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The Use of Personal Disruption Strategies by Female K-12 Superintendents

for Career Advancement

A Dissertation by

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University of Massachusetts Global

A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

November 2023

Committee in charge:

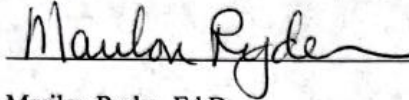
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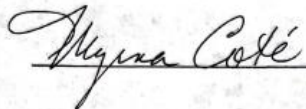
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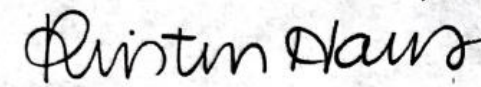
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November 2023

The Use of Personal Disruption Strategies by Female K-12 Superintendents  
for Career Advancement

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by Tricia Marie Thompson

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This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family who sacrificed their time for me to complete this dissertation. To my husband, there is no way I could have done this without your support along the way. To my kiddos, you are all fabulous humans, and I did this to show you that hard things can be done. You have all helped me immensely to be the working mama and now doctor I am today. To all the amazing women in my life, I see you and honor the fabulous people you are with this dissertation. To my work mentors along the way, your support and friendship has meant the world to me. To my girl tribe, you know who you are, and I am so grateful for your support. Finally, to my chair and committee members, thank you so much for everything. Last, to my father for teaching me to always fight for the underdog; this is truly in honor of you, and I hope you are smiling down at this one.

## ABSTRACT

The Use of Personal Disruption Strategies by Female K-12 Superintendents

for Career Advancement

by Tricia Marie Thompson

**Purpose:** The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods study was to identify and describe the perceived impact of W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) five disruptive career skills on female K-12 superintendents from an elementary background to their advancement to an executive leadership position.

**Methodology:** This explanatory mixed methods study identified and described the experiences of eight female K-12 Superintendents from California in the area of personal disruption strategies. Respondents were purposively chosen based on specific criteria and recommendations of an expert panel of experts. Data were collected, mean scores were tabulated, and themes were formed with regard to the five personal disruption strategies.

**Findings:** Examination of the mixed methods data from the eight superintendents indicated a variety of findings. First, females who challenge and influence authority do so for the purpose of pursuing equity, fostering relationships, and are more effective when influencing outweighs challenging. Second, humility is a prerequisite skill to improvisation. Third, substance over publicity is the major theme when females engage in effective forms of self-promotion. Fourth, diversification of skills is a main outcome from welcoming a less prescribed career path. Fifth, relying on skills of empathy helps women to aim for respect over likability.

**Conclusions:** The study supported the literature in that some of the key strengths held by females are called on when using these strategies: empathic mindset, equity focused,

humility, staying in the moment, relying on substance over publicity, developing a diverse resume, respect over likability, and care for others as a primary driver.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended that leadership training for women include ample work in disrupting inequities for student groups and evaluation of pedagogical programs as prerequisites to upper-division leadership. To promote the success of female education leaders, districts should facilitate the active use of feedback groups or professional learning communities to allow female leaders to hone ideas, and improvisational skills and practice perspective-taking opportunities.

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## PREFACE

One faculty researcher and four doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring specific behaviors women engage in to disrupt the protocols or processes already identified in the literature to secure promotions or executive leadership positions. The following five disruptive career skills were identified as the framework: (a) challenging and influencing authority, (b) preparing but also improvising, (c) engaging in effective forms of self-promotion, (d) welcoming a less prescribed career path, and (e) aiming for respect over being liked. Through their shared interest, a thematic study was conducted by the four doctoral students to identify whether the identified disruptive skills impacted females securing executive leadership positions. A secondary purpose of the study was that by studying this topic, the researchers can give female leaders the skills they need to break barriers into new and fulfilling careers in upper management. An explanatory mixed methods study was used to identify and describe the perceived impact of W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) five disruptive career skills on female advancement to executive leadership positions.

The four doctoral students collaborated with one faculty member to develop the purpose statement and research questions to ensure thematic consistency and reliability. The survey instrument, interview questions, and study procedures were designed as a thematic collaborative effort. The thematic group tested the device among themselves to identify any alterations that may have been needed. Each researcher then administered an online survey to female leaders to identify disruptive behaviors that may have impacted their career advancement to executive leadership. Following the survey, the researchers individually interviewed their study participants to explore the impact of disruptive



behaviors on their career advancement and the skills used to break barriers into new and fulfilling careers in upper management.

The term *peer researchers* was used throughout the dissertation to refer to the researchers involved in this thematic study. The peer researchers studied female leaders in the following fields: Dina Hernandez, Latina superintendents; Lorri Oliver, property management executives; Neko Green, senior pastors; and Tricia Thompson, superintendents from elementary background.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was once asked when there would be enough women on the Supreme Court, to which her response was consistent, “When there are nine.” (Vaynshteyn, 2020, para. 1). This statement has catalyzed society and organizations to consistently look at how hard it strives to represent all kinds of individuals, especially women. Like many others who have fought for equality and representation, Ginsburg did so with the keen understanding that leadership representing its constituents transforms organizations.

Eagly et al. (2003) explained that women outperform their male counterparts in the following areas: intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Regarding skills associated with transformational leadership, women often rank at or above their male counterparts. Additional studies have reported that organizations led by females are more likely to succeed in various measures such as financial performance, risk aversiveness, and retention of human capital (Brahma et al., 2021). Another study showed that female leaders often emerge with better results in times of crisis than their male counterparts (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries and states with female leaders were shown to have lower case rates and fatalities. Zenger and Folkman (2019) gave 360-degree leadership assessments on female and male leaders during the first wave of the pandemic. They reported that females outperformed their male counterparts in 13 of 19 categories, some of which included taking the initiative, learning agility, and inspiring and motivating others.

Despite knowing that women, by nature, make for genuinely transformational leaders, trends regarding females in senior leadership positions for most industries show that although women represent 35% of senior leadership positions, they simultaneously represent 58.4% of the workforce (Ariella, 2023). This trend is more alarming when it is noted that the number of females obtaining bachelor's degrees has risen to surpass their male counterparts within higher education (Fry, 2022). Also, in a post-COVID-19 pandemic society, females now equal the number of college-educated males in the workforce.

There are a few industries that have higher rates of female leadership, namely human resources (74.85%), education/social services (41%), healthcare (41%), and hospitality (33%; Ariella, 2023). Those same industries, however, represent a predominantly female workforce. Specifically, within the area of education, 73.6% of the workforce is female, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021). In an ever changing political, social, and financial environment, leadership responsive to consumer needs, adept at crisis management, and transformative is the best way to ensure success in K-12 education. In a workforce of 73.6% females and a student body of roughly 50% females, it is essential to determine factors that aid females in rising beyond the glass ceiling into positions of power within school districts.

### **Background**

Considering that women outnumber men in obtaining college degrees yet need to catch up to their male counterparts in achieving high-level executive positions, it is imperative to look into how women and their roles in the workforce have changed over the past 80 years (Fry, 2022). From the global perspective to the specific educational

focus presented in this study, it is essential as schools reopen in a post-COVID-19 pandemic society to look into what barriers exist for women obtaining leadership positions within education and how strategies have been employed by successful women leading educational institutions.

### **History of Women in the Workforce**

Women were sparse in most careers until World War II (WWII). Out of necessity, this changed during WWII (Breen, 2001). In a post-WWII workforce, the demographics of women did not fall with demobilization as was believed to have occurred. Many women chose to stay employed for various reasons (Goldin, 1991). As women remained in the workforce following WWII, there were developments in how women were treated and protected in the decades following the war. Legislature enacted Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, stating that employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin was against the law.

### **History of Women in Leadership**

Many studies have pointed to the benefit of companies and organizations that promote women leaders to top leadership positions (Hoobler et al., 2018), and benefits range from higher organizational value to innovation, social responsiveness, and philanthropic rationales. Organizations have learned over time that supporting women in leadership protects a company from becoming stagnant in its ideas (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Unfortunately, despite well-known and researched data to support females in leadership positions, the statistics on females who hold top leadership positions have shown little growth over the past 40 years. Many phenomena seek to explain the reason

behind this trend, including the glass ceiling and barriers created by other females (Carli & Eagly, 2001).

Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) reported that the following factors work in a concerted effort to create a glass ceiling for females: conscious and unconscious bias, lack of mentality/initiative to pursue leadership positions, lack of mentors, lack of policies to support work/life balance, “lean-out” phenomenon where women are choosing to slow to stop highly demanding careers, and lack of external networks or opportunity. Although these concepts are primarily institutional, they must be worked on systemically from within an organization and alongside a societal push (Akande, 1994).

On the other hand, barriers to females reaching upper leadership positions are other females’ actions, thoughts, and behaviors. Women who do not build each other up will not move themselves or others up (Ebunuwele, 2020). Although females can do many things to self-sabotage, they can also act in ways that do not support the leadership development of other females. One of these is the phenomenon referred to as *queen bee syndrome* (Berry & Kushner, 1975), which is when a female in an authority position is harder on other females rising to the top than they are toward males (Staines et al., 1974).

### **History of Women in Educational Leadership**

Although women are a prominent component in education, they come behind their male colleagues in leadership positions (Tarbutton, 2019). In addition, current statistics show that White men are still much more visible in educational leadership positions than female or minority counterparts (Morrison, 2018). Although the reality of females gaining status in educational leadership is lagging, there are many instances in which some women use strategies to move up in their districts, such as finding

appropriate sponsors and being willing to look into other districts for positions. Their movement has many positive outcomes that should be studied.

### **History of Women in Superintendencies**

The trend of females in the K-12 superintendency has increased from 27.47% in 2010 to 28.5 % in 2022 (Zippia, 2023b). Although this is positive growth, it also means that the projected gender gap is not likely to close until at least 2040 (Young et al., 2018). Many studies point out that women often find their path to superintendencies by following nontraditional approaches compared to their male counterparts (Kim & Brunner, 2009). A traditional path for a male to a K-12 superintendency would look like teacher, site administrator, district administrator, and then superintendent. A female's path could have lateral moves and perhaps changes in district to get to the superintendent's office.

One standard pipeline for leaders who aspire to the top educational leadership role, the superintendency, is by way of an athletic coaching route (Rousmaniere, 2013). Because males outnumber females in all athletic coaching positions, they have a more significant advantage in moving up the leadership career ladder than females (Sisley & Capel, 1986). This documented career path is a clear example of the following phenomenon within educational leadership: the glass ceiling and elevator, gender-stereotyped role expectations, and lack of sponsorship (Rousmaniere, 2013). The consistent use of the glass elevator by men and the glass ceiling for women further cements gender disparities in leadership (Montgomery, 2019).

## **Barriers Preventing Women from Leadership in Education**

Approximately 75% of public school teachers are women, yet their attainment of superintendency positions is much lower (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Because of the nearly even split of males and females in our schools as students, it is essential to examine what the research says regarding what barriers are keeping females from top leadership positions in school districts. The literature on barriers preventing access to female leadership in K-12 includes discrimination, work, and family balance concerns, lack of networking and mentoring, glass ceiling and glass elevator concerns, gender-stereotyped role expectations, and lack of sponsorship.

Work and family balance concerns, lack of sponsorship and networking, and widespread discrimination were commonly presented as barriers to upper-level management attainment for women. These barriers are primarily attributed to the phenomenon that most superintendents come up through the ranks as secondary principals (Miller et al., 2006). Because secondary principalships are more demanding in the evening and require longer hours than most other principalships, women who subscribe to more maternal gender roles are often less interested or directed away from these positions. Because of so few secondary spots, the need for more sponsorship for these positions is also very high (Montgomery, 2019). These factors lead to discriminatory beliefs on who can adequately do specific jobs.

## **Strategies for Women to Advance in Educational Leadership**

Although barriers for women in senior educational leadership positions are plentiful because of predominantly male attributes being ascribed as beneficial to leadership, females have employed many worthwhile strategies over time to overcome

those barriers (Shibley Hyde & Kling, 2001). Nakitende (2019) reported that women commonly use the following strategies to overcome these barriers: passion, self-efficacy, resilience, determination, communication, flexibility, reflection, adaptability, risk-taking, awareness, relationships, goal-setting, collaboration, commitment, prayer, integrity, research, join associations, and innovation.

These strategies also align with the five domains of successful leadership dimensions (Barsh et al., 2011). These domains are having a strong sense of meaning, managing energy, positive framing, making connections, and participation in other activities.

### **Theoretical Foundations to Explain Gender Roles Within Education**

#### **Social Role Theory**

Social role theory states that society believes that men and women have different strengths and thus attaches different roles to each strength based on what labor is needed in a given society (Eagly & Wood, 2012). The main differences are that men are more agentic, meaning their power is seen in more masterful, assertive, competitive, and dominant roles. On the other hand, because of their maternal nature, females are seen as more communal, meaning they are more friendly, selfless, others-minded, and emotionally expressive.

#### **Role Congruity Theory**

Role congruity theory takes social role theory further by explaining that specific societal roles have a predetermined set of characteristics that many feel are required for the position. This theory is primarily based on the fact that a particular group may have



done well in a position over time, thus leading others to believe that all future leaders in that arena must have the same qualities (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

### **Expectancy Value Theory**

When examining females in leadership roles, one must dive into what drove them to get there and what their expectation of leadership was as a catalyst for their performance. In Atkinson's (1957) seminal work on expectancy-value theory, he discussed this theoretical framework to "explain how the motive to achieve and the motive to avoid failure influence behavior in any situation where performance is evaluated against some standard of excellence" (p. 371). This work also discussed that for some individuals, when they engage in activities to advance and it is seemingly an out-of-reach goal, it causes a more significant motivator but more of a deterrent for others. This would be an essential foundation for women in leadership because risk-taking skills are often seen as a more male-centric way of leadership (Ertac & Gurdal, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework for Disruptive Career Skills**

It is essential to view these concepts within the context of various theoretical foundations relating to gender. One specific framework that needs to be considered when discussing female strategies is the disruption framework outlined in W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) disruptive career skills. These career skills include (a) challenging and influencing authority; (b) preparing but also learning to improvise; (c) finding effective self-promotion; (d) welcoming a less prescribed career path; and (e) aiming for being respected, not just liked.

### **Challenge and Influence Authority**

Although females are usually praised in school for their ability to play the good girl, W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) reviewed how females have learned to challenge and influence authority. An example is women who do not simply give their superiors what they want to hear but are often seen as more indispensable within an organization.

Another example is a person's ability to find a problem that needs to be solved and persuade others in the direction of what that person feels to be the correct answer.

### **Prepare but Also Learn to Improvise**

Although many executives typically go into situations with all the details worked out and planned, W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) discussed the need to practice the art of improvisation. Males, on average, are far more likely to go into a situation with little to no preparation and come up with off-the-cuff solutions. This disruption skill calls on the person to have a game plan and the courage to speak or problem solve on the fly with known facts.

### **Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion**

Within self-promotion, W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) discussed how many women do well in school and believe this pattern will lead to career advancement. The authors explain that for anyone to see the uniqueness and excellence they bring to a leadership position, they need to work on ways to highlight their progress. The ways women self-promote cannot be the same way males promote their advancement but must follow a more indirect method, including ensuring their team is praised for all they do. Women needing to explore different and effective forms of self-promotion is a powerful way to disrupt traditional career patterns.

## **Welcome a Less-Prescribed Career Path**

Although many believe playing it safe and following a prescribed career path will lead to career advancement, W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) suggested that women who are open to alternative career paths often find themselves in more senior positions. The authors also discussed the fact that accepting a less prescribed course that plays to a person's strengths is usually when the most significant gains are made. For example, women who choose to make lateral moves within an organization gain a more comprehensive knowledge of how the system works, thus putting them in better positions to lead the organization down the road.

## **Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked**

Doing the unexpected is the definition of a disruptor, according to W. Johnson and Mohr (2019). In their article, they discussed how females who knowingly choose the path that is not precisely what will make them popular but rather garner the most respect is often the path that leads to the most significant gains. Females, by nature, value relationships and work diligently to be liked by those they work with. Changing the mindset of being respected over liked is what the authors say can disrupt the traditional career path of these women.

## **Statement of Research Problem**

It has been said that any organization takes on the identity of its leadership, good, bad, or otherwise (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Educational leaders, in particular, profoundly impact the staff and students they serve. What a leader does trickles down to the classroom level by providing leadership, supporting district goals for achievement, and developing leadership at all levels of the organization (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The most senior ranking in an educational system is the superintendent, and the impact they

can have on the system can shift the learning outcomes for thousands of students for years to come.

Through their knowledge and influence, superintendents use their transformational leadership skills to shift a school system to increased success and navigate through turbulent times (Myers, 2014). According to an analysis of various 360 leadership assessments, women outperform their male counterparts in 17 of 19 categories of leadership capabilities that differentiate leaders from average or poor leaders (Zenger & Folkman, 2021). Knowing that superintendents have transformative effects on school systems and that females tend to outperform their male counterparts in many of the foundational skills needed to enact change, it is clear that work needs to be done to bridge the gender gap in these positions (Robinson et al., 2017).

In light of the data showing that women demonstrate more transformational skills than their male counterparts, women currently only represent 28.5% of school superintendents. This percentage is in direct contrast to the number of women serving in the overall educational workforce at 75% (Zippia, 2023b). To gain access to superintendency roles, individuals will likely travel through the principal and district office leader route. However, the data are clear: the higher the ladder in education, the fewer females are found. The data are even more interesting when reviewing the gender differences between elementary, middle, and high school principal positions. Elementary principals are 68% female, 40% of middle school principals are women, and 32.7% of high school principals are female. These data are connected to the fact that 81% of new superintendents are from middle/high school or district office positions. Putting those two points together, one can assume that this pipeline only exacerbates the gender gap in school superintendencies (Department for Professional Employees, 2019).

In the months and years following the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States has been plagued with what is known as the *great resignation* (Varghese, 2022). In all fields, the labor shortage has impacted boots on the ground and the pool of eligible and qualified leaders (Tran & Smith, 2022). Women can play a vital role in developing organizations that can create strategies to improve the work environment and thus the workforce for professionals suffering from a staffing shortage, especially in education. Unfortunately, despite the vital role of representative leadership in organizational success, females still need help finding themselves in educational leadership positions to the same extent as males (Zippia, 2023a).

Although the research has identified the internal and external barriers to female advancement within education, such as imposter syndrome, queen bee syndrome, and self-sabotage, it has not investigated how females can break traditional advancement norms and rise to high levels in organizations (Patrick, 2021). W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) described five specific career skills that one can use to disrupt or break away from set-forth norms and thus move oneself forward. These career skills include (a) challenging and influencing authority; (b) preparing but also learning to improvise; (c) finding effective self-promotion; (d) welcoming a less prescribed career path; and (e) aiming to be respected, not just liked. By focusing on how female leaders use these skills for advancement, one may learn how to best invest in female leadership development. New research on these five career skills can help women rise to positions in which their skillset is needed in a societal and political culture that is more complex than ever before.

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods study was to identify and describe the perceived impact of W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) five disruptive career skills on female K-12 superintendents from an elementary background to their advancement to an executive leadership position.

## **Research Questions**

1. What perceived impact did challenging and influencing authority have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
2. What perceived impact did preparing and improvising have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
3. What perceived impact did engaging in effective forms of self-promotion have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
4. What perceived impact did welcoming a less prescribed career path have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
5. What perceived impact did aiming for respect over being liked have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?

## **Significance of the Problem**

K-12 schools are filled with an equal mix of male and female students, yet teaching ranks include around 73.6% female, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021). More alarming is that nationwide, females currently only hold 28.5% of superintendent positions (Zippia, 2023b). Even more alarming, American Association of School Administrators (n.d.) reported in a recent study that of the 297 female superintendents they interviewed, only 130 came from an elementary background. There

are many benefits to having educators with broad subject matter knowledge in positions of leadership in K-12 districts, and one could argue that those with an elementary background by nature have a more expansive breadth of knowledge across content area instructional strategies (Spillane et al., 2003). Pedagogical knowledge is vital to genuinely leading systems to systemic instructional changes, so a system that values secondary experience may lend itself to missing out on leadership meant to transform instruction (Fraser & Fraser, 1979).

There has been ample research in the areas of internal and external barriers that keep women from obtaining these positions. Concepts such as self-sabotage, imposter syndrome, the glass ceiling, and lack of mentorship have credible impacts on how women will and will not advance in a school district (Miller et al., 2006). However, even when considering all the barriers women face in educational administration, researchers can learn from certain females when they study how these women have advanced despite their path being untraditional.

One way these women can be studied is by looking through W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) research about how women can become disruptors in setting their path to the superintendency. By compiling the identified disruptive strategies of these female leaders, the educational system can learn how to encourage, promote, and normalize these behaviors to promote a more diverse representation of leaders who are not traditionally garnering these positions. This study attempted to verify whether these behaviors have been helpful to women in their pursuit of the superintendency and what actual behaviors they have engaged in as part of the five tenets of W. Johnson and Mohr's disruptive skills. Results from this study can be used to influence leaders of

various backgrounds on mentoring and encouraging females to use the five distributive skills to impact their organizations positively. Last, professional organizations such as the American Association of Administrators, Association of California School Administrators, California Association of Latino School Administrators, and National Alliance of Black School Educators can benefit from the information discovered to help female education leaders develop disruptive skills in themselves to have greater upward mobility in districts.

Research exists on how these five disruptive career skills impact women aspiring to top-level leadership positions. However, no research has been dedicated to how career disruption skills have helped females excel in the K-12 learning environment. This study addresses a gap in vital research needed to support female leaders. Studying the lived experiences of females who, by a significant degree, have beat the odds can help the leadership careers of other female leaders aspiring to the school superintendency.

### **Definitions**

The following terms are both operational and theoretical terms relevant to the study. Theoretical definitions are cited from the literature, and operational definitions are the working definitions for this study.

#### **Operational Definitions**

**Affirmative action.** An active effort to improve employment or educational opportunities for members of minority groups and women (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

**Authentic leadership.** Leadership that is a result of strong relational capacity and the symbolic relationship of leader and follower (Eagly, 2005).



**Barriers.** Social constructs that interfere with the advancement of an individual in their career (Cassidy et al., 2021).

**Bias.** An inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair (J. Smith & Noble, 2014)

**Culture.** Learned beliefs, values, symbols, and norms that are common to a group of people (Northouse, 2010).

**Cultural norms.** What is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group (Groysberg et al., 2020).

**Discrimination.** The act, practice, or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).

**Disruptive innovation.** Innovation at the low of the market that eventually upends an industry (Christensen, 1997).

**Diversity.** Refers to the distinct traits that make a person unique, such as sex, race, gender, religion, education, age, ability, and national origin and culture (B. A. Williams, 2020).

**Dominated.** Controlling, prevailing, or powerful position, especially in a social hierarchy (Merriam Webster, n.d.-b).

**Glass ceiling.** An invisible barrier that prevents women from moving beyond a certain point in an organization (Hamilton, 2023).

**Good old boy network.** This refers to an informal system of friendships and connections through which men use their positions of influence by providing favors and information to help other men (Nelson, 2017).

**Inclusion.** The act of including someone or something as part of a group, list, or a person or thing is included (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

**Prescribed career path.** List of steps to take in one's professional life for progressing into different or more advanced roles at work (BambooHR, n.d.)

**Self-promotion.** Communicating one's skills to allow for recognition of strengths by others (Schawbel, 2013).

**Self-sabotage.** Internal thoughts and external actions that work against oneself in getting what a person wants (Ryder & Thompson, 2022).

**Sexism.** Cultural and economic structures that divide genders into dominant or subordinate subjects (Frye, 1983).

**Stereotypes.** Beliefs about the attributes of people classified into a social category (Eagly & Carli., 2007).

### **Theoretical Definitions**

**Disruptive behavior.** The seven-point framework by W. Johnson (2019) is a proven algorithm for developing personal disruption and high growth for individuals, which includes (a) taking the right risks; (b) play to your distinctive strengths; (c) embrace constraints; (d) battle entitlement, the innovation killer; (e) step down, back, or sideways to grow; (f) give failure its due; and (g) be driven by discovery.

**Gender role theory.** How people are expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct themselves based upon their assigned sex (Money, 1973).

**Imposter syndrome.** When a person feels unqualified and unworthy of respect. The individual feels underestimated and undervalued despite their abilities (Clance & Imes, 1978).

**Queen bee syndrome.** Coined to describe the general phenomenon that in particular women who have been individually successful in male-dominated environments are likely to oppose the women's movement (Staines et al., 1974).

**Social role theory.** The part people play as members of a social group (McLeod, 2008).

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to K-12 female public education superintendents in California who had primarily elementary teaching and/or administration experience before the superintendency. Only superintendents who (a) had at least 1 year of experience as a K-12 public education superintendent and (b) exhibited strong verbal and nonverbal communication skills were included in the sample group. To ensure these delimiters, purposeful and convenience sampling were used.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters, a references section, and the appendices. Chapter II presents a review of literature connected to the history of women in educational leadership and an in-depth look at the personal disruption strategies women use to attain high-level positions within school districts. Chapter III describes the research design and methodology of the study. Next, the instrument used to collect the data for the study is described along with the procedures. An overview of the sample selected from the study is described. Chapter IV presents an analysis of the data and a discussion of the findings. Chapter V explains a summary, conclusion, and recommendations for the study. Finally, the study ends with a references section and appendices.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the personal disruption strategies used by female superintendents, it is essential to start with how women have been represented in the workforce and then in leadership positions at large. This literature review provides a review of academic and professional literature about females rising in organizations, namely to the ranks of K-12 superintendents. It goes on to describe both internal and external variables that women face in obtaining these positions along with strategies that have helped these women along their leadership journey. Theoretical foundations are reviewed, and the components outlined in W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) personal disruption framework are described and examined to understand better the impact and the behaviors behind these disruption strategies.

### **History of Women in the Workforce**

At the start of the 20th century, the United States Workforce comprised nearly 5 million women, which was only about 18% of the workforce (Margolin, 1967). That amount increased to 27 million by 1966, accounting for 36% of the workforce. At the time of this study, women account for 56.8% of the workforce in the United States, and females between ages 25 and 54 account for 75%.

In a short amount of time within America's history, women's role in the workforce has changed dramatically (Rojas, 2017). In 1820, women were drawn into work during the Industrial Revolution because they could be hired for lower wages. They were brought in to support the increasing economy. As early as 1844, women began to unionize similarly to their male counterparts to enjoy some of the same protections. In 1869, because of mass casualties from the Civil War, women were drawn into the

workforce to fill the vacant positions left by those who passed in wartime efforts. In 1909, a labor strike spearheaded by women took place in the garment industry, intended to improve wages and working conditions. This strike marked one of the earliest instances in which a predominantly female group took a stand for their rights in the workplace. In 1918 following the First World War, it was deemed necessary to set some industry standards for women in the industrial workforce. By 1943, the power of Rosie the Riveter was in full effect as the strength of females brought to the labor market was well underway throughout the war.

The demands of society have meant that women have taken on more significant roles in many industries while still maintaining their roles within their home life. No event changed the involvement of women in the workforce more than during WWII (Breen, 2001). Following the need for labor in WWII, many women chose to stay employed, and even more decided to start employment after the war. Although historians vary in their perspectives on this matter, it is generally agreed that the war catalyzed a significant increase in women entering the workforce. However, only approximately half of the women employed during the post-war period were used in the labor force in the decade leading up to the war's conclusion (Goldin, 1991). More than a societal need for female labor led women to join the workforce in those years. Perhaps factors such as increases in home innovations, an increased realization of women's strengths in the workforce, and women's desire for more than living inside the home may have kept women wanting more than their traditional role had previously prescribed.

Following the war, treatment of women in the workforce declined as men came home and reclaimed their previous positions, despite women earning 59 cents to the

dollar every man earned at that time (Kanowitz, 1968). In 1963, a significant moment in the history of women in the workforce occurred when the Equal Pay Act was signed. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act made an even more significant impact on women's rights in the workforce by outlawing discrimination based on many factors, including sex.

