Stress and the Female Superintendent: Contributing Factors and Stress Management Strategies from the voices of California Female Superintendents

Monica Peterson

Brandman University, monica.p.peterson@gmail.com

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Stress and the Female Superintendent: Contributing Factors and Stress Management

Strategies from the voices of California Female Superintendents

A Dissertation by

Monica Peterson

Brandman University
Irvine, California
School of Education
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Committee in charge:
Phil Pendley, Ed.D. Committee Chair
Alan Enomoto, Ed.D. Committee Member
Tami Boatright, Ed.D. Committee Member
The dissertation of Monica Peterson is approved.

Phil Pendley, Ed.D.

Alan Enomoto, Ed.D.

Tami Boatright, Ed.D.

Patricia Clark-White, Ed.D.

October 2017
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ABSTRACT

Stress and the Female Superintendent: Contributing Factors and Stress Management Strategies from the voices of California Female Superintendents

by Monica Peterson

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify personal and professional factors that create stress for California female superintendents, describe the strategies used to manage stress, and provide recommendations for addressing stress from California female superintendents.

Methodology: A qualitative phenomenological methodology is used to seek the inner feelings and lived experiences of California female superintendents. This phenomenological study used in-depth interviews to gather qualitative data to address the RQs. Data gathered on stress related factors and stress management strategies were analyzed and discussed. In order to maintain validity and reliability and minimize internal and external threats, the researcher used qualitative inquiry processes. These processes included convenience sampling, interview questions aligned with the study’s purpose and research questions.

Findings: Major findings include personal and professional factors creating stress for California female superintendents, as well as stress management strategies used to minimize both personal and professional factors identified.

Conclusions: Numerous conclusions were drawn based on the major findings, and from these findings, a list of implications for action were generated. One implication for action is that school boards should provide coaches to help superintendents learn to
balance work and life time structures, manage priorities, and manage personal and professional stressors, among other implications.

**Recommendations:** Recommendations for further research are described in Chapter V, including duplicating this study for various target audiences including male superintendents in order to compare the differences between women and men.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Women Hold Up Half the Sky,* says an old Chinese proverb. This ancient phrase breathes imagery into the concept that half of the work and half of the thinking in the world is done by women. Both halves must work together in order to be complete and nothing can be truly whole if it excludes half of humanity (Helgesen, 1990).

Women have taken on leadership positions in every profession as top-level leaders and continue to break through cultural and societal barriers. In K-12 public education in the United States, women dominate the workforce of teachers and staff members; however, women are severely underrepresented in leadership roles (Institute of Education Services, n.d.). Women constitute 76% of the teacher workforce, where public school superintendents are typically pulled from; yet only 23% of superintendents are female (Institute of Education Services, n.d.). The California Department of Education (CDE) (2016) calculates that as of the 2015-2016 school year, out of 295,025 total teachers, 215,811 of them are female and 79,214 of them are male. This suggests that the pool of talent from which superintendents are developed and selected from continue to be disproportionately represented in the superintendent position.

A review of the literature suggests that this disproportionality may be attributed to the growing demands placed on today’s superintendent. T. E. Glass (1992) determined that school districts with leaders who are under a high level of stress do not perform as well. It is crucial for superintendents to learn effective coping skills to manage the stressors inherent to their positions (T. E. Glass, 1992). A high turnover and burnout rate exists for today’s superintendent. As T. E. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) stated, “the superintendency is a highly stressful job with its own unique stressors” (pp. 74-75).
These stressors stem from federal mandates, navigating political relationships with school boards (T. E. Glass, et al., 2000), while working to develop quality education systems and notable academic gains (Howley, Pendarvis, & Gibbs, 2002). It is little wonder why the role of superintendent deters excellent and qualified leaders from pursuing the position (Houston, 2001).

Women entering the role of the superintendency find themselves fighting another battle as they work to overcome the preconceived profile of the white male superintendent (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980). Women superintendents have had to navigate the hurdles of society’s metaphorical glass ceiling and prove themselves in a role that is severely underrepresented by women (Institute of Education Services, n.d.). The research clearly depicts a need to further investigate the role that stress plays in the superintendency and stress management strategies used by female superintendents. The answers to these questions will provide useful information for aspiring female leaders.

According to Houston (2001), individuals who may be considering becoming a superintendent look at current district superintendents, notice how unbalanced their lives often are, and decide it is not worth the stress. The Association of California School Administration (ACSA) (2000), presented that “balance of work and family, which rarely, if ever, leaves them enough time for themselves. By keeping stress at bay, leaders will be better equipped to do their jobs and communicate their needs” (p. 14).

The existing body of research presents a need to further examine the stress factors impacting the role of the superintendency for women and strategies for managing the inevitable stress that accompanies the role.
Background

History of Women in the Role of Superintendency

For more than three centuries, women were not allowed to hold leadership positions of any capacity. As women began to populate the workforce, their quest for equality broke through barriers at the turn of the century (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980). In 1909, female Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, Ella Flagg Young, made a prediction:

In the near future, we shall have more women than men in charge of the vast educational system. It is a woman’s natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the larger part of the work and yet be denied the leadership (as cited in S. T. McGrath, 1992, p. 62).

Some progress has been made since Ella Flagg Young’s now-famous prediction. There continues to be a strong gender inequity in upper management positions, including the position of the public school superintendent.

The 1960s and 1970s were eras when substantial gains in equality for women were made with the first federal law to directly impact a woman’s ability to attain the superintendency - The Equal Pay Act of 1963. This law prohibited discrimination in pay based on gender, mandating equal wages be paid for equal work (Anderson, 1998). The Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 further prevented gender-based discrimination and led to the creation of the Glass Ceiling Commission.

Despite these groundbreaking strides, the school superintendent continues to favor men over women (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980). A study of Virginia’s first female superintendents conferred that “extraordinary perseverance and personal motivation,
successful career-family systems and guidance from important mentors and family members allow women to master and overcome potential barriers to accessing the superintendency” (Lee, 200, p. 112). This kind of tenacity has inspired women to continue striving for equal representation and opportunity throughout our history and in modern day.

**Underrepresentation of Women in the Role of the Superintendency**

According to Biklen and Brannigan (1980), the profile of the school superintendent is considered to be a white, protestant, married, middle-aged man from a small town. Studies from Biklen and Brannigan reported minimal changes in the profile of the superintendent in the last 100 years.

This is especially alarming when considering the pool from which superintendents are drawn- teachers. Women comprise nearly 83.3% of all teachers, and yet, the percentage of female superintendents remains at a mere 23%. (Costello, Miles, & Stone, 1998)

Between 2008 and 2012, the percentage of female teachers in K-12 public schools in the United States increased from 75.6% to 76.3% while the percentage of female principals increased from 50.3% to 51.6% (USDOE, 2012). While this steady growth in female representation in public education, female representation in the role of the superintendency has seen minimal increases in the past few decades. These numbers are represented in Table 1.
At this current annual increase rate of 0.7%, 77 years will need to pass in order for females to be proportionately represented in the superintendency (Institute of Education Services, n.d.).

Adler and Izraeli (1988) present in their research that the reasons for women’s hesitation in management are similar worldwide—cultural sanctions, educational barriers, legal restrictions, corporate obstacles, and women’s disinterest in pursuing traditional managerial careers. M. Tallerico (1996) also found a significant underrepresentation of women in the superintendency role despite the trend toward diversity in public school leadership. No significant change has happened in the dominant pattern of men managing and women teaching (M. Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

M. Tallerico’s (2000) research also revealed that women spend an average of 15 years in the classroom before looking for an administrative position and men spend an average of 5 years in the classroom. These stark differences pose a necessary responsibility for researchers to learn more about the cause of this underrepresentation.
Leadership Demands on Today’s Superintendents

The superintendent’s primary role has shifted from focusing on being a figurehead to facilitating federal mandates (T. E. Glass et al., 2000). Superintendents may find themselves appeasing political agendas, and influencing stakeholders’ decisions rather than their own (Owen, 2000).

Adding to the demands of the role, California experienced significant educational reform and changes to funding formulas, accountability systems, and national legislation. In addition to these mandates, superintendents must be visionary and lead transformational, lasting, and positive change. A recurring theme in the literature asserts that effective superintendents lead efforts around a central vision built around student achievement and ensures that all initiatives align with this vision (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Today’s superintendent is expected to balance each of these factors effectively; with minimal conversation about personal well-being.

T. E. Glass et al. (2000) also assert that major stressors to the role of superintendency consist of a lack of adequate funding, competing community and school groups, unions, federal and state mandates, board member politics, and the public’s perceived dissatisfaction with school performance. Additional pressure is created due to a lack of resources to address and solve these issues (Public Agenda, 2001). Today’s superintendent is faced with political stressors of navigating the politics and conflicts of the school board members (Richardson, 1998). Balancing the often conflicting expectations of different constituencies is a major challenge for many superintendents (Goens, 1998).
Nearly 25% of superintendents who leave small districts report basing this decision on issues with the school board (T. E. Glass et al., 2000). In addition to these challenges, superintendents face complex problems when balancing educational, managerial, and political leadership to support the heavy responsibility of school improvement and student achievement (Howley et al., 2002).

Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) conducted a national survey of superintendents both male and female and found that 90% of respondents believed the district should give them more support to ensure well-being and job success.

**Stress-related Barriers for Women Pursuing the Role of Superintendency**

A variety of reasons contribute to the lack of women who hold the position of superintendency including a lack of mentorship, discrimination, lack of support, sense of isolation, societal pressures, and family responsibilities among other factors (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Women must overcome issues both personally and professionally in order to break into the existing pool of candidates to serve as top level administrators.

The Center for Creative Leadership conducted a study in 2006 addressing the question “How does stress impact leadership?” Seventy-five percent of the 160 respondents reported that their leadership role has contributed to higher levels of personal stress, and 28% of responses described having a lack of resources and time (as cited in Campbell, Baltes, Martin, & Meddings, 2007).

In addition to the heaping demands in the professional setting, women often face heaping demands on the domestic front as well. Women are faced with difficult decisions of balancing family and their careers, a challenge that is less prevalent for men.
For many women, there is minimal support in place to balance career and family (Huffington, 2014).

Caroline Turner (2012), author of *Difference Works: Improving Retention, Productivity, and Profitability Through Inclusion*, researched the challenges that women face in upper level management. Some of her findings concluded that:

43 percent of women who have children will quit their jobs at some point... For women to be engaged in the workplace, they need to feel valued. And the way many workplaces are set up, masculine ways of succeeding--fueled by stress and burnout-- are often accorded more value. (Turner, 2012, p. 50)

Ariana Huffington (2010), female founder and CEO, insists that women are responsible for leading the movement in honoring a more balanced approach to leadership. She shares in her book, *Thrive* the following:

This second revolution still very much in progress, as it needs to be. But we simply can’t wait any longer to get under way. That’s because women are paying an even higher price than men for their participation in a work culture fueled by stress, sleep deprivation, and burnout. That is one reason why so many talented women, with impressive degrees working in high-powered jobs, end up abandoning their careers when they can afford to. (p. 13)

Huffington (2010) goes on to explain that women in stressful jobs have a nearly 40% increased risk of heart disease and heart attacks compared with their less-stressed colleagues, and 60% greater risk for type 2 diabetes-a link that does not exist for men.

Sharratt and Derrington (1993) studied the most common barriers that women faced, some of which included sex-role stereotyping, availability of appropriate female
models, and availability of sponsorship or mentorship. Female superintendents face a myriad of complex issues in attaining and sustaining their positions.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Dr. Charles Daugherty at Duquesne University in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania addressed scholars attending a meeting about women in educational leadership with this statement:

For the sake of justice, we must make efforts to bring the number of women working in leadership positions into closer proportion with the number of women in education. We owe this effort especially to our daughters, but to all future generations who will benefit from more inclusive educational institutions. (as cited in Soberhart, 2009, p. xii)

The underrepresentation of women in top level management positions throughout the United States is most evident in the field of education. It is a critical time to learn from the experiences of women who have reached the pinnacle position of the educational field- the role of the superintendent. Research from American Management Association (1996), and Brock and Grady (2002) shed light on the harsh reality of the worsening stress levels for upper level management. As described thoroughly in Sapolsky’s (1994) *Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers*, the physical symptoms of stress can surface in various ways with links to cardiovascular disease, suppressed immune system, and juvenile diabetes among many other ailments. Long-term stress can have a devastating effect on work performance with decreased potentiation of the hippocampus which controls memory and executive functioning (Sapolsky, 1994). Furthermore, Sapolsky estimates that 75% of insomnia cases are triggered by some major stressor. The
damaging effects of a lack of sleep comes with its own growing snowball of complications, as presented throughout Ariana Huffington’s *Thrive*. “After all, the function of leadership is to be able to see the iceberg before it hits the Titanic. And when you’re burned out and exhausted, it’s much harder to see clearly the dangers--or opportunities--ahead” (Huffington, 2010, p. 75).

If stress is clearly a part of the daily lives of superintendents, then investigating the causes, strategies, and recommendations is critical to current and aspiring leaders. The resurgence in the study of leadership has not thoroughly investigated the causes and implications of stress (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000). A consistent theme among researchers in analyzing the high superintendent turnover and candidate shortage is the heightened stress associated with the position (Brock & Grady, 2002; Cooper et al., 2000).

Given the stressors associated with the position and the societal barriers that women in leadership have faced, how is it that some female superintendents overcome these challenges to thrive in their careers and personal lives? It appears that these leaders have developed attitudes and strategies to help them manage the personal and professional stressors impacting their work. How have successful female superintendents learned to withstand the hardships and maintain balance among so many constant personal and professional stressors? While these variables have been studied individually in various capacities, these questions still remain unanswered when viewed in this specific context. A predicted shortage of superintendents (Domenech, 2009) adds a sense of urgency for investigating this problem.
The existing body of research is populated with studies of women in leadership roles and factors impacting their work in these roles; however, few studies have been conducted on stress management among female superintendents specifically.

This study will investigate the factors that contribute to stress, describe the strategies used to manage these stressors and provide recommendations as learned through the stories and personal experiences of six California female superintendents.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify personal and professional factors that create stress for California female superintendents, describe the strategies used to manage stress, and provide recommendations for addressing stress from California female superintendents.

**Research Question (RQ)**

This study was guided by the following general question: *What personal and professional factors do California female superintendents identify as creating stress, what strategies do they use to address stress, and what recommendations do they have regarding addressing stress for aspiring female superintendents?*

**Research Sub-Questions (RSQs)**

1. What personal factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress?
2. How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address personal factors that create stress?
3. What professional factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress?
4. How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address professional factors that create stress?

