly appreciate you taking the time to share your story with me. To review, the purpose of this study is to share any barriers encountered and support systems you used while obtaining and now while serving in your current position. The questions are written to elicit this information but share stories or experiences as you see fit throughout the interview. Additionally, I encourage you to be as honest and open as possible for purposes of research and since your identity will be remain anonymous.*

As a review of our process leading up to this interview, you were invited to participate via letter and signed an informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete anonymity for the purpose of this study. Please remember, this interview will be recorded and transcribed, and you will be provided with a copy of the complete transcripts to check for accuracy in content and meaning prior to me analyzing the data. Do you have any questions before we begin? [Begin to ask interview questions]

Background Questions:

1. Share a little about yourself personally and professionally.
2. What positions did you hold prior to serving as a superintendent? For how long in each position?

Content Questions:
3. While attaining the position of superintendent, what ways do you feel that it was challenging to navigate the existing professional community of superintendents?
   a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
4. What rules, spoken or unspoken, explicit or implied, could be perceived as barriers to your advancement?
   a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
5. As defined by AT, instruments are defined as factors that allow a person to communicate and interact with their environment. Instruments can include, but are not limited to, strategic plans, books, internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics. Considering this, what instruments, if any, do you feel prevented you from interacting with your professional environment as an aspiring superintendent to your fullest potential?

a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

6. What social structures or expectations, inside and outside the organization, could be perceived as barriers in attaining your current position?
    a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

7. Please share any other barriers, personal and/or professional, that you experienced while you were attaining the superintendent position.
    a) What personal or professional support system(s), if any, did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

8. While currently serving as superintendent during this time of educational reform (such as the effects of LCFF, LCAP, ESSA, SBAC, Common Core Standards) what ways do you feel that it is challenging to navigate the existing professional community of superintendents?
    a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

9. What rules, spoken or unspoken, implied or explicit, could be perceived as barriers to accomplishing what you feel is important to your organization today?
    a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

10. As defined previously, instruments are factors that allow a person to communicate and interact with their environment. So, what instruments, if any, do you feel prevent you from interacting with your current professional environment in the most efficient manner?
    a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

11. What social structures or expectations, inside and outside the organization, could be perceived as current barriers for females serving as superintendents today?
    a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

12. Please share any other barriers, personal and/or professional, that you currently experience while serving as a superintendent during this era of educational reform.
    a) What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

APPENDIX E

Articles Related to District's Utilizing Contracted Search Firms for

Superintendent Search

NEWS

HEMET: Superintendent search firm to cost 25K

The Hemet school board will likely approve the use of Leadership Associates during its June 19 meeting

BY KEVIN PEARSON / STAFF WRITER
Published: June 18, 2012 7:00 p.m.

The Hemet school board is expected to approve spending almost $25,000 on a search firm to help it find a new superintendent.

The vote will come during a board meeting Tuesday, June 19, and is the first major step toward finding a new, permanent chief educator since Steve Lowder left in April.

The school board also will receive its annual budget presentation at the meeting.

District staff has proposed using Mission Viejo-based Leadership Associates as its search firm, with a cost to the district's general fund not to exceed $24,950.

The proposed contract gives the district the chance to end its relationship with Leadership Associates at various points. The district will pay the firm $8,732.50 in the first phase, during which the company will talk to staff and community leaders about what they would like to see in a superintendent.

The second phase includes recruitment and reference checking and will cost the district $11,227.50. The final payment, of $4,990, will be made once the search is completed.

On its website, Leadership Associates lists the closing date for applications for the Hemet position as July 20, with interviews scheduled for late August.

School board President Bill Sanborn previously said he is aiming for around October as a potential start date for the new hire.

Hemet has previously used Leadership Associates for superintendent searches, as have the Corona-Norco, Moreno Valley and Murrieta Valley school districts. Corona-Norco, the largest district in Riverside County, is currently using the firm to help fill its superintendent position.

After less than two years in Hemet, Lowder left to become superintendent in the Stockton Unified School District, a job he'll begin July 1. The board has since selected two different interim superintendents in his place, with Sally Cawthon currently holding that title.

Cawthon and Deputy Superintendent LaFaye Platter are potential candidates for the full-time position.

Tuesday's meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the school district office, 1791 W. Acacia Ave.