Although these were both considered landmark decisions made on behalf of women, many believe that these two pieces of legislation only highlighted the differences between men and women rather than providing proper protection. Some of this legislation only exacerbated the division of male versus female labor. Some examples are concerning hours of employment and weight restrictions on jobs for women. Although cloaked under protections, these laws were structural barriers to block women's involvement in certain careers.

When digging further into the birth of Title VII legislation, I found it to be in many ways an afterthought to add sex to the list of reasons why a person could be discriminated against for employment (Kanowitz, 1968). On the basis of sex was only added as a reason for discrimination after a segregationist politician believed that if they added that onto Title VII, it would be deemed so absurd that it would be voted down altogether. Little did he know that enough political and social pressure had been brewing on this topic that it would pass.

In the 60 years since Title VII of the Civil Rights Act passed, much new legislation has ensured that women and men have a fair chance at the table. In 1993, the Family Medical Leave Act provided that women and men could take the appropriate time off for family medical reasons, primarily because of childbirth, so that both genders in the workforce could meet the demands of parenthood (Rojas, 2017). Despite this legislation,

women are still five to eight times more likely to have their employment adversely affected by childcare disparities than their male counterparts (Almeida & Salas-Betsch, 2003)

### **History of Women in Leadership**

Although the number of women in the workforce shows a steady increase over time because of various political and social needs, women's attainment of leadership positions has also increased. Still, it does not match the rate of women entering the workforce (Pew Research Center, 2018). The data are very similar when one looks at Fortune 500 companies, state and federal political leaders, and university leaders.

In 1965, 2% of U.S. senators were female, and in 2021, that number was 26%. There have been periods when more rapid growth was present in women's attainment of these positions, namely from 1990-1995 when the percentage went from 2% to 9%, and between 2015-2021 when it grew from 20% to 26% (Pew Research Center, 2018) The United States House of Representatives comprised 2.3% females in 1965, which grew to 27.3% in 2021, roughly the same rate as those in the Senate with similar spikes between 1990 and 1995 and between 2015 and 2021. From Gladwell's (2008) *Outliers* perspective, it would be important to examine what societal factors were at play from 1990 to 1995 and from 2015 to 2021 that caused such spikes at those times. The literature on this topic reveals that women win elections they run for at similar rates as their male counterparts but do not run for office at the same rates. Simply put, women put themselves out there more during the surge times reported above, thus causing spikes. Political climates have also caused more women to strive for such positions over the past decade.

Women in the state legislature show some interesting trends as well. In 1971 women held 4.5% of positions in state legislatures, and in 2021, they held 30.8% of these positions (Pew Research Center, 2018). The differences in governmental leadership trends exist regarding the gubernatorial appointment rates. In 1975, 2% of governors were female; this number peaked at 18% in 2007 and has since dipped to 10% from 2010-2013 and back up to 18% in 2021. This percentage is far lower than in the federal legislature and other state government positions. Looking through an *Outliers* lens, one could say that gubernatorial appointments are a great example of how women can lead and lead well but are still not getting to the highest positions available within that industry.

The role of politics cannot be denied when it comes to women in leadership, and a great example is to examine the cabinet-level female representation by U.S. presidents over time. Figure 1 shows the female representation by U.S. president.

These data clearly show that political party affiliation impacts whether or not females are sought out and recruited for these high-level leadership positions. Republican candidates, over time, have shown to have far fewer females in cabinet positions than Democratic colleagues. Also, even more interesting is the increase from term one to term two for Democrat presidents, suggesting that they valued the work being done by their female colleagues, thus leading to higher value being found in having them in these positions.

In reviewing the growth of female leaders in the 60 years since Title IX and the Civil Rights Movement, it is essential to note that many female leaders serve as both trailblazers and what Gladwell (2008) called outliers. Former First Lady Michelle Obama



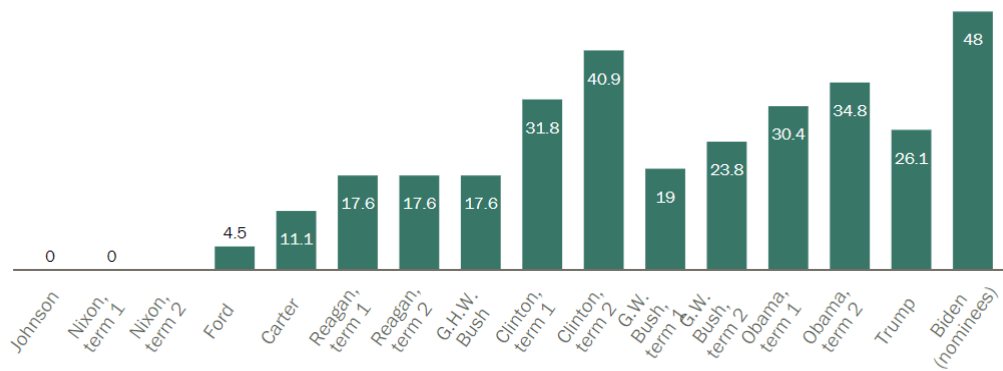
**Figure 1**

*Women in the U.S. Cabinet*

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**Women in the U.S. Cabinet**

*Percentage of Cabinet or Cabinet-level positions held by women*



*Note.* From “The Date on Women Leaders,” by Pew Research Center, September 13, 2018 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/fact-sheet/the-data-on-women-leaders/>).

came from a lower middle-class background and rose in power and influence because of her education and development of the First Lady’s Office into a more than ceremonial position. Malala Yousafzai is an activist who worked hard to make sure she could be the voice of others and spoke out even when that made her world more dangerous. There are iconic leaders such as Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who worked tirelessly and often independently to enact legislation to create meaningful support and change for other women. These women exemplify females who saw a need, knew they could fill it, and moved forward at all costs (LaMantia & Ma, 2022).

## **History of Women in Educational Leadership**

When looking at how women in educational leadership have fared in the job market, it is essential to note that females make up roughly 75% of the teachers in K-12 education. In the early part of the 20th century, the percentage of women who held elementary principal positions declined from 55% in 1928 to 20% in 1973 (Rousmaniere, 2013). The data on early 20th-century secondary positions show that female leadership was deficient and was below 1% by the midcentury. Currently, about 56% of public school administrators are female, and 44% are male, which means the leadership still does not match those being led. However, when the data are examined more carefully, it is crucial to dissect the types of administrative jobs and the level to which they rise in those positions (Zippia, 2023b )

Table 1 shows the differences in males compared to females across private schools and public schools for elementary, intermediate, and high schools. Females are more likely to hold principal positions in private schools and the primary grades. This division of labor also holds major financial ramifications for women. Positions in private schools and primary grades are known for lower compensation levels.

When the prevalence of male principals in public schools compared to private schools at all grade levels is examined, men are far more likely to hold positions in public schools and the secondary grades. When pay at private versus public schools for all positions is compared, educator salaries at private schools are far below public schools (Indeed, 2023). All district pay scales for elementary versus secondary positions show that elementary administrative positions are less compensated than their high school

counterparts, despite teachers at these levels making the same salary whether they are elementary or secondary (Taie & Lewis, 2022).

**Table 1**

*Representation of Male and Female Principals in Private and Public Schools*

	Male principals (public %)	Male principals (private %)	Female principals (public %)	Female principals (private %)
Total principals	44.0%	37.2%	56.0%	62.8%
Elementary principals	31.4%	24.9%	68.6%	75.1%
Intermediate principals	56.3%	55.4%	43.7%	44.6%
High school principals	64.5%	37.5%	35.5%	62.5%
Principal by student enrollment (less than 100)	49.2%	34.0%	50.8%	66.0%
Principal by student enrollment (100–199)	46.8%	35.8%	53.2%	64.2%
Principal by student enrollment (200–499)	38.9%	39.7%	61.1%	60.3%
Principal by student enrollment (500–749)	41.1%	60.2%	58.9%	39.8%
Principal by student enrollment (750–999)	50.1%	56.2%	49.9%	43.8%

The importance of looking at how administrators are dispersed between elementary and secondary contributes to natural career pipelines to district office leadership and superintendencies (Ramaswamy, 2020). As of 2015, 81% of superintendents came to their position through either secondary routes or district office

positions. Thus, because males occupy more of the secondary administrative positions to begin with, they are more likely to hold more superintendencies.

The career path of getting to the principalship shows exciting patterns as well. On their way to the principalship, women and men have equal opportunities to be department heads, vice principals, and club advisors. The differences lie on their road in two main areas: women are twice as likely to serve as curriculum specialists, and men are three times as likely to serve as coaches before their principalship (Maranto et al., 2017). Not only is the path to principal different, but the average time it takes one to get there also has marked gender disparity. Male principals take an average of 10.7 years, and female principals take an average of 13.2 years.

The current movement structure from principalship to district office shows that opportunities for the vast number of elementary leaders (primarily females) are much fewer than those opportunities for secondary leaders. Leaders of secondary schools (primarily males) are perceived as better candidates for higher-level positions because of larger schools with consequently larger budgets, more programs, more extensive facilities, and more community visibility, primarily because of athletics (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Sargent, 2001). The size of secondary sites often means that these principals spend more time facilitating adult interactions (stereotypically masculine) versus working on one-on-one relationships with young children (stereotypically feminine).

### **History of Women in Superintendencies**

In 2000, only 14% of superintendents were female (Kowalski et al., 2010). In 2021, this percentage was 28.5%. In 2022 it fell to 6.7%, based on recent data (Zippia,

2023a). This recent decline requires the examination of what possible social and political pressures may have halted the movement to provide more representation of women in these crucial roles.

When the timing of a drastic decline in female superintendents is examined, it is essential to note that in a study of 500 of the largest school districts, between March 2020 and September 2022, 246 (49%) of the 500 largest school districts in the country underwent or were currently experiencing a change in superintendents (ILO Group, 2022). When examining the data on the 246 superintendents who left their positions, I found that 94 were female. The stress created for school district administrators because of the COVID-19 pandemic created record numbers of leadership changes over this period; the pandemic saw an increase in superintendent turnover rates by over 46%. The pandemic is one of the most divisive, political, and sociocultural shifts that most countries have endured in modern history, so this decline coincided with this time in history.

Data on the types of districts also show that the demographic makeup of a district largely determines whether the superintendent is more or less likely to be turned over (ILO Group, 2022). Small towns and rural areas were more likely to experience a change in superintendents than their urban counterparts. In addition to top leadership being turned over, males were two times more likely to leave their positions during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the districts with men were turned over, those districts were usually those with more students on free or reduced lunch, English Learners, or students of color. Additionally, predominantly White districts were more likely to replace the superintendent with a male if their superintendency was turned over.

In addition to COVID-19 pandemic factors related to the female decline in superintendencies, it is essential to note that patterns related to career paths are another systemic piece of the puzzle that keeps women from these positions. Even the earliest research on the career path of male versus female teachers shows they have an “in and out” mentality regarding positions. Females plan to move into lateral positions within education more often than not. In contrast, men showed a more “in and up” mentality whereby teaching is always considered a stepping stone into higher positions (Zeigler, 1967). Evidence shows that women value teaching and learning more than the politics and networking required to rise into leadership roles (Gross & Trask, 1976; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Because the role of school boards in the superintendent search process cannot be understated, looking at how they primarily view the selection and evaluation of superintendent effectiveness over time also helps to understand why what is valued matters. In a 2010 survey of the most important criteria a school board looks at to determine superintendent effectiveness, the following three criteria emerged: board-superintendent relationship, employee morale, and student safety (Maeroff, 2010). In addition, it was reported that superintendent’s contracts primarily focus on general management and formal job requirements like work hours and degrees but rarely include academic duties or goals.

To summarize, when the role of instructional outcomes is not a primary focus in hiring and evaluating superintendents, those candidates who have a strong background in that area will likely be locked out, which tends to be elementary and thus predominantly female administrators. When reviewing how the role of coaching in the principal pipeline

has shaped how many males rise to superintendents, I found that the seminal work of Rousmaniere (2013) explained it best:

The work of athletic coaching-communication, authority, disciplinary training of students, and public relations-aligned with the emerging professional identity of the new principal and, in a happy coincidence, provided the masculine image that appealed to both the public and school reformers. (p. 101)

This masculine image explains why by 1970, nearly 80% of all school superintendents had coached athletic teams before their superintendency.

## **Barriers to Women in Leadership**

### **Internal Barriers**

Although the previous discussion focused on the historical aspects of women in leadership roles, particularly in the field of education, it is important to acknowledge that internal factors are regularly responsible for keeping women from more senior positions. These factors include self-sabotaging behaviors, negative self-talk, and imposter syndrome.

### ***Self-Sabotage***

Lerner (2012) described the following nine behaviors as critical in self-sabotage by female leaders: thinking too small, worrying, misunderstanding yourself, dishonesty, holding back, not taking time for reflection, inhibiting desires, isolating, and disempowering other women.

In the realm of thinking too small is the idea of minimizing, and women often do this in simple ways: not taking up the physical space in a room that their male counterparts do, maintaining a softer tone in meetings despite that it is not required,

passing off contributions as a by-product of what one's team has done, and not remaining present in situations (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018). Ultimately, it is the idea of asking oneself, "Am I living up to my potential and creating goals that align with that potential?" When women see their actual value, they can take up the space they deserve in all work environments.

Often women worry without having a source for their worry. Frequently this worry causes a drain in energy that could otherwise be used toward constructive preparation (Lerner, 2012). Worrying, also seen as ruminating, can also be counterintuitive in that it has the innate ability to make one feel worse and get in the way of solving problems. In contrast, men seem to move on at faster rates than women do (Jose & Brown, 2008). It is essential to be seen as confident in executive leadership positions. If someone is constantly worried about what has happened or what is going to happen, others begin to doubt their self-confidence (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018).

When women lack understanding of themselves, it comes from an inability to see their strengths and weaknesses and develop ways to use them to move forward and create action items to improve upon weaknesses (Lerner, 2012). In many circles, women fail to see their so-called feminine values as powerful means to use in office interactions. In a study by Gerzema and D'Antonio (2013), 64,000 people were asked to rate the top 10 leadership competencies they felt were desirable among modern leaders. Eight top 10 competencies are traditionally viewed as feminine, and two are usually considered masculine. Of those commonly viewed as feminine, the following list emerged: expressive, plans for the future, reasonable, loyal, flexible, patient, intuitive, and collaborative. The two generally viewed as masculine were decisive and resilient.



Whether or not women know and understand how to use these characteristics is crucial to their ability to use them to overcome self-sabotage.

Dishonesty for women is more about knowing when to say yes or no and being true to one's limitations on time (Lerner, 2012). Helgesen and Goldsmith (2018) referred to this level of dishonesty as the disease to please. Women often spread themselves so thin that they encourage too many people to rely on them. Once they cannot meet all those people's needs without being honest about their time, they often have stakeholders who view this stretch too thin as a lack of follow-through.

Women often self-sabotage by letting their inner critic control them, often by letting it quiet them when they should be heard (Lerner, 2012). Usually, women are made to feel as though they have too much; too much emotion, too many words, and too much disclosure (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018). This feeling of being too much can lead to stifling what makes women genuinely authentic leaders.

Not actively pursuing time for self-reflection is another example of self-sabotage. Women take on multiple vital roles both at work and home and at times, these roles leave them unable to take the time to reflect on how their leadership is going (Lerner, 2012). By judging themselves, holding onto the past, and dwelling in a time and place they are not in, women miss the opportunity for genuine self-reflection. Failing to recognize and appreciate all parts of who they are as leaders, good and bad, is where women fail in self-reflection (Pianta, 2020).

Knowing what women want and not being afraid to say it is where women seem to fall short, probably because they tend to worry about others first (Lerner, 2012). When women develop great ideas and keep them in a small group, it fails to inform the larger

community, which could then create a collective knowledge of the woman's strengths. The concept of putting one's job before one's career is when females spend all their time doing the day-to-day tasks of their jobs rather than seeking opportunities to publicly claim what they want next or how they are helping their organization. These efforts tend to stifle attempts to advance their careers (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018).

Lerner (2012) described the need to build a power web of individuals so that one can avoid the isolation trap that senior leadership can often lead to for women. This isolation translates into women who lack sponsorship and mentorship. Helgesen and Goldsmith (2018) highlighted that women tend to build relationships but fall behind their male counterparts in leveraging these relationships to further the organization's goals and, most definitely, as a career advancement tool. Isolation is the exact opposite of skillful use of leverage, and women need to learn specific and mutually beneficial uses for power to avoid the isolation trap that is part of self-sabotage.

The final type of self-sabotage involves women disempowering other women (Lerner, 2012). Although at first glance, one may assume that this is not an internal barrier, the message this sends to the organization does not encourage others to believe in their leadership. Women often disempower other women by failing to give constructive feedback and providing unsolicited help offers instead (Jones & King, 2016).

### ***Negative Self-Talk***

Another internal barrier for women happens when they engage in various negative self-talk. Women are said to engage in negative self-talk more because of having lower confidence levels than their male counterparts (Kay & Shipman, 2014). The internal dialogue directly correlates with the person's feelings about their skills in a particular

area. Negative self-talk affects a person's behavior: it dilutes one's value proposition, stagnates one's ability to self-promote, lessens one's leadership presence, and reduces one's likelihood to take risks. Negative self-talk comes in the following forms: catastrophizing, blaming, rehashing, and rehearsing, all of which have unique ways that create barriers for female leaders (Stahl, 2021).

Catastrophizing is when a person plays the "what if" game in a loop in their brain. These thoughts lead to greater feelings of anxiety and depression. Some examples of self-talk catastrophizing thoughts include asking

- What if this happens?
- What if that happens?
- This would be the worst if ...

When a leader takes on these thoughts, the impact on their mental health and ability to see clearly could be impaired, thus leading to impairment in overall leadership functioning (Stahl, 2021).

In the context of negative self-talk, it is important to recognize that assigning blame can be a two-way street, as you might excessively blame yourself for things that have gone awry. Also, if you consistently hold others responsible for what has gone wrong in your world, this level of blame is not healthy either. When you blame others for the situation, the most significant concern is that you take the ability to solve things away from yourself (Stahl, 2021). The common pitfall related to blaming is the perfection trap, whereby a person believes perfection matters most in leadership. Still, very often, the balance of model and learning from failure will help a person not to rely on blaming themselves or others for explaining a situation (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018).

Rehashing in self-talk is when a person puts a conversation or situation on a constant replay in their brain to make sense of it (Stahl, 2021). Another term to define this is ruminating, which according to Helgesen and Goldsmith (2018) had different effects on men versus women. When men ruminate, they often report blame and anger toward another person, but women tend to direct that anger toward themselves when they ruminate. Both men and women will find this behavior counterproductive because it makes a person feel worse and creates problems in their ability to solve problems.

Rehearsing is taking on a future conversation in your head so often that it acts as a stall for genuinely having a difficult conversation (Stahl, 2021). The biggest pitfall in this is that rehearsing a conversation takes out half of the dialogue and does not allow the back-and-forth of the conversation to happen. Building truly collaborative relationships at work requires symbiotic connections to be effective, and a unilateral discussion will not get to that point.

### ***Imposter Syndrome***

I still sometimes feel like a loser kid in high school, and I just have to pick myself up and tell myself that I'm a superstar every morning so that I can get through this day and be for my fans what they need for me to be.

—Lady Gaga.

The concept of imposter syndrome knows no limits, especially for women, as evidenced by the quote from one of the most successful and legendary recording artists ever. The statistics on its prevalence have crossed through all industries since the inception of research on the topic in 1978 (Clance & Imes, 1978). Impostor syndrome or phenomenon is based on the idea that high-achieving, educated women doubt that they

deserve or should be allowed in their position. The most significant difference they found between men and women that has led to this feeling is the male idea that success comes from within. The female inclination to believe that it resulted from external factors. The prevalence of imposter syndrome across industries shows the following:

- 75% of executive women report experiencing imposter syndrome at different points in their careers.
- 85% of individuals believe that imposter syndrome is a common experience by women in corporate positions in the United States.
- 74% of female executives do not believe that their male counterparts experience imposter syndrome.
- 81% of female executives believe they have more pressure than their male colleagues not to fail.

It is important to note that since the seminal research on this topic began, additional attention has been brought to light that males experience imposter syndrome at roughly the same rates since the inception of this topic (Bravata et al., 2020).

In their research, Clance and Imes (1978) traced the roots of imposter syndrome to one of two family structures. The first is that the female has a close relative that the family believes is intellectually superior, but the opposite is true. In this instance, she works hard to prove them wrong but ultimately falls back into the beliefs held by the family. The second is that the female is told that she can do great things, and when she starts to encounter difficult things in adult life, she is left believing that her parents were not truthful with her. Regardless of how a female comes to her sense of imposter syndrome, there are four studied patterns of behavior that any female struggling with this

is sure to have: some or all diligence and hard work, a sense of phoniness, using charm and perceptiveness to win the approval of superiors, and negative social consequences for confidence in ability.

The first behavior of diligence and hard work is a cycle by which any stray from hard work will cause others to find out that she does not have the skills or experience required of a position (Clance & Imes, 1978). Effort and hard work are seen as viable substitutes for the ability of someone with imposter syndrome. They spend large amounts of energy to appear confident but lack the confidence to realize they also have large amounts of ability (Yaffe, 2020).

The second behavior involves a sense of phoniness (Clance & Imes, 1978). When this happens, the person does not always voice their ideas and tailors their interactions based on how they perceive the audience will take them. Another example would be including all of your bosses' ideas despite knowing that you have ideas that could improve upon theirs only not to expose yourself if you genuinely do not measure up.

The third behavior is the females' charm or perceptiveness to gain an ally (Clance & Imes, 1978). The problem with this is that although she may gain an ally temporarily until she truly believes that she is of value to a company or organization, she doubts whether or not the ally is truly impressed with her talents or abilities or by only what she has projected to them. In addition, because the female is seeking this validation, it only makes her feel more inadequate in why she should need this level of validation.

Last, there is a belief that if a woman is confident and believes in herself, she will bring a layer of negative attention because this type of attitude breaks traditional gender norms (Clance & Imes, 1978). This is why researchers and social commentators are

implored to stop the narrative on imposter syndrome as a required component of female development. Simply put, imposter syndrome took a fairly universal feeling of discomfort, second-guessing, and mild anxiety in the workplace and pathologized it, especially for women. In addition, the idea is that fixing confidence will never equate to fixing competence, so perhaps focusing on this is not the best way to improve modern feminist practices to support women (Tulshyan & Burey, 2021).

### **External Barriers**

Many external barriers impact how women rise in organizations. For a long time, gender-based research focused on how women compare to men regarding leadership. Still, researchers eventually found value in looking at females in leadership and in understanding that their world is different. Studying through the lens of their world was more beneficial to see how to change the circumstances they encounter (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010). Two interrelated barriers that impact how women rise at a different rate in leadership are the glass ceiling and glass elevator phenomena, both of which are indicative of what one sees in educational leadership. Another external barrier that seems counterintuitive to moving women forward is the idea of the queen bee syndrome whereby a female in a senior position fails to support other females and often makes their path more difficult (Staines et al., 1974). Last, one could not talk about external barriers to leadership without discussing the pivotal role many females play in their homes and how this can impact upward mobility in leadership positions. This is what can be known as the maternal wall (J. Williams, 2004).

### ***Glass Ceiling Versus Glass Elevator***

The term *glass ceiling* was originally used by Loden in 1978 during a panel discussion about women's aspirations (Pelican Bay Post, 2011). At the outset, the panel had taken on the perspective of what women can do differently to help their careers until Loden explained the systemic invisible barriers and actions that keep women from advancement, and in later years the idea was widened to include minorities in those affected by the glass ceiling. In 1991, the U.S. Department of Labor expanded the definition. It sheds more light by defining the glass ceiling as those artificial barriers based on attitudinal and organizational barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organizations into management level positions (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). Some of the factors that create a glass ceiling can include stereotyped gender roles (J. Williams, 2004), hierarchical gender positioning in the workplace (Washington et al., 2007), and decision makers being disproportionately male (Bonawitz & Andel, 2009).

Because the glass ceiling focuses on barriers keeping women from progressing in organizations, it may be essential to reframe that in the area of education, knowing that females make up roughly 75% of staff. In light of education being divergent in data from other industries, the question is not what keeps women from more senior positions but what accelerates their male counterparts faster; thus, the glass elevator phenomenon for men is discussed.

Because females dominate the workforce in education but not leadership positions, it is accurate to assume that the tenets of the glass elevator are at work. C. Williams (1988) looked at men rising in leadership in alleged pink collar work such as



nursing, librarianship, elementary school teaching, and social work. The men in these organizations felt that, to some extent, they had an invisible push behind them to move up through their organizations and reported things such as the preference to hire men over women in these professions, tracking into administrative roles, and more frequent supervision by members of the same sex.

Males in female-dominated professions report that their gender is often seen as a positive difference (C. Williams, 1988). Thus, they tend to form bonds with other males to show their differences from the female majority clearly. In pink collar fields, men reported that negative stereotyping from outsiders also pushed them to attain more senior positions. Although the role of the glass ceiling for women cannot be understated, it is far more likely that educational leadership disparity in gender is more a result of the glass elevator that men face when entering a female-dominated workforce.

### ***Queen Bee Syndrome***

It seems counterintuitive to assume that women can be the most significant barrier to other women when it comes to career advancement. Still, the theories and research about the prevalent queen bee syndrome confirm this can be the case. The research has shown that queen bee behaviors are found in those leadership positions in which these women are surrounded primarily by males. It has shown that senior leaders are more critical of their junior leaders and thus do not generally endorse increasing females to leadership positions (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2004, 2012; Faniko et al., 2017)

Three common behaviors were noted in the literature regarding queen bees. The following is what most literature has said regarding those behaviors:

- distancing themselves from junior women by claiming they are different from that group
- assimilation with men by taking on more masculine tendencies in the workplace
- opposition to policies set to upset the status quo (Derks et al., 2015, 2016)

It is important to note why women would engage in these tactics, especially when it is known that more women at the top means more room for women at the top. Ryder and Briles (2003) discussed how the following can cause women to act against their gender:

- competition because of demographic and social trends
- pay disparity
- economic downturns that feed greater competition
- rise in acceptable unethical behavior
- alliances and cliques
- female propensity to increased personal interaction
- female propensity to more widespread concerns
- women must do more to prove knowledge base
- women being bold enough to speak up about queen bee syndrome
- stereotypes of how women handle disagreements
- women are less likely to confront harassing behavior

### **Strategies for Advancement of Women in Educational Leadership**

Although there are many barriers for women in the realm of educational leadership, there are many ways that women are successful in their rise to the top of

school districts. Next, external and internal strategies that assist women to rise and why they are successful are discussed.

## **Networking**

An external strategy that women can employ to help themselves is by harnessing networking. Men do this with great ease through external activities such as golf or sports, but women often do not engage in these valuable opportunities as often. In a 2022 Forbes coaching article, Neale discussed the following as reasons why women should step into the networking domain: it allows the advancement of one's own and others' careers, it allows one to accomplish and contribute more, it provides the ability to access and extend support to others, it advances one's learning and growth, it activates creativity and innovation, and finally, it amplifies one's voice through the system.

Women are the last to want to be involved in conversations regarding office politics, but often first in their ability to build and connect with others. One such networking tool that women use is the idea of relationship mapping whereby the woman looks to see whom she has a connection with and then does deep work in figuring out whether there are others she should work on building connections with to ensure her network is vast (Heath et al., 2017). In addition to seeing how to make connections that will push oneself forward, it is crucial to make sure networking connections are diversified in nature in their location both inside and outside one's organization, whether with females or males. Although it may seem initially more comfortable to stick to female mentors for females and males for males, both sexes need to seek diverse perspectives in their networking to help foster higher levels of innovative thinking (Ibarra, 2016).

## **Mentoring**

Mentoring is one of the key ways that women advance in educational leadership. Through mentorship relationships, women gain inspiration, encouragement, and strength from their mentors. T. M. Brown (2005) explained how mentorship gets women to higher positions and plays equally as vital a role in keeping them in those positions. Bynum (2000) discussed mentors' role in helping women break the barriers they see in their path. Women with positive role models and mentors are highly correlated to their upward mobility in organizations (Noel-Batiste, 2009).