5. What recommendations do California female superintendents have for aspiring female superintendents regarding addressing personal and professional stress?

**Significance of the Problem**

Work related stress for upper level management is on the rise (American Management Association, 1996), and the symptoms of stress can have debilitating effects on physical health, family life, and emotional wellness (Colgan, 2003). As a result of the numerous administrative demands and shortages, many researchers have contributed to the literature on the school administrator’s stress levels and burnout rate (Brock & Grady, 2002, Colgan, 2003, Gates & Gmelch, 1998, Nussebaum, 2007). These challenges are heightened for women who must navigate the continuing societal and cultural barriers that are ahead of them (Huffington, 2010). The uncomfortable truth is that a woman who is equally as qualified must overcome greater barriers to reach the pinnacle of the public education field. Between political and bureaucratic accountability and balancing responsibilities in their personal lives, becoming a female superintendent is a vast undertaking.

This study is significant for multiple reasons:

1. Findings from this study will add to the body of research and provide data to educational leadership programs in order to better prepare future educational leaders.
2. Strategies learned from the participants in this study will provide helpful strategies in overcoming the inevitable stress that follows aspiring female superintendents.

3. This study will enhance the reader’s knowledge of the historical barriers and journey that women have navigated in a male-dominated role.

A wealth of valuable insight will come from the narratives of women who have navigated the challenges stacked against them to obtain the superintendency. In pursuing the answers to the RQs, existing superintendents will have an opportunity to share their stories, grow the body of knowledge on the issues they face, and provide aspiring female leaders with key information to support their career paths.

**Definitions**

_**Superintendent.**_ The Chief Executive Officer of a school district, reports to the school board, and manages administrative affairs within a school district.

_**Stress.**_ In 1936, Hans Selye defined stress as the body’s way of responding to a demand. He discovered that these stressors can cause serious and long-term issues.

_**Barrier.**_ Defined by Dulac (1992), the term refers to any obstacle that will hinder the employment of women as public school superintendents.

_**Job Stressors.**_ Includes stressors that directly relate to the quality and quantity of work performed as well as the feedback and appraisals that individuals receive regarding their job performance (Sethi, King, & Quick, 2004).

_**Personal Stressors.**_ Stressors that arise from the demands of relationships in both the home and work settings. Quick and Quick (1979) also refers to this as interpersonal stressors.
Stress Management. The wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person’s stress levels, especially chronic stress and work-related stress for the female superintendent.

Stressors. Specific events or situations that trigger the feeling of stress.

Theoretical Definitions

This study assumes two theoretical concepts, defined as follows:


Human Function Curve. Originally developed by Peter Nixon, there are different levels of stress that affect our level of performance. According to this model, there is a point where chronic stress can impede our performance. Performance is impeded on either sides of the spectrum- too little stress and too much stress (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Human Function Curve. Adapted from “The Practitioner,” by Nixon, P.G., 1976, p.765. Copyright by PubMed- indexed for MEDLINE.
Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to female superintendents from various regions of California.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I is an overview of the study where background information, a description of the problem, RQs and significance is provided. Chapter II provides an extensive review of the body of literature pertinent to the purpose of this study. Chapter III details the methodology used to collect and analyze data. Chapter IV contains a detailed analysis of the data and synthesized coded data from qualitative data collected. This dissertation is concluded with Chapter V with a summary of the study, findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research on the topic.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

An important challenge facing superintendents is how to handle personal stress in a positive and constructive manner without passing it on to their staff. Intellectually understanding that stress is a normal condition of the position is just as important as finding personal coping mechanisms to reduce its negative effects. Coping, understanding, and reducing superintendent stress should be a high priority for school boards and professional associations serving superintendents and boards. (T. Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 47)

A comprehensive review and analysis of the literature was conducted using books, journals, papers, articles, and dissertations. Sources were organized by category and topic using a Synthesis Matrix (see Appendix A). The review is organized into five areas. The first section provides a historical perspective of women in the workforce and women in leadership. The second section addresses women in leadership and the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency. The third section analyzes the scope of the literature on stress in relation to this study. The fourth section summarizes the body of literature on stress management and describes the theoretical underpinnings of this study. This chapter concludes with the fifth section which specifies the gap in the research.

Historical Perspective

To understand the complexity of the female superintendent population, it is essential to understand the history of women in the workforce, in education, and in
leadership who have paved the way for women seeking opportunities beyond the home front.

It has only been 90 years since women were granted the right to vote and progress for women in leadership has remained slow. Men traditionally did all the teaching up until the late 18th century and were known as *schoolmasters*. Women and people of color were taught to respect men’s authority and were not considered for positions in education because of the lack of formal schooling they were allowed (C. C. Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Women began training boys and girls, age’s four to seven, around the close of the Colonial period. Filling dual roles as teacher and housewife, she would gather the local children in her home to teach them letters (C. Shakeshaft, 1989).

When white educated men became unavailable, the demand for teachers increased (C. C. Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Single women were thought to be ideal for these positions because it would prepare them for motherhood and tap into their maternal instincts. They were also less expensive to hire in comparison to a male’s salary, earning approximately one-third of the income of a man (C. Shakeshaft, 1989). In 1848, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, organized the first convention for women’s rights. It is believed that the modern women’s rights movement was inspired by this convention (M. Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). By 1890, 63% of colleges in America were open to women, opening up more opportunities for women to advance professionally and academically (Cott, 2000). In 1909, Ella Flagg Young was appointed the first woman superintendent of Chicago public schools who predicted that “women are destined to rule the school of every city” (p. 112). Despite these predictions, the teaching profession
became more feminized as the administrative roles became more masculinized. J. M. Blount (1998) proclaimed that,

It was not coincidental that teachers’ independence and decision-making powers were stripped away just as women dominated the profession numerically. The male educators who remained had to assert their masculine qualities somehow, thus many became administrators to control labors of women just as fathers and husbands long had done in the home. Administrators did not appear in significant numbers until women began filling teaching positions. (p. 27)

In 1920, 55% of principal positions were held by women; however, women have never accounted for the majority of district superintendents (Seay, 1993). Men were typically hired for these higher-paying positions. Despite the feminist movement, the right to vote, and economic growth, women in administrative positions declined after 1930 (Obermeyer, 1996). During the Great Depression and the years following, many believed that women in leadership were not suited to handle the discipline issues within schools, and were considered to be too emotional and dependent on evaluation and feedback (Boudreau, 1994). An analysis of public school superintendents by J. Blount (1993) revealed that women comprised 9.02% of superintendents in 1910, 11.21% in 1930, 9.05% in 1950, and 3.41% in 1970. This rise and fall of percentages can be attributed to the suffrage movement through World War II when women held roughly 10% of all superintendence’s. After World War II, representation of women in the superintendency dropped to 3.41% by 1970, the lowest in the century (J. Blount, 1993). According to J. Blount (1998), men returning from war to fill positions may have contributed to the lack of women in school administration. This period around World
War II was the only time in history that women held a majority of the educational administration positions; however, after men returned from the war, educational administration was once again dominated by men (Mertz, 2009).

Women were often encouraged to stay home; while men were encouraged to become teachers and administrators so that “more competent staffs would exist in public schools” (C. Shakeshaft, 1999, p. 110). Cultural critics became concerned with boys being feminized by female teachers and sought to create spaces for “boys to be boys.” The belief that men were more equipped to take charge and maintain discipline in classrooms was a common thought that discouraged women from education and especially from administrative positions (C. Shakeshaft, 1999). By the 1960s and 1970s, a large number of men returned to the teaching profession to avoid the draft since teaching was a protected profession. These men entering the education field began climbing the ladder to administrative positions more quickly than women (M. Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This practice began to favor career advancement of men over women (Newton, 2006).

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was the first federal law to have a direct impact on helping women in their pursuit of the superintendency by mandating equal wages must be paid to women and men for equal work (Anderson, 1998). Gender discrimination was further addressed by Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1972, which prohibited any educational program receiving federal funding from gender discrimination (Anderson, 1998).
In 1994, women only comprised 10% of the directorships at Fortune 500 companies, and by 1996, only four women held the role of CEO at Fortune 1000 companies (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 2011).

Progress continued with The Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 which combated gender discrimination and launched the Glass Ceiling Commission (Anderson, 1998; Dardaine Ragguet, Russo, & Harris, 1994). These national laws and mandates delivered a clear and widespread message that discrimination based on gender was a violation of women’s constitutional right (Paddock, 1981). A global perspective reveals even more stark disparities for women in leadership. Even with cultural differences in expectations for managers, male dominance across the world still prevails. For example, countries where “feminine” characteristics are more highly valued than “masculine” characteristics still do not have the highest proportion of female leaders (Hofstede, 1989).

Chase (1995) concluded that while the education system in America has greatly evolved during the 20th century, social characteristics for the superintendency has not. Women remain severely underrepresented in the role of the superintendency despite the overwhelming majority of women serving as teachers and central office positions.

By the 1990s, more than 50% of students in the educational administration programs were women (Mertz, 2009). This may provide some hope that women may be working their way up the ranks in educational administration. In fact, female principals outnumbered male principals in 2003-2004.
**Underrepresentation of Women in Superintendency**

Despite the historical strides for women in the workplace and in leadership, there remains a large gap in the representation of women serving as public school superintendents.

Bjork (2000) agrees that “women remain a rich and untapped resource for the job… the under-representation of women and people of color in the profession is shameful” (p. 278). The disproportionality of women in educational leadership positions reflects the large gender gap in every other profession in the United States (Litmanovitz, 2011). Litmanovitz (2011) created an image that represents the disproportions that exist for women in education positions (See Figure 2).


Litmanovitz’ (2011) research examined the contributing factors of this gap in educational leadership, and concluded that potential sources of the problem included:
• Lack of role models- with more men as administrators, there are fewer female role models in administrative positions for aspiring female leaders to look up to.

• Leadership stereotypes- a historical and societal stereotype of an effective leader may impede women pursuing leadership opportunities.

• Lack of a pipeline for teachers- a lack of training programs from teacher to principal or from principal to district official challenges women to navigate these promotions with little support.

• Work-life balance- if someone needs to stay home, a women is more likely than her male counterpart to leave the workforce.

• Different reasons for entering education- many women become teachers without the intent to moving into administration.

For years, women’s motivation to enter the education field has been their love of teaching and making a positive impact on students; however, men view teaching as a stepping stone into administration or a different field (Kim & Brunner, 2009). This difference is thought to be what makes women effective leaders. Women value the teaching profession because they enjoy building relationships which may lead to promotions (C. Shakeshaft, 1989). Women’s higher rate of participation in professional development make it more likely than men that they will maintain student achievement as a top priority (C. C. Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Despite the qualities that women bring to leadership roles, the career mobility remains low. Many attribute this to the women themselves lacking the confidence to be outspoken and pulling back instead of leaning in
Others believe that the barriers imposed by society’s norms placed on women is to blame (T. E. Glass et. al., 2000).

M. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) report that while the representation of women in school leadership has increased, they do not fill administrative positions that are proportionate to the number of women in the teaching profession, or in proportion to the number of women certified to become administrators. Several studies have been conducted to obtain updated statistics. According to the 2010 The School Superintendents Association (AASA) study, the percentage of female superintendents was 24.1%, the highest ever reported (as cited in T. J. Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson 2011).

According to M. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), men and women share the same ambitions of creating change; however, women are more likely than men to have a desire to make a drastic change and to challenge the status quo. Men and women differ in leadership styles and having a diverse team of administrators is beneficial for everyone. Even so, society-wide assumptions are difficult to overcome. C. C. Brunner and Grogan (2007) wrote that,

Women typically have more classroom experience, and many have it at the elementary level. These experiences, as well as their career paths, formal and informal training, age, and other issues related to gender can create the impression that women lack what is seen as proper leadership style, that is, they do not exhibit the familiar and accepted masculine persona. (p. 43)

Since men have dominated these administrative positions in education, a male style of leadership has become the expectation. Women bring many positive and
effective qualities to the table that are not as readily recognized. They tend to display their transformational skills in the area of collaboration (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Women often describe their accomplishments as a collaborative effort, rather than an individual pursuit. Studies suggest that women see power differently and utilize their power to promote everyone’s power (M. Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). C. C. Brunner and Grogan (2007) further assert that, “the increased focus on academics and accountability should make the job more attractive to more women who tend to have more focus on curriculum, teaching, and learning” (p. 88). Despite these alignments, women remain underrepresented in the role of the superintendency.

The issue of gender discrimination continues to hinder women’s effort in reaching the pinnacle career in public education. Men are viewed as ideal candidates for the superintendency, and this discrimination in the hiring process is partially to blame (Brunner & Kim, 2010). Research by Bell and Chase (1995) provides a deeper insight into the biases that exist for hiring teams and search consultants. School boards perceive women as weak and “too emotional and can’t see things rationally and so that effects their decision making” (p. 56). With women being natural nurturers, “that doesn’t sit well in the superintendency; we [superintendents] have to make tough decisions… women are not as strong in dealing with the major issues as men would be” (Bell & Chase, p. 56). While there have been several studies indicating the existing discrimination against women in hiring for management, it is difficult to measure how far reaching and impactful these assumptions are on women seeking the superintendency. M. Grogan (1996) found that highly qualified female candidates for the superintendency were seen by hiring agencies as women first and administrators second.
Taking a closer look at the career trajectories of individuals seeking the superintendency helps to explain another contributing factor in the under representation. In 1989, C. Shakeshaft designed a chart of the typical career paths leading to administration. C. Shakeshaft revealed the limited movement toward the more prestige positions of secondary principal, assistant superintendent, or superintendent. Also illustrated is that there are more entry level opportunities for the typical male teacher who is aspiring to be a school administrator (C. Shakeshaft, 1989) (see Figure 3).

Positions as coaches, assistant principals, or high school department chairs serve as stepping stones to help men acquire the next leadership role. On the other hand, women teachers who aspire to be administrators often lack opportunities to participate in the normal track to the superintendency because many of them work in elementary schools (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Only a small percentage of elementary schools have assistant principals, and almost none have department chairs (T. E. Glass et al., 2000). The unlikelihood of women serving as high school principals, department chairs, and coaches, the common stepping stones to the superintendency, may provide some additional factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the role (Bjork, 2000). “It’s much more difficult, even for a male, to go from the elementary school principalship to superintendency than it is from a secondary school” (Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999, p. 53). Some literature asserts that women wish to remain in fields that are female dominated which is perceived as a more comfortable placement. The fact that women may have different leadership styles than their male counterparts can lead to perceptions of being “different” or “an outsider” (Alston, 1999).