Follow Kevin Pearson on Twitter @pe_kevinpearson or online at blog.pe.com/Hemet

Note. Adapted from "HEMET: Superintendent search firm to cost 25K" by The Press Enterprise, June 18, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.pe.com/articles/district-657581-superintendent-school.html

Education

Search for New Brawley Superintendent is Underway as Board Hires Consulting Firm

By Katherine Ramos - March 24, 2016   0

BRAWLEY– After considering a choice between two consulting groups, the Brawley Elementary School District Board voted to work with the McPherson and Jacobson group for help in the process of hiring a new superintendent. Based in Riverside, the firm was recommended to the board by the California School Board Association (CSBA).

Similar to the process in the Fall of 2015, the district has opted to work with a consulting group in order help move the superintendent hiring process along and stay on schedule.

The consulting group will help draft a list of requirements that will be used on the applications using input from the board, school district staff (including teachers), classified, and secretarial staff, and possibly input from the students, and community stake holders.

The firm will also make recommendations when choosing candidates for the interview process and might make suggestions about who would likely be the best choice. The BESD board will make the final choice on the new superintendent at the end of the process.

Using the consulting firm will likely cost the district $18,255 in total for all of McPherson and Jacobson's services.

The BESD board still projects a new superintendent will be hired by June of this year, and the McPherson and Jacobson group assured them this was possible.

Note. Adapted from "Search for New Brawley Superintendent is Underway as Board Hires Consulting Firm" by Desert Review, March 24, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.thedesertreview.com/search-for-new-brawley-superintendent-is-underway-as-board-hires-consulting-firm/

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Trustees choose firm to conduct search for superintendent

By Jonathan Riley Reporter   Aug 19, 2015   💬 0

JONATHAN RILEY/Big Bear Grizzly
Kent Bechler, left, and Michael Escalante, right, gave a presentation July 31 to the Bear Valley Unified School District board on behalf of their search firm Leadership Associates. The board voted Aug. 12 to hire the company for its leadership search.

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The Bear Valley Unified School District board of trustees voted unanimously Aug. 12 to contract with the firm Leadership Associates to help the district conduct its search for a new superintendent and tentatively for an executive director of business services.

The total cost to the district for both searches is $32,000, at $21,500 for the superintendent and $10,500 for the executive director of business services. The board will request a termination clause in the agreement with Leadership Associates in case the board only ends up wanting the firm to do the

Note. Adapted from "Trustees choose firm to conduct search for superintendend" by Big Bear Grizzly, August 19, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.Bigbeargrizzly.net/news/trustees-choose-firm-to-conduct- search-for-superintendent/article_2ca72a68-4608-11e5-bfd5-2788bd2b0666.html   continued

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superintendent search. In previous leadership searches, the district has used the free search process provided by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools office rather than a private search firm.

"I think the county, from what I knew, did a wonderful job," trustee Paul Zamoyta said at the Aug. 12 board meeting. "But that's the only thing I've known, and now that I've seen the presentations and the added benefits that they offer, and having gone through that process twice before with the county, I personally think it's a good use of public taxpayer dollars and the district's money to hire a search firm."

Leadership Associates, along with another search firm, the Cosca Group, gave presentations at the school board's July 31 special meeting. At the Aug. 12 meeting, other board members agreed with Zamoyta, saying the search firms' recruiting process to find the best candidate, versus simply advertising the job opening, was an important factor.

"That for me really tipped the scales for going with one of the two firms, as opposed to going through the county," said trustee Cathy Herrick. "It's definitely worth the expense."

While Frank Cosca of the Cosca Group showed up for the Aug. 12 board meeting; no one representing Leadership Associates was in attendance. In response to a question from Herrick, interim Superintendent Ron Peavy confirmed that both firms were informed that the leadership search and the possibility of choosing a firm would be on the Aug. 12 agenda. Cosca said if his company's name is on a board agenda, a company representative will be at the meeting.

"I wish the other group was here but they obviously couldn't make it today," said board president Bev Grabe.

Board members said that the similar pricing of both firms made it difficult to decide between them and that either could've done a good job finding a superintendent for the district. "I think the only advantage that I saw was a potential broader network that Leadership Associates provided for the search process," said trustee John Goepp. At the July 31 board meeting, Leadership Associates partner Michael Escalante told the board that his firm conducts about half of all school district leadership searches in California.

The next step in the search process is an initial meeting between Leadership Associates and the board to discuss what the district is looking for in a superintendent, which is scheduled for Wednesday, Aug. 19.

Contact reporter Jonathan Riley via email at jriley.grizzly@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter @BBGrizzlyJon.