G. H. Brown (2011) stressed that for mentorship to work, it must have a two-way street whereby women are not only seeking mentorship but also seeking out those to mentor. Mentorship must include teaching the game's rules to the organization, opportunities to try out skills and get feedback, and opportunities to sponsor into high-level positions to be considered truly transformative (Mertz et al., 1987).

Although there has been ample research on mentorship, there is also the notion that its closely related cousin, sponsorship, is more responsible for female advancement. Helgesen and Goldsmith (2018) stated that mentors and sponsors are different in that mentors offer advice and serve as a sounding board, but sponsors are less about talk than action. The problem with sponsorship with all organizations, especially in education, is that there are so few spots at the top to sponsor folks. This lack of sponsorship often makes women feel as though they do not have what it takes when, in all reality, they have not had the opportunity to find someone who believes in them. When a lack of mentors or sponsors exists, the most important thing for a woman is to gain allies who support them

as leaders so those leaders above them see how supported they are by those around them (Sandberg, 2015).

### **Overcoming Self-Confidence Issues**

Self-confidence has a recent history of being studied for its prevalence as a genetic trait of humans, meaning there is evidence to prove that up to 25% of it can be inherited (Harper et al., 2014). Despite their genetic link to confidence, scientists have concluded that although genetics may drive part of a person's confidence, gender does not have any genetic differences in the presentation of this trait. So one could wonder what in nature causes men to act more confidently than women. Specific work on overcoming self-confidence issues is paramount to building up women in all industries.

Confidence is built over time with success in the actions one takes (Harper et al., 2014). Nurturing self-confidence requires high levels of expectations coupled with support. Building confidence means doing things you have not done, having setbacks, and revisiting your approach based on those learnings. Pushing people into areas of discomfort is where self-confidence and grit are developed (Duckworth et al., 2007). When a group of female superintendents was asked what helps them increase their level of self-confidence, they reported the following as critical actions/behaviors that have led to increased self-confidence: networking with other people, staying current in the field, and leading by servant leadership (Kelsey et al., 2014).

### **Constructive Preparation**

For leaders to be genuinely transformational, they must hone their ability to engage in constructive preparation. This leadership attribute has been shown to benefit both males and females, but especially females (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe,

2008). Not only is the internal ability of females to constructively prepare important, but recognizing the need for organizations to be intentional about preparing females for leadership roles is just as vital (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As mentioned previously, sponsorship over mentorship is another way that females can constructively prepare themselves for growth in their leadership (Hewlett, 2013).

For many leaders, articulating their vision for an organization is one of the critical behaviors that either propel their leadership skills or hold them back (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). These visioning and communication skills can be honed and practiced in constructive preparation. Structuring and preparing formal and informal communication help leaders build strong networks of support that help them move initiatives and gather sponsorship (Kolb & Bartunek, 1992).

### **Theoretical Foundations to Explain Gender Roles Within Education**

#### **Social Role Theory**

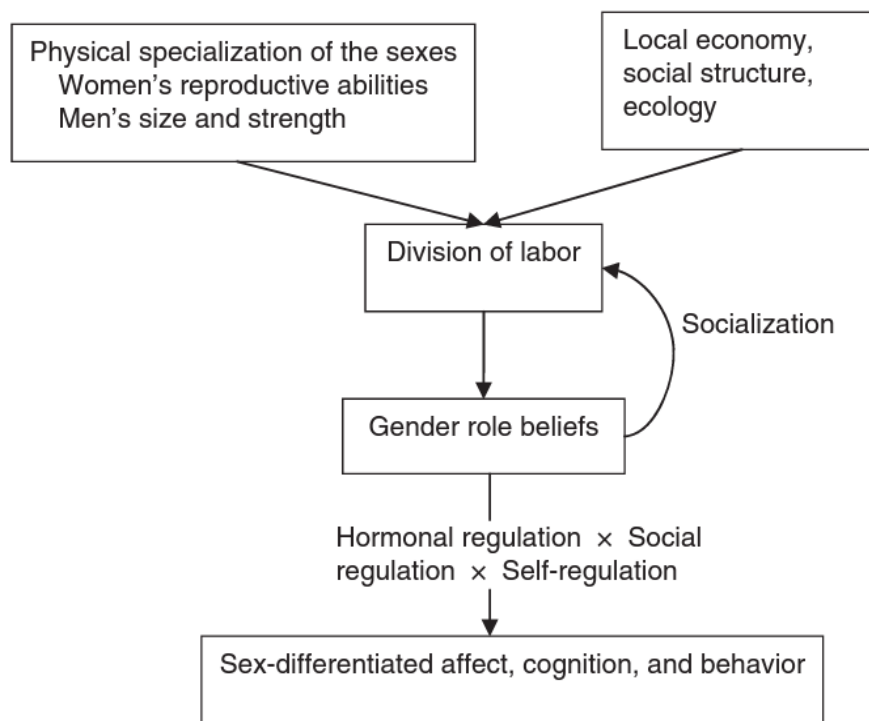
Social role theory is based on the work of Eagly and Wood (2012) and attempts to explain how a society ascribes specific roles to men or women based on perceived strengths and weaknesses observed over time. It is thought that physical gender strengths caused many societies to assume that males would be better equipped to handle more demanding jobs. The role of women in childbirth made societies believe that women were better equipped to serve in more nurturing roles. Social role theory is best defined in Figure 2 from Eagly and Wood.

This figure explains that physical differences combined with the local economy and societal rules have led to a division of labor that has created beliefs about what each gender should be doing; then, society has socialized both men and women into these roles

over time. This socialization has led to different thinking, affect, and behaviors from each of the genders. In education, that has meant that females have in more significant numbers taken on the nurturing role of classroom teachers, and males have taken on the role of leader more often.

**Figure 2**

*Diagram of Social Role Theory*



*Note.* From “Social Role Theory,” by A. H. Eagly and W. Wood, 2012, in P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, and E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, p. 465, SAGE Publications.

Within social role theory, there are two kinds of expectations or norms for the roles; descriptive and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms describe what the gender does, and injunctive norms describe what gender is supposed to do (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). This is important when discussing female administrators because it could speak to the

explicit or implicit expectations that others have regarding their performance in their positions.

### **Role Congruity Theory**

Role congruity theory expands upon the social role theory by taking the notions of what genders are perceived to be better at in various positions and adding that a given position is done best when it has the qualities most common by certain genders. In essence, it creates an expectation that to succeed in that position, one must have the qualities ascribed to the gender most often assigned to that position (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Role congruity theory is essential to understand in leadership because leadership has a set of attributes that are most inherently masculine, and this can lead to expectations for both male and female leaders to ascribe to.

Eagly and Karau (2002) explained that females face two forms of prejudice regarding role congruity theory. First, females are often evaluated more harshly than men in the potential for leadership because of existing stereotypes favoring men in these positions. Second, there is a harsher evaluation of women in leadership because when they do show these attributes, they are not seen in a favorable light than men showing the same attributes are seen in.

### **Expectancy Value Theory**

Expectancy value theory is a motivation-based framework based on combining the following factors in building up what an individual or a set of individuals view as crucial to a person's success: self-perceptions, socialization processes, and contextual factors (Eccles et al., 1998). A person's individual and collective identity and self-



concept are shown in how they value certain activities, which can influence their motivation and choices (Eccles, 2009).

The expectancy component of the theory posits that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities and the likelihood of success significantly influence their motivation. This component suggests that female leaders' self-efficacy beliefs play a critical role in shaping their aspirations and persistence in pursuing leadership positions. Women who possess high self-efficacy for leadership are more likely to set ambitious goals, persist in the face of challenges, and actively pursue leadership development opportunities (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework for Disruptive Career Skills**

In W. Johnson's (2015) *Disrupt Yourself: Putting the Power of Disruptive Innovation to Work*, the concept of personal disruption and how individuals can embrace change, take risks, and leverage disruptive innovation to accelerate their professional growth and success was discussed in its relation to a world and labor market that thrives on innovation and individual's use of divergent choices. W. Johnson, an expert on innovation and personal disruption, outlines a framework for individuals to navigate their careers by embracing and harnessing disruptive forces. She suggested that individuals should be willing to step outside their comfort zones, challenge conventional wisdom, and proactively seek new opportunities. W. Johnson introduced the concept of the S-curve of learning, which illustrates how individuals progress from a phase of rapid growth and learning to a phase of mastery and, eventually, stagnation. She emphasized the importance of continually seeking new learning curves and reinventing oneself to avoid complacency and ensure ongoing growth and fulfillment. The book provides

practical strategies, examples, and case studies to help individuals disrupt themselves effectively. W. Johnson also covered topics such as identifying and evaluating personal strengths, taking calculated risks, building supportive networks, and embracing failure as a catalyst for growth.

### **Five Disruptive Career Skills**

W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) discussed how the very skills that helped women be high achievers in the classroom may be keeping them out of the boardroom. Although W. Johnson (2019) later wrote about how disruption is a powerful tool in taking organizations to the next level, the work focused on how it can be used on the individual level, especially for women. W. Johnson and Mohr narrowed the disruptive behaviors they believed women needed to engage in to help them be seen as competent leaders into the following areas: figure out how to challenge and influence authority, prepare but also learn to improvise, find effective forms of self-promotion, welcome less prescribed career path, and go for being respected not just liked.

### **Examples of Career Disruption Skills for Women**

Many women have used career disruption skills to their advantage in modern history. Some examples of women who have used disruptive skills toward career advancement include Facebook chief operating officer's Sheryl Sandberg when she left a coveted position at Google to join a growing new company called Facebook and used her innovative new ideas in a market willing to grow them. Another example is Ursula Burns, former CEO of Xerox, who challenged traditional expectations and norms for women and thus created new ways of dealing with old workplace issues. Another example is Sara Blakely, founder of SPANX shapewear, who took risks by challenging industry norms to

become a globally recognized brand. The skills discussed in the following sections are those outlined by W. Johnson and Mohr in their 2019 Harvard Business Review article in the book *Women at Work*.

### **Challenge and Influence Authority**

When women challenge and influence authority, they often use their collaboration skills and transformational leadership style (W. Johnson & Mohr, 2019). Leveraging these unique leadership skills helps to create a more effective and inclusive leadership style (Eagly et al., 2003). In addition, women often challenge the status quo in an organization when they are brought in during times of crisis to save the day, as evidenced by the glass cliff phenomenon. The glass cliff shows how women often challenge traditional notions of authority by assuming leadership in challenging contexts (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010).

Women also work on challenging authority as they bring with them a unique set of familial expectations and often work to make sure their work environments are conducive to these types of demands on leadership (Gartzia & Vinkenburg, 2011). As the number of female leaders moves to surpass the number of male leaders, it can be expected that organizations that reach a critical mass of females will lean into better work structures to support the familial needs of not only working mothers but working fathers as well (Konrad et al., 2008). J. L. Smith and Huntoon (2014) showed that women's involvement with and influence over senior leadership allows for greater degrees of innovation and drive and for larger organizational inclusivity.

One industry in which the effects of women challenging and influencing authority are evident is politics. B. C. Johnson and Brown (2019) argued that the impact of women

and their power dynamics has changed the democratic landscape of what was historically thought of as a traditionally male-dominated field. They reported that women's political influence has had the single greatest impact on equity and social justice topics.

Additionally, women who challenge their leaders lead by example and encourage other women to step into these roles. A singular example of this in politics, although not literally a politician, is former First Lady Michelle Obama. She learned from her position that she could leverage initiatives that worked on childhood obesity, higher education for all, education for girls, and various other social campaigns.

Although there are many benefits to women working to challenge and influence authority, it does not come without possible pitfalls. The research has shown that the following are potential ways that challenging and influencing authority can have adverse effects on female career advancement: gender-based backlash, stereotype threat, glass ceiling, and double standards concerning gender expectations. Eagly and Carli (2007) showed that women who challenge and influence authority may be perceived as violating societal expectations, leading to negative perceptions and evaluations from others. Spencer et al. (1999) showed that women who challenged authority could have their competence and leadership ability called into question because a stereotyped threat could be developed about them. Glass and Cook (2016) showed that the glass ceiling phenomenon was present in women who attempted to challenge and influence authority. Rudman and Glick (2001) talked about how women faced a double-bind position in leadership to display both communal and agentic qualities and that an assertion to challenge authority may play against this balance in the way of a double standard.

## **Prepare but Also Learn to Improvise**

Ideal leaders can think critically, adapt, and learn to improvise (H. Gardner & Laskin, 1995; W. Johnson & Mohr, 2019). Females who work on their ability to mix preparation with improvisation can find themselves better prepared for all types of leadership roles. When females explore specific strategies meant to embrace flexibility and adaptability, they build their ability to seize opportunities and handle unexpected situations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Another reason why developing this skill is essential for women is that they often excel at their employment of empathy, which can be a precursor tool for building skills in preparation and improvisation (Gentry et al., 2007).

Eagly and Karau (2002) discovered that preparedness increases the likelihood that others will view a leader as competent and also increases the likelihood that a leader will be successful in challenging authority, discussed in the first disruptive behavior. For most leaders, this preparation comes from formal education, vocational training, professional development programs, and mentorship opportunities (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In addition to those preparation forms, the following personal development tasks are other practices vital for leaders: developing emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and building resiliency (Goleman, 1995).

When leaders improvise well, they can think more creatively, take calculated risks, and respond effectively to rapidly changing situations. The strategies used by leaders to grow their skills of improvisation include flexibility and agility, confidence in decision making, and effective communication. Women more open to change can adapt to evolving situations, adjust their approach, and seize unexpected opportunities (Lampel, 2019). When women build confidence in their abilities and decision-making skills, they

can make quick, effective decisions in difficult situations (Kay & Shipman, 2014).

Finally, no improvisation can be understood or appreciated without effective communication skills that foster understanding, influence, and collaborative problem solving (Powell & Greenhaus, 2010).

Many female leaders have become adept at pairing preparation with improvisation, such as Jacinda Ardern (prime minister of New Zealand), Mary Barra (chief executive officer of General Motors), and Angela Merkel (former chancellor of Germany). Ardern is known for meticulous preparation, as seen by her evidence-based policy-making and clear communication. Still, she has also shown a keen level of adaptability because she was one of the first leaders to implement strict lockdown procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ardern, 2020). Barra has spent her entire career learning all about the vast technical components of the automotive industry and has done so with a strong focus on strategic planning, but she also fosters innovation to keep up with competitors in a global market in regard to electric and self-driving vehicles (General Motors, 2021). Merkel was known for conducting thorough research to aid in policy-making. Still, when faced with events like the European financial crisis or large numbers of refugees, she used her vast knowledge base to come up with decisive and timely actions (A. Smith, 2020).

Some possible negative outcomes of using preparation coupled with improvisation are a lack of support or recognition and an increased sense of Imposter Syndrome. Because of gender stereotypes, their improvisational skills and preparedness may go unnoticed or be undervalued, thus limiting their opportunities for growth and advancement (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This lack of support can be demotivating and could

lead to a decreased desire to seek new opportunities to practice skills of preparation coupled with improvisation. Imposter Syndrome can hinder their ability to embrace improvisation fully, because they may be more likely to second guess their decisions or hesitate to take risks (Clance & Imes, 1978).

### **Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion**

Females in all industries, but particularly those industries in which male-dominated leadership is present, face the daunting task of finding ways to self-promote that are mindful of a potential backlash to missteps in this area (Brescoll et al., 2010). Some studies show that a collective effort of women to promote other women is another way to build opportunities for effective forms of self-promotion (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004).

Self-promotion is viewed as the other side of the modesty coin, which for women is harder to flip without careful planning. However, the literature has shown that women who engage in self-promotion often perceive themselves as more competent (Rudman & Glick, 2001). There is ample literature that has shown how training for women in communication on how their efforts and achievements led to the completion of projects has shown to assist in career advancement. By outlining the specific actions a female takes, she relays to others how her role was necessary to the process without centering the conversation on who she is but instead on what she has done.

Self-promotion helps females to advance by assisting them to overcome societal gender stereotypes (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Females can challenge the biases by increasing their visibility and allowing them to highlight their achievements. Females can then counteract negative stereotypes to ensure their achievements are recognized (Eagly

& Carli, 2007). This level of visibility helps females to increase their credibility and ultimately affects their upward mobility within organizations.

Self-promotion also helps to increase a person's confidence and assertiveness, which are leadership qualities largely looked for in all leaders. This increased self-assurance gained by actively promoting their accomplishments is another major benefit of self-promotion (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). One of the arenas in which self-promotion has both internal and external positive benefits is networking and mentorship (Ibarra, 1993). These networks allow a forum to self-promote and enable leaders to support other leaders as they engage in self-promotion.

Although self-promotion has many positive side effects for female leaders, it can also lead to the following: perpetuation of stereotypes, encourage backlash, and hinder collaborative environments. Societal expectations and biases often perceive assertive and self-promoting behaviors as more acceptable for men than women (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Women who take on these behaviors can be seen as overly ambitious, aggressive, or even narcissistic (Rudman & Glick, 2001). These perceptions are likely to lead to trust and credibility issues for females. Backlash toward females who engage in these behaviors ranges from envy and resentment to punishment and social isolation (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Phelan, 2010). Last, collaboration can become hindered when females value self-promotion over building relationships or fostering teamwork because they could be perceived as self-centered or competitive (Braun et al., 2016). These factors highlight the importance of striking a balance between self-promotion and maintaining positive leadership qualities.



## **Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path**

In general, in the field of education, a female's career path stays on the following pathway: teacher, support staff, assistant principal, principal, district office administrator, assistant superintendent, then superintendent with major tendencies for multiple lateral moves along the way (Kim & Brunner, 2009). In general, males have a much more linear format than what was listed for females, and more often, that does not involve coaching and secondary experience, with very little room for the lateral moves that are more common in females' trajectory. Women often welcome the motivations, experiences, and strategies employed while gaining experience in various lateral positions within an organization (Cech et al., 2019).

An interesting way to view a female's career path is represented in Mainiero and Sullivan's (2005) work on a kaleidoscope career model. In this model, they explore how women embrace multiple nonlinear career opportunities along their journey. These career paths can form their professional, entrepreneurial, and social identity. The variety of careers along their path allows for the development of a vast array of skills and knowledge that can make them better suited for positions that may have them overseeing these areas. In this model, females are more prone to explore their values, interests, and goals in making career decisions moving forward.

Although society has traditionally emphasized prescribed and linear career paths, this fixed path has become largely outdated in many fields. Many researchers have suggested that leaders should embrace the less prescribed path because it can provide larger benefits in the areas of personal growth, innovation, resilience, and employee retention (Arthur et al., 1989; De Vos et al., 2003; Dollinger, 2003; Forret & Dougherty,

2001; Gunz & Heslin, 2005; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Tumasjan et al., 2011). In the area of personal growth, careers that are characterized by exploration and varied experiences promote a greater sense of self-awareness, adaptability, and resilience (Arthur et al., 1989; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). With regard to generating innovation and creativity, when individuals have diverse experiences, they are more likely to develop a broader perspective and generate new and novel ideas (Dollinger, 2003; Tumasjan et al., 2011). When leaders have diverse experiences, their solutions to problems are a blending of ideas across perspectives, not simply from one place. Welcoming a less prescribed career path leads to greater resiliency as individuals develop various transferable skills and an ability to navigate different environments (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Gunz & Heslin, 2005). Finally, especially in the current state of the Great Resignation, employee retention is increased when people are encouraged to explore different avenues within an organization as they feel valued and supported (De Vos et al., 2003).

Although in recent times welcoming a less prescribed career path has become more of the norm, there are still possible negative impacts to doing so. Some of the possible negative career impacts include uncertainty, limited specialization, and decreased job security. Uncertainty comes into play in that a less prescribed path can create ambiguity, making future career prospects difficult to predict (Hall & Chandler, 2005). When allowing for a less prescribed career path, some research has shown that it allows for more breadth over depth; this limited career specialization may cause the leader to be less competitive in the job market (Dries et al., 2008; Inkson et al., 2014). Staying on a traditional career path results in limited job security and little volatility in

one's position. However, a less prescribed career path may involve frequent job changes, contract work, or entrepreneurial endeavors (Feldman & Bolino, 2000).

### **Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked**

If you just set out to be liked, you would be prepared to compromise on anything at any time, and you would achieve nothing.

—Margaret Thatcher

A key component needed for a female to break through traditional gender stereotypes is to gain skills and confidence enough to be good with being respected over being liked (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Some research even shows that women may avoid fields altogether when they are concerned about the level of likeability they are likely to encounter (Fels, 2004). In working toward the goal of being respected over being liked, some key factors include the importance of knowing how to present one's authentic self, engage in self-reflection, and use strategic ways to self-present (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010).

To clearly understand the behaviors of a leader, it is important to note some of the key behaviors leaders take when they want to be liked versus when they want to be respected. In Table 2 are a list of these behaviors in each of the two categories. When reviewing the table, one can see that it takes more intentional effort to work on respectability over likeability and requires more than just surface relationships to get to that point.

In pursuing career advancement, the vast amount of female criticism comes when females display more male agentic qualities that are perceived negatively. It is common for men to aim for respect over likeability, perhaps because of differences in confidence

**Table 2***Behaviors by Leaders Who Want to Be Liked Versus Respected*

Behavior of leaders who want to be liked	Behavior of leaders who want to be respected
Seek positive attention and approval	Tell the truth, even if it's unpopular
Engage in gossip rather than giving direct feedback	Explain their thinking behind the difficult decisions they make
Try to please everyone	Acknowledge the elephant in the room, even if they can't fix it
Make promises they can't keep	Say no when they need to
Keep strong opinions to themselves	Be open-minded and decisive
Flood people with credit, compliments and praise	Give credit when it is due to others and also take it when it's due themselves
Play favorites (but pretend they don't)	Tolerate feelings of disappointment, frustration, sadness and anger in themselves and others
Use information as leverage, withholding or giving it away	Hold people accountable for their results
Give people tasks they enjoy rather than assignments that stretch and challenge them	Be consistent and fair in setting rules and expectations
Focus more on how people feel (in general, and about them personally) than about achieving outcomes	Set and honor boundaries for themselves and others
	Deliver negative feedback directly and in a timely manner
	Ask for feedback regularly and then act on it
	Apologize when they make mistakes and then move on
	Model the behavior they expect from others

*Note.* Adapted from “Why the Most Successful Leaders Don’t Care About Being Liked: Being Liked is Fleeting. Here’s What Matters More,” by D. G. Riegel, 2018, *Inc.* (<https://www.inc.com/deborah-grayson-riegel/why-most-successful-leaders-dont-care-about-being-liked.html>).

or in men's general ability to not ruminate on given situations (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Either way, females who employ strategies to garner respect from males and females will also find others' perceptions of their abilities increase.

When leaders prioritize respect over likability, they highlight the development of trust, foster accountability, promote ethical behavior, and drive long-term success. Trust is developed when leaders earn respect through their actions, integrity, and consistent decision making (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995). When leaders aim for respect, their expectations and standards are clear, and they hold people accountable for their actions and performance (Latham & Pinder, 2005). When the leader aims for respect, they are much more likely to do what is right rather than seek approval; this model sets an example for others to follow, thus increasing ethical standards within an organization (Treviño et al., 2006). Respected leaders create positive and supportive work environments, leading to long-term success in an organization (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008).

Although respect over likability has positive possibilities for a leader, it does not come without potential downsides. Some potential downsides could include: potential alienation, decreased morale, and limited collaboration. Some research has shown that when a leader focuses on earning respect, there is a strong possibility that they may employ a more authoritarian approach that could lead to reduced communication, approachability, and rapport with team members (W. L. Gardner et al., 2009).

Likability encompasses the aspects of empathy, approachability, and fostering positive relationships (Kark et al., 2003). When likability is not the focus, it can create a work environment that includes fear, anxiety, and reduced job satisfaction (Riketta, 2005). When a leader is likable, they are associated with fostering positive relationships

and an inclusive environment (Ferris et al., 2005). When garnering respect is more of the goal, it can create a more top-down approach that can stifle innovative and creative thinking (Edmondson, 1999).

### **Gaps in Research**

There is a large body of research on barriers to women obtaining superintendency positions, along with ample work on specific strategies to overcome self-sabotaging behaviors. There is very little research on how personal disruption strategies can impact how females advance in an organization and, specifically, how they impact their rise to superintendencies. This study was meant to see whether or not and to what extent personal disruption strategies have impacted a group of female California superintendents because little research has been published in this area.

### **Synthesis Matrix**

A synthesis matrix is provided highlighting how the academic and professional literature matches the variables of this study (see Appendix A).

### **Summary**

Chapter II provided a thorough review of the literature as applicable to the history of women in the workplace, in leadership, and specifically school leadership, including the barriers they have faced and strategies used as they rise to the top of school districts. The internal barriers such as self-sabotage, negative self-talk, and imposter syndrome were discussed. External barriers such as glass ceiling, glass elevator, and queen bee syndrome were identified as major contributors to the gender inequality in these positions. Some strategies highlighted as important to women succeeding in these

positions included networking, mentoring, overcoming self-confidence, and constructive preparation.

In the review of theoretical foundations, social role theory, role congruity theory, and expectancy value theory were discussed as all having an essential piece of the puzzle regarding gender norms and expectations by both males and females in society. Finally, the following disruptive behaviors from W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) were described with examples from the literature in how they may contribute to a person's perceived competency and ability to leverage these skills to attain higher positions of executive leadership: (a) challenging and influencing authority, (b) prepare but also learn to improvise, (c) find effective forms of self-promotion, (d) welcome a less prescribed career path, and (e) aim for being respected not just liked. The chapter concluded with gaps in research and a description of the synthesis matrix used to ensure all sources were used appropriately, as shown in Appendix A.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

Knowing whether or not personal disruption strategies are at work with female superintendents' career trajectories is an essential first step to defining the specific behaviors these women have engaged in to prepare future female leaders better to follow in their footsteps. These disruptive behaviors are primarily within women's internal locus of control and thus are worth quantifying and exploring more in-depth. W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) framework for personal disruption identifies five key behaviors that served as the focus of this research: challenge and influence authority, prepare but also learn to improvise, find effective forms of self-promotion, welcome less prescribed career path, and go for being respected not just liked.

Chapter III outlines the methodology used in this study to identify and describe the extent to which these women have used these five personal disruption strategies. The chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions, followed by a description of the qualitative and quantitative research design, population, sampling frame, and sample. Then an in-depth description of instrumentation is presented, including quantitative and qualitative instrumentation, the researcher as an instrument, and quantitative and qualitative field testing. Following instrumentation is a discussion of validity, reliability, and data collection methodology. The chapter concludes with data analysis, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods research study was to identify and describe the perceived impact of W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) five disruptive career



skills on female K-12 superintendents from an elementary background on their advancement to an executive leadership position.

### **Research Questions**

1. What perceived impact did challenging and influencing authority have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
2. What perceived impact did preparing and improvising have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
3. What perceived impact did engaging in effective forms of self-promotion have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
4. What perceived impact did welcoming a less prescribed career path have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
5. What perceived impact did aiming for respect over being liked have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?