Based on the 1992 study of American school superintendents, T. E. Glass (1992) found that women superintendents hold higher degrees and spend more time in teaching positions prior to attaining the superintendency. Table 2 displays the differences between men and women in degrees held, and Table 3 compares the length of service as a classroom teacher prior to the role of superintendency.
Female superintendents generally have more teaching experience and more advanced degrees, and yet, the rate of women serving as superintendents is still significantly less than that of men. Research by M. Tallerico (2000) had similar findings in the discrepancy between length of service as classroom teachers before advancing to administration. Women spend an average of 15 years in the classroom before looking for an administrative position and men spend an average of five years in the classroom.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that the pipeline to the superintendency is not only full of women; but also that women are interested and qualified to assume the
position. C. Bruner and Grogan (2007) cite a survey that was conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (2003), that 40% of women in central office administration expressed interest in becoming a school superintendent. The same survey also revealed that nearly 33% of women in central office administration are serving as assistant deputy or associate superintendents, positions that most commonly lead to advancement to the superintendency.

**Barriers to the Advancement**

The barriers that women must face in obtaining the superintendency has been extensively investigated (Bell & Chase, 1995; J. M. Blount, 1998; C. Brunner, 1999; M. Grogan, 1996; M. Tallerico, 2000). The gender disparities in the school superintendency may be attributed to the societal belief that women are not suited for specific jobs. Most female superintendents think that gender barriers exist; and even most men feel that they do to an extent (T. E. Glass et al., 2000). If 76.1% of women are educators (Institute of Education Services, n.d.), why aren’t more of them hired as school superintendents? A predicted shortage of superintendents (Domenech, 2009) adds a sense of urgency for investigating this problem. The AASA study, *2000 Study of the American School Superintendency* was analyzed by T. E. Glass (2000) to examine why female superintendents and male superintendents are so disproportionately represented. Major findings from T. E. Glass analysis include:

1. Women are not in the positions that normally lead to the superintendency.
2. Women are not gaining superintendent’s credentials in preparation program.
3. Women are not as experienced or interested in district-wide fiscal management as men.
4. Women are not interested in the superintendency for personal reasons.
5. School boards are reluctant to hire women superintendents.
6. Women enter the field of education for different purposes than men.
7. Women enter education administration too late. (pp. 28-31)

A common theme in the literature is that women are perceived as weaker, more emotional leaders and are challenged by tough decision making. One of the five “breaking insights” from research by C. Brunner (1999) is that women superintendent’s experience gender bias, and they acknowledge it. M. Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole (1993) attempts to explain the phenomenon of the existence of underrepresentation:

Taken together, these quotations reflect stereotypical images of what a socially-acceptable leader looks like and does. They reveal potent assumptions about the kinds of roles and responsibilities thought to be appropriate for men and women in American society. They make it appear that women do not “fit the bill” and leave unquestioned the underlying assumptions about leadership. They constitute gender-related factors which work against women superintendents. (p. 11)

A female leader’s inability to manage her stress levels both in the home and at work may impact her ability to perform either job well. Given the apparent and stark underrepresentation of women in leadership and specifically in the superintendency, it is critical for women to acquire and implement effective stress management strategies (Dufu, 2017). The existence of stress and the inability to balance professional and personal stressors may impact the number of women who decide to pursue the superintendency, and may give off the perception that they are weak or unable to handle the demands of the job. According to Barth (1991), stress is the second most common
reason for leaving a leadership position in education, falling just behind excessive time demands. Many potential superintendents chose not to apply for the position due to the stress (Cunningham & Burdock, 1999). “Considerable stress is felt by slightly more than 44% of superintendents and this coupled with those reporting very great stress brings high stress levels to near 60%” (T. Glass & Franceschini, p. 47). In 1988, The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) facilitated a study that concluded the three main reasons for the administrator shortage: (a) low pay in comparison to the responsibilities of the job, (b) too much stress, and (c) too much time required of the job.

**Impacts of Stress on the Superintendency**

Stress was first defined by Selye (1976) as a common response to a range of unpleasant sensory stimuli, called stressors. Selye identified differences in the types of stress a person experiences. W. H. Gmelch (1996) defined stress as “the anticipation of your inability to respond adequately to a perceived demand accompanied by your anticipation of negative consequences for an inadequate response” (p. 10).

Several types of stress exists; some of which have positive effects on our lives. Eustress is associated with positive stress that motivates individuals, neustress refers to a steady internal state of being, and distress is associated with negative aspects of stress (Selye, 1976). An emerging theme in the literature on stress is that prolonged reaction to excessive distress can result in chronic over tension causing diseases such as hypertension, high blood pressure, obesity, and various other debilitating health conditions (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Selye, 1976). The stress response can have multiple components including emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and
psychological (Bekker, 2001). Psychological stress occurs when there is a subjective imbalance between the demands placed on someone and the resources they have to manage these demands (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). A person will experience an optimal level of stress when the demands and the resources balance each other out. On the contrary, when the demands are greater than the resources, a person will feel overwhelmed or under too much pressure (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994).

Peter Nixon, a British cardiologist, presented the Human Function Curve as a result of his research in 1979. This human function curve indicates that there is an “optimal” level of stress where functional amounts of arousal support effective task performance. As the stress escalates beyond this phase and enters into the fatigue, exhaustion and eventually burnout. Stress that lasts long enough in this unhealthy range contributes to decreased performance.

The literature on stress is populated with findings of adverse effects of stress on physical and mental health. Ulman (2000) found that among women, chronic exposure to stress can lead to “physical or psychological conditions, such as gastrointestinal distress, high blood pressure, headaches, muscle spasms, abnormalities of the reproductive cycle, and anxiety” (p. 342). The cost associated with negative stress is worth noting. Costs related to stress ranges from $150 billion each year (Schell, 1997) to $300 million per year (Schwartz, 2004). Stress for top-level executives has also risen from 25% in 1993 to 30% in 1996. Superintendents fall within the top-level executive category, where they experience a greater amount of negative stress.

Many studies have utilized the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) as an assessment of administrative stress (W. H. Gmelch & Swent, 1984). The ASI identifies
four sources of stress: (a) task-based stress, (b) role-based stress, (c) conflict-mediation stress, and (d) boundary-spanning stress (W. H. Gmelch & Chan, 1995). Task-based stress relates to day to day activities and occurs when superintendents feel the pressure of performing their daily activities such as administrative meetings, responding to phone calls, and meeting with parents (W. H. Gmelch & Chan, 1995). Role-based stress occurs when the role responsibilities of the superintendent cause conflict between the variety of audiences served. With conflicting interests between school boards, communities, faculties, and state mandates, the superintendent is faced with navigating the political climate and implications of their decisions. Conflict-mediating stress comes from conflicts within role-based stress. It is associated with managing the conflicts that occur between superintendent and board relations or other stakeholders with differing opinions. Boundary-spanning stress relates to managing the internal audience of those working within the organization and the external audience of the community, parents, taxpayers, and businesses (McGarity, 2004, p. 24).

One survey of superintendents found that nearly one third of the New York superintendents retired due to stress (A. Goldstein, 1992). School superintendents are held responsible for the progress and achievements of their students. In reviewing the challenges and satisfactions of the most visible role in public education, it is evident in the literature that the stress associated with the position is immense and increasing. Superintendents today face a myriad of pressures that are markedly different from even a decade ago.

Between the 1920s and the 1950s, superintendents were expected to be involved mostly in human relations (Norton, Webb, Diugosh, & Sybouts, 1996). Around the
1960s, superintendents became more involved in employee morale and motivation (Houston, 2007). Increasing school reform in the 1980s meant that the role of the superintendent began to look more like a compliance officer, adding a considerable amount of stress to the individuals assuming this role (Norton et al., 1996). With the passage of No Child Left Behind, superintendents were now expected to manage overall school performance and student achievement. According to Houston, today’s superintendent must be a collaborator, consensus creator, and community builder, on top of advocating for children and managing teaching and learning. These heaping demands have increased the level of stress in the position. Most citizens see the superintendent as the “chief expert on schools in the community” (T. E. Glass et al., 2000, p. 19).

Lopez (2007) describes the 21st century superintendent as “the chief executive officer of a school district who performs managerial services and who reports to the elected members of the district board of education” (p. 12). Houston (2001) asserts that the 21st century superintendent “will understand that learning is no longer about place, it is now about process” (p. 431). With these global demands, today’s superintendent faces a challenging and stressful job description. Sharp and Walter (2004) describe the job as “hazardous to your health” (p. 18). They go on to describe the various components of the role,

A superintendent has to have a working knowledge of many things: personnel, finance, facilities, public relations, curriculum, instruction, collective bargaining and other areas. The superintendent cannot be an expert in one area and ignore the others. (Sharp & Walter, 2004, p. 15)
The demands of the job undoubtedly cause an insurmountable amount of stress. Increasing performance expectations, financial struggles, and extensive political pressures make the job of a school leader less desirable. According to T. E. Glass et al. (2000), pressures caused by a lack of adequate funding, competing community and school groups, employee unions, state-legislated mandates, intrusive board members and the public’s perceived dissatisfaction with performance of schools can all cause stress for superintendents. Stress can become disabling. (p. 72)

T. E. Glass (1992) further drives the point of overwhelming demands of the job. “Most superintendents are well paid professionals in their communities. The downside is that most are on call 24 hours a day and have very long work days, which often don’t end until late in the evening” (T. E. Glass, 1992, p. 32).

Konnert and Augenstein (1990) created a list of competencies that a superintendent in the ‘90s must have. The competencies identified by Konnert and Augenstein were developed in 1990, 27 years ago, and it can be assumed that the superintendent role has since increased in expected competencies since this time (see Table 4).
Table 4

Competencies That Superintendents Must Have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>• Serving as a change agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Human</td>
<td>• Computer literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Technical</td>
<td>• Delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Conceptual</td>
<td>• Enabling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication skills</td>
<td>• Empowering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decision making</td>
<td>• Management of organizational dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Problem identification</td>
<td>• Group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Alternative identification</td>
<td>• Resource management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Alternative selection</td>
<td>A. Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Implementation</td>
<td>B. Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Evaluation</td>
<td>C. Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strategic planning</td>
<td>• Public speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Goal setting</td>
<td>• Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation skills</td>
<td>• Stress management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk-taking skills</td>
<td>• Time management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Stress can lead to burnout and reduces longevity in the superintendency.

Longevity is a measurement of time that a superintendent serves in their position within a school district. The longevity of a superintendent has decreased, with the average time served being approximately three years (Natkin et al., 2002). Turnover in the superintendent position can be traumatic for schools and communities (Lere, 2004). In addition to disrupting school reform efforts (McAdams, 1995), turnovers in the superintendent position can have a negative impact that “filters down, in the form of low morale, in the faculty, the staff, and into the students” (Capps, 1992, p. 92). Successful change requires continuity and constancy of purpose and vision sustained over a period of time (Natkin et al., 2000). A study conducted by Beekley (1999) found that female superintendents left the superintendency because of stress caused by difficult board relationships, time/stress management, political and financial woes, and public criticism.
A lack of consistency is stressful for all audiences. “It has to be a team effort! Board members, superintendents, and others must recognize that frequent superintendent turnover is not good for kids” (Metzger, 1997, p. 24).

More issues are on the horizon for the school superintendent: pay for performance, prolonged budget deficits, shrinking applicant pool, political attention, charter schools, and changing federal initiatives. If the current state of the superintendency is one of burnout, stress and turnover, investigating the contributing factors of personal and professional stress among female superintendents is timely, relevant, and urgent. While several variables contribute to the lack of longevity, stress is one of them.

Richardson (1998) suggested that school districts suffer when the superintendent is under stress because they

- generally do not perform well when they are more preoccupied with handling stress than with developing the organization’s potential, it is, then, imperative that measures be taken to help superintendents cope more effectively with the stressors inherent in their position. (p. 17)

In addition to the four dimensions of stress as outlined in the ASI, personal and professional stress are specific to the setting in which the stress occurs and critical to the investigation on stress.

**Personal Stress**

Personal stress refers to pressures stemming from personal life. A concept consistently found in the literature on women and stress is the disproportionate strain placed on women to manage more on the homefront. Taylor et al. (2000) theorize that
due to greater investments in pregnancy and motherhood, the female stress response has “evolved to maximize the survival of self and offspring” (p. 411). Bekker (2001) theorizes that the nature of female stress response may depend on the presence or absence of children in need of care.

Using measures of stressful life events and depression, Cyranowski, Frank, Young and Shear (2000) found evidence that individuals in general, and women in particular, are at risk for depression in response to stressful life events. In a study of 356 Canadian women, the most frequently reported health problems were stress, anxiety, and depression (Walters, 1993). Research in both clinical and non-clinical populations have found that women have higher rates of affective and anxiety disorders than men (Kessler et al., 1994; Miller & Kirsch, 1987). While the rates vary from study to study, the general pattern across cultures is that women are almost twice as likely to experience depression as men (Stroud et al., 2002; Wolk & Weissman, 1995). Possible explanations of these gender differences include biological, cognitive and social factors (Wolk & Weissman, 1995).

Numerous authors observe that due to traditional gender roles, women with full-time careers continue to retain a majority of the child-rearing and household duties, which can lead to role strain and elevated stress levels (Farhang, 1999; L. A. Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Rosenfeld, 1992; Wu & DeMaris, 1996). Swiss and Walker (1993) delve deeper into the struggle for work-life balance among working women.

As long as a woman plays by the male rules of the game, the career doors stay open. Proving she can do her job is not enough. As soon as she proposes a different agenda for combining a career with an involved family life, doors in the
professions begin to swing shut. Despite the rapid evolution and expansion in women’s roles in the last decade, the roles of men at home and the rules for success in the office have barely moved. Reflected in deeply entrenched attitudes about how to be a “professional,” and intensified by the realities of who does what in the home, today’s rules of work dictate that one critical aspect of a woman’s life is destined to be out of balance. (p. 4)

A study conducted by Farhang (1999) found that mothers of young children with full-time careers are likely to prioritize children, career, and spouse above themselves and fail to allocate sufficient time to support their own emotional and physical needs. Women in this study stopped exercising consistently, limited time for personal health, stopped visiting with friends, and did not take the time to find ways to reduce stress (Farhang, 1999). For example, the results of a U.S. national household survey indicated that family and economic hardships were significant predictors of depression in women (Wu & DeMaris, 1996). A survey of 395 adults found that women tend to experience more parenting and economic strains than men do. Married women do the bulk of the housework and childcare, even when they are employed full-time (Eliot, 2001).