Note. Adapted from "Trustees choose firm to conduct search for superintendend" by Big Bear Grizzly, August 19, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.Bigbeargrizzly.net/ news/trustees-choose-firm-to-conduct- search-for-superintendent/article_2ca72a68-4608- 11e5-bfd5-2788bd2b0666.html

Note. Adapted from "Rialto Unified: 35 apply to be next superintendent" by The Sun Education, March 17, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.sbsun.com/social-affairs/20150317/35-apply-to-be-next-rialto-unified-superintendent

School board picks search firm

By Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell, Staff Writer

POSTED: 07/05/11, 12:01 AM PDT | 0 COMMENTS

The San Bernardino City Unified school board selected Leadership Associates on Tuesday to do its search for interim and permanent superintendents.

The selected firm was one of three that made presentations at the meeting.

The search for a new superintendent was necessary after Arturo Delgado announced he was leaving the district to become Los Angeles County's superintendent of schools.

"In looking at all three, Leadership sounds the most promising in finding us a qualified person," said school board member Elsa Valdez.

The three presenters, selected at a special meeting last Tuesday, also included the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Office and The Cosca Group Leadership Development Corp.

Representatives from Cosca Group, consisting of mostly retired superintendents from all over the state, were the first to speak, describing the type of person they seek for such a job.

Those attributes included candidates on the way up who are well-liked by their school boards.

Cosca had four candidates in mind for the interim position.

Board members were concerned about the background of the representatives, their familiarity with the demographics of the district and how many superintendents they have placed.

Leadership Associates representatives said they do 50 percent of the searches in California and would do everything they could to find the right fit for the district.

They wanted to meet with board members and residents as soon as possible to determine what the community wanted in a superintendent.

They described being with the board all the way through the process and having a solid track record with candidates they have found.

Board member Lynda Savage stressed that the board was eager to find someone who would remain with the district for many years.

Note. Adapted from "School board picks search firm" by The Sun News. Retrieved from http://www.sbsun.com/article/zz/20110705/NEWS/110708030

Board member Judi Penman asked how many finalists the firm typically generates. The representatives said from four to six.

Board member Barbara Flores asked about the timeline in filling the position and demographics they had dealt with in the past.

"You can understand our demographics because you have lived them," she said.

San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools representatives described themselves as being the largest superintendent search service provider in the county.

The representatives said the office has a vested interest in the person who becomes superintendent.

One of the most important steps will be getting input from stakeholders because the district serves such a diverse population, they said.

The search would be extensive, they added, stressing that there would be no cost to the district for the interim search if the office was selected to search for the permanent superintendent.

Board members again asked that everyone from educators in the district to community members have a say in determining the new superintendent.

Gil Navarro, a member of the county Board of Education, recognized the contributions of existing administrators and questioned why money would be spent on a search for an interim superintendent.

He also raised concerns about Superintendent of Schools Office doing the search.

"I see a conflict of interest here, because this office provides oversight for district financial stability," he said.

The board has expressed an interest in finding a candidate from outside the district.

Mel Albiso, the assistant superintendent and chief administrative officer, has run the district's day-to-day operations since Delgado's departure.

Note. Adapted from "School board picks search firm" by The Sun News. Retrieved from http://www.sbsun.com/article/zz/20110705/NEWS/110708030

APENDIX F

ACSA's Women in School Leadership Conference 2016: Online Registration, Schedule of Events, and Speakers

ACSA's Women in School Leadership Conference 2016: Day 1 Agenda

ACSA's Women in School Leadership Conference 2016: Day 2 Agenda

Friday, September 30

Time	
7:30am	Buffet Breakfast
8:30am	General Session
9:45am	Achieving Equity for Women of Color in Leadership
	Leadership Matters, Leaders Share Success, Lead by Publishing!
	Leading Equity and Excellence: Closing the Opportunity Gap for Women
	Prepare for your next role- Leveraging your professional learning network (PLN) to support your future career goals.
	Mock Interviews
11:00am	Leading with Heart-Understanding Your Humanity As a Means for Advocating for Equity
	Mindfulness for Women Leaders Si, No Yo Quien? If not Me, then Who?
	The Day in the Life of Shirley Holmes – Tools for the Female Investigator
12:15pm	General Session
2:00pm	Closing Session