### **Research Design**

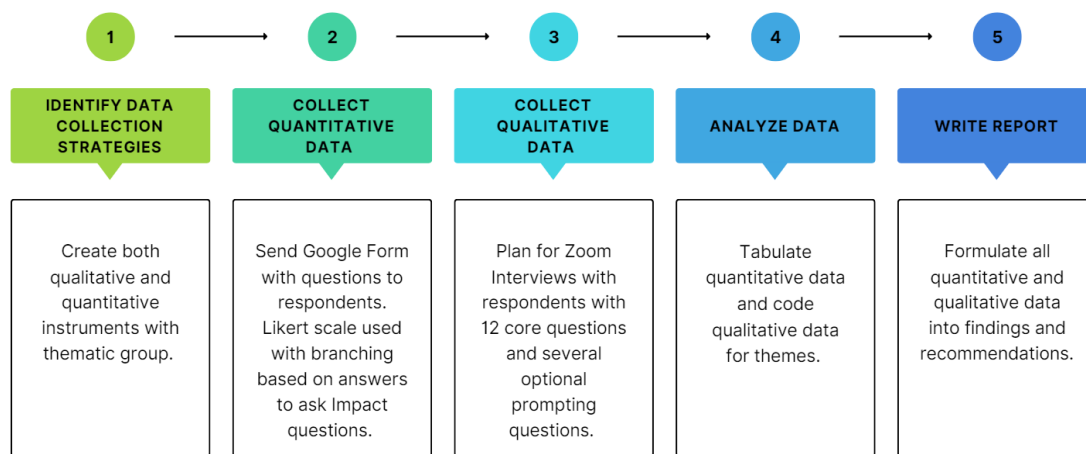
The type of research design chosen for this study was an explanatory mixed methods design. Advantages of this type of study include the ability to collect more comprehensive data than other designs, allowing for the analysis of both the process and outcomes, compensating for limitations by using a single method, and enhancing the credibility of findings from a single method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Additionally, a mixed methods design allows for investigating different types of research questions that can be more complex. This study had five separate research questions to be analyzed that referred back to personal disruption strategies used by these women. Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, I gained a well-rounded view of whether

and to what extent these female superintendents used these personal disruption strategies. Figure 3 shows how the design was a sequential explanatory mixed methods design in which quantitative data were first collected, followed by qualitative data that elaborated on quantitative data findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Figure 3**

*Explanatory Mixed Methods Design*



*Note.* Adapted from *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry* (7th ed.), by J. H. McMillan and S. Schumacher, 2010, p. 404. Pearson.

**Quantitative Research Design**

A nonexperimental, descriptive research design was used for the quantitative aspect of this study. The initial part of the study was a Google Form survey designed to determine whether and to what extent female superintendents’ used the five personal disruptions strategies and how they felt the use of those impacted their career advancement (see Appendix B). The survey included six questions in Part I that focused on providing an example of the career skills with a Likert scale response. Participants were asked to rank disruptive career skills from 1 (*definitely no*) to 4 (*definitely yes*). If

the respondents answered *definitely yes* or *generally yes* on a question, they were then sent to a follow-up Part II question that focused on the impact of disruptive skills.

Participants were asked to rank how much of a positive impact it had on their advancement to an executive leadership position.

These scales were developed to ensure participants would have to answer by agreeing or disagreeing with each statement to avoid the option of participants selecting neutral (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This provided the most descriptive quantitative data that could then be analyzed in terms of mean, mode, and frequency analysis.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

After collecting quantitative data, Zoom interviews were planned with the respondents to get more data on using the personal disruption strategies for the female superintendents. The qualitative data collected were meant to support and further enhance the data gained from the quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The qualitative survey consisted of 12 open-ended questions, beginning with an introduction and brief background of the participant regarding how they got to their current role. This introduction was followed by questions regarding the five personal disruptive behaviors and subsequent career impacts. It concluded with additional probing questions to gather other data about how they may have used the strategies (see Appendix B). Questions were included in an interview guide developed with a phenomenological approach so participants could explain their experiences, the meaning, structure, and essence of these experiences, and their impact on career development (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Each interview had the same 12 questions asked from each respondent, but a bank of probing follow-up questions was drawn from based on the respondent's responses to diving deeper into certain concepts. To ensure that I could fully participate and recall all

vital pieces of the interview, each interview was audio recorded for greater transcription ease later. The content of each interview was analyzed for themes, and the themes were used to write a comprehensive analysis of each of the lived experiences of the respondents based on their responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

### **Method Rationale**

This thematic study was developed to investigate how females use disruptive strategies for executive career advancement. One faculty researcher and four doctoral students discovered a common interest in exploring specific personal disruption strategies used by female executives in various populations. This explanatory mixed methods research study focused on five personal disruption strategies and whether/to what extent those strategies helped the career trajectory of those women. The thematic team of researchers selected leaders in educational and public organizations, and each researcher interviewed eight participants. My fellow doctoral candidates and I studied leaders in the following fields: Tricia Thompson- Female K-12 Superintendents from an elementary background, Dina Hernandez-Latinx superintendents, Lorri Oliver-female property managers, and Neko Green-female pastors.

There was consistency throughout the thematic study in creating the purpose statement, research questions, quantitative and qualitative instruments, and research procedures. The group of thematic researchers worked individually within a single selected sample population of leaders, and all used the same methodology, explanatory mixed methods, and interview and survey questions. This allowed the researchers to examine both quantitative and qualitative methods for the phenomenon studied to increase the depth and scope of the study. A mixed methods research design was selected

for this study because it allowed more comprehensive data to be analyzed, allowed investigation of different types of research questions, and enhanced the credibility of findings from a single method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). More specifically, a sequential explanatory design was chosen to allow for quantitative data to be collected first, then qualitative data in the form of open-ended interview questions that expanded upon the results found in the quantitative survey.

### **Population**

The population is the group of individuals who meet specific criteria of which the intent is to generalize information gained from them (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the population was K-12 female superintendents from California. According to Zippia (2023b), 28% of superintendent positions across the United States are currently held by females. According to the California Department of Education (n.d.), there are 343 K-12 districts in California. In these districts, 126 females and 217 males are currently leading in the superintendent role. This equates to 37% of California K-12 districts led by a female. Using this percentage, it can be estimated that the population for this study was 126 female superintendents leading a K-12 school district.

### **Sampling Frame**

Creswell and Creswell (2017) defined sampling frame as the list of defining criteria from which a sample can be obtained. To be able to generalize the findings of this study, the following qualifications were outlined in advance to apply to the superintendents for this study:

- Currently a female superintendent in a California public K-12 district.
- One or more years of experience in this position.

- Elementary experience as a teacher and/or principal for grades K-6 before becoming a district office administrator or K-12 superintendent.

Of the estimated 126 females leading K-12 districts in California, 53 have a multiple subject credential based on the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (n.d.) Data System for Educator Credentials tool. This equates to 15% of K-12 school districts in California being led by females from an elementary background.

### **Sample**

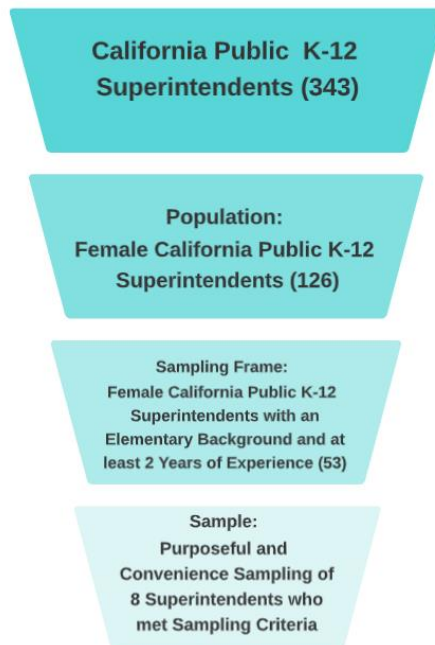
Because this study is targeted at the need for elementary experience, purposeful and convenience sampling were used (Patton, 2015). There were 53 female superintendents across California identified who met the sampling frame criteria. This study includes interviews with eight of these women. These individuals were found using the Association of California School Administrators database for superintendents and the California Department of Education database of superintendents.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a sample as “a group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). From the sampling frame, purposeful and convenience sampling were used to identify the sample for the study. Purposeful sampling allowed specific elements from California’s population representative of female superintendents to be selected. Convenience sampling allowed female superintendents to be interviewed in close geographic proximity, ultimately making the research and data collection process accessible and expedient (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The criteria for selecting participants for convenience sampling were also specific and included participants from various counties in California. It was inferred that the characteristics of the sample were likely characteristics of the population (McMillan &

Schumacher, 2010). The sample for the study was eight female K-12 public school superintendents with an elementary background employed in various counties in California. Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommended a small sample size so a researcher can provide a detailed and thorough picture of the phenomenon, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*K-12 Superintendents Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample*



Using the list obtained from the California Department of Education (n.d.), all 53 eligible superintendents who met the required criteria were contacted through email, which explained the purpose of the study and gauged their willingness to participate. Various district contacts were also contacted to help connect with some of the women on the list. Upon being able to obtain eight participants who were willing to be a part of the study, I sent each participant the quantitative survey protocol, the qualitative survey

protocol, informed Consent and the UMass Global Internal Review Board (IRB) Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendices B, C, D, and E). Interviews were conducted using Zoom, a video conferencing system. An audio release was signed, and the interview was recorded digitally. The interview questions regarding personal disruptions and their impact on career development were given to the participants to reference during the interviews along with a copy of their responses to the quantitative portion of the survey for ease of reference to each category. An interview protocol was used to ensure consistency with each interview; however, follow-up and confirmation questions were asked if the participant struggled to answer any questions.

### **Instrumentation**

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used for this study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, "Quantitative and qualitative data collection is implemented in two phases, with the primary emphasis on quantitative methods" (p. 401). Both the quantitative and qualitative survey instruments were developed initially by four thematic researchers and a faculty member. Both the quantitative and qualitative surveys were designed to be aligned with the frameworks created by W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) on personal disruption strategies.

The quantitative instrument was used to gain initial data from participants about their experiences within a Likert scale survey; each participant could answer each question regarding how often they engaged in each career skill on a four-category continuum ranging from definitely yes to definitely no. The answers were 4 = *definitely yes*, 3 = *generally yes*, 2 = *generally no*, and 1 = *definitely no*. If the respondent answered 4 = *definitely yes* or 3 = *generally yes*, the online survey then asked follow-up questions



created to measure the perceived impact of each of the behaviors on their career advancement. These questions followed the Likert scale as follows: 4 = *high degree*, 3 = *some degree*, 2 = *little or no degree*, or 1 = *detrimental to my career advancement*.

The quantitative survey allowed each participant to begin thinking about their experiences in a structured framework for which a qualitative, open-ended interview would follow. These quantitative data were collected from an online survey created by the original group of four peer researchers and one faculty member. The qualitative data were collected from an open-ended interview protocol developed by the thematic group. The open-ended format allowed participants to expand upon the answers given in the quantitative survey and describe their lived experiences from their perspective, providing rich phenomenological data from which I could analyze all data, identify and code themes, and triangulate to provide a holistic description of the personal disruption strategies used by the respondents and the impact of such behaviors.

### **Quantitative Instrumentation**

The study's first phase was a quantitative online survey (see Appendix B) to determine which personal disruption behaviors participants experienced throughout their career development and how these behaviors impacted their careers. The benefit of using an online survey included reduced cost and time, expedient responses, and easy follow up (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, obtaining quantitative data allowed me to find various statistical data, analyze the data, and make inferences from the results, also known as inferential statistics (Salkind, 2017). Quantitative data are also vital in helping reduce bias because the statistics and information obtained from quantitative surveys allow a researcher to make decisions based on empirical evidence. The peer

researchers developed the instrumentation based on the five personal disruption strategies initially designed by W. Johnson and Mohr (2019).

### **Qualitative Instrumentation**

The second phase of the study was qualitative interviews. Each participant was interviewed using a script of open-ended questions to elaborate on the responses already given in the quantitative survey (see Appendix C). The standardized open-ended interview is one of four different approaches to interviewing, as described by Patton (2015). The thematic researchers and faculty determined the exact wording of the questions in advance, and all interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order. When respondents are asked the same questions, the probability of being able to compare responses increases. The interviews were conducted through an online conferencing application called Zoom. At the start of each interview, I attempted to build rapport and trust with the participants. Following these short conversations, an overview and purpose of the study was provided, the procedural safeguards in place were explained, and the interview began. Each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed using the transcription application Temi. The transcript was returned to the participant to review and adjust before being put in the software program Delve to be coded.

### **Researcher as the Instrument**

I was an instrument during the qualitative portion of the interview. This could have led to a level of researcher bias, but that would be dependent on my level of involvement with the subjects of the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I was a complete outsider to this study because my involvement with the subjects was solely

because of the interview. I did not have a personal or professional relationship with the subjects before the interviews. The lack of involvement with the subjects increased the validity of the results because I did not have anything to gain or lose from this study's outcomes. I still interpreted the results of the open-ended interviews in a manner that qualified me to be an instrument, ultimately affecting the results and findings of the study.

### **Quantitative Field Test**

The quantitative survey was field-tested to verify that no bias was present in procedures or questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A retired superintendent who met all the samplings criteria except actively working because this was deemed appropriate for testing out the questions, and the respondent herself had ample experience in working through dissertations so she could provide feedback from that perspective as well. Upon completion of the quantitative field test, the participant completed the feedback form, and I reviewed it to verify there was no evidence of bias and that the survey went according to plan (see Appendix F).

### **Qualitative Field Test**

Similar to the quantitative field test, a qualitative field test was conducted with the same respondent as the quantitative survey to verify that no bias was present in the technique and in question content (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The interview with the field-test participant took place online through Zoom and using the qualitative field test tool (see Appendix C). The interview was observed by an adjunct faculty member from the Organizational Leadership EDD program to provide feedback regarding her observations of the open-ended interview. Upon completion of the field-test interview,

the participant answered questions from the participant feedback form (see Appendix G), and the observer responded to questions from the observer feedback form (see Appendix H). During the field test, all questions were deemed valid and would yield good data; because of the complexity of the questions, the respondent had the questions in advance and agreed that would be the best when actual interviews started.

### **Validity**

Validity is a term used to describe to what extent an instrument is measuring what it is intended to measure (Patten & Newhart, 2023). When completing a mixed methods study, the validity of both the quantitative and the qualitative findings must be established. To verify the validity of the quantitative instrument, the team of thematic researchers used expert judges for validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Additionally, the team used the evidence based on internal structure to design questions closely linked to the theory or intended use of the scores and personal disruptive strategies. See Appendix J and K for Quantitative and Qualitative Alignment Tables for Survey and Interview Questions.

When working on the qualitative part of the research study, I used Delve software to identify themes, assign codes, and triangulate the qualitative data. At the onset of all interviews, the purpose of the study was explained, thus providing for construct validity. Last, because this study was targeting a specific subset of female superintendents, it is essential to note that external validity is confined to individuals who meet the sampling criteria for this study.

### **Reliability**

Reliability indicates that similar results will be achieved from the same set of questions/tests (Patten & Newhart, 2023). For this study, the following types of

reliability were used to increase the chances that similar results would appear over time: interobserver reliability and parallel-forms reliability. The survey was constructed with the thematic peers and thus covered interobserver reliability. The parallel forms of reliability were protected because the subjects were assessed in two different ways on the content of this study with both a quantitative survey and a qualitative interview. A standardized open-ended interview was used to increase reliability, and another faculty member observed the field test, ensuring that all parties would do the survey consistently. All interviews were transcribed and returned to respondents to verify that all information was correctly recorded, thus allowing for security in intercoder reliability. Using Delve to code themes reduces the bias I could bring as the researcher into reviewing the results.

### **Data Collection**

Because of the nature of an explanatory mixed methods study, there were two phases of data collection. First, an electronic survey was used to collect responses to the 12-question electronic survey done through Google Forms using a Likert scale for the questions and only allowing for impact responses when the respondent rated the disruption behavior as *definitely yes* or *generally yes*. Upon completion of the electronic surveys, interviews were done with each participant using the online video conference application called Zoom. Beyond the field test, data collection was completed when I was certified by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research to conduct human research. Approval was also obtained from the UMass Global IRB to conduct the study (see Appendix I). Once approval was granted, data collection began. The eight participants received a copy of the UMass Global IRB Informed Consent (see Appendix D), the UMass Global Bill of Rights (see Appendix E), and an email including a link to

the electronic survey. Data collection began when each participant consented to participate in the study. To ensure data were stored safely and securely, data was stored using a password-protected digital device; I was the only person with access to the collected data.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

Before collecting quantitative data, participants were sent informed consent and bill of rights forms via email, including a description of the use of data and guaranteed confidentiality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A link to the survey was provided once each participant read and consented to take part in the survey. The participants were given 1 week to complete the survey, which took approximately 10 to 15 min. The participants were sent two reminder emails to ensure they met the deadline before their allotted time window closed.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

Once electronic surveys were completed, one-on-one interviews were scheduled with each respondent. Upon permission from each respondent, the interviews were recorded to assist with transcription later. Each survey lasted about 60 min. At the onset of the interview, some start-up questions were asked to put the respondent at ease in the conversation. Then the purpose of the study was reviewed again before working through the 12 open-ended questions with the respondent using a standardized open-ended interview approach. Each participant was also provided with a copy of her own quantitative electronic survey results during the open-ended interviews to assist the respondent. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by a web-based transcription service called Temi. Once the transcription was complete, a copy of the transcript was

sent to each participant to review for accuracy. Once approval was given from each participant, the results were uploaded to the qualitative data analysis software called Delve to identify themes and code the data.

### **Data Analysis**

In a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, quantitative data are the precursor to qualitative data, and qualitative data are used to support the quantitative data and go more into depth with them (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The qualitative data allowed me to learn more about each participant's quantitative responses by providing specific stories and examples of how the leader used disruptive behaviors and how they perceived that strategy impacted their career advancement. Once the quantitative and qualitative data were combined, the data could be triangulated to make some generalizations about how that strategy was or was not helpful to these females.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data analysis included collecting and analyzing data from the online Google Forms survey. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize, organize, and consolidate the number of findings from the survey. Specifically, the survey results were collected and analyzed to gain descriptive data such as the mode of the personal disruption strategies used. The mode is used to measure the central tendency. The mode was assessed to determine which personal disruption behaviors occurred most frequently. The electronic survey questions were closed-ended and based on predetermined response scales using a 4-point Likert scale, which included the following numerical assignment: 4 = *definitely yes*, 3 = *generally yes*, 2 = *generally no*, 1 = *definitely no*. Participants completed the survey first, which was then followed by the interview.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The analysis of qualitative data requires that the researcher employ different means of data analysis. To derive meaning from qualitative data, the words were analyzed to code them into themes to gather meaning from the responses (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Eight interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. To verify that each respondent was quoted correctly, the transcription was sent to the respondents for verification. Upon approval, the transcriptions were loaded into Delve to identify and code themes. All text was reviewed to identify categories related to the research question, then I created codes within Delve representative of high-frequency words and themes. For codes with few frequencies, I reviewed and reevaluated the significance of the code to determine appropriate identification. Each code was checked thoroughly to ensure it directly answered the study's research questions.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The UMass Global IRB approved the research study. Written consent was gained from each respondent before collecting data, and safeguards were put into place to ensure the rights of the female superintendents were intact and their anonymity upheld. As explained in the Bill of Rights, participants could withdraw at any time, and all ethical protections were adhered to (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Additionally, the data was stored in a password-protected digital device that only I could access.

## **Limitations**

All research studies have restrictions outside the researcher's control known as limitations. These limitations can impact results and the accuracy of generalizing to a larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To provide full transparency, the



following were limitations of this study: location of the study, the sample size of the participants, time constraints, and bias of the researcher.

### **Location of the Study**

The United States is home to thousands of districts and superintendents; because of this, the focus was narrowed to superintendents in California. Convenience and purposeful sampling were used to gain access to these women. Public K-12 district superintendents were used and not female superintendents who are in K-6, K-8, private schools, county offices of education, or nonpublic schools. Because of this, the results can only be generalized to public K-12 superintendents from California.

### **Sample Size of the Participants**

A total of eight participants participated in the study. Patton (2015) indicated that this sample size is appropriate for a mixed methods study. However, the findings cannot be generalized to the overall population of female assistant superintendents throughout the United States.

### **Time Constraints**

Time is a limitation known all too well by all within education, but especially by female superintendents. Finding the time to schedule to make it through all the open-ended interview questions within a 60-min time frame may have limited the depth of the interview and subsequently the results.

### **Bias of the Researcher**

Qualitative research involves the telling of a story, and as such, is subject to the bias of the researcher. My background as an educational leader who has aspirations for a superintendency is an important attribute to divulge as a source of bias in this study. I

have encountered internal and external barriers as described in this study, and my personal experiences may have impacted the analysis of the findings.

To reduce the effects of researcher bias, I kept an epoche or journal of biases during the process of interviewing. Moustakas (1994) defined an epoche as a way of owning and setting aside one's ideas to be open to new ideas. Open-ended questions also helped me to minimize my bias when interviewing. After the interview was conducted and transcribed, I sent the transcript to the participants to check for accuracy.

### **Summary**

Chapter III provided a detailed account of how this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was conducted. The chapter began with a general summary, purpose statement, and research questions. An explanation of the research design followed, including quantitative and qualitative research designs. Next, the population, sampling frame, sample, and sample selection process were described—instrumentation followed by examining quantitative and qualitative instrumentation and the researcher as an instrument. Validity and reliability were discussed next and data collection and analysis afterward. Finally, ethical considerations and limitations were presented. The overall quantitative and qualitative analysis and findings can be found in Chapter IV, and Chapter V concludes with a discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research studies.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

### Overview

This mixed methods explanatory study aimed to identify and describe the use and impact of personal disruption strategies for K-12 female superintendents with an elementary background on their career path. The qualitative and quantitative measures sought to determine whether the strategy was used and to what extent it had a positive or negative impact on the career trajectory of the individual. This study was based on a framework written by W. Johnson and Mohr in 2019. The framework sought to determine how each of the following five variables impacted the career trajectory of individuals:

- challenging and influencing authority
- preparing but also learning to improvise
- engaging in effective forms of self-promotion
- welcoming a less-prescribed career path
- aiming for being respected over being liked

Chapter IV provides an overview of the purpose of the study, the research questions, research methods, data collection process used in the study, population, and sample.

Chapter IV concludes with a presentation of the data using the research questions and a summary of the findings.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods study was to identify and describe the perceived impact of W. Johnson and Mohr's five disruptive career skills (2019) on

female K-12 superintendents from an elementary background to their advancement to an executive leadership position.

### **Research Questions**

1. What perceived impact did challenging and influencing authority have on female K-12 Superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
2. What perceived impact did preparing but also improvising have on female K-12 Superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
3. What perceived impact did engaging in effective forms of self-promotion have on female K-12 Superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
4. What perceived impact did welcoming a less prescribed career path have on female K-12 Superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
5. What perceived impact did aiming for respect over being liked have on female K-12 Superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?

### **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

#### **Population**

The population is the group of individuals who meet specific criteria of which the intent is to generalize information gained from them (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the population was K-12 female superintendents from California. According to Zippia (2023b), 28% of superintendent positions across the United States are currently held by females. According to the California Department of Education (n.d.), there are 343 K-12 districts in California. In these districts, 126 females and 217 males are currently leading in the superintendent role. This equates to 37% of California K-12 districts led by a female. Using this percentage, it can be estimated that

the population for this study was 126 female superintendents leading a K-12 school district.

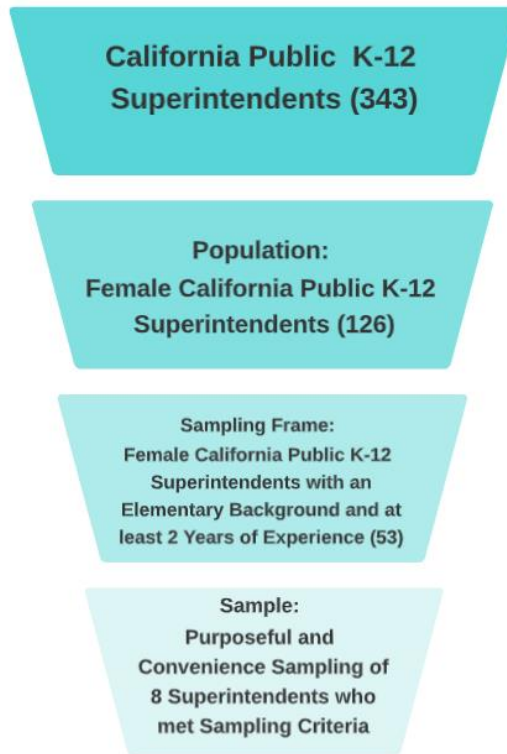
### **Sample**

Because this study was targeted at the need for elementary experience, I used purposeful and convenience sampling (Patton, 2015). Fifty-three female superintendents across California were identified who met the sampling frame criteria. This study included interviews with eight of these women. These individuals were found using the Association of California School Administrators database for superintendents and the California Department of Education database of superintendents.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a sample as “a group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). From the sampling frame, purposeful and convenience sampling were used to identify the sample for the study. Purposeful sampling allowed I to select specific elements from California’s population representative of female superintendents. Convenience sampling allowed I to interview female superintendents in close geographic proximity, ultimately making the research and data collection process accessible and expedient (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The criteria for selecting participants for convenience sampling were also specific and included participants from various counties in California. I inferred that the characteristics of the sample were likely characteristics of the population. The sample for the study was eight female K-12 public school superintendents with an elementary background employed in various counties in California. Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) recommended a small sample size so I can provide a detailed and thorough picture of the phenomenon, as shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

*K-12 Superintendents Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample*



### **Demographic Data**

To maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the study participants, their names and identifying information were omitted from the findings. The eight study participants were alphabetically identified from A through H as outlined in Table 3. The sample included female K-12 superintendents with some level of elementary teaching and/or administrative experience from seven counties as outlined in Table 3. Eight interviews took place in August and September 2023. For the purposes of this study, a small district is defined as less than 5,000 students, a medium size district is defined as 5,000 to 15,000 students, and a large district is defined as more than 15,000 students.

**Table 3***Participants Demographic Information*

Participant ID	County	District size	Month and year of interview
Participant A	County A	Small	August 2023
Participant B	County B	Large	August 2023
Participant C	County C	Medium	August 2023
Participant D	County D	Large	August 2023
Participant E	County E	Medium	August 2023
Participant F	County E	Medium	August 2023
Participant G	County F	Large	September 2023
Participant H	County G	Medium	September 2023

As part of the quantitative survey, the participants were asked about their age and years of experience, and the following information was obtained. Three participants were between 60 and 69 years old, and five participants were between 50 and 59 years old. Two had been a superintendent for 2 years, one for 3 years, two for 4 years, one for 7 years, one for 11 years, and one for 15 years.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

Data collection included the use of an electronic survey for the quantitative phase of the study followed by an interview for the qualitative phase of the study. The following sections describe quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

## **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The electronic survey was developed using the web-based program Google Form. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize, organize, and consolidate the number of findings from the survey. The results were collected and analyzed to gain descriptive data such as the percentage of participants who answered a certain way on each question. The electronic survey consisted of 13 close-ended questions that were based on predetermined response scales, using a 4-point Likert scale, which included the following numerical assignment on the questions related to the use of the behavior: 4 = *definitely yes*, 3 = *generally yes*, 2 = *generally no*, and 1 = *definitely no*. It also included questions to measure the impact of the personal disruptive career skill but was only asked if the participant rated the use as a 4 = *definitely yes* or 3 = *generally yes*. The questions used to measure impact followed the following Likert scale: 4 = *high degree*, 3 = *some degree*, 2 = *little or no degree*, and 1 = *detrimental to my career development*. Participants completed the survey first then followed up with the open-ended interview.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative interview phase allowed participants to expand the depth of their responses as reported in the online survey and to elaborate on the use of personal disruption strategies. I used an interview protocol based on the five personal disruption strategies laid out by W. Johnson and Mohr (2019). The questions from the interview were structured and semistructured. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 min and was conducted via the online video conference application Zoom. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using the transcription software Rev, and then the transcript was coded using the qualitative analysis software program Delve Tool. To answer the



research questions, I coded emergent themes from the data based on personal disruption strategies.

I used qualitative inductive analysis to extract themes from participant interviews. Analysis was inductive in that no theoretical construct or preconceived structure was used to code data, but rather, initial readings were used to start developing themes and refine from that point. Once all data were initially coded, I went through again, combined any themes, and deleted any themes with minimal references or support. Each research question presents findings.

### **Interrater Reliability**

Interrater reliability involves peer researchers examining and coding the same data to verify that there is agreement between both coders. Similar interpretations of the same data set are required to meet interrater reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). Peer researchers cross-checked data codes to reconcile discrepancies to reach an agreement on the codes and worked to explain differences in how the text was analyzed. After I coded the data one time, a peer researcher did the same piece, and we agreed on 82% of the themes coded within the data. An agreement of 80% or higher was recommended by Patton (2015).