Balancing too many roles or conflicting expectations of roles can lead to role strain (Froberg, Gjerdingen, & Preston, 1986; Wu & DeMaris, 1996). Role strain can lead to negative effects on physical and mental health as the number of roles for women increase. Research by Hansot and Tyack (1981) assert that marriage has differing effects for men and women. Marriage is an asset for men while it is a liability for women. J. M. Blount (1998) profiles a traditional male administrator who was able to advance in school leadership because his supportive wife concentrated on mothering and partnering; freeing
him up to focus on advancing in his career. Most of the female superintendents tended to follow the career paths of their husbands (Staples & Neal, 2000), and did not feel that they could relocate (Montz & Wanat, 2008).

C. C. Brunner (2000) stated that “after the time demands of the workday schedule and the time demands of meeting both role- and gender-related expectations, household and family demands are significant” (p. 124). The choice between the role of a wife-mother and a career woman can cause great stress when considering how much time each take (C. C. Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Due to these stressors, female superintendents are more likely to be unmarried according to a study which revealed that 24.6% of women in the superintendency are unmarried compared to only 6.13% of men (T. Glass & Franceschini, 2006). To delay these stressors, 86% of the female superintendents reported that they waited to pursue the position (Dabney-Lieras, 2008).

It appears that the nature of women’s relationships is a central indicator of her overall sense of well-being (Davis & Oathout, 1987). According to Belle (1991), women tend to maintain more emotionally intimate relationships compared to men. These intimate relationships are mobilized for social support during stressful times; however, they can add more pressure onto women to uphold the expectations and reciprocity of these relationships. Belle (1991) suggests that networks can lead to psychological distress when “network members place heavy demands on individuals to provide assistance and support” (p. 259). The values embedded in work and family roles make it difficult for women to maintain a connection with others. T. E. Glass (1992) points to the damages that stress can have on relationships.
Interpersonal relations typically suffer when leaders are under extreme stress, and organizations such as school districts, in which leaders constantly are under substantial pressure, generally do not perform well when they are more preoccupied with handling stress than with developing the organization’s potential. (T. E. Glass, 1992, p. 52)

**Professional Stress**

Professional or occupational stress refers to “an experience arising from a perceptual comparison between an excess of work-related demands over an individual’s perceived capability, power, and motivation to meet those demands, when failure to respond to them has significant perceived consequences” (Farkas, 1983, p. 2). Job-related stress has been defined as the mental, emotional, and behavioral reaction “to vulnerability caused by elements in the job environment that are, in large part, out of the awareness of the worker” (Kagan, Kagan, & Watson, 1995, p. 71).

Negative stress related to the workplace is well-researched. Without a doubt, stress from work affects performance, and it is important for organizational leaders to understand the causes and long-term effects (W. G. Goldstein & Darou, 1991). Both physical and mental illness increases as job stress increases (Bayer, 1991; Greene & Nowack, 1991). Workplace stress can cause coronary heart disease, obesity, and behavioral problems including violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and theft (Jones & Boye, 1992). Women with full-time careers must manage the stressors from their jobs, in addition to being the primary caregivers for their families and managing household responsibilities. Women superintendents cited gender issues, discrimination, isolation and the loss of quality of their personal lives as stressors (Beekley, 1999).
The nature of the work environment has been shown to carry over into the home; affecting interactions with spouses and children (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989). Role strain, resulting from an overload of responsibilities that exceed the individual’s capabilities or resources to handle, can result in a spillover effect into all areas (Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985). In a study by Montz and Wanat (2008), 26% of the female superintendent participants had personal anxiety about the effect that their careers had on their families.

When women struggle to find balance and experience role overload, “women managers have been found to have difficulties unwinding after leaving their place of employment and can experience extensive stress and conflict, especially if they hold jobs that are highly complex and demanding” (Fagenson, 1993, p. 200). One of the major issues that women confront in the work environment is the ways gender role expectations drive attitudes and perceptions.

Female leaders experience all of the same stressors as men; as well as additional job stressors that are unique to women. These stem from society, from the organization, and from themselves (Fagenson, 1993).

**Stress Management Strategies**

A variety of activities and strategies exist to help women reduce and manage their stress.

Individuals may use various stress management techniques to “cope with life’s challenges, to relax, and to find peace of mind” (Lehrer & Woolfolk, 1993, p. vii). Some general stress-reducing techniques include progressive muscle relaxation, biofeedback,
meditation, autogenic training, hypnosis, listening to music, and exercise (Lehrer & Woolfolk, 1993).

Ulman (2000) found that relaxation, exercise, healthy nutrition, and group support successfully decreases the stress response. Other studies suggest that participation in group stress management training, including mindfulness meditation, can reduce stress (Reibel, Greeson, Brainard, & Rosenzweig, 2001; Williams, Kolar, Reger, & Pearson, 2001). Health-promoting self-care is defined by Acton (2002) as “actions persons take to improve their health, maintain optimal functioning, and increase general well-being” (p. 73). Some of these self-care activities include getting adequate rest, eating healthy, and exercising. Acton found that women who practice more health-promoting self-care activities experienced less negative effects of stress on well-being.

Another strategy found to reduce the effects of stress is participating in leisure activities. Wearing (1998) described leisure as freedom of choice of activity, time, or company, and brings personal satisfaction. A study of 31 women revealed that “this sense of freedom was facilitated by a change of place, schedule, activity, or companions and this freedom to change or vary one’s context led to feelings of well-being and relaxation” (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992, p. 311). Various authors report evidence that leisure activities can guard against the negative health effects of life stressors (Bedini & Guinan, 1996; Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993). The female participants in Freysinger and Flannery’s (1992) qualitative study reported that leisure gave them an “opportunity to regain a neglected or rarely realized sense of self” (p. 314), something that can be easily lost in their roles as workers and mothers. An empirical study by Canam (1986) found that exercise, reading, hot baths, television watching, and talking to others were leisure
activities used most by women to manage stress. A review of the literature uncovers additional stress management techniques used by working mothers. A qualitative study of 10 married mothers with full-time careers (Farhang, 1999) found that the most frequently used strategy in managing stress was “spending time alone” (p. 111). This study further revealed that “having time to themselves provided respite from their many obligations and allowed them to be replenished” (p. 112).

Litmanovitz (2012) interviewed women leaders and found that several factors contributed to their ability to succeed despite the multitude of barriers placed on them. These factors included:

- Mentorship
- Support at home
- Role models
- Personal wherewithal

Learning from the success of women at the top will shed light on how we might design solutions and ensure that women who want to go beyond the classroom can do so.

**Partner and Family Support (Spouse and Family Support)**

A large body of research suggests that social support plays a role in buffering personal and professional stress (Rosenow, 1982). Stress of multiple roles has been shown to decrease when the woman’s spouse is supportive of her choices (Novak, 1989). Even for adolescent girls, perceptions of support for working women and parental and teacher support were associated with higher levels of career achievement and motivation (Farmer, 1985). Relationships are primary, with “healthy, dynamic relationships as the motivating force that propels psychological growth” (Jordan, Surrey, & Kaplan, 1991, p. 43).
Social support has been characterized as providing the benefits of stability, intimacy, spontaneity, and mutuality (Gottlieb, 1992).

The concept of mutuality is another important component of spousal support. Since primary relationships play a large role in a woman’s ability to juggle life and work, it is relevant to understand which factors contribute to alleviating stress. Mutuality refers to the reciprocal nature of a partnership and can indicate the level of satisfaction and support in a relationship. Mutuality is characterized by receptivity to others, emotional availability, and flexible response patterns (Jordan et al., 1991). Partnerships and exchanges that exhibit mutuality can increase well-being, increase confidence, promote knowledge of self and others, increase connection with others and heighten feelings of self-worth (Walsh & Osipow, 1994). Levels of depression among women has been found to be related to the degree of mutuality in their intimate relationships (Sperberg & Sabb, in press). A large body of research suggests that positive connections can increase well-being and minimize stress. Depression in women have been linked to social isolation, relationship loss, and dysfunctional family relationships (Belle, 1990).

**Work/Life Balance**

Balance is the point in which one is satisfied with what she is putting in and getting out of each area of life (Smith, 1990). The definition of success for women today is when achievement is reached both personally and professionally (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Despite the negative effects of role strain, the literature also suggest that multiple roles can be beneficial if managed appropriately. Some benefits of multiple roles include increased income, role privileges, higher self-esteem and self-worth, and opportunities for more social relationships (Perry-Jenkins, 2000, Wu & DeMaris, 1996). Considering
the stress relieving capabilities of positive and reciprocated relationships, it is important for working women to set aside time for family. Balance between professional and personal lives benefits the individual women as well as the organization itself (Fagenson, 1993). Bennis (1989) suggests that “all executives should practice the new 3 Rs: retreat, renewal, and return” (p. 186). Organizations are beginning to explore ways to support their employees in attaining a healthy work/life balance. “The idea of balance has been building. Companies were first interested in stress management, then burnout and now balance” (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992, p.101).

Swiss and Walker (1993) provide advice on balancing work and family as seen in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Advice for Women Confronting the Work/Family Dilemma*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Response Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set priorities</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t sacrifice your personal life</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make compromises</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t postpone family life</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have confidence in your decisions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep work and family separate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose your employer carefully</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Female leaders seek balance between their professional and personal lives, and they do not intend to dedicate themselves to one part of their lives at the expense of the other (Duff & Cohen, 1993; Fagenson, 1993). Research by Helgesen (1990) and C.
Shakeshaft (1989) both suggest that women can create improved working conditions by expressing their personal values. The alignment of professional and personal values in the workplace is critical (Kouzes & Posner, 1993).

Additionally, studies have asserted that leaders must engage in reflective practice to balance the uncertainty, instability, and conflict associated with the role of the superintendency (Kowalksi, 1999; McAdams, 1995; Schon, 1983).

**Coping with Multiple Role Demands**

Many working mothers use strategies to manage the numerous demands of their varying roles in the home and at work. Adjustments and accommodations at home and work can help women juggle priorities. For example, a qualitative study of low-income Mexican women were found to temporarily ignore the demands of other roles when focusing on the demands of one role (Meleis, Douglas, Eribes, Shih, & Messias, 1996). Compartmentalizing the roles depending on which was most prominent and participating in enjoyable activities such as going out, singing, and socializing, were used as effective stress management strategies (Meleis et al., 1996). It is also beneficial to balance the care of others with care of self (Wuest, 2001). In doing so, women learn to incorporate replenishing activities into their daily routines.

A number of authors note the significance of supportive spouses, friends, relatives, and coworkers in helping women balance the demands of multiple roles (Dufu, 2017; Farhang, 1999). M. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggest that males or other partners should take on more of the responsibilities to achieve balance and prevent negative side effects of an overworked mother. This support includes help with childcare, sharing household responsibilities, arranging schedules, and sharing feelings
about balancing multiple roles. In Tiffany Dufu’s (2016) recent book *Drop the Ball*, she provides readers with detailed instructions of strategies for partners to balance the demands of household responsibilities equally. Dufu challenges women to assert their own needs and push back on traditional sex role expectations by leaning on spouses, family, and individuals in our social networks. Napholz (2000) also found that women attempting to balance multiple roles reported that they needed to take care of themselves while taking care of others. Women realized that in order to continue giving so much to others, they must invest in themselves. Success in integrating the roles of mother, wife, and worker will come from integrating their own needs to be both assertive and nurturing (Farhang, 1999).

Wuest (2001) describes a process of “re patterning care” (p. 167), in which women decide what they will give up and what they will do to juggle multiple roles. Some of these strategies include anticipating demands, establishing ground rules, juggling time, relinquishing responsibilities and participating in activities to replenish oneself. Studies have shown that women who go against the sex role norms have better mental health (Woods et al., 1993). “Women who had traditional sex role norms, little task-sharing support from a spouse, and little emotional support had poorer mental health than their counterparts” (Woods, 1985, p. 4). The authors suggest that nontraditional women are more likely to negotiate with others, leading to a more extensive support system. The body of research overwhelmingly suggests that the burden of balancing multiple roles as worker, parent, and spouse appears to be alleviated to the extent in which they receive support in the home (Dufu, 2016; L. A. Gilbert & Rachlin, 1987). Having access to resources and coping skills can alleviate these stressors.
Mentoring Relationships

One solution to combat the stresses of navigating a career in male dominated field is mentoring relationships (Searby & Tripses, 2006). Mentoring is referred to as “a personal learning partnership between a more experienced professional who acts as a guide, role model, coach, teacher, and/or sponsor and a less experienced professional” (Searby & Tripses, 2006, p. 182). The existence of the “old boys’ network” provides this type of mentoring support for men and women do not have this same kind of support. Sharing the struggles and obstacles faced by women is important to teaching other aspiring female administrators how to navigate these challenges. Staying connected can minimize feelings of being overwhelmed and ensures that wholeness and self-clarity is achieved. Sheckelhoff (2007) advises women leaders to act authentically, believing in one’s self and seeking support from others. One of the major insights emerging from research by C. Brunner (1999) was that women superintendents find ways to talk about their successes and that these strategies are helpful to others.

Barriers to Self-Care

Even if women develop a strong stress management system, there may still be barriers beyond their control. “Women across cultures have been found to face numerous constraints to leisure” (Freysinger & Flanner, 1992, p. 303). In a study of 500 students and university employees, K. A. Henderson et al. (1988) found that women with characteristics of a stereotypic masculine personality (i.e. assertive, independent) perceived fewer barriers to leisure and recreation than those with personalities that were feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated. Women spend less uninterrupted time on leisure activities; therefore, making leisure less relaxing (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000).
Shaw (1994) found that a lack of time is of the biggest constraint for women. Various authors have argued that traditional gender roles, or women’s household obligations and family commitments, are a constraint to leisure (K. A. Henderson & Dialeschki, 1991; Shaw, 1994). Various authors also suggest that social norms may restrict women’s participation in leisure activities, in addition to being defined by class and race (Freysinger & Flanner, 1992; Shaw, 1994). For example, low-income women and minority women are more likely to experience economic constraints that white, middle-class women (Shaw, 1994). Another barrier to effective stress management for women is the difficulty in acknowledging and asserting their needs (Ulman, 2000).