Professional References/Readings
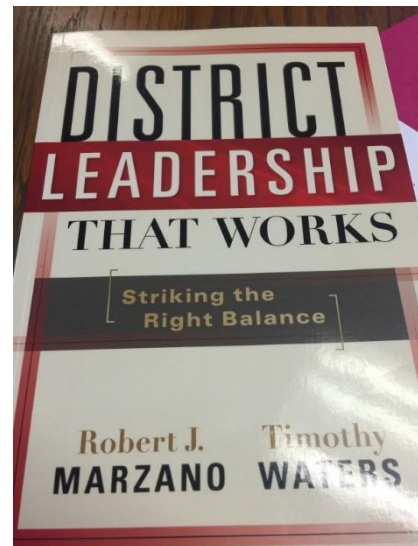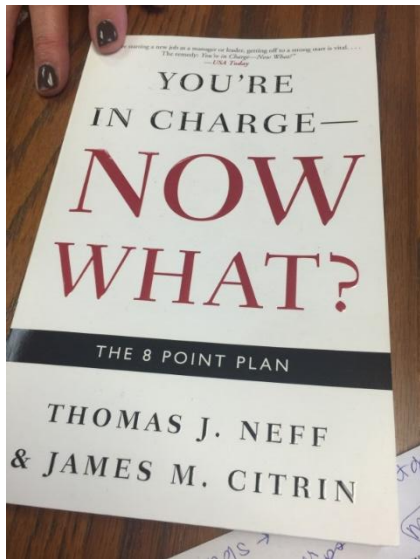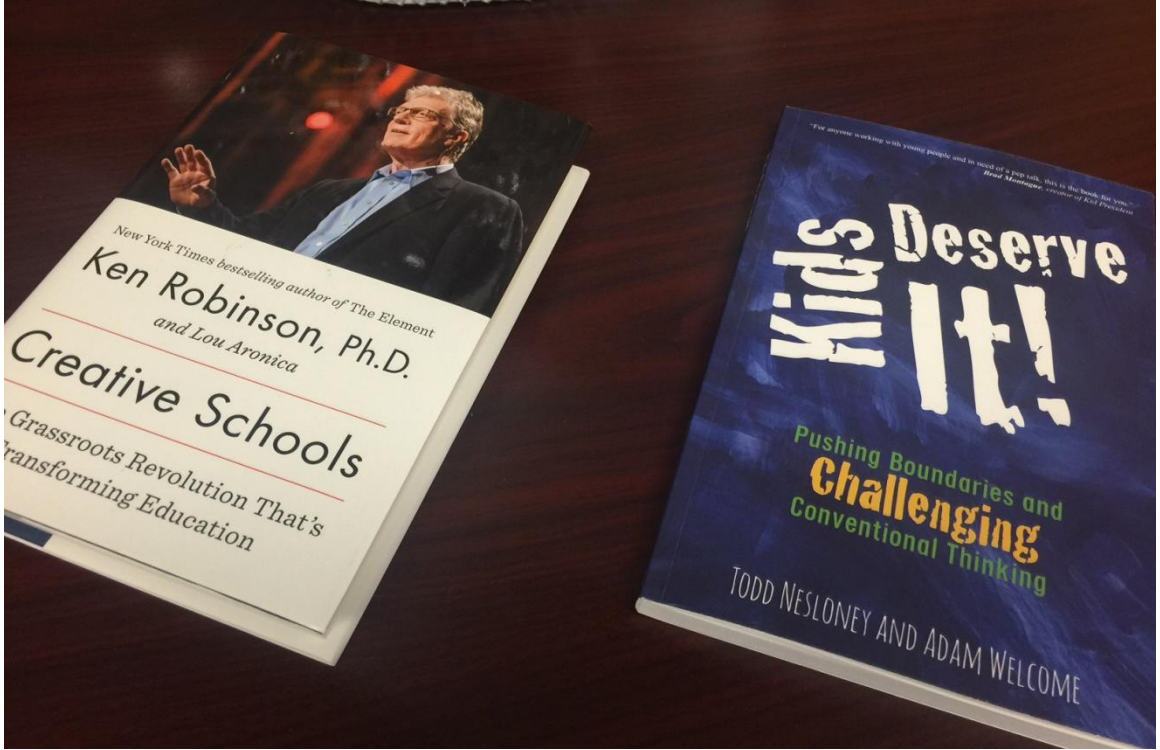
ACSA's Superintendents' Symposium: Goal and Schedule of Events

ACSA's Region XIX's Women's Leadership Network, Changing

Mindset through Coaching Dinner Conference (Riverside County): Agenda

APPENDIX J

Online Forums to access Female Educational Leadership Articles

Facebook and Twitter