### **Research Question 1: Challenging and Influencing Authority**

The first research question asked, “What perceived impact did challenging and influencing authority have on female K-12 superintendents’ advancement to an executive leadership position?” This first research question was broken into two parts because the skills of challenging and influencing authority, although similar, are very different in practice. For each question, the quantitative survey gave a statement related to the

question and asked on a Likert scale to what extent the participant agreed with the statement. The follow-up question was more about to what extent the participant agreed that the use of the skill had a positive impact on the career trajectory.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

Figure 6 shows that in challenging authority, 75% of participants agreed that they definitely do this, and 25% agreed that they generally do this. In Figure 7, when evaluating the impact of this, 25% believed to a high degree that this had a positive impact on their career trajectory, and 75% rated this as having some degree of a positive impact on their career trajectory.

**Figure 6**

*Quantitative Responses to the Use of Challenging Authority*

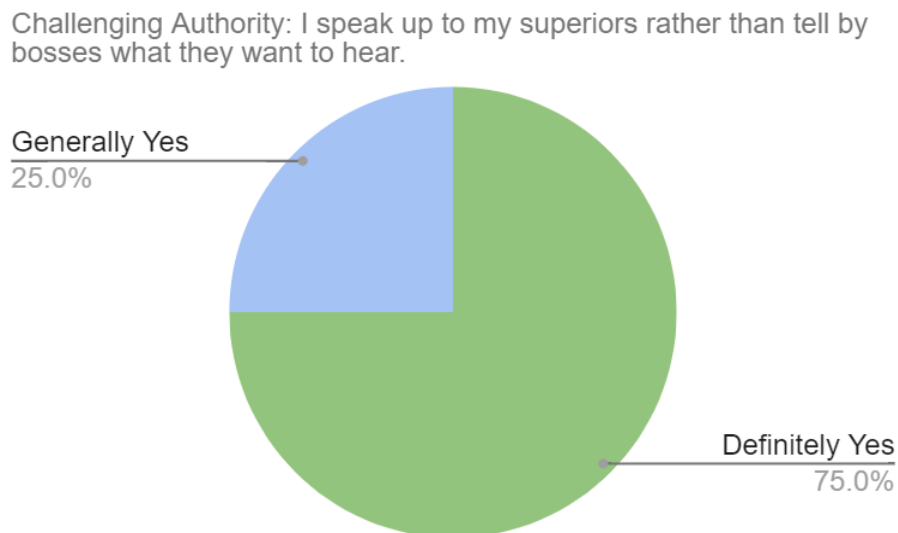
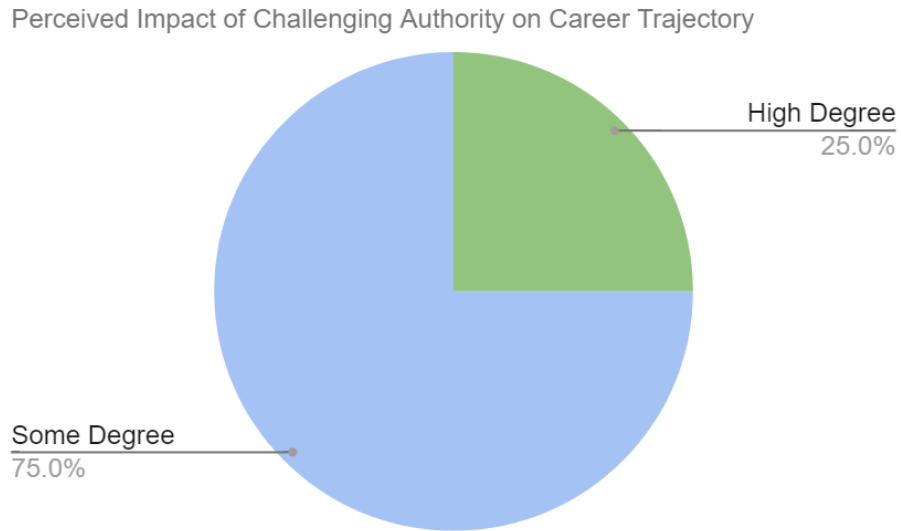


Figure 8 shows that in the area of influencing authority, 87.5% of participants agreed that they definitely do this, and 12.5% agreed that they generally do this. In Figure 9, when evaluating the impact of this, 75% believed to a high degree that this had a

positive impact on their career trajectory, and 25% rated this as having some degree of a positive impact on their career trajectory.

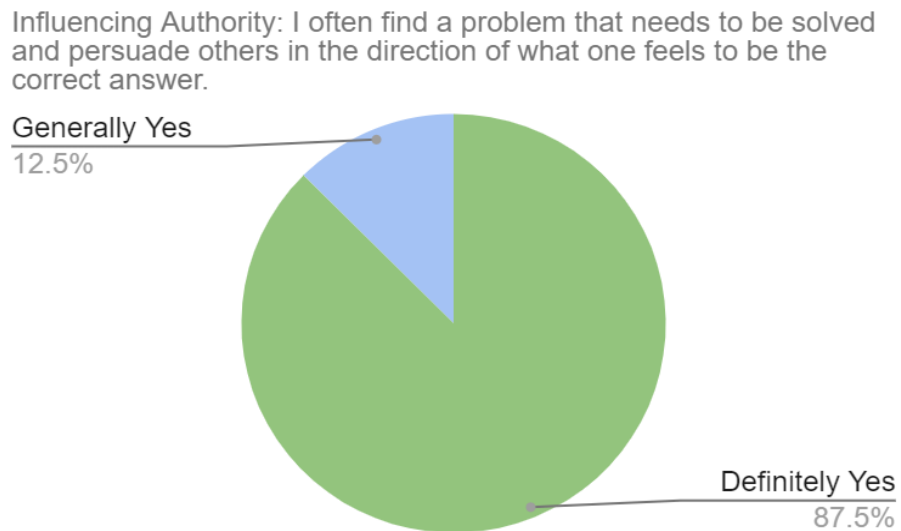
**Figure 7**

*Quantitative Responses to the Impact of Challenging Authority*



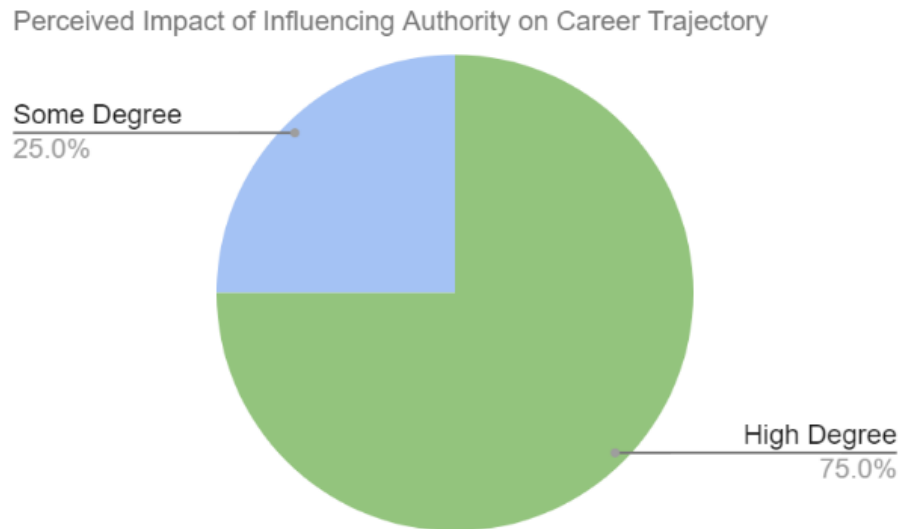
**Figure 8**

*Quantitative Responses to the Use of Influencing Authority*



**Figure 9**

*Quantitative Responses to the Impact of Influencing Authority*



**Qualitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

*Challenging Authority*

During the interviews regarding challenging authority, the following five themes emerged: navigating gender and professional stereotypes, defending professional principles or practices, opposing imposed or ineffective policies, addressing inequality and inequity, and pushing for better organizational efficiency and decision making. Each theme shown in Table 4 is addressed in turn.

**Navigating Gender and Professional Stereotypes.** The most frequent theme that appeared when participants were asked questions related to challenging authority fell along the lines of participants doing what was unexpected for their gender or outside the realm of what one would assume as traditional for a female in the educational profession. Participant B noted that challenging authority fell outside the norm of “women are expected to be nurturing, and people come to us to be nurtured.” Participant F stated that

she feels that society allows men to challenge authority and that the same expectations or allowances are not for females.

**Table 4**

*Themes Related to Challenging Authority Experienced While Advancing to the K-12*

*Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Navigating gender and professional stereotypes	21	7	87.5%
Defending professional principles or practices	15	7	87.5%
Opposing imposed ineffective policies	13	6	75.0%
Addressing inequality and inequity	19	6	75.0%
Pushing for better organizational efficiency and decision making	12	5	62.5%

An interesting story by Participant E noted an experience in which she went to a school site with two other male assistant superintendents and was stopped for her identification but the men were not, and rather than raising awareness to this she acquiesced to not upset the situation. Many women shared similar stories about how they felt the pressure to stay polite and that it kept them from challenging authority. Many of the participants noted that being persuasive, as measured by influencing authority rather than challenging authority, fell more within the constructs of what was expected of them as females.

**Defending Professional Principles or Practices.** There are a myriad of professional ideals and practices that are part of the educational system, and, there are a variety of instances that allow one to protect long-standing values within education.

Participant G talked about the importance of “pushing back, but rather raising cognitive dissonance so that things are brought to the attention of those making decisions.” The COVID-19 pandemic was also brought up several times during the focus on these questions because superintendents report to school boards, and school boards had to learn alongside the administration how to take in changing information and deliver it to their constituents. Participant F talked about having to tell her board in the midst of masking, school closures, and the vaccine debates that “if they weren’t in it for the students like she was, she might not be the superintendent for them, or for COVID.”

Participant E noted,

Other times I challenged authority because I felt really passionate about the fact that the direction that we were taking was not a great direction, nor had it been thought out well, and there might be another way to do things.

This addresses the fact that many superintendents must work with individuals who are not educators and thus may not always have the teacher’s mindset that so many of the participants discussed.

**Opposing Imposed Ineffective Policies.** In education, there is often a time when there are a multitude of others trying to make decisions in arenas that they are not fully versed in, and the skill of being able to change this is even more crucial. Participant C shared an experience in which her district was being reviewed by a board-hired outside evaluator who came in to suggest various programs and initiatives for the school district. Because of the superintendent’s extensive knowledge of the district, she could speak up because she was well aware of the issues and the things that would and would not help alleviate the problems.

Several participants noted that paramount to their decision-making was remembering what it was like for them to be a teacher. For example, Participant C was told that she would need to collect lesson plans from all teachers, and she pushed back on her superiors that she would not need to collect all but spot checks and only collect from those she had ongoing concerns with. This ability to push back against a policy that not only would not help teachers but also could be detrimental to staff morale showed how these women as leaders must be willing to challenge practices so that their organizations can thrive and grow.

**Addressing Inequality and Inequity.** Most of the participants explained that when they used the skill of challenging authority, it fell within the realm of fighting inequality or inequity. For Participant B, it meant making sure the digital divide was handled long before the COVID-19 pandemic. For Participant C, it meant telling a principal that they have the highest socioeconomic status in the district, yet only had satisfactory test scores, thus creating a layer of inequity for those students. Participant G noted that when challenging authority was necessary for equity, she used a database of information and anecdotal evidence to support claims that change was needed.

Participant G noted, “I think I spent a career disrupting inequities, but I wouldn’t say that challenging those in positions of authority was how I always got it done.” Telling the student-centered story about the inequity was often the tool most used by the participants. Participant F talked about the need to review the grading practices in her district because of student demographics. She said, “We just wanted to change the grading policy so that kids had a fair shot as some were doing homework outside their classrooms or in a car because it was all they could do.”

**Pushing for Better Organizational Efficiency and Decision Making.** Many of the participants noted the fact that their efforts to transform their organization toward more efficient models meant that they had to challenge those in positions of authority. Participant C noted, “The district didn’t want to do innovative things, but I told them this is a must for our students.” Organizational efficiency often came up when discussing COVID-19 protocols and the ever-changing nature that they created both in the classroom and in the boardroom. Many of them spoke about how they had to challenge their board members and encourage them to look at facts, guidance, and legally defensible actions in the face of an ever-changing political and social dilemma.

To increase organizational efficiency, Participant B noted that she went to her superiors and let them know she did not need to be paid more or have a different position, but she needed a seat of influence so that she could help guide the organization in a direction that made more sense for students. After that, she noted that the superintendent asked her at the time how she would restructure the district if given the opportunity, and she shared her perspective on what would help to increase district efficiency. Many of the moves to challenge authority ultimately led Participant A to realize that she could not just sit back and let another person come in to change what was going on in her district but rather needed to step up and speak out as to what she could do to support change efforts.

### ***Impact on Challenging Authority***

During the interviews regarding the impact of challenging authority on one’s career, the following themes emerged: focus on students’ well-being, getting noticed and credibility, creating a unified front, positive approach and effective communication, and positive career advancement. Each theme shown in Table 5 is addressed in turn.



**Table 5**

*Themes Related to Impact of Challenging Authority Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Focus on students' well-being	12	6	75.0%
Getting noticed and credibility	10	6	75.0%
Creating a unified front	7	6	75.0%
Positive approach and effective communication	12	5	62.5%
Positive career advancement	5	5	62.5%

**Focus on Students' Well Being.** When the participants talked about the impact of challenging authority, the number one thing that came up was that it highlighted their ability to focus on student well-being as a primary driver. They overwhelmingly felt that when their ability to challenge authority was coupled with a strong desire to improve outcomes for student well-being, it was seen not as an abrasive tactic but one with heart behind it. Participant H noted “that it has advanced my career consistently because you are influencing decisions about students and families.” Participant C also noted that challenging authority helped her to sleep at night because kids were the focus of every challenge.

**Getting Noticed and Credibility.** In getting noticed and credibility, the idea of challenging authority could be a double-edged sword. Sometimes, challenging authority meant they were noticed, affecting credibility but not always to the positive end. Sometimes, the candidates were challenging authority and being perceived as insubordinate at the same time. But other candidates noted that they made a name for

themselves in challenging authority as someone who would fight against inequities and for student well-being.

Participant C noted that in challenging authority, she continued to push for something. After pushing for a prolonged period, it did not yield organizational change but rather put her in a different position at a different grade level to help her develop a different mindset regarding the organization. Although this type of credibility and noticeability was not the ultimate goal of this administrator, she also understood that it helped round out her experiences and provided her with opportunities later.

**Creating a Unified Front.** In creating a united front, the various unions that superintendents work with came up as a source of authority that these participants would regularly challenge during their career trajectory. In challenging these authority figures, they were able to forge relationships that ultimately had an impact on their career trajectory. In creating a united front with her teachers' union, Participant D noted, "I came out with a positive relationship with our teachers' union and their leadership after I questioned and listened to their concerns."

Participant F described how she could advance her career by challenging others and bringing them along with her. She remembered she had an opportunity to change someone's mind and quickly recognized that she needed to not come off as abrasive to help further her cause. She also noted that a hard stand right away would not bring anybody with her in the work she was trying to do.

**Positive Approach and Effective Communication.** Participant G noted, "I think if I had not learned you are not challenging the authority, you're challenging the status quo, and the authority may or may not be in a position to understand that to have the data

about that.” This framing of this administrator’s challenge is an example of developing a positive approach to communication that involves bringing data and attacking problems, not people. Several participants noted this approach as crucial for gaining visibility when aspiring to higher leadership positions.

Participants maintained that when challenging authority, one of the key skills being developed is the ability to communicate effectively. Effective communication is often seen as an essential skill for superintendents because of the amount of publicity given to this position. Clearly and consistently articulating how actions and decisions are made to improve student outcomes is key to being seen as a leader in an educational organization. Participant E noted that this business is always about kids, and talking about how to challenge the system is always centered on student needs.

**Positive Career Advancement.** Positive career advancement was a general theme in this area; five of the participants were seen as student-centered with great communication, a positive approach, the ability to create a united front, and stronger notoriety and credibility because of challenges when questioning how things have always been done. Participant D noted that she gained credibility by being the person who would challenge authority.

### ***Influencing Authority***

During the interviews on influencing authority, the following themes emerged: challenging and improving organizational structure, building relationships and trust across stakeholders, and enhancing negotiation and communication skills. Each theme shown in Table 6 is addressed in turn.

**Table 6**

*Themes Related to Influencing Authority Experienced While Advancing to the K-12*

*Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Challenging and improving organizational structure	9	6	75.0%
Building relationships and trust across stakeholders	25	6	62.5%
Enhancing negotiation and communication skills	17	5	62.5%

**Challenging and Improving Organizational Structure.** When influencing others to challenge or improve an organizational structure, many of the participants noted that this was one of the most challenging tasks but also the most necessary to impact organizational change. Participant A shared a story in which she came into a district and had to structure and implement processes related to English language development curriculum instruction assessment and accountability where very little had been done previously. Even though English language development programs are state-mandated, the district had minimal buy-in or structures to support the implementation of this idea. She used her influence to establish the need for such programs and to help develop a mindset regarding why fidelity to such programs would have such a huge impact on student achievement.

A common theme among all participants in this area was that they all understood it was a delicate situation to work on influencing authority when changing organizational structures. They all understood that when someone comes into a situation and is asked to look at how an organization is structured, there is a balancing act between recognizing

organizational strengths and wanting to improve upon long-held past practices that may be part of a district's culture.

**Building Relationships and Trust Across Stakeholders.** Building relationships and trust among stakeholders was a prevalent theme across many of the disruption strategies, but none more than in this one because the influencing can only happen when there is a strong relationship between parties. A great example was when Participant F faced a potentially chaotic situation the weekend Hurricane Hillary was headed for Southern California. For this superintendent, it meant a thorough inspection of all district classrooms. Hence, she took this opportunity to write a note of well-being on the whiteboard of every teacher whose classroom she walked into. In little acts such as this, many of these superintendents did not take for granted but chose to develop small relationships across their districts to develop trust.

**Enhancing Negotiation and Communication Skills.** When discussing influencing authority, the concept of using negotiation skills was nearly synonymous with using effective communication skills. One of the most significant examples of this in several participants' responses was related to labor union relationships. Participant C noted that she had great relationships with her union but understood it was their job to be combative, so her ability to influence them was far more successful than her ability to develop challenging encounters with them. Participant D noted that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a heightened need to influence labor unions because of the various opportunities they had to work with them on solutions.

In developing their skills within labor negotiations, Participant E noted that in working on negotiation and communication skills, the union developed a healthy and

authentic trust and respect for her and was more readily open to future communications. Participant D noted that by doing things that were not threatening, there was an ability to develop a collegial relationship with her labor unions. Participant D also recalled that in negotiations with her labor unions, she found a clause in their contract that said if they ever got to a point at which they had a certain unfunded liability, the union would share that cost evenly. This displayed a level of negotiation skills that ultimately helped her financially move the district in a different direction.

***Impact of Influencing Authority***

During the interviews on the impact of influencing authority, the following themes emerged: maintaining integrity and transparency, gaining respect and recognition, adapting to challenging situations, and balancing persuasion and authenticity. Each theme shown in Table 7 is addressed in turn.

**Table 7**

*Themes Related to the Impact of Influencing Authority Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Maintaining integrity and transparency	17	7	87.5%
Gaining respect and recognition	15	6	75.0%
Adapting to challenging situations	14	6	75.0%
Balancing persuasion and authenticity	13	4	50.0%

**Maintaining Integrity and Transparency.** Overwhelmingly, most of the participants agreed that they used influencing authority much more than challenging

authority and that if there is a positive impact in this area, it was largely because of influencing than challenging authority primarily because of the ability to maintain integrity and transparency. Participant B noted that during her career, she was part of multiple town hall groups with various stakeholder groups, and a key feature of these groups was that they often allowed the groups to see the leader in a place where they had to manage situations and questions that were uncomfortable openly. These types of public vulnerability when they were seeking to influence authority led to increased perceived integrity and transparency.

Participant E shared an incident with a board member who had a different political leaning than several others, and she recalled that he often disagreed with her on issues. She had to continually remind him of their legal obligations to uphold the law, which he felt was challenging him. Ultimately, the relationship garnered her approved ratings from him in that he saw the integrity it took for her to uphold laws that may or may not have been what is popular to others.

**Gaining Respect and Recognition.** In gaining respect and recognition, many superintendents talked about how, when influencing authority, they often put themselves in a place where people may not always agree with them but respect them. Participant C recalled a situation when she guided her administrators and told them that if they did not have difficult conversations, they were probably not doing their job. This conversation influenced her staff to have more difficult conversations and ultimately created an ability for them to respect her for calling out the need for this in their organization.

Participant H noted, “The more influence you have, people start seeing the influence, the more power you gain and the more respect you gain, and then you get

natural authority by just walking in the room.” Ultimately, she believed this kind of leadership and influence had garnered her an amazing amount of respect and recognition in her district, her local area, and nationally.

**Adapting to Challenging Situations.** When the superintendents reflected on the impact of influencing authority, they shared that by influencing authority, they were often placed in positions in which they had to adapt to challenging situations. Participant E talked about an experience in which she had done tremendous work with her school board before a meeting. Then, while sitting at the meeting, all aspects of her previous work to influence the board seemed to have little return in the meeting itself. Her ability to pivot in that situation, regardless of how challenging it was, was ultimately something that she felt impacted the board’s perception of her in addition to other people’s perception and confidence in her ability to move upward from there.

**Balancing Persuasion and Authenticity.** When these women discussed influencing authority, one of the themes that came out very clearly was that when they sought to influence authority, they knew that the level of persuasion needed to come with its dose of authenticity. A few of the superintendents even noted that the need for this authenticity when seeking to influence authority was to be still perceived as having positive female characteristics rather than a more directed and agentic male style to those they were trying to influence.

Participant G mentioned that a high level of competency was required so that her influencing authority was not viewed as a pushiness or bulldozer approach to those she was attempting to influence. To support this view, Participant A mentioned that she has seen female superintendents approach situations of influence with more agentic qualities.



This approach often did not suit them well relative to the impact on their career trajectory.

### **Research Question 2: Preparing but Also Improvising**

The second research question asked, “What perceived impact did preparing but also improvising have on female K-12 superintendents’ advancement to an executive leadership position?”

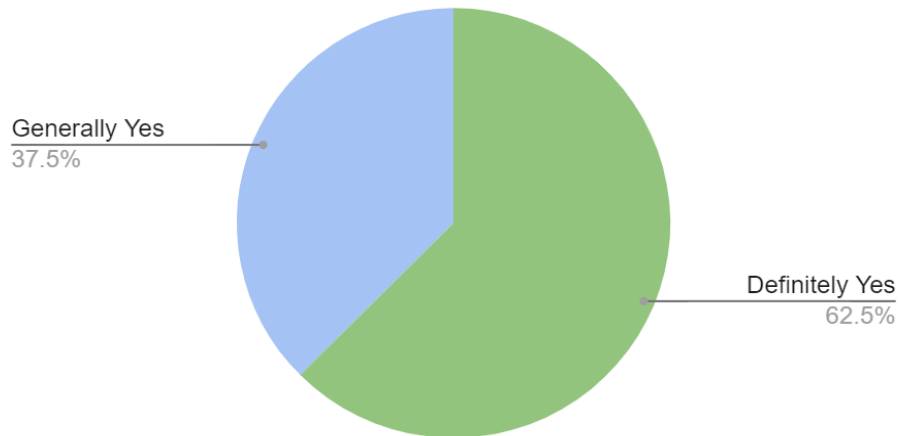
#### **Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

Figure 10 shows that in preparing but also improvising, 62.5% of participants agreed that they definitely do this, and 37.5% agreed that they generally do this. In Figure 11, when evaluating the impact of this, 75% believed to a high degree that this had a positive impact on their career trajectory. In comparison, 25% rated this as having some degree of a positive impact on their career trajectory.

**Figure 10**

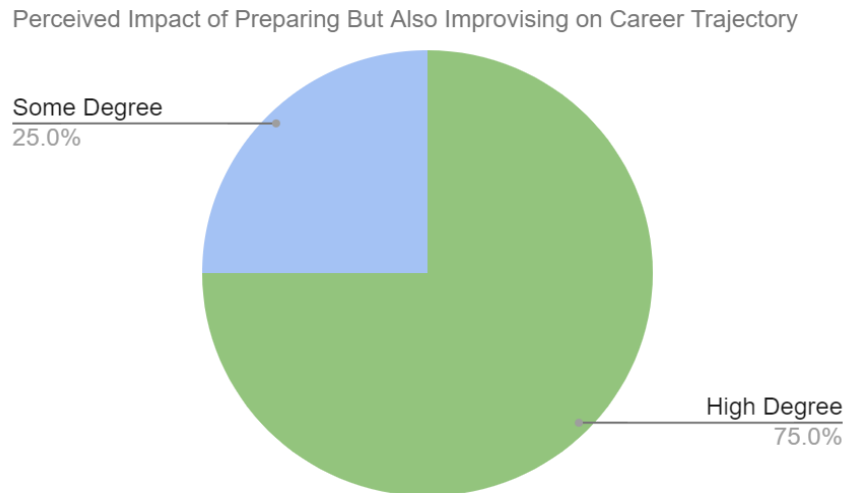
*Quantitative Responses to the Use of Preparing but Also Improvising*

Preparing But Also Improvising: While I like to prepare in advance, I also am comfortable going into unfamiliar situations and capable of providing on the spot solutions.



**Figure 11**

*Quantitative Responses to the Impact of Preparing but Also Improvising*



**Qualitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

***Preparing but Also Improvising***

During the interviews on preparing but also improvising, the following themes emerged: adapting to challenging situations, strategic preparation and pivoting, improvising for positive impact, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Each theme shown in Table 8 is addressed in turn.

**Table 8**

*Themes Related to Preparing but Also Improvising Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Adapting to challenging situations	14	6	75.0%
Strategic preparation and pivoting	14	6	75.0%
Improvising for positive impact	7	6	75.0%
COVID-19 pandemic	9	5	62.5%

**Adapting to Challenging Situations/COVID-19 Pandemic.** Adapting to challenging situations was overwhelmingly something that these superintendents have had to do throughout their entire careers. Participant A noted a time when she had a vendor scheduled to do some training, and at the last minute, the person canceled, and she had to pivot to figure out what was going to meet the needs of her district best. Participant E noted a situation when she was asked to speak in front of a large group, and subsequently, that group stood up to explain their discontent about some of her decisions. Many of the people in the room were people she considered friends and close colleagues, and her ability to be reflective in a situation and adapt to what could have been incredibly detrimental to her career was overwhelming and what pushed her forward into her career.

One specific example that came up in multiple interviews was regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, which was by far the greatest challenge superintendents had seen in modern history. Participant E gave an example of how she recognized in her community that while schools were shutting down, it was important for her to support healthcare efforts so that school could resume. In that vein of thinking, she helped local hospitals by helping organize vaccination efforts as part of a district response to COVID-19. This thinking not only helped her community understand the gravity of the situation but also how the district was trying to partner to bring kids back.

**Strategic Preparation and Pivoting.** Many of the superintendents noted that they prepare in their heads 100% of the time, whether in the office or out doing things in the community. They are constantly thinking, “What happens next? How do I prepare for later? What’s going on in the long term?” Participant G noted that the more someone plans, the less they have to do it. Participant F was asked to lead something within her

community and was unsure she was right for the job, so she prepared a speech involving a popular children's book for this group. When she got into the group, she recognized that it was perfect for this group and would help cement their support regarding an upcoming literacy initiative. Having both a plan and a way to switch paths if needed subsequently allowed for her to be seen as strategic within her community.

Participant A noted that as in all districts in California, even structures within the superintendency allow for and support both preparation and pivoting. One example she gave was the formulation of the Local Control Accountability Plan. Although seen as a multiyear plan, it has inherent revisions that happen annually so that long-term planning is coupled with intermittent pivots based on actual versus projected needs. Many of these women leverage the Local Control Accountability Plan and its action items as part of their strategic planning process.