Additionally, women experience guilt when taking time to participate in recreational activities that may relieve stress. Women “start to feel guilty about pursuing pleasure and play” (Domar & Dreher, 2000, p. 2). Hendersen and Dialeschki (1991) theorize that women are more likely to feel guilty for taking time away from the pressures and demands of others. Women not only lack the time to commit to personal leisure, but they are also less likely to feel entitled to this type of self-care (Harrington, Dawson, & Bolla, 1992). The literature suggests that women with dependent children feel a greater need to care for their families and not on self-care. This concept is referred to as an “ethic of care” proposed by Carol Gilligan (1982) in her book, In a Different Voice. This idea explains the differences between the ethical senses of men and women. Women fear a lack of connection with others and are “more embedded in relational concerns than those of men” (p. 167). This ethic of care may lead women to neglect their personal needs as they work to address the needs of their family (K. A. Henderson
&Allen, 1991). Research by Harrington et al. (1992) found that women feel that they must always be available to care for others and that their own needs are less important.

**Summary and Gaps in the Literature**

An extensive review of the literature demonstrates that opportunities for women wishing to advance to the superintendency is limited (C. Brunner, 1999; M. Grogan, 1996; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Historical and societal barriers have impacted a woman’s ability to advance at the same rate as her male counterparts. Women have saturated the teaching profession, yet this majority is not mirrored in educational administration. Low pay, stress overload, and time commitments required are factors that deter women from pursuing administrative positions. These barriers are exonerated by the professional and personal stressors from juggling the multiple demands and roles of the workplace and home. Mothers who aim to fulfill their personal and professional goals seem to be taking on more responsibilities and roles to manage it all; leading to overwhelming amounts of stress. This prolonged stress can have negative effects on work performance, behavior, and health. Literature on stress management techniques was thoroughly reviewed. Common themes among the body of research on stress management include support from others, work life balance, mentoring relationships, and self-care. Stress management strategies used by female superintendents is missing in the literature.

C. C. Brunner (2000) states that studies on women superintendents has been “previously neglected” (p. 76), creating a sense of urgency to investigate this population. As discussed in Chapter I, research has been conducted on women in leadership, the effects of stress on women and employees, and female superintendents in various
contexts. Research is limited on stress for female leaders and extremely limited on stress for female superintendents. A wealth of valuable insight will come from the narratives of women who have navigated the challenges stacked against them to obtain the superintendency despite the historical absence of women in the role. Chapter, III will describe the methods used in this study in an effort to capture the perspectives of female superintendents in the California Central Valley.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter provides an outline and explanation of the methodology utilized in examining the RQs and purpose statement. It includes detailed information about population, selection of the sampling, data collection method, and data analysis. Additionally, a description of the instrumentation and reliability and validity of the study is included. This study intends to add to the body of literature on female superintendents by gathering and describing their perceptions of stress and how they manage the stressors in their personal and professional lives. In-depth personal interviews were conducted with female public school superintendents for this phenomenological study. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the study’s limitations and an overall summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify personal and professional factors that create stress for California female superintendents, describe the strategies used to manage stress, and provide recommendations for addressing stress from California female superintendents.

RQs

This study was guided by the following general question: What personal and professional factors do California female superintendents identify as creating stress, what strategies do they use to address stress, and what recommendations do they have regarding addressing stress for aspiring female superintendents?
RSQs

1. What personal factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress?

2. How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address personal factors that create stress?

3. What professional factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress?

4. How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address professional factors that create stress?

5. What recommendations do California female superintendents have for aspiring female superintendents regarding addressing personal and professional stress?

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was selected and used for this study. Qualitative methods serve as “important tools within this broader approach to applied research, in large part because they provide valuable insights into the local perspectives of study populations” (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 7). In this kind of research, the researcher is the instrument of the data collection; therefore, the researcher is able to gather valuable perspectives and experiences from participants. A phenomenological methodology “aims to capture the essence of program participants’ experiences” (Patton, 2015, p. 116) of a sought after phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon examined is the stressors and stress management of females working as superintendents of public school districts in
California. Patton (2015) asserts that "phenomenological research methods can focus more deeply on exploring how people make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness” (p. 115).

The study seeks to analyze the lived experiences by collecting in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015). Seidman (2013) confirms that a phenomenological approach allows the interviewer and participant to explore the perceived experiences of the participant, and use its context to reflect on the meaning. A qualitative phenomenological methodology is most appropriate to seeking the insight from the female superintendents identifying their personal and professional stress factors and their management strategies. Capturing these experiences in an authentic and natural setting is key to ensuring a clear and accurate picture of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, in-depth and semi-structured interviews in a space that is selected by the participant increases the likelihood of establishing a comfort level in a natural setting (Merriam, 2009). Further, Merriam (2009) describes that this natural environment allows the researcher to have more flexibility to prompt or ask the participant for additional information based on their responses.

A qualitative phenomenological methodology will be the most appropriate approach in seeking the inner feelings and lived experiences of California female superintendents who grapple with daily stressors and manage these factors to succeed in a role that women are historically and currently underrepresented.

Population

Roberts (2010) defines population as the group of interest as identified by the researcher. The population that this study seeks to represent is all public school
superintendents in California. According to the California Department of Education (CDE) (2016) in the 2015-2016 school year, California consists of 526 public elementary districts, 77 public high school districts, and 343 public unified school districts, totaling 946 potential public school districts. The total population for this study is 946 California public school superintendents.

**Target Population**

The target population is focused on a narrower group of individuals from which a sample can be drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). Of the 946 public school districts, 16% of them are led by a female superintendents (Association of California School Administrators [ACSA], 2008). There are 151 female public school superintendents in California. The target population for this study is the 151 female superintendents who are currently serving as public school superintendents in California. For the purpose of this study, there were no specifications on the individuals selected from this pool such as the size of district or how many years served as superintendent.

**Sample**

According to Gay and Airasian (1996), sampling occurs when individuals are selected to represent the broader target population of the study. This study used both purposive sampling and convenience sampling. In order to conduct this study, a small sample of female superintendents was drawn from various geographical areas and district sizes in order to have an array of perspectives represented. Using Ed Data Education, a Partnership program with CDE, a list of all California public school districts was generated. From this list, it was narrowed down to specifically female school superintendents in the Central Valley. The purpose of using female superintendents in
the central valley was to provide a convenience for both the researcher and the participant in arranging a familiar and natural setting to conduct an in-depth interview.

A spreadsheet was developed to document and identify current female superintendents. From this spreadsheet, 12 female superintendents were identified through a recommendation process. The chair and researcher’s dissertation committee identified potential superintendents who met the criteria for the study.

**Sample Selection Process**

The sample selected for this study consisted of females who are currently serving as public school superintendents in various regions of California. The selection process followed these steps:

1. A list of all current superintendents of public school districts in California for the 2016-2017 school year were generated.
2. Female superintendents in the selected counties were identified.
3. Potential participants were vetted by the chair and committee, who are aware of their qualifications, and a list of potential participants meeting the criteria was created.
4. From this group of potential participants, a list of email addresses were collected and a message was sent via E-mail to request participation by the superintendents.
5. Each interested and qualified participant received a formal invitation letter (see Appendix B), a consent form (see Appendix C), and assurance of confidentiality. From the list of interested participants, 12 individuals were selected to participate based upon convenience for the researcher.
6. An interview date and location was arranged at a location that was preferable to the participant.

7. After the participant gave official consent to participate, an interview protocol and procedures were sent at least one week prior to the scheduled interview.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative research, and defines the processes, analysis, and interpretation of data collection (Merriam, 1995). This phenomenological study used in-depth interviews to gather qualitative data to address the RQs (see Appendix D). Data gathered on stress related factors and stress management strategies were analyzed and discussed. Each prospective participant was provided a research study invitation letter and informed consent document. In order to maintain validity and reliability and minimize internal and external threats, the researcher used qualitative inquiry processes. These processes included convenience sampling, interview questions aligned with the study’s purpose and RQs.

**Instrument**

The researcher followed the appropriate steps to ensure that a reliable and credibly study was conducted as advised by Merriam (1995). One step of this process was to directly align interview questions with the purpose and RQs. This step among others are included in an interview protocol based upon the RQs for the study that was developed by the researcher to provide an in-depth discussion that will capture the holistic experiences of female superintendents. To obtain reliable and in-depth data, a sequence of contextual interview questions followed by a series of probing questions designed to address the study’s RQs should be developed (Patton, 2015). The interview
protocol consisted of 20 background and follow-up questions. Questions were developed to be open-ended and designed to elicit responses that, when viewed collectively, give an in-depth understanding of the perceived stressors and the management strategies of female superintendents. The researcher developed questions that were meaningful to the respondents and related to the RQs. The researcher ensured that biased language was avoided.

To arrange and conduct interviews, the researcher completed the following steps:

1. The researcher obtained formal consent and a description of the study will be shared with the participants.

2. An email was sent to each consenting participant to arrange a time and date for an initial interview.

3. A follow-up phone call was made by the researcher to ensure that each participant understands what to expect and that they are willing to be interviewed in person.

4. The in-person interviews were conducted in June of 2016 at a location selected by the participant to ensure a natural environment and comfortable setting.

5. The researcher recorded the interviews using a handheld recording device and a transcription professional will transcribe the recorded information and send to the researcher in an email.

6. Upon receiving the transcription of each interview, the participant and the researcher had the opportunity to review and approve.
7. The researcher will analyze the transcribed data for common themes that address the RQs.

**Reliability**

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), reliability “refers to the consistency of the scores obtained—how consistent they are for each individual from one administration of an instrument to another and from one set of items to another” (p. 165). The researcher took measures to ensure that the reliability and credibility of the study is strong. These measures included conducting a field test prior to data collection, audit trail, triangulation of data, and using intercoder reliability. Merriam (1998) describes coding as an essential task in which to “keep track of your thoughts, musings, speculations, and hunches as you engage in analysis” (p. 165). This coding process will be reinforced by intercoder reliability to ensure validity of the analysis of the collected data. Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2002) asserts that at least 10% of the data will be double coded by second researcher and must result in 80% or higher alignment. A secondary researcher was assigned to code and analyze a selected 10% of the data in a manner that reflects accuracy and objectivity. Themes determined by either coder were discussed, and frequencies were compared.

In addition to inter-coder reliability, triangulation of the data was conducted. Artifacts of recent articles on superintendents and stress were included to support the findings of contributing factors of stress for female superintendents. These artifacts also show a public demand for more female leader in the role. Other artifacts included women’s networking organizations and conferences that exist to support women in educational leadership roles. Workshops in wellness exist throughout the conference
schedule. Furthermore, an audit trail consisting of interview transcriptions, artifacts, interview protocol and notes will support the reliability of the data. Internal reliability will also be addressed as the qualitative researcher is of the most complex and important data collection instrument and personally informs the study (Merriam, 1995). Therefore, internal reliability was addressed through collaboration with a committee of other researchers. This committee will provide objective feedback on the study’s design, methodology, data collection and coding process. The researcher will also use a field test to seek feedback on the interview protocol and revise the questions accordingly.

Validity

Validity refers to the level of how accurately the instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Roberts, 2010). The validity of the study depended largely on the methodology, integrity, and sensitivity of the researcher. Researcher bias is a major threat to validity in qualitative studies, as the researcher acts as the instrument of study (Patton, 2015). Yin (2011) emphasizes the importance of active listening and interpretation in qualitative studies. The researcher realized the role in establishing a rapport with respondents, while recognizing one’s own perspective in interpreting findings. Carefully documenting all procedures, remaining open about the limitations presented, and utilizing a committee of experts in the field of education supported the validity of this study. A field test was also utilized to receive feedback and ensure that the interview questions correlated with the RQs. All changes proposed in the field test process and through collaboration with the committee of experts were made accordingly.

Field test. The field test was developed to decrease the likelihood of external or internal threats to the validity of the study. The participants of the field test consisted of a
two retired female superintendents, both of whom were informed and experienced voluntary participants. The researcher created an identical interview experience as the one designed for the study to ensure that interview questions and RQs were aligned, and to practice using limited biased language or gestures. Following the interview, the participant was asked to provide feedback about the questions, comfort level, researcher objectivity and length of interview. Adjustments to the interview protocol and process will be made depending on the feedback received.

**Data Collection**

Following Brandman University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process (see Appendix E), data will be collected from 12 female superintendents of public school districts located in selected counties in California. Clearance was obtained through the National Institute of Health for “Protecting Human Research Participants” (Appendix F). Alternative types of districts will not be included in this study, and current superintendents only will participate. The following steps will be followed when collecting data:

1. The researcher obtained a list of female superintendents currently serving in public school districts in the Central Valley.
2. The researcher corresponded with the identified contacts via email, which included an introduction, explanation of the study, and a request for participation.
3. Confidentiality assurance, consent forms, and descriptions were sent to the participant upon agreeing to participate in the study.
4. The researcher scheduled a time and date to participate in a face-to-face interview at a location selected by the participant. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

5. The researcher conducted an in-depth, face to face interview with each female superintendent. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participant and the researcher reviewed the transcription before analysis began.

6. The researcher analyzed the transcription for common themes and coded the data. Inter-coder reliability was addressed using a second coder to increase validity and reliability. Other archival data was reviewed and coded for common themes.

After interviews were conducted and transcribed, a thank you card and token of appreciation were sent to participants for sharing their experiences and adding to the body of research for up and coming school leaders.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis consists of interpreting the data presented through case studies, interviews, or field notes (Patton, 2015). This process allows the researcher to draw conclusions and make recommendations. The primary focus of this study was to capture the phenomenon that exists around female superintendent’s causes of stress and their stress management strategies; therefore, the most appropriate method of gathering these experiences was through in-depth interviews, observational notes, and archival data.

Each interview was recorded using an electronic recording device, and submitted to a professional transcription service. Once transcribed, the researcher forwarded a copy
to the participant who reviewed for accuracy. The researcher reviewed the transcription also and typed all field notes from the interview. Analysis of the data began after these reviews. The researcher read through the transcriptions carefully and analyzed the data for common themes and patterns. Codes were developed by the researcher based on the common patterns and entered into NVivo research and coding software. The researcher is responsible for actively reviewing, analyzing and identifying the themes emerging from the data (Merriam, 1995). NVivo served as a tool to manage various codes and track frequencies; however, the researcher was responsible for identifying and developing the various themes. Colleagues who were familiar with but not part of the study served as intercoder reliability participants, independently coding the data to assure consistency of interpretation and to reduce the possibility of researcher bias. The data was double coded to increase inter-coder reliability. The researcher ensured that the interview questions correlated with the RQs. This made it possible for the codes that emerged within the data directly address the RQs.

Limitations

Various limitations exist in this study. One limitation is the geographical location of the participants and the number of participants. The study is limited to the State of California due to the proximity of the researcher and nature of the type of data collection. In-depth, face to face interviews require a considerable amount of time that limits the amount of individuals who are willing to participate. In addition to this, the study is limited to specifically female superintendents, narrowing the pool of potential candidates. The amount of female superintendents that are willing to take the time to participate is another major limitation. During various times of the school year, the position may have
heavier workloads and therefore impact participation. Finally, this study is limited because there will be no data collected from male counterparts, indicating no comparisons of commonalities and differences can be determined.

**Summary**

Presented in Chapter II was the information related to the design and methodology used to carry out an investigation of the perceived stressors and stress management strategies of female superintendents. Rationale was provided for the use of a qualitative phenomenological research method. The population and sample were described, as well as data collection and instrumentation to be used for this study. Data analysis was described, as well as consideration of the study’s reliability and validity. Within Chapter IV, the data analysis and research findings will be presented, and concluded in Chapter V.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected from the study, which intended to examine the contributing factors of stress and the stress management strategies utilized by female superintendents. Chapter IV reviewed the purpose of this study, RQs, methodology, population, sample, and concludes with a presentation of the data, organized by RQ with conceptual underpinnings of the Human Function Curve.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify personal and professional factors that create stress for California female superintendents, describe the strategies used to manage stress, and provide recommendations for addressing stress from California female superintendents.

RQs

This study was guided by the following primary qualitative RQ: *What personal and professional factors do California female superintendents identify as creating stress, what strategies do they use to address stress, and what recommendations do they have regarding addressing stress for aspiring female superintendents?* This question was then divided into five SRQs, as follows:

1. What personal factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress?
2. How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address personal factors that create stress?
3. What professional factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress?
4. How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address professional factors that create stress?

5. What recommendations do California female superintendents have for aspiring female superintendents regarding addressing personal and professional stress?

**Methodology**

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was selected and used for this study. Qualitative methods serve as “important tools within this broader approach to applied research, in large part because they provide valuable insights into the local perspectives of study populations” (Mack et al., 2005, p. 7). In this kind of research, the researcher is the instrument of the data collection; therefore, the researcher is able to gather valuable perspectives and experiences from participants. A phenomenological methodology “aims to capture the essence of program participants’ experiences” (Patton, 2015, p. 116) of a sought after phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon examined is the stressors and stress management of females working as superintendents of public school districts in California.

The study sought to analyze the lived experiences by collecting in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015). A qualitative phenomenological methodology was the selected approach to capture the inner feelings and lived experiences of California female superintendents who grapple with daily stressors and manage these factors to succeed in a role that women are historically and currently underrepresented. The researcher followed the appropriate steps to ensure that a reliable and credibly study was conducted as advised by Merriam (1998). One step of this process was to directly align
interview questions with the purpose and RQs. This step, among others, are included in an interview protocol based upon the RQs for the study that was developed by the researcher to provide an in-depth discussion that will capture the holistic experiences of female superintendents. The interview protocol consisted of 20 background and follow-up questions. Questions were developed to be open-ended and designed to elicit responses that, when viewed collectively, give an in-depth understanding of the perceived stressors and the management strategies of female superintendents. The researcher developed questions that were meaningful to the respondents and related to the RQs. The researcher ensured that biased language was avoided. To arrange and conduct interviews, the researcher obtained formal consent from each participant prior to the interview. An interview was then arranged during a mutually agreed upon date and time. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using Adobe Connect and then sent to the participant to review. After the participants approved the transcription of the interview, the researcher analyzed the transcribed data for emergent themes that addressed the RQs.

The researcher took measures to ensure that the reliability and credibility of the study is strong. These measures will include conducting a field test prior to data collection, audit trail, triangulation of data, and using intercoder reliability. The validity of the study depended largely on the methodology, integrity, and sensitivity of the researcher. Researcher bias is a major threat to validity in qualitative studies, as the researcher acts as the instrument of study (Patton, 2015). The researcher realized the role in establishing a rapport with respondents, while recognizing one’s own perspective in interpreting findings. Carefully documenting all procedures, remaining open about the limitations presented, and utilizing a committee of experts in the field of education
supported the validity of this study. A field test was also utilized to receive feedback and ensure that the interview questions correlated with the RQs. Inter-coder reliability was addressed using a second coder to increase validity and reliability. Other archival data was reviewed and coded for common themes.

**Population and Sample**

The population that this study sought to represent is all public school superintendents in California. According to the CDE (2016) in the 2015-2016 school year, California consisted of 526 public elementary districts, 77 public high school districts, and 343 public unified school districts, totaling 946 potential public school districts. The total population for this study was 946 California public school superintendents. The target population was focused on a narrower group of individuals from which a sample can be drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009). Of the 946 public school districts, 16% of them are led by a female superintendent (ACSA, 2008). The target population for this study was the 151 female superintendents who were currently serving as public school superintendents in California. For the purpose of this study, there were no specifications on the individuals selected from this pool such as the size of district or how many years served as superintendent.

This study used both purposive sampling and convenience sampling. In order to conduct this study, a small sample of female superintendents was drawn from various geographical areas and district sizes in order to have an array of perspectives represented. Using Ed Data Education, a Partnership program with CDE, a list of all California public school districts was generated. A spreadsheet was developed to document and identify current female superintendents throughout California. From this spreadsheet, 12 female
Superintendents were identified through a recommendation process. The chair and the researcher’s dissertation committee identified potential superintendents who met the criteria for the study. Each of the 12 superintendents are listed below with their associated county. With a limited population of female superintendents in California, the researcher went through great lengths to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Thus, names, employers, and other leading information have been omitted from the presentation of the findings. The 12 participants were numerically identified in the findings from 1 to 12 (i.e. Superintendent-1; Superintendent-2, etc.) (see Table 6).

Table 6

Superintendent Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-1</td>
<td>Los Angeles County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-2</td>
<td>Sutter County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-3</td>
<td>Tulare County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-4</td>
<td>Riverside County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-5</td>
<td>Tulare County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-6</td>
<td>Riverside County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-7</td>
<td>Sacramento County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-8</td>
<td>San Diego County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-9</td>
<td>Riverside County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-10</td>
<td>Napa County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-11</td>
<td>Tulare County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent-12</td>
<td>Sacramento County</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation of the Data

RSQ1

The first sub question of this study sought to answer: What personal factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress? Four themes were identified among the 12 participants, ranging from a frequency of six to four. Table 7 displays the identified themes with frequency counts of the contributing factors of stress for California female superintendents.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balancing Multiple Roles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for Family Members</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Guilt</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Life Changes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Balancing multiple roles.** The most frequent personal factor causing stress among the participants in this study was the balancing act of serving multiple roles. Half of the superintendents interviewed agreed that this task was a main source of stress and that it was unique to being a female administrator. “As a woman, you’re trying to find the balance constantly between how to support family in that mom role, but also being a boss” (Superintendent-8). This point was echoed by Superintendent-7,

*I think for every working woman there is a push and pull of meeting the needs of your family and meeting the needs of your job, your work, your passion, whichever... both entities need me... so you’re continuously juggling what’s the highest priority today.*
One superintendent perceived her early years as an administrator as being more stressful, “... the early on in my career, being more stressful, you know, being mom, a wife, and an administrator” (Superintendent-5). Serving in multiple roles and the pressure to balance it all was an emerging theme for stress causing factors.

**Caring for family members.** Participants in this study revealed that caring for the needs of their family members was another source of stress. Caring for elderly parents, children, or spouses, created a high level of stress in their lives.

*I have an elderly mother who has dementia and so she needs a lot of my time.

And in my busy schedule I struggle to give her that time... my own personal take on what I should be doing for her versus what my time allows me to do.*

(Superintendent-3)

Another superintendent found her stress levels rising during certain times of her life when she or her children were having medical issues.

*Trying to get to doctor’s appointments, doing all of those types of things and being there for surgeries. When I had my own personal bout with cancer... still going to work trying to be on your A game. It does affect your personal stress life.* (Superintendent-1)

**Feelings of guilt.** Another emerging theme in personal factors creating stress was overwhelming feelings of guilt for the time spent away from home. Four of the superintendents interviewed felt this sense of guilt.

*I may have to miss this at work for family. Or I may have to miss this for family for this at work. So, I think that creates the sense... often a sense of guilt in both instances... like you can’t make the world happy. And for some reason, we think*
that we should. And, often we think as women, that we are supposed to be perfect in both worlds. And, and so, I think that creates a great deal of stress.

(Superintendent-7)

After discussing the guilt she felt, Superintendent-4 admitted that it was pressure she put on herself:

*I would say that I put those pressures on myself, because as a mom, I feel a very deep, deep sense of obligation, and also just out of my own desire to want to ensure that I’m doing what’s best for my kids and for my spouse. And so, the guilt that I place on myself is my own guilt, it’s not because of what they do.*

For several participants, these feelings of guilt were heightened during times where they felt out of balance. “*We cause ourselves to feel guilty or we’re not making it because we aren’t in balance*” (Superintendent-10).

**Major life changes.** During times of great change, several superintendents interviewed for this study found that they felt greater levels of stress. Major life changes such as relocating for a job, going through a divorce, or losing someone important, caused a great deal of stress for four of the participants in this study. “*I think the most stressful thing I’ve experienced in my personal life is I went through a significant breakup*” (Superintendent-9). Another regarding relocating, “*Relocating. That’s probably the biggest one*” (Superintendent-12). Despite these major life changes, participants who identified this as a cause acknowledged the temporary nature of these stressful periods.
The second sub question of this study sought to answer: *How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address personal factors that create stress?* While serving as superintendents, the female participants shared their most common personal factors creating stress in their lives. The emerging themes are populated in Table 8, sorted by frequency count in descending order.

Table 8

*Personal Stress Management Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Life Choices and Regular Exercise</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Time for Loved Ones</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear Separation Between Work and Home</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spousal Support</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion &amp; Spirituality</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Healthy life choices and regular exercise.** Approximately nine out of the 12 participants interviewed claimed that they use exercise and healthy eating as a stress management strategy. Some female superintendents find ways to incorporate it into their days, *“Sometimes it’s going to the restroom and doing an extra flight of stairs”* (Superintendent-1), and others schedule it into their daily routines, *“Exercising is obviously a strategy in reducing stress, and so I do that on a very regular basis”* (Superintendent-4). Another superintendent holds herself accountable by paying for a trainer, *“I pay someone to do personal training with me twice a week, because when I pay for it, I feel like I will be there”* (Superintendent-4).
**Making time for loved ones.** Another theme that emerged among the management strategies for personal factors of stress was making time for loved ones, including children, spouse, and friends. Tending to personal relationships was a stress relieving measure experienced by half of the participants in the study. One superintendent finds relief in spending time with her grandchildren, “We have four grandchildren, and they are probably the pinnacle of stress relief for me that I can imagine... Making time for family. I mean listening, and making time” (Superintendent-3). Another participant shared that even with her busy schedule as a superintendent, she was “able to commit more to family time,” she explained that this was due to being “more in charge of your world” as a high level administrator (Superintendent-8).

**Clear separation between work and home.** Female superintendents expressed that being able to separate work and home life serves as an important strategy to manage stress. One superintendent shared, “... when I leave work, I leave it here... I know it’s not so clean cut, but I make every effort to do that. Because of that, my stress levels have been manageable” (Superintendent-11). Another stated that, “We work really diligently to have weekends be our weekends” (Superintendent-4). One superintendent indicated that more hours does not necessarily equate a better leader, “I try not to... continue the myth that more hours makes you a better leader, because it does not. It makes you a tired, worn-out leader...” (Superintendent-9). Despite this realization, many superintendents interviewed were willing to work extra hours during peak or busy seasons, acknowledging the ebb and flow of workload that comes with the superintendency.
Spousal support. One theme that emerged from the study was having a supportive spouse. Five of the participants reported that a top strategy used to combat stress from personal factors was having a supportive and understanding spouse with an equal share of the household responsibilities. A superintendent stated,

*I have been fortunate to have a really good partner that has picked up the slack wherever slack has been. And um, I think that’s really the key there. You work in collaboration and partnership, it’s not about your job or my job, it’s how we make it happen.* (Superintendent-11)

Another stated, “I’ve been married almost 25 years, same husband. And keep the career moving forward, but my husband has been very supportive...” (Superintendent-CG).

Similarly, several superintendents referred to toxic or unsupportive relationships as a source of stress and leaving these unhealthy relationships actually alleviated the stress on their work and personal lives (Superintendent-2).

Religion and spirituality. Four of the 12 superintendents who were interviewed for this study shared that escaping to a spiritual or religious place brings them peace and comfort among various stressors. “*I start with my devotional prayer, and that puts my mind and heart and soul in the right place*” (Superintendent-12). Another superintendent found a similar relief through the belief in a higher power, “*My spiritual relationship, having that spiritual relationship or for me, my relationship with who my higher power has created a relief of stress.*” (Superintendent-1)

This spirituality has carried over into the workplace for Superintendent-6,

*...something important that I use to destress and center me... It is an important*
factor in my life and that is my faith. There are a number of people surrounding me at work that pray for me and support me when they can see me struggling. I was trying to recall why it never seems so bad even when I’m in the middle of the challenge. I try to go to church regularly... they know it is where my focus on grace comes from. We actually use the words “giving grace to others” as a fundamental and shared practice in our district office.

RSQ3

The third sub question of this study sought to answer: What professional factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress? Table 9 contains the identified themes, ranging in frequency from eight to three. This table is sorted by frequency count in descending order of the factors creating stress for female superintendents.

Table 9

*Professional Stress Factors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Conflicts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Relationships with School Board</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Politics of District &amp; Community</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battling Gender Bias &amp; Traditional Gender Norms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Personnel conflicts.** Over half of the superintendents interviewed for this study found that dealing with personnel, whether it was their immediate teams, the staff they serve or the surrounding community, was a major source of professional stress. One superintendent reflects on how can be the best and the worst part of your job.

...people are the best part of your job and they’re the most challenging part of
your job. So, you know, you make a good hire, you have good people, it makes your world shine. And you get a bad hire, and it can just suck the life out of you. Um, and those things are hard to manage. Um, and they create stress. And often, at least for me, it’s that I believe that everybody has the potential to be amazing. And so, when you hire someone and they begin to fall short... I wind up giving more and more and more, thinking it’s me. I haven’t given them enough to be successful. (Superintendent-7)

Another layer of this contributing factor of stress is the conflicts within a superintendent’s immediate team, “Not having a cohesive senior management team was a very large contributing factor to stress... having a good team, having strong leaders around you is very important. And when that’s missing, that is very stressful” (Superintendent-4). Many superintendents in this study agreed that their jobs felt more stressful during times of conflict and when confrontation occurred.