**Improvising for Positive Impact.** In the area of improvising for positive impact, these women talked about how the strong desire to plan but also improvise was based upon their need to provide a positive impact for stakeholders and students. Many of them noted the strength they had in reading the room when it came to situations discussing student needs. When they came into conversations, although they had an idea of what they thought would be best for students in the organization, they soon realized that to make a positive impact, there was a level of humility needed by them to listen and truly hear from their organizations. This type of leadership that is flexible and reflective of needs led to positive impacts within their districts, such as increased student test scores, increased safety measures, or increased access to technology.

### ***Impact of Preparing but Also Improvising***

During the interview on the impact of preparing but also improvising, the following themes emerged: adapting to challenging situations, humility and open-mindedness, and being present and reading the room. Each theme shown in Table 9 is addressed in turn.

**Table 9**

*Themes Related to the Impact of Preparing but Also Improvising Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Adapting to challenging situations	14	6	75.0%
Humility and open-mindedness	12	7	87.5%
Being present and reading the room	3	3	37.5%

**Adapting to Challenging Situations.** The women interviewed believed that adapting and challenging situations had an incredibly positive impact on their ability to achieve higher positions within their organizations. Once they were seen as somebody who could pivot when needed but also be able to be crystal clear on what was important, they were looked at more often for leadership positions. Participant E talked about staying the course through challenging situations with course corrections along the way but still heading in the same direction for her district. All the participants noted that school boards looked for someone who was reflective but forward-focused and could weather challenging situations by staying steady and on course.

**Humility and Open-Mindedness.** Preparing but also improvising has a lot to do with whether an individual is humble and open-minded to solutions beyond their own.

Participant C talked about her position as an assistant superintendent at one point in time and how she had to step back many times to respect the superintendent's decision. This level of humility, despite having ample experience in decision-making herself, showed that she knew how to remain open-minded. She agreed that being observed acquiescing to her leader ultimately had a positive impact on her career. Participant C also noted that someone can get defensive or say they are right about something, and ultimately people look to them to see which path they choose.

**Being Present and Reading the Room.** Although many experiences shared by these women were large-scale in nature, this topic seemed to come up frequently and was much simpler. One of the seemingly little moments discussed in preparing but also learning to improvise was the idea of being present and reading the room during presentations or meetings. Participant F noted that she would “not try too hard to be so prepared that you can't listen and be present at the moment because these moments change, and your reaction to them must change as well.” Participant E talked about meeting with stakeholders and the impact of her coming and being reflective during those conversations. She noted that impressions of a person are not formed in emails but are formed during informal conversations, meetings, and presentations, and whether leaders are fully involved in the moment they are in.

### **Research Question 3: Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion**

The third research question asked, “What perceived impact did engaging in effective forms of self-promotion have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?”

## Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation

Figure 12 shows that in the area of engaging in effective forms of self-promotion, 12.5% of participants agreed that they definitely do this, and 37.5% agreed that they generally do this, and 50% agreed that they generally do not do this. In Figure 13, when evaluating the impact of this, 12.5% believed to a high degree that this had a positive impact on their career trajectory, 12.5% rated this as having some degree of a positive impact on their career trajectory, 25% agreed it had little to no degree of positive career impact, and 50% did not agree that this helped to advance their careers.

## Qualitative Data Analysis and Presentation

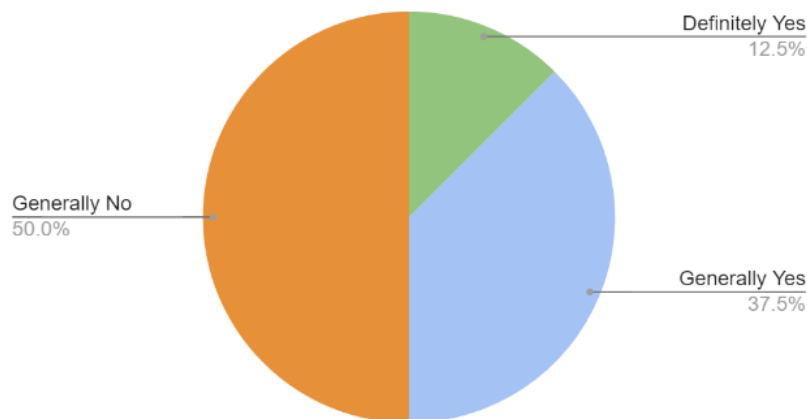
### *Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion*

During the interview on engaging in effective forms of self-promotion, the following themes emerged: substance over publicity, promoting accomplishments and initiatives, modesty and hesitance to self-promote, and promotion through relationship building. Each theme shown in Table 10 is addressed in turn.

### Figure 12

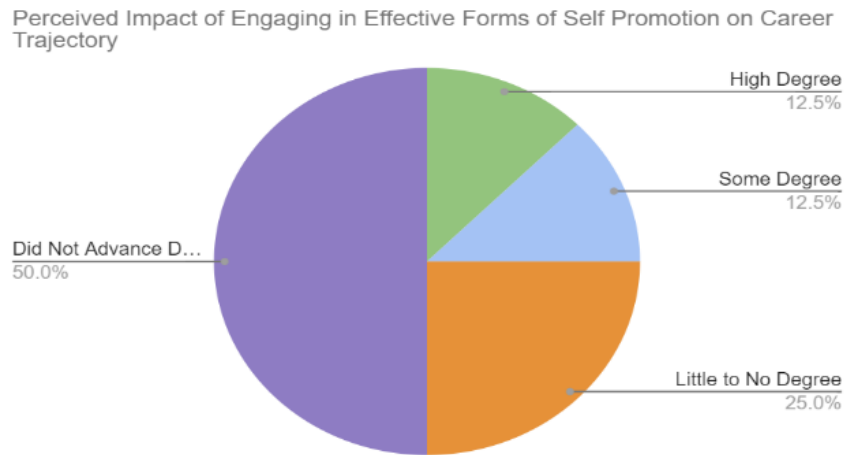
#### *Quantitative Responses to the Use of Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion*

Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion: While I believe in allowing my work to speak for itself, I have found ways to effectively highlight my accomplishments.



**Figure 13**

*Quantitative Responses to the Impact of Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion*



**Table 10**

*Themes Related to Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Substance over publicity	21	8	100%
Promoting accomplishments and initiatives	20	8	100%
Modesty and hesitance to self-promote	11	6	75%
Promotion through relationship building	10	6	75%

**Substance Over Publicity.** The topic of substance over publicity came up many times with participants. Participant G stated,

The uniqueness and excellence that anybody brings to a leadership role, I guess indirectly people will see that when you get results, but when you purposely point



this out, it seems as though it is for publicity rather than to highlight accomplishments of the organization.

Participant D believed that when the publicity or self-promotion is too contrived, it backfires and has the opposite effect on the individual. Additionally, the same participant felt that if someone actively engages in doing the best job they can, it will get noticed regardless of whether they are not the one drawing attention to it.

The participants spoke freely of knowing people who have actively self-promoted and seen it turn off others on their abilities and overall likability. To keep this from happening, Participant G discussed how people who think about self-promotion actively are usually not people who elevate their organization. Participant G talked about how many administrators who actively pursue self-promotion often do not do good work, which becomes more apparent through their efforts to self-promote. Participant F pointed out that certain individuals, particularly some males, can create glossy pamphlets. Still, the credibility of the content within those pamphlets is often questioned by both their communities and the organization's members.

**Promoting Through Accomplishments and Initiatives.** Because nearly all of the candidates remarked about how effective forms of self-promotion are not only difficult to find but even detrimental if done wrong, there was one area that many of them did agree on in this question. They agreed that by promoting the accomplishments of the district, the department, the school site, or the students, they were telling the story of their leadership. Participant C noted that the positive benefits of focusing on student achievement and student programming for most of her career have helped make her school system a success and her career trajectory one as well.

Many of the superintendents noted that it was important for people to know who they were and attach them to the district so that they were viewed as part of the success when things happened in the district. Participant H talked about how when one promotes the district and insists on knowing the members of their community, they are working on both the district and self-promotion.

All participants noted that modesty and hesitancy to self-promote was a key factor for them in deciding that their self-promotion would come through accomplishments of the organization rather than actual things they have done. Participant A said that when a finger is pointing at her in praise, she routinely points it to someone else. Participant G noted that sometimes this modesty and hesitance to self-promote could be problematic for administrators, especially when it counts as an interview in which they would forget to sing their praises.

Participant G relayed a story regarding humility, and if a person is truly humble, they are not self-promoting and are promoting other people. In many ways, this leads to the next theme of promotion through relationship building because the relationships and accomplishments work together to be an effective way to self-promote.

**Promotion Through Relationship Building.** The participants agreed that effective forms of self-promotion were most successful when working on relationship building at all levels of the organization. Participant F shared that self-promotion through relationships was the only appropriate way that she felt she was selling who she was as a person. Participant H understood that she is the face of her district and has been for many years, and as such, the district's accomplishments are her own, and the relationships she has formed are part of those accomplishments.

Many of these women recognized that they currently occupy top leadership positions within their organizations, making self-promotion necessary to advance their organizations. However, they also emphasized the importance of promoting others by nurturing relationships and supporting the development of fellow leaders, thereby expanding the concept of self-promotion to encompass the growth of those around them. Participant A shared an example about a former mentor who gave her an idea, and she had planned to credit that person with the idea, but they let her know that she needed the credit more, so she should talk about it being her idea. In these relationships, the reputations of all of these women have become part of the story of who they are and have thus led to a positive career impact for them.

***Impact of Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion***

During the interview on the impact of engaging in effective forms of self-promotion, the following themes emerged: substance over publicity, positive effects, neutral effects, and negative effects. Each theme shown in Table 11 is addressed in turn.

**Table 11**

*Themes Related to the Impact of Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Substance over publicity	21	8	100%
Positive effects	19	8	100%
Neutral effects	4	3	37.5%
Negative effects	3	2	25%

**Substance Over Publicity.** All participants noted that for self-promotion to be effective and have a positive impact on one's career, it needed to be in the vein of substance over publicity. Participant C noted that when self-promotion comes in the form of highlighting student achievement and student programming, it serves the purpose of highlighting the work that happens under the person's leadership. Participant H noted that the intentionality of promoting district initiatives, programs, and successes is heightened once one achieves the status of superintendent because the story of the district ultimately tells the story of the superintendent. Participant G explained,

This is the one I like the least because I think most superintendents, except for my predecessor, try not to do a crapload of this all the time, and I think it's odious and terrible. I never wanted to be a baby-kisser and a hand-shaker, which is why I never wanted to be a superintendent until I met my predecessor who I was like, okay, if that's a superintendent that I could do, I don't believe in self-promotion.

**Positive Effects.** Despite the fact that most of the participants conveyed a strong reluctance toward using self-promotion when discussing impact, they all expressed ways in which self-promotion, in the context of promoting district priorities, was perceived as having a beneficial effect. Participant F noted that promoting herself through relationships with people and organizations by going out and doing the work positively impacted her career trajectory. Participant E agreed with this perception and said that building relationships with students and staff led her to attain the role of superintendent.

Participant D relayed a story about when she was up for a superintendent role against another candidate and was told that not enough was known about her to place her in that role, so at that point, she did not get the position. The colleague who got the job

was good at putting herself in the right spot at the right moment to get noticed, whether intentional or unintentional. She recognized that ensuring the board and community knew enough about her would be crucial to positively impacting her career trajectory.

**Neutral Effects.** Some of the candidates expressed that self-promotion can often be misconstrued or perceived in a negative light, therefore leaving it open to the discretion of individuals to determine whether it is positive or negative. When asked about the effects of self-promotion on her career, Participant D shared that her philosophy was that her work would speak for itself and that she would not need to self-promote.

**Negative Effects.** Although many participants noted that they did not like to use self-promotion readily, they all noted its positive effects. A few participants shared concerns about the potential negative consequences associated with self-promotion. Some of them relived stories of colleagues who self-promoted in a way that lacked authenticity and substance, leading to negative effects on their career trajectory. Participant D noted a time when she saw a colleague doing this, and it felt contrived and ultimately backfired on the person.

#### **Research Question 4: Welcoming a Less-Prescribed Career Path**

The fourth research question asked, “What perceived impact did welcoming a less prescribed career path have on female K-12 superintendents’ advancement to an executive leadership position?”

#### **Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

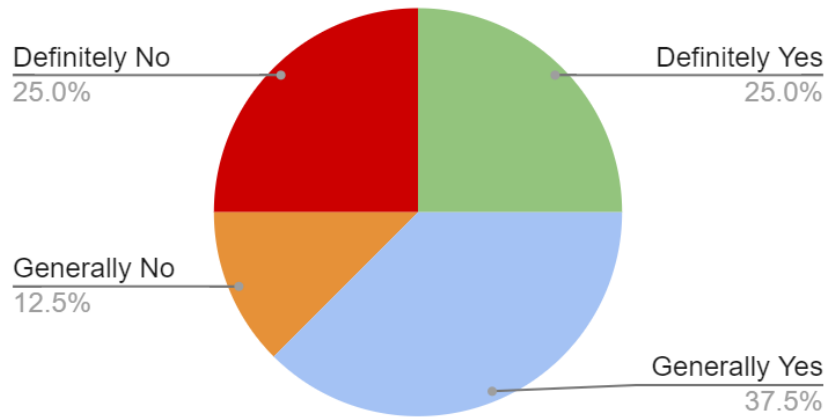
Figure 14 shows that in the area of welcoming a less prescribed career path, 25% of participants agreed that they definitely do this. In comparison, 37.5% agreed that they generally do this, 12.5% agreed that they generally do not do this, and 25% agreed that

they definitely do not do this. In Figure 15, when evaluating the impact of this, 50% believed to a high degree that this had a positive impact on their career trajectory. In comparison, 12.5 % rated this as having some degree of a positive impact on their career trajectory, and 37.5% agreed that it did not advance their career trajectory.

**Figure 14**

*Quantitative Responses to the Use of Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path*

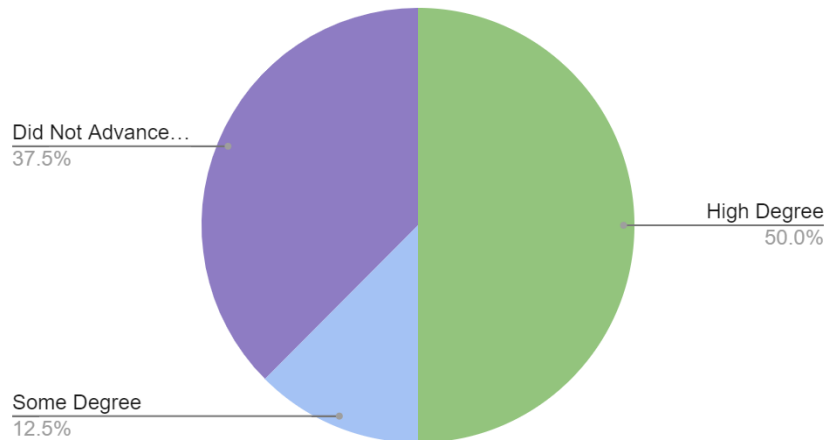
Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path: I have taken a lateral move or a job outside my career field.



**Figure 15**

*Quantitative Responses to the Impact of Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path*

Perceived Impact of Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path on Career Trajectory



## Qualitative Data Analysis and Presentation

### *Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path*

During the interviews on welcoming a less prescribed career path, the following themes emerged: diverse career trajectory: career adaptability and flexibility, diverse career trajectory: varied experiences and roles, learning and gaining new skills, and transitioning to nontraditional roles. Each theme shown in Table 12 is addressed in turn.

**Table 12**

*Themes Related to Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Career adaptability and flexibility	28	8	100.0%
Diverse career trajectory: Varied experiences and roles	18	7	87.5%
Learning and gaining new skills	18	7	87.5%
Transitioning to nontraditional roles	11	6	75.0%

**Career Adaptability and Flexibility.** All participants believed that welcoming a less prescribed career path allowed for career adaptability and flexibility. Many of them relayed experiences of changing districts and changing positions or going into fields in which they had little knowledge previously in an attempt to gain different perspectives. Participant G noted that she was gaining an education in instructional technology but then recognized the need to have administrative training so quickly changed it to educational administration. This type of adaptability when a person recognizes the need for new skill sets was similar to what some of the other participants also noted.

**Diverse Career Trajectory: Varied Experiences and Roles.** Being open to different pathways and strengths that others see in you was part of what Participant G, Participant D, Participant C, and Participant A experienced. One participant went from an educational services role to leading in educational technology. One participant talked about having limited skills in Excel spreadsheets and then going on to be the assistant superintendent of business services.

**Learning and Gaining New Skills.** Even though many of the participants noted that they felt their career path was linear in nature, upon answering probing questions, they all were able to see that there were lateral moves and moves that maybe they would not have taken if it were not for the need for them to develop skill sets in other areas. Participant H went from working in a small district to a large district to have the experience of taking her skills and amplifying them. Many of the participants noted that there was a tap on the shoulder to move them to a different position to help their skill sets increase. Participant G noted that this happened many times throughout her career trajectory. Participant F talked about how she learned to love doing facilities work after doing some work in this area even though many who consider themselves instructional in nature do not regularly take on these types of roles.

Another participant talked about how moving to human resources took her skill set from curriculum and instruction and broadened it to the various legal and programmatic needs of Human Resources.

**Transitioning to Nontraditional Roles.** One great example of transitioning to a role that would be nontraditional happened to Participant B. She took on the role of director of technology through a series of staffing changes within her district. She took on



this role after a board member expressed that he did not believe she could fulfill the role of this position. After doing this, her district led all others in the area regarding the acquisition of technology and use in the classroom, so much so that it garnered national recognition.

Another example of taking on a nontraditional role was when Participant G decided to take time away from her superintendency to lead a post-secondary degree program. In doing this, she was able to hone her organizational leadership skills by teaching them to others and thus gain a wider network of supporters who knew of her work.

***Impact of Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path***

During the interviews for the impact of welcoming a less prescribed career path, the following themes emerged: developing a broader lens and secondary perspective, leadership and decision making, and versatility and understanding in the superintendent role. Each theme shown in Table 13 is addressed in turn.

**Table 13**

*Themes Related to the Impact of Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Developing a broader lens and secondary perspective	12	7	87.5%
Versatility and understanding in superintendent role	10	6	75.0%
Leadership and decision making	6	3	37.5%

**Developing a Broader Lens and Secondary Perspective.** All the participants in this study were women who had elementary experience but found themselves in a K-12 superintendency role. Many of them noted that part of their welcoming a less prescribed career path was in their ability to develop a secondary perspective that would assist them in gaining the reputation of being able to obtain a K-12 superintendency. Participant G noted that being open to different pathways, especially when a comfort level may lie within elementary, was important to her career trajectory. One of the most significant differences between elementary and secondary lies in the completion of and importance of the master schedule, so Participant C noted that she needed a position that allowed her to work hands-on with the master schedule to help develop that critical piece of secondary education. Participant C also noted that when working with the unions prior to having secondary experience, she did not understand the concerns about teaching staff having three preps when her elementary counterparts had six, so developing her knowledge in this area was important to developing her secondary lens.

**Leadership and Decision Making.** Welcoming a less prescribed career path allowed the superintendents to increase their leadership and decision-making skills. When looking at their organizations from a different vantage point, they were able to see how their impact could be different based upon the decisions that they were part of. Participant C noted that when working on leadership and decision making, it was important to notice that the technical skills gained by a role within a district were only part of the district's story, but the community-based skills and the historical knowledge of what works and does not work in a community were even more important along the prescribed career path.

**Versatility and Understanding in the Superintendent Role.** Along the prescribed career path of all the participants was the need to truly understand the superintendent's role in the district. They needed to understand that a superintendent needed to be able to talk about instruction, business human resources labor negotiations, student safety educational technology special education effective governance, and many other aspects of running large K through 12 districts. Participant A noted that welcoming a different career path allowed her to know and understand the needs of various schools within the district rather than a singular approach to being a principal at one school site.

#### **Research Question 5: Aim for Being Respected Over Being Liked**

The fifth research question asked, "What perceived impact did aiming for respect over being liked have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?"

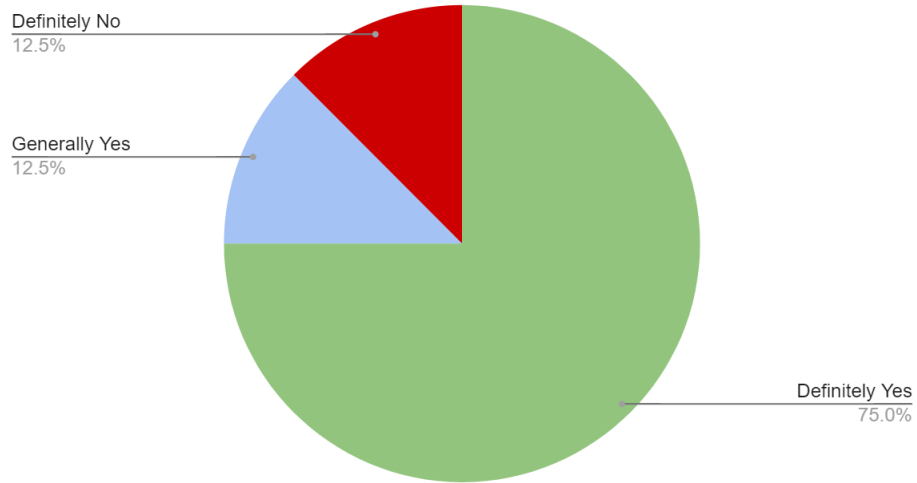
#### **Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

Figure 16 shows that in the area of aiming for being respected over being liked, 75% of participants agreed that they definitely do this, and 12.5% agreed that they generally do this and 12.5% agreed that they definitely do not do this. In Figure 17, when evaluating the impact of this, 37.5% believed to a high degree that this had a positive impact on their career trajectory. In comparison, 37.5% rated this as having some degree of a positive impact on their career trajectory, 12.5% agreed this had little to no degree of impact on their career trajectory, and 12.5% agreed that it did not advance their career trajectory.

**Figure 16**

*Quantitative Responses to the Use of Aiming for Being Respected Over Being Liked*

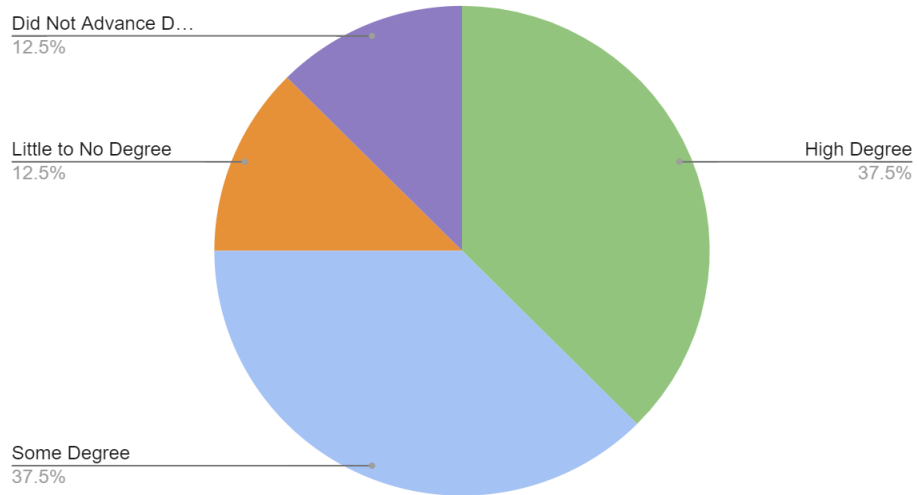
Aim for Being Respected Over Being Liked: I have undertaken actions that may not necessarily enhance my popularity but have garnered respect for my decision-making abilities.



**Figure 17**

*Quantitative Responses to the Impact of Aiming for Being Respected Over Being Liked*

Perceived Impact of Aiming for Being Respected Over Being Liked on Career Trajectory



## Qualitative Data Analysis and Presentation

### *Aiming for Being Respected Over Being Liked*

During the interview questions on aiming for being respected over being liked, the following themes emerged: adapting through challenging situations, making tough decisions for the greater good, prioritizing integrity and professionalism, promoting open communication and transparency, and considering the well-being of employees. Each theme shown in Table 14 is addressed in turn.

**Table 14**

*Themes Related to Aiming for Being Respected Over Being Liked Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Adapting through challenging situations	14	6	75.0%
Making tough decisions for the greater good	9	6	75.0%
Prioritizing integrity and professionalism	10	5	62.5%
Promoting open communication and transparency	5	4	40.0%
Considering the well-being of employees	4	3	37.5%

**Adapting Through Challenging Situations.** Challenging situations often bring up the dichotomy between respect and likability. This was a primary theme in aiming to be respected over being liked. Participant H noted that there was a time when she did not have all the perspectives needed to make a decision during challenging times, but she understood that making that decision ultimately would lead to people respecting her, not

necessarily all people liking her. When confronted with a group of stakeholders who did not agree, Participant E chose to smile at each one of them through their discontent, understanding that although they might not like her in that situation, she would choose to use respect toward them.

**Making Tough Decisions for the Greater Good.** Making difficult decisions for people often means that one must keep one's purpose toward something greater than the individual. Participant H noted that "if I'm going to be liked, I'm not going to be effective." Participant D related an experience in which a close friend of hers was a principal after she became superintendent and soon after that started slipping in her job responsibilities. She recognized her need to remedy the situation because of its impact on staff, students, and the principal at the site. Although this decision was not an easy one for her, she recognized that her ability to make this decision was for the greater good of her district and specifically for that school site.

**Prioritizing Integrity and Professionalism.** When asked to reflect on likability, many of the participants noted that likability was less important than things like integrity and professionalism. The participants could all name individuals who were likable within districts but had very little impact on district achievement or morale. Participant G noted that "the pitfall is when we think if people just see me as competent and smart and a good person that they're going to think I'm the right one for the job." Participant A recognized the importance of being a person whom people can trust more than any likability, and ultimately, she recognized the fact that not everybody will like everybody, so people are probably better off if they quit trying to please everybody.

**Promoting Open Communication and Transparency.** When discussing likability and respect, the candidates talked about the fact that open communication and transparency lead more to respect than likability does. One example of this was when Participant G spoke about an area that she was vulnerable to. It helped her develop empathy for her and thus get behind her cause because she showed her vulnerability. She found support for her causes by doing so.

**Considering the Well-Being of Employees.** More than working on likability, the participants explained that the sincerity with which they care about those who work for them increases their respectability. Participant G talked about the fact that gaining these relationships and working on caring for her employees has made the difference between being seen as likable and being seen as respected. She was clearly able to state that she knows the names of all 6,000 of her employees. Participant G also noted that she sees directors and superintendents who do not take the time to make personal connections with people, which leads to a lack of likability and also a lack of respect.

### ***Impact of Aiming for Being Respected Over Being Liked***

During the interview questions on the impact of aiming for being respected over being liked, the following themes emerged: balancing respect and likability, making tough decisions for the greater good, and prioritizing integrity and professionalism. Each theme shown in Table 15 is addressed in turn.

**Balancing Respect and Likeability.** Many participants talked about the need to balance respect and likability. They believed that maintaining this equilibrium is ultimately what has positively influenced their careers, but they all maintained that there will always be people who do not like what they are doing and that they will never please

everyone. Participant A said, “There may be people on your school board and you want to get hired and they just don’t like you, not that they don’t respect you, they just don’t like you.” Additionally, Participant A noticed that there are disadvantages to not pleasing all the people in power, for example, those on the school board.

**Table 15**

*Themes Related to the Impact of Aiming for Being Respected Over Being Liked Experienced While Advancing to the K-12 Superintendency*

Theme	References	Participants	% of participants
Balancing respect and likeability	10	6	75.0%
Making tough decisions for the greater good	12	6	75.0%
Prioritizing integrity and professionalism	9	5	62.5%

**Making Tough Decisions for the Greater Good.** In terms of their career impact, making the tough decisions that ultimately benefited the greater good of the district and even if they resulted in initial short-term likability, would eventually pave the way for long-term respect and credibility. Participant D noted that “making the decisions that I knew were right at the moment has gained me the respect to continue to do the work.” Participant C also noted, “I think people don’t like you when you have to make the right decision in the best interests of kids if it doesn’t meet what adults want from a decision.”