Managing relationships with school board. Half of the participants in this study identified schools boards as a contributing factor of stress stemming from the workplace. Superintendent-7 shares her feelings about the “tricky dance” of managing relations with the school board:

The board creates stress. And it depends on the makeup of your board and the way the cycles work. You could be fine, and have an election and not be fine. And so, it’s another one like at any moment, things change, right? But um, the politics of managing your board. The board hires you. You are their one employee. So, a good piece of a superintendent’s job is how do I keep them happy without being subservient to them, right? How do I keep, how do I manage them
when they want to micromanage or when they want to just stay focused on special
interests? Or how do I manage them when they don’t really believe my role is to
manage them, but I know it is. So, you know, for the sake of the organization and
everyone else, I have to be the buffer between them and this board. And I have to
keep the board informed, but ... I kind of have to manage their energies, and,
that’s a very tricky dance... And if you get a board member who’s sideways, it
creates an incredible amount of stress. (Superintendent-7)

Superintendents who found this to be an area of stress find themselves trying to
read and differentiate their approach depending on who is currently sitting on the board.
Superintendent-6 was challenged by the task of figuring out “Five different
personalities... I still had to differentiate for what they needed” (Superintendent-6).

Navigating politics of district and community. As the district’s figurehead, it is
the superintendent’s job to navigate the various “political minefields” (Superintendent-3)
while doing what’s in the best interest of students and supporting district personnel. One
superintendent describes the politics that accompany the position,

it takes a lot of energy to manage politically, the world of a superintendency. And
it’s such a broad category that it’s hard to explain, but it’s political relationships,
it’s politically advocating, it’s being in places where political people are, it’s
knowing and being aware and informed about politics of your community and the
state. (Superintendent-7)

Another superintendent realized the importance of acknowledging the politics of
her district in hindsight, “it just became a political nightmare for me... I realized I should
have just watched and looked to see what was going on, and realized how deep the
political ties go” (Superintendent-6). Several other references were made to politics related to the school board. These responses were coded under managing relationships with the school board.

**Battling gender bias and traditional gender norms.** Entering and serving in a role that has been historically underrepresented by women and currently continues to be, can create stress for women who are working to change the perceptions of the community.

...we don’t advocate and negotiate as well as men do. That provides a level of stress, because... we are not compensated equally to our male counterparts. Whether it’s because our boards believe... we aren’t the breadwinners in the family so we don’t need the money, or we can’t possibly be doing as good of work, but whatever the issue is, that dynamic definitely exists. (Superintendent-9)

Overcoming these gender biases was an area of stress for three of the 12 superintendents interviewed. Another superintendent provides her perspective on dealing with the biases of others regarding female leaders,

*I also think we’re looked at differently. So, we have to prove ourselves more.*

*And so, not only are we doing all this social and emotional care factor, we also have to be bigger, brighter, better, firmer, because otherwise people will question it because we’re women.* (Superintendent-7)

**RSQ4**

The fourth sub question of this study sought to answer: How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address professional factors that
Creating stress? Strategies identified by the female superintendents are illustrated in Table 10.

Table 10

Professional Stress Management Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Relationships</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship or Professional Coaching</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Resilient Mindset</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Vacation Time to Reset</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying Connected with Other Superintendents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Building relationships.** The most common theme among stress management strategies for professional stressors was building relationships. A variety of types of relationships were identified by the participants including collaboration among stakeholders, being a familiar presence at school sites, and connecting with staff on a personal level. Superintendent-5 found that how she treated people in her work community alleviated stress for her by “...establishing a positive work environment that allows people to feel free... you need to have an open door with them so that they feel free enough to come talk to you.” Connecting with staff on a personal level was a successful strategy used by Superintendent-6, “I do things with my staff. Like tonight, we are all in a lip sync... It’s super exciting, it’s fun, so a lot of people’s spouses will come out, we have fun!.” Another superintendent found that having a workplace friend provides a stress relief,

*I know that having a quote unquote best friend at work, um, is a critical grounder for stress. You know, having someone at work that you’re close with that you*
really care about that you know always cares about you... it’s made a huge
difference. (Superintendent-7)

Mentorship or professional coaching. Five of the 12 superintendents
interviewed have found that access to a mentor or professional coaching reduced some of
the stress they felt from workplace stressors. Superintendent-6 uses a hired mentor as
well as a friend, “I not only have the formal, professional coaching, but...one of my best
friends is one of my cabinet members. She says I’m the toughest person she’s ever
worked for, but we’re super close.” Coaching on the receiving end as well as the giving
end was identified as stress relievers,

Coaching, and listening, and being there for other people is a major, major stress
reliever for me because you have to be calm to be present for them... Because you
know a superintendent is not going to call you and ask for something if they’re
not under a lot of stress. (Superintendent-6)

Superintendent-8 shared that she believed mentors for superintendents are willing
to make the time to support you, “I don’t know too many people in that role who would
say I don’t have time for you. They would make the time.”

A resilient mindset. Five of the superintendents identified resilience and mindset
as a strategy to combat professional stress. For some, they believed that their positive
mindset and tendency to go into problem solving mode made a big difference in their
ability to keep stress at bay. “I don’t evaluate or assess my day by the number of
problems I have” (Superintendent-1). Superintendent-2 uses “laughter, finding joy, [and]
appreciating others” as a way to prevent stress from occurring. Her approach was also
shared by Superintendent-5, “I’m not going to achieve my goals by complaining.”
Superintendents who had a positive or problem solving mindset believed that they were less affected by professional stressors.

**Using vacation time to reset.** Four participants shared their strategies to relieve stress by taking advantage of vacation time and time off. “*We have planned vacations, and that is really important*” (Superintendent-4). Similarly, Superintendent-3 shared her strategy for holding herself accountable to using her vacation days, “*I work 225 days plus I carry over vacation days that aren’t timely for me to take... we really structure trips that are locked into time schedules that we will lose money if we don’t take the trips.*” In addition to planning vacations, taking advantage of personal or sick days throughout the year to focus on self-care was a realization that Superintendent-7 experienced as a superintendent,

*I do think that when it does get to that place where it’s overwhelming, that you’re taking that personal necessity day to just not be there, to just go, you know what? Today I just can’t show up the way I need to show up. So, you know, um, I’ll just take a sick day or a, a personal necessity day.*

She went on to explain how giving herself permission to take care of herself has made it easier for her to come out of those stressful places.

**Staying connected with other superintendents.** A less common but still an emerging theme among stress management strategies was staying connected to other superintendents. This included professional networks that gave superintendents an opportunity to network and discuss challenges with. Referring to the idea of loneliness at the top, several superintendents shared their success stories with staying connected.

*I have so many networks. You know, I just spent two days in a leadership*
collaborative with superintendents, and some I’m closer to than others. But, while I was there, I met quite a few new superintendents... you hear about people’s lives, which I find very interesting, and you learn things. (Superintendent -6)

Another participant, Superintendent-10, found this strategy to helpful as well, “...the whole notion of the network is around building relationships with other superintendents, providing collegial support, and working through problems and practices.” Superintendent-3 also points out the benefits of discussing and problem solving with fellow superintendents,

I’m a member of the district administration which has a district administration leadership institutes and 70-75 superintendents from across the nation get together at summits and talk round table conversations. Challenges and things like that. That’s very helpful for me.

RSQ5

The fifth sub question of this study sought to answer: What recommendations do California female superintendents have for aspiring female superintendents regarding addressing personal and professional stress? Seven emerging themes were identified among the 12 participants, which ranged in a frequency count from six to three. Table 11 illustrates the identified themes and by frequency counts.
Table 11

**Recommendations for Aspiring Female Superintendents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be authentic</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that women are an asset to the role</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use your village</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuously seek ways to improve</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn from and appreciate all phases of the journey to superintendency</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Build relationships.** Finding ways to connect and build relationships within the organization was a common theme identified among the 12 superintendents interviewed. This allows superintendents to create a support system that can help during challenging times and celebrate the accomplishments in your work.

*I think the other piece is to have a support system around you. Not only your family, but a professional support system....I do know for a fact, that I would not be as successful as what I am if I did not have a strong support system around me, professionally... to have mentors who have been in your seat is really important. Um, and the higher up you go, the fewer people you have that you can talk to.*

(Superintendent-7)

Further illustrating this point, Superintendent-1 emphasizes the importance of surrounding yourself with trusted confidants. “*Find yourself good friends or good confidants or good mentors that are going to look out for your best interest but not just tell you what you want to hear*” (Superintendent-1). Another recommendation shared on
this topic from Superintendent-5, “Understand that your reputation precedes self, and your reputation is built on every interaction that you have... be kind to people.”

**Be authentic.** A common recommendation among the 12 female superintendents was to believe in yourself and stay true to who you are.

Believe in what you’re doing and in doing what’s right for kids. And don’t think what did I do and is it because I’m this age or that age or like the Aztecs. Don’t take it personally. I understand people come from different perspectives, different situations. They’re going to bring different things to the table. Honor and respect their perceptions. But know who you are and what you want to accomplish and keep moving. It doesn’t matter if you’re a man or woman. Keep moving. (Superintendent-2)

Similarly, another participant advised that aspiring superintendents be authentic and genuine. “First off, you really need to be an authentic and genuine leader. People can, people really, really gravitate to authenticity” (Superintendent-5). Half of the participants in this study advised that female superintendents stay true to their own values and “don’t let others define you” (Superintendent-9).

**Believe that women are an asset to the role.** Another emerging theme among recommendations to aspiring female superintendents was holding onto the belief that women are an asset to the superintendency and deriving a sense of confidence and purpose from that. “I find the workplaces with a woman at the lead, and someone who’s really in touch with the social and emotional of the organization, great things happen for kids. Great things happen for kids in those places” (Superintendent-7). Supporting other female leaders sends a message that women are a powerful force and incredibly capable,
“I think we could really show as women that we can be powerful influences on our society if, if we step into this job. So, those are really the messages that I try to share”
(Superintendent-9)

**Use your village.** Three female superintendents in this study shared similar advice for aspiring female superintendents--to accept help from others. “Don’t think that you’re superwoman. You know, whatever help that you can get, get it. You’re going to be making a healthy income, it’s okay for you to help others in the process”
(Superintendent-11). A concept unique to superintendents is having the ability to lead and work through other people, as Superintendent-6 shared, “I’ve got to lead through everybody else. And if you’re the person who does it all, who’s so controlling... you’re going to burn out and you’re not going to have a team.” Utilizing the help you have available to you is a crucial skill in successfully managing the role of the superintendency.

**Continuously seek self-improvement.** Three of the 12 superintendents interviewed shared common recommendations of continuously working on their leadership skills and improving their practices. “I would say... not to stop learning... you can tell those who stop learning, in administration versus those who don’t. Just given their visions and aspirations for kids isn’t the same” (Superintendent-8). With content knowledge being a necessity in the role of the superintendent, recommendations to never stop learning were emerging themes. “You also need to be knowledgeable in content. So you need to educate yourself... learn as much as you can about the different programs, the structures and policies that happen in a district” (Superintendent-5).
Learn from and appreciate all phases of the journey to superintendency.

Several superintendents provided recommendations that urged aspiring female superintendents to appreciate every position on their path to the superintendency. There is something to be learned from each position along the way. “I would have to say, on the way up to the position, slow down and love the job you’re in, right? Just learn about that job, love the job” (Superintendent-6). Another superintendent shared that,

Any position we’re in serves a greater purpose.... So my recommendation for them might be for them to think about what is their purpose, what do they want to do with their life, do they want to serve their greater good, but also realize that every role, there’s a commitment.

Understanding the value in each position you hold will bring greater appreciation for your work as a superintendent. “If you want to be a classroom teacher, be a classroom teacher. Whatever it is you want to do, be careful not to get caught up in the oh, that’s the next thing” (Superintendent-10).

Most Frequent Codes

In this study, healthy life choices and regular exercise were most frequently experienced by female superintendents as a stress management strategy. A total frequency count of nine was the most frequently used theme. Following health life choices and regular exercise, personnel conflicts had the next highest frequency count with eight total. This theme emerged for RSQ3, when participants were asked which professional factors created stress in their lives. Additionally, building relationships was reported as a stress management strategy for professional stress and was the third most popular code with a frequency of seven.
Table 12 reviews the top three most frequent codes that emerged from the study. The table contains the theme, frequency count, and correlated RQs.

Table 12

*Most Frequent Codes*

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Personnel Conflicts</td>
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**Summary**

This chapter presented the collected data and findings of this qualitative study. The study sought to examine both the personal and professional factors that contribute to the stress of female superintendents, how they manage these stressors and recommendations for aspiring female superintendents. Female superintendents are an underrepresented group in this educational leadership position. The population consisted of superintendents across California. A total of 12 female superintendents--one from Los Angeles County, one from Sutter County, three from Tulare County, three from Riverside County, two from Sacramento County, one from San Diego County, and one from Napa County--participated in this study.

The primary RQ that guided this study, asked: *What personal and professional factors do California female superintendents identify as creating stress, what strategies do they use to address stress, and what recommendations do they have regarding addressing stress for aspiring female superintendents?* Five sub questions further delineated the study to differentiate between personal and professional stress. An
interview protocol was developed with five background questions and 11 primary questions that directly correlated to each RSQ. Every participant engaged in an in-depth, virtual or in-person interview, which was recorded using Adobe Connect and transcribed. All recorded interviews were sent for verbatim transcription and the verbatim transcriptions were then sent to and reviewed by each participant for accuracy before the coding of the data began. Additionally, artifacts were gathered related to the RQs of this study. The complete set of data was then coded for common themes using the NVivo coding software program. To increase reliability of the study, a process known as intercoder reliability (Lombard et al., 2004) was utilized, which consisted of a peer researcher coding a portion of the data. Both the researcher and the peer researcher collaborated and determined a common conclusion for the coded data.