When it came to student achievement, all participants commented about how making decisions or calling for action has led to long-term respect gains. Participant C recalled a time when she had to go to a group of administrators and let them know that the scores for their students were not what they needed to be and that the district and



board needed to see improvement to move forward. This level of clear expectation for the staff, although there were initially some likability losses, ultimately led to respectability gains.

**Prioritizing Integrity and Professionalism.** When these superintendents prioritized their integrity and professionalism, the career impact was consistently positive when it came to their concern over respectability over likeability. They had a clear understanding that to be effective their likability did not need to be the most important thing for them. One superintendent noted that the longer superintendents hold the position and the closer they get to retirement, the less they really care about likability and the more they care about their impact on students. Having clear superintendent expectations is what Participant C felt has led to the perception of her as a person of integrity and professionalism.

### **Key Findings**

Based on the data collected and analyzed from the quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with eight K-12 superintendents with an elementary background, key findings resulted related to the use of W. Johnson and Mohr (2019) personal disruption strategies. Based on the research, the following key findings were discovered.

#### **Summary of Findings: Challenging Authority**

- Navigating gender and professional stereotypes greatly impacts K-12 female superintendents' ability and likelihood to use this skill.
- K-12 female superintendents are more likely to challenge authority figures in the scope of defending professional practices.

- Female superintendents are more likely to challenge authority when asked to carry through ineffective imposed practices.
- Exposing and addressing inequities is a prevalent reason to challenge authority among these women.

#### **Summary of Unexpected Findings: Challenging Authority**

- The perceived impact of challenging authority was on its ability to get the person noticed and add credibility.
- Creating a unified front was seen as a reason that this disruptive skill impacts a person's career trajectory.

#### **Summary of Findings: Influencing Authority**

- Most examples of influencing authority followed along the theme of challenging and improving upon organizational structures.
- Building trust and relationships was another example of how these individuals influenced authority.
- There is a need to develop negotiation and communication skills when influencing authority.

#### **Summary of Unexpected Findings: Influencing Authority**

- Influencing authority was seen as having a much more positive impact on career trajectory than challenging authority.

#### **Summary of Findings: Prepare but Also Improvising**

- Most examples in this area could be linked to the COVID-19 pandemic because this caused more of these situations than any other crisis in modern history.

- Strategic planning with ample deviations from the plan is more important to these women than a strict plan.

#### **Summary of Unexpected Findings: Prepare but Also Improvising**

- Humility and open-mindedness were a prerequisite to using this type of skill.
- Being truly present and reading the room are skills that often can lead to the impression that others may garner about one's ability to fill a certain role.

#### **Summary of Findings: Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion**

- Participants agreed that they do not feel as though self-promotion is something a leader should be doing actively, but rather be a result of the accomplishments of their school/department/district's accomplishments.
- Substance over publicity is seen as a key tenet to effectively promoting oneself or one's district.
- Modesty and hesitance were some of the key factors keeping women from actively self-promoting.

#### **Summary of Unexpected Findings: Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion**

- Although the participants agreed that they are not comfortable in this area, they agreed that it is necessary at some point for a positive career trajectory.

#### **Summary of Findings: Welcoming a Less-Prescribed Career Path**

- Developing a wider lens of district departments and grade levels was the main reason why a less prescribed career path was followed by some participants.
- Being open to the strengths other people see in you is another reason why a career path may not follow an expected progression.

### **Summary of Unexpected Findings: Welcoming a Less-Prescribed Career Path**

- Actively pursuing opportunities to develop a “secondary lens” would be crucial to any administrator with an elementary background seeking a K-12 superintendency.

### **Summary of Findings: Aim for Being Respected Over Being Liked**

- Challenging situations can lead to instances in which others choose to respect and/or like you.
- Integrity and professionalism are more important outcomes than respectability and likability.

### **Summary of Unexpected Findings: Aim for Being Respected Over Being Liked**

- When it comes to positive career impact, there is power in being seen as a person who actively considers the well-being of one’s employees.
- It is possible to have respect without likability and likability without respect and still have a positive impact on a person’s career trajectory.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods study was to explore the perceived impact of W. Johnson and Mohr’s (2019) personal disruption skills on the advancement to a K-12 superintendency for eight female superintendents of an elementary background. Data collection included a Likert scale survey that touched on the use and impact of the five disruptive career skills and a semi-structured interview. This chapter provided an analysis of the data related to the use of career skills and their perceived impact on career advancement. Key findings and unexpected findings related

to each research question were identified. Chapter V provides an overview of the major findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This explanatory mixed methods study identified how female K-12 superintendents with an elementary background used W. Johnson and Mohr's (2019) personal disruption strategies along their career trajectory. It sought to clarify whether the disruption strategy was used, give explicit examples of their use, and determine to what extent there was a perceived impact of the personal disruption strategy on their careers. The foundation of this study was based on the work of W. Johnson and Mohr (2019), appropriately titled, *Women Need to Realize Work is Not School*. In it they sought to explain why females needed to realize that work was not school, and the same things that made them successful in a school environment would ultimately not equate to the same success in leadership role attainment. Chapter V provides an overview of the study (purpose statement, research questions, methodology, population, and sample), major findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research. The chapter closes with reflections from I .

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods study was to identify and describe the perceived impact of W. Johnson and Mohr's five disruptive career skills (2019) on female K-12 superintendents from an elementary background to their advancement to an executive leadership position.

### **Research Questions**

1. What perceived impact did challenging and influencing authority have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?

2. What perceived impact did preparing but also improvising have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
3. What perceived impact did engaging in effective forms of self-promotion have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
4. What perceived impact did welcoming a less prescribed career path have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?
5. What perceived impact did aiming for respect over being liked have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?

### **Methodology**

The type of research design chosen for this study was an explanatory mixed methods design. Advantages of this type of study include the ability to collect more comprehensive data than other designs, allowing for the analysis of both the process and outcomes, compensating for limitations by using a single method, and enhancing the credibility of findings from a single method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Additionally, a mixed methods design allows for investigating different types of research questions that can be more complex. This study had five separate research questions to be analyzed that referred to personal disruption strategies used by these women. Using quantitative and qualitative research methods, I gained a well-rounded view of whether and to what extent these female superintendents used these personal disruption strategies. The design was a sequential explanatory mixed methods design in which quantitative data was first collected followed by qualitative data that elaborated on quantitative data findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

## **Population**

The population is the group of individuals who meet specific criteria of which the intent is to generalize information gained from them (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the population was K-12 female superintendents from California. According to Zippia (2023b), 28% of superintendent positions across the United States are currently held by females. According to the California Department of Education (n.d.), there are 343 K-12 districts in California. In these districts, 126 females and 217 males were in the superintendent role at the time of this study. These numbers equate to 37% of California K-12 districts led by a female. Using this percentage it can be estimated that the population for this study was 126 female superintendents leading a K-12 school district.

## **Sample**

Because this study was targeted at the need for elementary experience, I used purposeful and convenience sampling (Patton, 2015). There were 53 female superintendents across California identified who met the sampling frame criteria. This study included interviews with eight of these women. These individuals were found using the Association of California School Administrators database for superintendents and the California Department of Education database for superintendents.

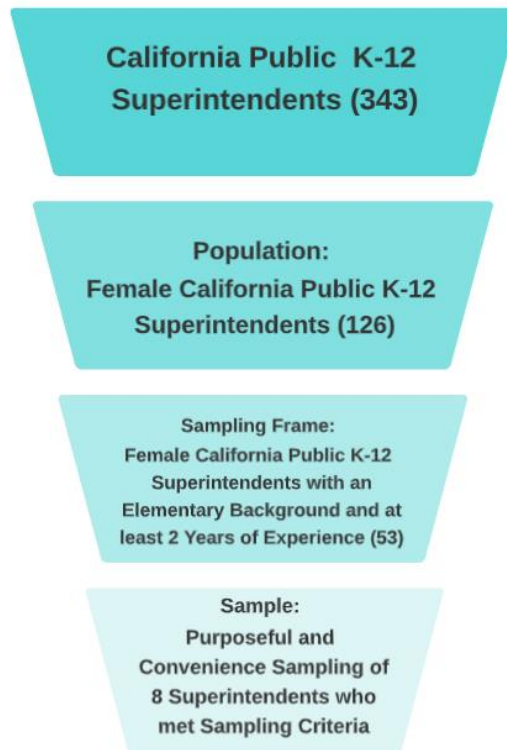
McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a sample as “a group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). From the sampling frame, purposeful and convenience sampling were used to identify the sample for the study. Purposeful sampling allowed me to select specific elements from California’s population representative of female superintendents. Convenience sampling allowed me to interview female superintendents in close geographic proximity, ultimately making the



research and data collection process accessible and expedient (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The criteria for selecting participants for convenience sampling were also specific and included participants from various counties in California. I inferred that the characteristics of the sample were likely characteristics of the population. The sample for the study was eight female K-12 public school superintendents with an elementary background employed in various counties in California. Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) recommended a small sample size so I can provide a detailed and thorough picture of the phenomenon as shown in Figure 5 (repeated here for ease of reference).

**Figure 5**

*K-12 Superintendents Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample*



## **Summary of Major Findings**

### **Challenging and Influencing Authority: Major Findings**

The first major finding related to challenging and influencing authority was that although traditional gender stereotypes may discourage females from challenging authority, they are more likely to do so if they are defending professional practices, opposing ineffective practices, or advocating against inequities.

This finding is congruent with Eagly and Wood's (2012) social role theory in that to challenge someone else's authority is often deemed a more agentic quality ascribed to males than females. Defending professional practices is an area in which an administrator is likely to challenge others who may not have the same level of professional background but are trying to impact the classroom in ways that those within education know do not benefit students. Educators are consistently called to find and remediate inequitable situations for students, so it is no surprise that advocating inequities is a major driver to challenging authority.

Several of the participants noted that when they decided to challenge or influence authority, it needed to be from a place that put student needs first. Some examples included technology needs, student discipline data, school site achievement data, or staffing decisions. No matter the issue, if it came down to their challenging something that would have immediate student impact, there was more credibility and value placed on the challenge.

The second major finding for this theme was that influencing authority serves a dual purpose for K-12 female superintendents in that it allows them to question existing

practices with an aim for improvement while fostering collaborative relationships along the way.

Although challenging authority is not as widely used by these leaders, influencing authority is regularly used and has very high ratings of perceived impact on the female superintendent's career trajectory. When these females seek to influence authority, they hone their skills in fostering collaborative relationships, thus making it easier to influence others along the way. This information was confirmed by Nakitende (2019) in that fostering collaborative relationships is one area females regularly use to overcome career barriers.

### **Challenging and Influencing Authority: Unexpected Major Findings**

The first unexpected major finding related to challenging and influencing authority was that when female K-12 superintendents challenge authority, it can get them noticed, but if executed improperly, it can give the impression of a fractured administrative team.

Leadership teams are meant to be cohesive teams that drive an organization's mission, vision, values, and goals (Lucas & Valentine, 2002). With that said, these female leaders noted a need to be mindful of when and how they challenge authority so they do not give off the perception of a fractured team to others within an organization. This closely links to another finding associated with reading the room in that it is important to know the environmental factors that must be present to appropriately challenge others in positions of power.

The second unexpected major finding for this theme was that influencing authority was perceived to have a considerably more positive impact on individuals' career trajectories than solely challenging authority.

When determining the impact of influencing authority, the participants interviewed responded very similarly, saying that influencing is when they have mainly seen positive career gains. Even though these women agreed that there is a place to challenge authority at times, the larger return comes when they use their influencing skills (Jacobson et al., 1997).

### **Prepare but Also Improvise: Major Findings**

The first major finding related to preparing but also improvising was that the use of preparation with improvisation was predicated on the female superintendent's ability to remain humble and open-minded through all interactions.

It was unexpected to see humility and open-mindedness as prerequisite skills to planning but also improvising. Still, the respondents talked quite a bit about the need for this. It came up as necessary because they recognized that being humble helps others to see your authenticity. Better yet, it allows the leader to see other possibilities that they may not have initially thought of. Covey (2022) talked about how a "humble person is more concerned about what is right than about being right, about acting on good ideas than having good ideas, and about recognizing contribution rather than being recognized for making it" (p. 106).

The second major finding from this theme was that maintaining a strong presence and being able to read the room has been a primary means by which female educational

leaders have adapted during challenging situations, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic.

These participants recognized that their ability to prepare and improvise effectively was predicated on their ability to read the room and make adjustments. The level of emotional intelligence this requires is notable in at least four of the five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, and social skills (Goleman, 1995). COVID-19 was by far the most frequent example in this area, and for many of these women, their leadership was both tested and solidified during the pandemic. Still, the COVID-19 pandemic was greatly instrumental in honing their skills of improvisation.

### **Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion: Major Finding**

The major finding related to engaging in effective forms of self-promotion was that authentic self-promotion was described as having a primary focus on promoting the achievements of an organization rather than those of an individual. This inclination often arises from modesty and a reluctance to shine the spotlight on oneself.

When seeking to show one's accomplishments, these female superintendents essentially felt that the authentic way to achieve this was to highlight organizational accomplishments and allow them to speak about the strength of their leadership skills. To some extent, they all expressed major hesitance in touting their accomplishments. They admitted that when they have seen others do this, it often backfired, and the individual was not seen positively. When these females made the organization the focus, they also understood that they were leaving up to others the conclusions the organization wins from their actions. They were largely able to find comfort and authenticity in that.

### **Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion: Unexpected Major Finding**

The unexpected major finding related to engaging in effective forms of self-promotion was that although all participants expressed reluctance to use self-promotion, they all understood its value and importance in being perceived as capable of career advancement.

Self-promotion in and of itself, although not a primary strategy for these females, was something they understood could impact one's career trajectory if no one noticed their accomplishments. If their impact on an organization goes unnoticed, the likelihood of their being selected for more leadership responsibilities diminishes. Another factor that impacted these women in the area of self-promotion is that their previous experiences as elementary administrators meant that their initial sponsorship base was smaller than their secondary colleagues. To build momentum, it was essential for someone like a sponsor to highlight the strengths that they bring to the organization at different levels.

### **Welcoming a Less-Prescribed Career Path: Major Finding**

The major finding related to welcoming a less-prescribed career path was that having a range of diverse experiences allows women to be seen more readily for career advancement. Diversity can come from linear paths and from the paths that others believe leaders can thrive in and learn from.

Running an entire school district requires knowledge of instruction, fiduciary responsibilities, human resources, student safety, facilities, and many other areas. The career paths of these women show their willingness to embrace and adapt to diverse roles as they advanced in their careers. Not only did these roles expose them to others who then could speak to their leadership abilities, but it also allowed them to hone their

technical skills so that they could lead in all the other areas. They all shared a story or two of someone who saw a niche they had and encouraged it so they could broaden their experiences.

### **Welcoming a Less-Prescribed Career Path: Unexpected Major Finding**

The unexpected major finding related to welcoming a less-prescribed career path was that to be seen as plausible for K-12 administrative positions, leaders from an elementary background must actively pursue secondary experiences that prepare them to handle the vast differences between the elementary and secondary arena.

There are marked differences in how elementary and secondary school environments work, and this was regarded as a critical factor that ultimately positioned these women as capable leaders of K-12 unified school districts. For some, it was experience in running an intermediate or high school at some point in their career; for others, it was leaning into learning about secondary life while in district office positions.

### **Aim for Being Respected Over Being Liked: Major Findings**

The first major finding related to aiming for being respected over being liked was that respect and likability are distinct concepts that can exist together or independently, with the potential to either positively or negatively impact a female's career trajectory.

Most of these women agreed that these two concepts can exist together, yet also agreed that respectability was a primary goal. These women had ample examples of how they have had to forego likability in arenas where they need to do right by students. In doing so, they gain respectability from some but lose likeability from others. These women understood that to consistently be seen as someone who could effectively serve

the role of superintendent, they needed to make sure that both respectability and likability remained positive.

The second major finding related to this theme was that caring about employees is one way that female K-12 superintendents are measured in respectability or likability.

Females have a predisposed societal expectation to care for others because many females are caretakers and/or mothers. This expectation often plays out with these superintendents in that they are judged in the areas of respectability and likeability in how they show care for their employees. These women talked about how when they show genuine care and interest in their employees, it results in others perceiving them as likable and respected individuals, leading to positive outcomes. They also shared that their male counterparts do not have this expectation or perceived benefit from this type of interaction with employees.

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions are based on the major findings of the study and supported by a review of the literature regarding the use of W. Johnson and Mohr's personal disruption strategies (2019) by female K-12 superintendents with an elementary background.

#### **Conclusion 1: Challenging Authority Must Serve the Express Purpose of Advocacy and Equality**

Challenging authority is best used by female superintendents to honor professional practices, advocate for effective districtwide practices, and work toward equality. This practice must be done through a critical lens to avoid the appearance of a fractured team. The literature supports the use of challenging authority for the cause of



increasing equitable practices because these types of leadership skills truly develop an inclusive leadership style (Eagly et al., 2003).

Many women bring into the workplace a unique set of familial expectations that often leads them to have a perspective that is attuned to recognizing and addressing inequalities. So the fact that challenging authority is best done in the spirit of that purpose is even more of a reason for females to embrace this why in their work (Gartzia & Vinkenburg, 2011). The literature broadly supports that women's involvement with and influence over senior leadership allows for greater degrees of organizational inclusivity (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018).

**Conclusion 2: Influencing Authority is a More Commonly Employed Approach to Achieve More Significant Results Than Challenging Authority**

Female superintendents tend to employ influencing authority more than challenging authority, but influencing authority has the prerequisite skill of fostering collaborative relationships to truly influence. The literature regarding the glass ceiling effect supports this claim in that women who challenge authority are much more likely to experience the glass ceiling than those who choose to use their influence over people (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Rudman and Glick (2001) described the double bind that females face when showing both communal (female) and agentic (male) qualities when attempting to challenge authority, but by using influence the more communal qualities that are congruent to societal expectations can move the female and the organization forward.

### **Conclusion 3: Developing Humility and Open-Mindedness is a Natural Byproduct of Using Improvisational Skills**

Preparing but improvising requires internal control measures because it requires humility to develop one's open-mindedness. The literature discussed the need for all leaders to engage in constructive preparation, especially females (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2008). Female confidence increases with preparation but increases even more when their preparation couples with the ability to be humble and open to the ideas of others when leading.

### **Conclusion 4: Staying in the Present Moment is the Best way for Females to be Prepared to Improvise**

Remaining present at the moment is another way female superintendents develop their improvisational skills in that they must know what a situation requires before stepping in. The literature discussed how females often excel at using and employing empathy at critical moments during their careers (Gentry et al., 2007). Thus, empathy can be harnessed to make well-versed decisions in the moment in response to the needs of others.

### **Conclusion 5: Females Do Not Use Self-Promotion as Readily or as Easily as Their Male Counterparts and Are Often Viewed Negatively for Doing So**

Female superintendents struggle in recognizing and using self-promotion, relying instead on telling the story of their district rather than resorting to blatant self-promotion. The fact that females are not as likely to rely on effective forms of self-promotion could very well be a symptom of how women tend to self-sabotage. In social role theory, the concept of descriptive forms versus injunctive norms is closely related to the concept of

whether a female uses self-promotion (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Descriptive norms would indicate that some females and males self-promote to be seen; injunctive norms describe what each gender should do and would say that women largely should not do this, but for men, it would be seen as more socially acceptable.

**Conclusion 6: Prioritizing Substance Over Publicity in Marketing an Organization's Achievements is the Most Widely Used and Effective Form of Self-Promotion**

Female superintendents know that finding a way to tell the story of one's department, school site, or district is self-promotion that can paint a person in a more favorable light than one who explicitly sings one's own praises. Visibility was discussed widely in the literature regarding self-promotion and is part of any conversation between publicity and substance. Backlash toward females who engage in publicity over substance types of self-promotion range from envy and resentment to punishment and social isolation, so making sure to carefully evaluate the self-promotion from this lens is critical to deeming self-promotion as effective or ineffective (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Phelan, 2010).

**Conclusion 7: Females Who Accumulate a Diverse Range of Work Experiences Position Themselves More Effectively for the Role of a Superintendent**

Female superintendents who develop a wide variety of work experiences position themselves more readily for the role of the superintendent compared to those who follow a linear path with limited diverse experiences. One way that this complements current literature on the topic is in the "in and out" mentality of female leaders versus the "in and up" mentality of male leaders (Zeigler, 1967). Females tend to fall into positions based on the skillset they bring whereas men tend to fall upward into positions based on the desire

to move upward in an organization. The ways males and females arrive at different career paths impact how diverse their skills are before obtaining their superintendency. Inherent in the need to develop a diverse background is still the social constructs whereby women value teaching and learning more than the politics and networking required to rise into leadership roles (Gross & Trask, 1976; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Variety in experiences also connects to the literature on women building a power web of individuals who can speak to women's talents, skills, and abilities (Lerner, 2012). Networking is the way these women seek to build this power web. Relationship mapping while building diverse experiences is one that the literature explained leveraging career opportunities along the way (Heath et al., 2017).

**Conclusion 8: Gaining Knowledge of Secondary Education Is a Key Piece for Educational Leaders in Developing Skills to Become K-12 Superintendent**

K-12 superintendents need to have a repertoire of secondary knowledge to draw from when attempting to move into their role. This feat may prove more challenging for those who come from primary experience. As seen in the literature, not only is secondary knowledge important, but the visibility the secondary experience gets a leader is imperative to school success (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Sargent, 2001).

**Conclusion 9: Female Leadership Should Prioritize Respect but Should Not Completely Disregard the Importance of Likability**

Balancing respect and likability, although important in some ways, cannot come at a cost to the overall level of respect of the individual because it is respect that facilitates organizational change. Respect and likability could be linked to the existing literature on the topic through the lens of queen bee syndrome. Perhaps in working on

respectability, some women do not realize the potentially negative effect they have on other women's growth if likability is not what they are aiming for at the moment (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011; Ellemers et al., 2004, 2012; Faniko et al., 2017).

### **Conclusion 10: Leading With Empathy in Service to Being Led Promotes the Establishment of Both Respect and Likability**

Female superintendents' ability to cultivate empathy and build relationships enables them to build a bridge between respect and likability. This fits well with one tenet of what school boards look most for in superintendents—employee morale (Maeroff, 2010). The literature supports the fact that likability encompasses empathy, approachability, and fostering positive relationships (Kark et al., 2003). Although the literature suggested that in some environments a leader prioritizing respectability might be perceived as top-down, it is through garnering both respect and likability together that female leaders work to acquire and maintain both these attributes, thus attracting more supporters for their leadership.

### **Implications for Action**

Based on the major findings and conclusions of this study, the following implications for action are recommended for female educational leaders, school districts, and organizations:

- Educational leadership programs, school districts, and professional organizations must establish equity-based leadership training for female leaders that targets specific ways they can influence others to create more inclusive and equitable environments for staff and students. This needs to be done so that females can

have a strong basis on which to tackle problems by way of challenging and influencing authority.

- School districts must invest in training for leaders on how to determine district practices that are grounded in strong pedagogical frameworks.
- District leaders and professional organizations must intentionally work to promote collaborative coaching groups among female leaders that can help them pace changes they want to make in organizations from a critical lens.
- Female leaders must continuously work on fostering collaborative relationships at all levels to use powers of influence when needed.
- Female leaders must actively engage in scenarios with other leaders whereby they handle what-if situations to practice how they would handle unexpected situations.
- Female leaders should take time in meetings to observe how others read the room and tailor reactions to the room.
- Female leaders should work on the ability to solve problems from someone else's position rather than the one they sit in.
- Female leaders should actively work with public information officers to celebrate the accomplishments of their school sites, departments, or districts.
- Female leaders should resist the urge to self-promote blatantly and put things through a filter of substance over publicity, using a team around them to filter content.

- To make sure the findings of this study are able to be used by current and future leaders, I plan to publish this in ACSA publications on women in leadership and present on the topic at future women in education leadership events.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Recommendations for further research regarding the use and impact of personal disruption strategies by female K-12 superintendents from an elementary background are discussed in the following sections.

#### **Recommendation 1: Replicate the Study by Comparing Female and Male Use of the Personal Disruption Strategies to Determine Whether There Are Notable Differences in Their Approaches**

This study showed the impact of personal disruption strategies on the career trajectory of female superintendents. It would be important to note whether these findings varied greatly when asked of male superintendents. Knowing how males use these strategies and perceive their impact will assist in making changes to how a variety of underrepresented groups rise to the role of superintendent.

#### **Recommendation 2: Conduct a Study of Female Education Leaders to See Whether Differences Exist in Their Use of the Strategies Based on Age**

The participants in this study were solely from the ages of 50 to 59 and 60 to 69, but there are female leaders from other generations who have not arrived at the point of assuming the role of superintendent. There are countless books written about how different generations attack work and leadership from very different places, so it would be interesting to see how a Gen X, a Millennial, or a Gen Y would answer differently.

This would be especially interesting in the concept of self-promotion given their greater inclination to use social media to market their accomplishments.

**Recommendation 3: Replicate the Study by Adding a 360 Assessment Component for Others to Complete Regarding the Superintendent to Validate Whether Perceptions of the Leader Match Their Self-Report of the Strategies**

This study showed only the leaders' perceived use and impact of the personal disruption strategies. Although personal reporting of the use is truly how they see it, I wonder whether others would see their use of the strategy similarly. Additionally, in the area of impact, it would be interesting to learn whether others would see their impact in the same light. Using some type of 360 evaluation so that superiors, colleagues, and direct reports could report on how often they see the strategies used would go far in describing to what extent leaders employ the strategies.

**Recommendation 4: Replicate This Study in 10 Years on Non-COVID Leaders to Verify Whether the Use of the Strategies is an Anomaly to Pandemic Leadership**

This study showed how leaders developed these skills, but many of the participants noted the pandemic as having an impact on their use of these skills. Studying how leaders use these skills in a postpandemic world would determine whether the use of these skills held true through both typical and crisis leadership moments.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflection**

In my 23 years in education, I have always questioned why our workforce demographics do not match our leadership demographics. I have seen inspiring leaders from all backgrounds come and go in my organization, but I have always been left wondering why, if women are predominantly teaching students, are more women not



leading schools and districts. I am the product of education at a single-sex high school, so in many ways, my brain has been trained to see the enormous talent that women present, both personally and professionally. I have seen women challenge the systems they work and live in with seemingly great ease to the outside eye, but I also have seen women be torn down for fighting for what is right. I have seen women in my organization make significant strides from a leadership perspective, and it leaves me filled with hope for the future, but as all have heard, hope is not a strategy. My greater purpose behind this study was to give women some concrete steps to be seen as the right one for the job regardless of the level of self-doubt they have to the contrary.

My review of the literature validated that my concerns about the lack of women in superintendencies were a shared interest that many have had. In my own state and local area following the pandemic, I have seen several local district school boards eliminate female superintendents to hire male superintendents. All of the literature has advocated consistently ensuring that any group that finds themselves underrepresented continues to seek out opportunities to find ways to support those who are underrepresented.

After hearing the various stories from the amazing women I spoke to as part of this study, I could see that the literature concerning the barriers and strategies to their rising in districts was truly supported by their experiences. They primarily used many of the strategies, but I was surprised by a few things: their reticence toward self-promotion, their leaning toward influence over challenging authority, and the fact that many of them did not see that they had less prescribed career paths with a vast array of experiences on their way to the superintendent's position.

The findings from this study showed how women can do things that put themselves in positions to be noticed for their accomplishments and leverage their strong emotional intelligence skills to build relationships that will assist them in being seen as respectable and likable. My implications for action are meant to be used by women to help grow themselves and other women into roles of leadership so that women can find themselves being seen as the right one for the job regardless of where they find themselves in education.

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Zippia. (2023b, July 21). *School superintendent demographics and statistics in the US:*

*Demographics.* [https://www.zippia.com/school-superintendent-](https://www.zippia.com/school-superintendent-jobs/demographics/)

[jobs/demographics/](https://www.zippia.com/school-superintendent-jobs/demographics/)

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Synthesis Matrix

Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improve	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked
Barsh, J., Cranston, S., & Lewis, G. (2011). How remarkable women lead: The breakthrough model for work and life. Currency.	x				x								
Berry, J., & Kushner, R. (1975). A Critical Look at the Queen Bee Syndrome. Journal of the NAWDAC.			x	x									
Bodalina, K. N., & Mestry, R. (2022). A case study of the experiences of women leaders in senior leadership positions in the education district offices [Article]. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 50(3), 452-468. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220940320">https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220940320</a>	x	x			x								
Brancu, M., & Desormeaux, L. (2022). Introduction to supporting women in leadership across industries and contexts. Consulting Psychology Journal, 74(2), 143-145. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000230">https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000230</a>	x				x								
Budworth, M.-H., & Mann, S. L. (2010). Becoming a leader: the challenge of modesty for women [Article]. Journal of Management Development, 29(2), 177-186. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711011019314">https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711011019314</a>	x		x							x			
Carli, L. L., & Eagly, A. H. (2001). Gender, Hierarchy, and Leadership: An Introduction [Article]. Journal of Social Issues, 57(4), 629. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00232">https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00232</a>	x		x	x									
Chisholm-Burns, M. A., Spivey, C. A., Hagemann, T., & Josephson, M. A. (2017). Women in leadership and the bewildering glass ceiling. American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy, 74(5), 312-324			x	x									
Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. Psychotherapy: Theory,			x										x

Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improvise	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked
Cook, S. G. (2003). Who says women lead differently? , 12(1), 6. <a href="https://UMassGlobal.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=edsgao&amp;AN=edsgcl96254760&amp;site=eds-live&amp;scope=site">https://UMassGlobal.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=edsgao&amp;AN=edsgcl96254760&amp;site=eds-live&amp;scope=site</a>	X		X	X	X								
Derks, B., Ellemers, N., Van Laar, C., & de Groot, K. (2011). Do sexist organizational cultures create the queen bee? <i>British Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 50, 519-535. doi:10.1348/014466610X525280	X			X									
Derks, B., Van Laar, C., & Ellemers, N. (2016). The Queen Bee phenomenon: Why women leaders distance themselves from junior women. <i>The Leadership Quarterly</i> , 27, 456-469. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.12.007	X			X									
Derks, B., Van Laar, C., Ellemers, N., & De Groot, K. (2011). Gender bias primes elicit Queen Bee responses among senior police women. <i>Psychological Science</i> , 22, 1242-1249.	X			X									
Derks, B., Van Laar, C., Ellemers, N., & Raghoe, G. (2015). Extending the Queen Bee effect: How Hindustani workers cope with disadvantage by distancing the self	X			X									
Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 85(9), 62-71.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. <i>Psychological review</i> , 109(3), 573.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. <i>Handbook of theories of social psychology</i> , 2.	X	X	X	X	X	X							
Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & Van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: a meta-analytic comparison across studies and	X				X								

Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improvise	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked
Ebunuwele, F. G. (2021). Women and Leadership: A Feminist Perspective. SAU JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, 5(1), 166-174.	X				X								
Elias, E. (2018). Lessons learned from women in leadership positions. Work, 59(2), 175-181. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-172675">https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-172675</a>	X		X	X	X								
Ellemer, N., Rink, F., Derks, B., & Ryan, M. (2012). Women in high places: When and why promoting women into top positions can harm them individually or as a group (and how to prevent this).	X	X	X	X	X		X						
Ellemer, N., van den Heuvel, H., de Gilder, D., Maass, A., & Bonvini, A. (2004). The underrepresentation of women in science: Differential commitment or the queen bee syndrome? British Journal of Social Psychology, 42, 1-24.	X		X	X	X								
Faniko, K., Ellemer, N., Derks, B., & Lorenzi-Cioldi, F. (2017). Nothing changes, really: why women who break through the glass ceiling end up reinforcing it. In.	X	X	X		X								
Fry, R. (2022). Women now outnumber men in the US college-educated labor force.	X				X								
Gardner, H., & Laskin, E. (1995). Leading minds: An anatomy of leadership. New York, NY: Basic Books.	X	X			X								
Glass, T. E., & Franceschini, L. A. (2007). The state of the American school superintendency: A mid-decade study. Rowman & Littlefield Education.		X			X								
Grogan, M., & Shakeshaft, C. (2010). Women and educational leadership. John Wiley & Sons.	X	X	X	X	X								
Helgesen, S., & Goldsmith, M. (2018). How women rise: Break the 12 habits that hold you back. HarperCollins Publishers.	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Hoobler, J. M., Masterson, C. R., Nkomo, S. M., & Michel, E. J. (2018). The business case for women leaders: Meta-analysis, research critique, and path forward. Journal of Business Ethics, 151(1-2), 1-14.	X				X	X	X	X					

Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improvise	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked
<a href="https://hbr.org/2020/12/research-women-are-better-leaders-during-a-crisis?registration=success">https://hbr.org/2020/12/research-women-are-better-leaders-during-a-crisis?registration=success</a>	x				x					x			x
Ibarra, H., & Obodaru, O. (2016). Women and the vision thing. <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 94(1), 62-70.	x	x			x								
Ibarra, H., & Petriglieri, J. L. (2010). Identity work and play. <i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i> .					x								
Johnson, W. (2019). <i>Disrupt Yourself, With a New Introduction: Master Relentless Change and Speed Up Your Learning</i>			x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x
Johnson, W., & Mohr, T. (2013). Women need to realize work isn't school. <i>Harvard Business Review Blog Network</i> . Retrieved				x					x	x	x	x	x
Kay, K., Shipman, C., & Kay, K. (2014). <i>The confidence code</i> (p. 12). HarperBusiness.													
Kim, Y. L., and Brunner, C. C. (2009). School administrators' career mobility to the superintendency: gender differences in career development. <i>J. Educ. Admin.</i> 47, 75-107. doi: 10.1108/09578230910928098		x			x								
Kim, Y. L., and Brunner, C. C. (2009). School administrators' career mobility to the superintendency: gender differences in career development. <i>J. Educ. Admin.</i> 47, 75-107. doi: 10.1108/09578230910928098	x	x			x				x	x	x	x	x
Lerner, H. (2012). <i>In her power: Reclaiming your authentic self</i> . Simon and Schuster.	x				x						x		
Liu, H. helena.liu@uts.edu.a (2019). Just the Servant: An Intersectional Critique of Servant Leadership. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 156(4), 1099-1112. <a href="https://doi-org.libproxy.chapman.edu/10.1007/s10551-017-3633-0">https://doi-org.libproxy.chapman.edu/10.1007/s10551-017-3633-0</a>	x				x	x							

Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improve	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked
Mainiero, L. A., & Sullivan, S. E. (2005). Kaleidoscope careers: An alternate explanation for the "opt-out revolution". <i>Academy of Management Executive</i> , 19(2), 12-15.					X							X	
Maranto, R., Carroll, K., Cheng, A., & Teodoro, M. P. (2018). Boys will be superintendents: School leadership as a gendered profession. <i>Phi Delta Kappan</i> , 100(2), 12-15.		X			X	X	X						
Maranto, R., Teodoro, M.P., Carroll, K., & Cheng, A. (2017). Gendered ambition: Career advancement in public management. <i>ERN Public Policy Centers Research Paper Series</i> , 9 (3).		X				X	X			X			
Maranto, R., Trivitt, J., Nichols, M., & Watson, A. (2017). No contractual obligation to improve education: School boards and their superintendents. <i>Politics and Policy</i> , 45 (6).		X			X								
Miller, S. K., Washington, Y. C., & Fiene, J. R. (2006). Female superintendents: Historic barriers and prospects for the future.		X	X	X	X								
Mohr, T. (2013) Attention, high-achieving women: Stop being 'good students' at work! Today. <a href="#">Attention, high-achieving women: Stop being 'good students' at work!</a>	X		X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Montgomery, M. (2019). The Impact of Male Gender Dissonance on Women's Potential Eligibility for Advancement to K-12 Public School Superintendent (Doctoral dissertation, Brandman University).		X			X								
Morrison, N. (2018). White men are still over-represented in school leadership .		X	X		X								
Mulawarman, W. G., Komariyah, L., & Suryaningsi. (2021). Women and Leadership Style in School Management: Study of Gender Perspective. <i>Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences</i> , 16(2),		X											



Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improvise	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Titled
Nakitende, M. G. (2019). Motivation and perseverance of women in education leadership in the United States of America. <i>Journal of Science and Sustainable Development</i> , 6(2), 75-101.		X			X								
Olson, K. (2019). Women be wise WHY IT'S HARD TO MOVE UP: Although women dominate and power-up education, educational leadership is still overwhelmingly white and male. Why, and what to do? [Article]. <i>Leadership</i> , 48(5), 24-29. <a href="https://UMassGlobal.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=aph&amp;AN=136487460&amp;site">https://UMassGlobal.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&amp;db=aph&amp;AN=136487460&amp;site</a>		X	X	X	X								
<a href="#">Pew Research. The Data on Women Leaders   Pew Research Center. Accessed on January 29, 2022</a>					X								
Robinson, K., Shakeshaft, C., Grogan, M., and Newcomb, W. S. (2017). Necessary but not sufficient: the continuing inequality between men and women in educational leadership, findings from the American Association of School Administrators mid-decade survey. <i>Front. Educ.</i> 2:12. doi: 10.3389/educ.2017.00012		X	X	X	X								
<a href="https://www.sutori.com/story/the-evolution-of-women-in-the-workforce--KYRSWNjwZ4i8zN8Dv1D7HTNz">Rojas, C. (2017). The evolution of women in the workforce. Retrieved from https://www.sutori.com/story/the-evolution-of-women-in-the-workforce--KYRSWNjwZ4i8zN8Dv1D7HTNz</a>	X	X		X									
Rousmaniere, K. (2013). <i>The principal's office: A social history of the American school principal</i> . SUNY Press.		X			X	X							
Rudman, L.A. and Glick, P. (2001), "Prescriptive gender stereotypes and backlash toward agentic women", <i>Journal of Social Issues</i> , Vol. 57 No.4, pp. 743-62.		X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		

Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improvise	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Liked
Ryder, M., & Briles, J. (2003). <i>The sexx factor: Breaking the unwritten codes that sabotage personal and professional lives.</i> New Horizon Press.	X		X	X		X							
Saeeda, S., & Umbreen, S. (2012). <i>Women, Educational Leadership and Societal Culture</i> [article]. <i>Education Sciences</i> , 2(1), 33-44. <a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/educ2010033">https://doi.org/10.3390/educ2010033</a>		X			X								
Sanchez, J. E., & Thornton, B. (2010). <i>Gender issues in K-12 educational leadership.</i> <i>Advancing Women in Leadership Journal</i> , 30.		X		X	X	X	X	X					
Sandberg, S. (2015). <i>Lean in-women, work and the will to lead.</i>	X		X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
Schechtman, L. (2004) <i>Ways Women Lead.</i> Retrieved from <a href="https://www.nais.org/">https://www.nais.org/</a>	X		X	X	X								
Shakeshaft, C. (1989), <i>Women in Educational Administration</i> , 3rd ed., Corwin Press, Inc., Newbury Park, CA.		X	X	X	X								
Shibley Hyde, J., & Kling, K. C. (2001). <i>Women, motivation, and achievement.</i> <i>Psychology of women quarterly</i> , 25(4), 364-378.	X		X	X	X			X					
Stahl, B. (2021, November 23). <i>4 common types of self-talk.</i> <i>Mindful.</i> <a href="https://www.mindful.org/4-common-types-self-talk/">https://www.mindful.org/4-common-types-self-talk/</a>			X								X		X
Staines, G., Tavris, C., & Jayaratne, T. E. (1974). <i>The queen bee syndrome.</i>	X		X	X		X							

Work Cited	History of Women in Leadership	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Current Status and Need for Women in Executive Leadership	Social Role Theory	Role Congruity Theory	Expectancy Value Theory	Challenge and Influence Authority	Prepare, But Also Learn to Improvise	Find Effective Forms of Self-Promotion	Welcome a Less Prescribed Career Path	Aim for Being Respected, Not Just Treated
Tarbutton, T. (2019). The leadership gap in education. <i>Multicultural Education</i> , 27(1), 19-21.		X			X								
U.S. Department of Education (2015). Digest of Education Statistics, 2013 (NCES 2015-011). Table 209.10, Number and percentage distribution of teachers in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by selected teacher characteristics: Selected years, 1987–88 through 2011–12.	X	X			X								
U.S. Department of Labor. (1991). A report of the glass ceiling initiative. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED340653)				X	X								
<u>Washington, Y. C., Miller, S. K., &amp; Fiene, J. R. (2007). Their work identity and entry to the profession. <i>Journal of Women in Educational Leadership</i>, 5, 263–283.</u> Retrieved from <a href="http://cehs.unl.edu/jwel">http://cehs.unl.edu/jwel</a>	X		X	X	X								
Waters, J. T., & Marzano, R. J. (2006). School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement (pp. 2006-2008). Denver: eCO CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).		X			X								
Williams, J. (2004). Hitting the maternal wall. <i>Academe</i> , 90(6), 16–20. <a href="https://doi.org/10.2307/40252700">https://doi.org/10.2307/40252700</a>	X	X	X			X							
Young, M. D., Marshall, C., and Edwards, T. (2018). "Left out: gender and feminism in the educational leadership curriculum," in <i>Educational Leadership as a Culturally-Constructed Practice: New Directions and Possibilities</i> , eds J. Wilkinson and L. Bristol (New York, NY: Routledge), 166–207.	X	X	X	X		X	X	X					
<u>Zippia the Career Expert. (2022, September 9). School Superintendent Demographics and Statistics in the US.</u> <a href="https://www.zippia.com/school-superintendent-jobs/demographics/">https://www.zippia.com/school-superintendent-jobs/demographics/</a>		X			X								

## APPENDIX B

### Quantitative Survey Instrument

#### INTRODUCTION

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me regarding your leadership and what has led to your success as a female leader. It is my hope that by studying this topic we can give female leaders the skills they need to break barriers into new and fulfilling careers in upper management.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research on Johnson and Mohr's **FIVE DISRUPTIVE CAREER SKILLS** on female (career focus; i.e. supt,) advancement to an executive leadership position. The five identified disruptive career skills include the following:

1. Challenging and Influencing Authority
2. Preparing but also Improvising
3. Engaging in Effective Forms of Self Promotion
4. Welcoming a Less-Prescribed Career Path
5. Aiming for Respect Over Being Liked

It's best not to 'overthink' the statements and respond with your first perceptual thought. This survey should only take about 10-15 minutes. After you complete and submit the survey, the researcher will contact you to schedule an interview to explore your thoughts on these career skills and how they may have an impact on women's ability to move forward in her career.

#### **Directions:**

**PART I:** The following survey represents the five DISRUPTIVE CAREER SKILLS. For each skill there is an example of behaviors associated with each category. Using the four-point scale for each Disruptive Career Skill, please indicate how frequently you have engaged in each career skill as you progressed along in your leadership career.

*4= Definitely Yes*

*3= Generally Yes*

*2= Generally No*

*1= Definitely No*

**PART II:** If you checked *Definitely Yes or Generally Yes* how much of a positive impact do you perceive it had on your advancement to an executive leadership position?

- 4= High Degree
- 3= Some Degree
- 2= Little or No Degree
- 1= Detrimental to My Career Advancement

## DISRUPTIVE CAREER SKILLS SURVEY

### 1. CHALLENGING AND INFLUENCING AUTHORITY

**Challenging Authority:** Challenging authority refers to the act of questioning, opposing, or pushing back against those in positions of power or leadership who make decisions or enact policies. It involves a willingness to challenge the status quo, question assumptions, and propose alternative ideas or solutions.

	4 Definitely Yes	3 Generally Yes	2 Generally No	1 Definitely No
<b>EXAMPLE:</b> I speak up to my superiors rather than tell my bosses what they want to hear.				
<b>If you checked “Definitely Yes” or “Generally Yes” Above</b>				
<b>IMPACT:</b> How much of a positive impact do you perceive <b>Challenging Authority</b> had on your advancement to an executive leadership position?	4 High Degree	3 Some Degree	2 Little or no Degree	1 Detrimental to my Career Advancement

**Influencing Authority:** Influencing authority refers to the act of using persuasive communication and other means to affect the decisions and actions of those in positions of power or leadership. It involves a willingness to engage with authority

figures, build relationships, and make reasoned arguments to shape outcomes that align with one's goals or values.

	4 Definitely Yes	3 Generally Yes	2 Generally No	1 Definitely No
<b>EXAMPLE:</b> I often find a problem that needs to be solved and persuade others in the direction of what one feels to be the correct answer.				

If you checked " <i>Definitely Yes</i> " or " <i>Generally Yes</i> " Above				
<b>IMPACT:</b> How much of a positive impact do you perceive <b>Influencing Authority</b> had on your advancement to an executive leadership position?	4 High Degree	3 Some Degree	2 Little or no Degree	1 Detrimental to my Career Advancement

## 2. PREPARING BUT ALSO IMPROVISING

**Preparing But Also Improvising:** While it is important for all leaders to go into situations with a game plan, it is equally important that they also go in with the skills to pivot and stray from the game plan as the situation prescribes.

	4 Definitely Yes	3 Generally Yes	2 Generally No	1 Definitely No
<b>EXAMPLE:</b> While I like to prepare in advance, I also am comfortable going into unfamiliar situations and capable of providing on the spot solutions.				

If you checked “ <i>Definitely Yes</i> ” or “ <i>Generally Yes</i> ” Above				
<b>IMPACT:</b> How much of a positive impact do you perceive <b>Preparing but also Improvising</b> had on your advancement to an executive leadership position?	4 High Degree	3 Some Degree	2 Little or no Degree	1 Detrimental to my career advancement

### 3. ENGAGING IN EFFECTIVE FORMS OF SELF-PROMOTION

**Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion:** For anyone to recognize and appreciate the uniqueness and excellence they bring to a leadership role, it is essential that they actively showcase their achievements. Self-promotion can be achieved through direct and indirect methods.

	4 Definitely Yes	3 Generally Yes	2 Generally No	1 Definitely No
<b>EXAMPLES</b> While I believe in allowing my work to speak for itself, I have found ways to effectively highlight my accomplishments.				

If you checked “ <i>Definitely Yes</i> ” or “ <i>Generally Yes</i> ” Above				
<b>IMPACT:</b> How much of a positive impact do you perceive <b>Engaging in Effective Forms of Self Promotion</b> had on your	4 High Degree	3 Some Degree	2 Little or no Degree	1 Detrimental to my career advancement

advancement to an executive leadership position?				
--	--	--	--	--

#### 4. WELCOMING A LESS PRESCRIBED CAREER PATH

**Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path:** While many believe playing it safe and following a prescribed career path will lead to career advancement, some suggest that being open to and pursuing alternative career paths will lead to career advancement.

	4 Definitely Yes	3 Generally Yes	2 Generally No	1 Definitely No
<b>EXAMPLES:</b> I have taken a lateral move or a job outside my career field.				
If you checked “ <i>Definitely Yes</i> ” or “ <i>Generally Yes</i> ” Above				
<b>IMPACT:</b> How much of a positive impact do you perceive <b>Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path</b> had on your advancement to an executive leadership position?	4 High Degree	3 Some Degree	2 Little or no Degree	1 Detrimental to my career advancement

#### 5. AIMING FOR RESPECT OVER BEING LIKED

**Aiming for Respect Over Being Liked:** This happens when you choose the path that is not precisely what will make you popular but rather garner you the most respect.

	4 Definitely Yes	3 Generally Yes	2 Generally No	1 Definitely No
<b>EXAMPLES</b> I have undertaken actions that may not necessarily enhance my popularity but have garnered				



respect for my decision-making abilities.				
<b>If you checked “<i>Definitely Yes</i>” or “<i>Generally Yes</i>” Above</b>				
IMPACT: How much of a positive impact do you perceive <b>Aiming for Respect over Being Liked</b> had on your advancement to an executive leadership position?	4 High Degree	3 Some Degree	2 Little or no Degree	1 Detrimental to my career advancement

## APPENDIX C

### Qualitative Survey Instrument

#### OPENING QUESTIONS

- Can you tell me a little about your career journey that brought you to the role you currently serve today?
- What positions did you hold, and for how long?

#### 1. CHALLENGE AND INFLUENCE AUTHORITY

**Challenging Authority:** Challenging authority refers to the act of questioning, opposing, or pushing back against those in positions of power or leadership who make decisions or enact policies. It involves a willingness to challenge the status quo, question assumptions, and propose alternative ideas or solutions.

- As you reflect on your career can you share any stories or examples of how you may have challenged authority while advancing your career?
- In reflecting on this career area, what impact, positive or negative, do you believe challenging authority had on your career trajectory?

**Influencing Authority:** Influencing authority refers to the act of using persuasive communication and other means to affect the decisions and actions of those in positions of power or leadership. It involves a willingness to engage with authority figures, build relationships, and make reasoned arguments to shape outcomes that align with one's goals or values.

- As you reflect on your career can you share any stories or examples of how you may have influenced authority while advancing your career?
- In reflecting on this career area, what impact, positive or negative, do you believe your challenging authority had on your career trajectory?

#### 2. PREPARING BUT ALSO IMPROVISING

**Preparing but also Improvising:** While it is important for all leaders to go into situations with a game plan, it is equally important that they also go in with the skills to pivot and stray from the game plan as the situation prescribes.

- As you reflect on your career, can you share any stories or examples of how you have come into situations fully prepared, but you were able to make

something up on the spot, without prior planning or preparation in a way that achieves a desired outcome.

- In reflecting on this career area what impact, positive or negative, do you believe preparing but also improving had on your career trajectory?

### **3. ENGAGING IN EFFECTIVE FORMS OF SELF-PROMOTION**

**Engaging in Effective Forms of Self-Promotion:** For anyone to recognize and appreciate the uniqueness and excellence they bring to a leadership role, it is essential that they actively showcase their achievements. Self-promotion can be achieved through direct and indirect methods.

- As you reflect on your career can you share any stories or examples of how to effectively promote the work you have done in a way that achieves a desired outcome?
- In reflecting on this career area what impact, positive or negative, do you believe engaging in effective forms of self-promotion had on your career trajectory?

### **4. WELCOMING A LESS PRESCRIBED CAREER PATH**

**Welcoming a Less Prescribed Career Path:** While many believe playing it safe and following a prescribed career path will lead to career advancement, some suggest that being open to and pursuing alternative career paths find themselves in more senior positions.

- As you reflect on your career can you share any stories or examples of how you have welcomed a less prescribed career path in a way that helped you see your organization from a wider lens?
- In reflecting on this career area what impact, positive or negative, do you believe welcoming a less prescribed career path had on your career trajectory?

### **5. AIMING FOR RESPECT OVER BEING LIKED**

**Aiming for Respect Over Being Liked:** This happens when you choose the path that is not precisely what will make you popular but rather garner you the most respect.

- As you reflect on your career can you share any stories or examples of how you have taken actions to be respected over being liked?
- In reflecting on this career area what impact, positive or negative, do you believe aiming for respect over being liked had on your career trajectory?

### **POSSIBLE PROBING QUESTIONS**

1. What is your opinion about that?
2. Can you expand upon that a bit more?
3. Do you have more to add?
4. Please describe an example of...
5. Can you provide an example of..
6. Can you discuss ...
7. Tell me about a time when ....

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent

#### **INFORMATION ABOUT: Personal Disruption Strategies Used By Female K-12 Superintendents from an Elementary Background for Career Advancement**

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** *Tricia Thompson, M.A.*

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by *Tricia Thompson*, a doctoral student from the School of Education at UMass Global. The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods research study is to identify and describe the perceived impact of Johnson and Mohr's five disruptive career skills (2013) on female K-12 Superintendents from an Elementary Background to their advancement to an executive leadership position.

The interview(s) will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes and will be conducted in a one-on-one virtual interview setting (using Zoom).

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.
- b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue as a text document and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
- c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding personal disruption strategies used by female superintendents for career advancement. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about this study in which I participated. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
- d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact *tferrer@mail.umassglobal.edu* or by phone at 951 818-9789 or Dr. Marilou Ryder (Chair) at *ryder@umassglobale.edu*.
- e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) 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, you will be 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 the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, at 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 consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

## APPENDIX E

### UMass Global Internal Review Board Bill of Rights



Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS Global Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMASS Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.



## APPENDIX F

### **Quantitative Feedback Form**

#### **Field-Test Survey Feedback Questions**

Included in Electronic Survey: As a doctoral student at UMASS Global, I appreciate your feedback as it helps me to build the most effective survey instrument possible. Your participation is crucial to this effort.

Please respond to the following questions after completing the survey. Your answers will assist me in refining the survey items. This will allow me to make edits to improve the survey prior to administering to potential study participants.

A copy version of the survey is provided as an attachment to the email that contained this feedback form to refresh your memory of the instrument, if needed.

Thank you very much for your assistance. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

1. How many minutes did it take you to complete the survey, from the moment you opened it on the computer until the time you completed it?

2. Did the portion up front that asked you to read the consent information and click the agree box before the survey opened concern you at all?

3. The first paragraph of the introduction included the purpose of the research study. Did this provide enough clarity as to the purpose of the study?

4. Was the Introduction sufficiently clear (and not too long) to inform you what the research was about? If not, what would you recommend that would make it better?

5. Were the directions to Part 1 clear, and did you understand what to do? If not, would you briefly state the problem.

6. Were the brief descriptions of the 5 choices prior to your completing the 12 items clear, and did they provide sufficient differences among them for you to make a selection? If not, briefly describe the problem.

7. As you progressed through the 12 items in which you gave a rating of 1 through 5, if there were any items that caused you to say something like, "What does this mean?" Which item(s) were they? Please use the paper copy and mark those that troubled you. Or if not, please check here:

## APPENDIX G

### **Qualitative Participant Feedback Form**

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe your experiences with self-sabotaging behaviors, the impact, and strategies used to overcome the barriers?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview?

## APPENDIX H

### **Interview Observer Feedback Reflection Questions**

1. How long did the interview take?
2. Were the questions clear or were there places when the interviewee was unclear?
3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing?
4. How did you feel during the interview?
5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? a. For the observer: how did you perceive the interviewer regarding the preceding descriptors?
6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
7. Are there parts of the interview that seemed to be awkward and why do you think that was the case?
8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would it be and how would you change it?
9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

## APPENDIX I

### Introduction Letter to Study Participants

Date

Dear (Name),

My name is Tricia Thompson and I am conducting research into female leadership in conjunction with my Doctoral studies at UMass Global. The purpose of this explanatory mixed methods research study is to identify and describe the perceived impact of Johnson and Mohr's five disruptive career skills (2019) on female K-12 Superintendents from an Elementary Background to their advancement to an executive leadership position.

You have been identified as a female Superintendent in California and as someone ideal for this study. This study will explore how personal disruption strategies have impacted the career advancement of female superintendents. The data collected from surveying and interviewing female superintendents are intended to increase the understanding of the impact of personal disruption strategies on women's careers in educational leadership. Findings gathered from the research are anticipated to be used to describe personal disruptive strategies and measure the extent to which they are believed to impact female career advancement.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. As a participant in this study, your contributions may assist other female administrators striving for the superintendency. The study consists of an electronic survey that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and a follow-up interview that will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at any time. Thank you in advance for your acceptance of my request. Your involvement is critical to the success of this study. If you have any questions, you may contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by email at XXXXX@[mail.umassglobal.edu](mailto:mail.umassglobal.edu).

Sincerely,

Tricia Thompson Doctoral Candidate, UMass Global

APPENDIX J

**Quantitative Instrument Alignment Table**

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
What perceived impact did challenging and influencing authority have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?	X				
What perceived impact did preparing and improvising have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?		X			
What perceived impact did engaging in effective forms of self-promotion have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?			X		
What perceived impact did welcoming a less prescribed career path have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?				X	
What perceived impact did aiming for respect over being liked have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?					X

APPENDIX K

**Qualitative Instrument Alignment Table**

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
What perceived impact did challenging and influencing authority have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?	X				
What perceived impact did preparing and improvising have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?		X			
What perceived impact did engaging in effective forms of self-promotion have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?			X		
What perceived impact did welcoming a less prescribed career path have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?				X	
What perceived impact did aiming for respect over being liked have on female K-12 superintendents' advancement to an executive leadership position?					X