Findings of the study indicated several emerging themes in the areas of contributing factors of stress and stress management strategies for both professional and personal. The most frequent stressors for personal stress were: (a) balancing multiple roles, (b) caring for family members, (c) feelings of guilt, and (d) major life changes. The most common strategies for managing personal stress were: (a) healthy life choices and regular exercise, (b) making time for loved ones, (c) clear separation between work and home, (d) spousal support, and (e) religion and spirituality. The most frequent stressors for professional stress were: (a) personnel conflicts, (b) managing relationships with school board, (c) navigating politics of district and community, and (d) battling gender bias and traditional gender norms. The most common strategies for managing professional stress were (a) building relationships, (b) mentorship or professional
coaching, (c) a resilient mindset, (d) using vacation time to reset, and (e) staying connected with other superintendents.

Additionally, there were numerous recommendations provided to aspiring female superintendents regarding managing stress in the position, as well as general advice for success as a female superintendent.

Artifacts in this study included (a) networking opportunities, (b) agendas, (c) calendars, (d) newspaper articles, and (e) ACSA leadership conference for women in educational leadership (see Appendix G and H).

Chapter V of this study will present conclusions based on these findings. Furthermore, Chapter V will provide recommendations for further research on this topic.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This phenomenological study examined the personal and professional factors that create stress in the lives of California female superintendents, as well as their stress management strategies and recommendations for aspiring female superintendents. The following overarching RQ guided the study: What personal and professional factors do California female superintendents identify as creating stress, what strategies do they use to address stress, and what recommendations do they have regarding addressing stress for aspiring female superintendents? Five RSQs were further developed to delineate between personal and professional factors creating stress and stress management strategies.

This study used qualitative methodology to examine the experiences of female superintendents. Their stories were captured using in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Additionally, artifacts were gathered to triangulate the findings. The target population was that of female superintendents in California, and 12 of those female public school superintendents from various counties in California served as a sample for this study. The major findings, drawn conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for future research are included in this chapter.

Major Findings

The major findings of this qualitative study are separated by each RSQ.

RSQ1

RSQ1 examined: What personal factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress? The four emerging themes from this RQ were balancing
multiple roles (6 out of 12), caring for family members (4 out of 12), feelings of guilt (4 out of 12), and major life changes (4 out of 12). Each of these factors created stress for California female superintendents who participated in this study.

Half of the female superintendents in this study believed that balancing multiple roles between work and home was a major personal factor contributing to stress in their lives. Numerous authors observed that because of traditional gender roles, women with full-time careers continue to bear a majority of the child-rearing and household responsibilities, leading to role strain and heightened stress levels (Farhang, 1999; L. A. Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Rosenfeld, 1992; Wu & DeMaris, 1996). The women who identified this as an area of stress faced the challenge of deciding where to focus their time, between being a mother, a leader, and finding time for self-care. The pressure to balance and be the perfect version in each role has left many female leaders in this study feeling stressed out and like they are not good enough. Between caring for family members, building their communities and schools as a superintendent, and finding time to live healthy and balanced lives has proven to be a challenging goal to attain.

Additionally, female superintendents felt a sense of guilt when spending time away from the home, as well as guilt for spending time away from work. The pull from either direction left a void in the other, creating a difficult and stressful daily struggle between work and home. Female superintendents in this study felt that the balance of time between work and home left little time for self-care and leisure activities.

**RSQ2**

RSQ2 inquired: *How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address personal factors that create stress?* California female
superintendents use a variety of strategies to address personal factors creating stress in their lives, including; health life choices and regular exercise (9 out of 12), making time for loved ones (6 out of 12), clear separation between work and home (6 out of 12), spousal support (5 out of 12), and religion and spirituality (4 out of 12). A large majority of the female superintendents interviewed for this study identified healthy life choices as a stress management strategy. Ulman (2000) found that relaxation, exercise, healthy nutrition, and group support successfully decreases the stress response. Similar to the research, female superintendents interviewed in this study found ways to incorporate exercise into their daily routines, whether at work or scheduled time outside of work. Some women hired a physical trainer or used a standing desk at work. Other women believed that making a conscious effort to eat nutritious meals was a form a self-care and an important part of their stress relief. Some specific strategies shared included walking up an extra flight of stairs at work, stepping away for lunch to increase awareness of what is being consumed, participating in walking meetings, and working out on a regular basis.

Living a healthy lifestyle was the most common theme among all RQs in this study.

Separating work and home, and having the support of a spouse were areas that eased stress for California female superintendents. Fagenson (1993), among other studies, have examined the relieving capabilities of positive and reciprocated relationships in the home. It is crucial that in a high caliber leadership role, women have an equal and supportive relationship in the home.

Implications of this major finding will be examined in this chapter.
RSQ3

RSQ3 sought to answer: What professional factors do California female superintendents identify that create stress? There were four themes that emerged from the interview responses for this RQ. Personnel conflicts (8 out of 12), managing relationships with the school board (6 out of 12), navigating politics of district and community, and battling gender bias and traditional gender norms (3 out of 12) were identified as major themes. Conflicts stemming from poor work performance of staff members, incohesive team members, bad hires, and general difficulty getting along with personnel was a leading factor of professional stress for California female superintendents. Some women attributed this to feelings of discomfort because they were a woman or younger than team members or subordinates. Several participants in this study mentioned that personnel conflicts often included not feeling supported by other women in their organizations or networks. For some, they found that male mentors served as a stronger support system than female mentors. This created some tension at first; however, many women were able to win over their boards and other key stakeholders, helping to make this stressor manageable. Nearly 25% of superintendents who leave small districts report basing this decision on issues with the school board (T. E. Glass et al., 2000). These findings were supported by this study, where participants found that dealing with board members is a contributing professional factor of stress. If the relationships between superintendent and school board members was positive, female superintendents experienced a major reduction in stress; however, if they had strained relationships with their board members, this caused a considerable amount of stress. Superintendents can be dismissed by a collective vote from the school board which puts
them in a difficult position to balance a positive relationship despite varying political interests from board members. Learning to manage different personalities to appease the board members and also advocate for district staff members and the community is a challenging task for many California female superintendents.

**RSQ4**

RSQ4 inquired: *How do California female superintendents describe the strategies they use to address professional factors that create stress?* Five strategies for addressing professional factors creating stress for California female superintendents were identified in this study. Participants in this study used relationship building (7 out of 12), mentorship or coaching (5 out of 12), having a resilient mindset (5 out of 12), using vacation time to reset (4 out of 12), and staying connected with other superintendents (3 out of 12). The themes of relationship building and staying connected were a major finding for this RQ. Supported by research, Walsh and Osipow (1994) confirmed that partnerships and mutual exchanges increases connection and self-worth. California female superintendents have tapped into these connections by building relationships with their staff members or teachers, seeking support from a mentor, or staying connected to other superintendents. Each of these themes emerged in the data and have a similar stress relieving outcome.

Additionally, using vacation time and having a resilient mindset were ongoing strategies that California female superintendents used on a regular basis to combat high levels of stress stemming from the job. They viewed stressors from the job as solvable and temporary.
RSQ5

RSQ5 examined: *What recommendations do California female superintendents have for aspiring female superintendents regarding addressing personal and professional stress?* Seven themes emerged from the interview data as major recommendations for aspiring female superintendents. When given the opportunity to give advice to aspiring female superintendents, current female superintendents from this study shared that they should build relationships (6 out of 12), be authentic and true yourself (6 out of 12), believe that women are an asset to the role (5 out of 12), use your village (3 out of 12), continuously seek ways to improve (3 out of 12), learn from and appreciate all phases of the journey (3 out of 12). The idea of building a strong support system both professionally and personally was mentioned by half of the participants in the study. Women need to find good confidants to support them through challenging times. Some women found this outlet in a colleague, and others in a professional mentor. Another common theme was urging aspiring female superintendents to be authentic, true to themselves, and not wavering on their core values. Sheckelhoff (2007) advises women leaders to act authentically, believing in one’s self and seeking support from others. The idea of growth and self-improvement was advised to improve their practices and skills, but also that a leader needs be authentic to what matters most to them.

**Unexpected Findings**

Several findings were uncovered in this study that were not specifically sought out. One unexpected finding was from the professional factors creating stress for female superintendents. The data revealed that despite the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency statewide and nationwide (USDOE, 2012), only 3 participants
mentioned the existence of gender bias or challenges working in a male dominated position as an area that created stress for them. Nine of the twelve participants did not mention a gender bias as being a leading challenge for them as a superintendent. The researcher has theorized that this may be due to the common practice of avoiding drawing attention to their genders in the workplace. Also, the researcher speculates that as women rise into the highest position in education, their experience with gender bias decreases. With this prestigious position comes a new level of respect which may influence how they are treated by others, making gender bias less prevalent.

Another unexpected finding came from observations during the interview. RSQ1 had a comparable amount of codes overall, but less themes identified. Women spent less time identifying their personal factors creating stress, indicating that they quickly and easily knew what their personal stressors were. On the other hand, professional factors creating stress took longer to explain with noticeably longer think time from the participants. It was the researcher’s interpretation that the women in the study seemed to be able to spend more time discussing the professional stressors impacting them.

Conclusions

Conclusions were derived based on the findings of collected data in this study and supported by a review of the body of research. The literature compliments the major findings in contributing factors and stress management strategies for female superintendents. Similar to the body of research on the topic, women in leadership are susceptible to stressors in their personal and professional lives that are not as prevalent for men. The literature also reinforces that a significant amount of unhealthy tension may
lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction, risking premature resignations from the superintendency by female superintendents.

Review of the previous literature and findings from this study conclude that there are effective strategies that can be used to alleviate both professional and personal stress. Learning from and sharing these strategies are critical to the success of female leaders.

This study found that personal factors creating stress for women included many homefront responsibilities including caring for family and balancing multiple role demands. Since women are more likely to stress about responsibilities in the home, this puts an added burden unique to female leaders. Strategies that have worked well for current California female superintendents in the field include exercise, healthy eating, and separating work and life. Women leaders need structures in place and shifts in culture to be able to readily access and utilize these effective strategies without guilt.

Secondly, professional stressors of serving as a female superintendent are consistent with findings from the literature. Managing schools boards, dealing with politics of the district, or personnel conflicts inevitably accompany the role of the superintendent; however, the strategies that exist both in the body of research and this study assert that these stressors are more manageable when superintendents can access perks such as professional coaches, vacation time, and time to connect with others. The factors contributing to stress may not change, but steps can be put in place to support female superintendents and female leaders in coping with stress and living a more balanced life that allows the leader to bring their full and healthy selves to complete the difficult work of leading a school district.
**Implications for Action**

Implications for action were directly aligned with the conclusions drawn from the major findings of this study. The following actions should be considered by county and district superintendents, institutions of higher learning, county offices of education, school district boards of education, search consultants, educational networking groups, professional coaches, and mentors to ensure that educational female leaders are set up for success in their positions and have the opportunity to live healthy and balanced lives.

The implications for actions include:

1. School Boards should provide coaches to help superintendents learn to balance work and life time structures, manage priorities, and manage personal and professional stressors.

2. School boards should create and enforce progressive policies that promote wellness and balance among their leaders. One suggestion to include in this policy is to increase the number of vacation days allotted in a school year as well as recommendation from the school board that a MINIMUM of three personal days must be taken during each fiscal year.

3. School districts and/or local county offices of education should create and implement wellness programs that include explicit courses in stress resilience, professional individual coaching, and effective stress management strategies.

4. School districts should compensate and encourage memberships to networking organizations such as the ACSA, as well as cover expenses for ongoing professional development opportunities in leadership for superintendents and aspiring superintendents.
5. Popular media outlets should feature the work of female educational leaders across the country to promote the exposure of women in leadership and encourage aspiring female leaders to learn about the challenges and strategies of successful female leaders. Such outlets may include women’s conferences, articles in mainstream magazines, advertising materials from local universities, etc.

6. Female superintendents should form interest based and/or regionally based support groups as a means to collaboratively manage stress.

7. Organizational leadership programs should make work life balance and stress management themes that are addressed throughout their programs.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The following recommendations were made for further research based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

- That this study be replicated using both female and male superintendents to identify the differences between contributing factors of stress and stress management strategies between male and female leaders.
- Explore whether there is a relationship between a leader’s degree of stress and the stress management strategies they use.
- Compare and explore the factors creating stress for superintendents leading small one-school districts to that of superintendents leading large school districts.
- Explore case studies of school districts who have implemented successful wellness programs district-wide and identify their best practices.
• Study female leaders who have high levels of balance and low levels of stress to determine if a relationship exists between balance and leadership effectiveness.

• Explore how spouses of female leaders are affected and what strategies they use to ensure happiness and wellbeing, identifying the challenges or stressors they face.

• A study that compares the responses of female superintendents from different age groups.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

As a woman juggling multiple roles as a mother, educational leader, spouse, and doctoral student, I have personally experienced the overwhelming feelings of stress while trying to balance it all and ensure that everyone in my circles are happy. I was highly interested in hearing the stories of female leaders who have attained the pinnacle position of their educational career ladder. In conducting these interviews, I learned that even successful female superintendents experience stress both in the workplace and in the home. I also learned that even as these stressors arise, women have the power to change their behavior and their mindset to overcome adversity and cope with these challenges. I learned that resilience is a muscle, strengthened by hardship. I learned that women in leadership who have overcome barriers to get to their seat want to tell their story and help aspiring leaders. A wealth of information, lessons, and resources are waiting to be untapped with every female leader that I worked with.

Each woman that I had the privilege of speaking to immediately let me into their personal experiences and lives, seeming to forget that I was a stranger. A wonderful
interaction took place with each participant who so readily opened up about their struggles, as well as how they got themselves out of even the most daunting stressful situations.

Although they had different methods, each woman found the strength within themselves to face the challenge in front of them, to cope emotionally, to swallow their pride, to learn from their mistakes, to push forward, and to continue showing up for their people day in and day out. I hope to share that even during the most difficult times, we can find it within ourselves to pull out strengths and qualities we may not have known we had. And that these strengths may have only been found by stretching ourselves both personally and professionally.
References


Dulac, B. J. (1992). *Women superintendents and school board presidents: Profiles and Perceptions of barriers and strategies that have an effect on women in attaining the superintendency*. Boston College.


# APPENDIX A

## Literature Matrix

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<th>Women in Leadership</th>
<th>Historical Context: Women in Leadership</th>
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May 1, 2017

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study of Female Public School Superintendents in California. The main investigator of this study is Monica Peterson, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are the superintendent of a public school district and meet the gender criteria. Approximately 12 superintendents will be invited to enroll in this study. Participation should require one hour or less of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify personal and professional factors that create stress for California female superintendents, describe the strategies used to manage stress, and provide recommendations for addressing stress from California female superintendents.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be invited to participate in an in-person or virtual Adobe Connect interview, conducted by the primary investigator. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. A copy of the interview protocol is included with this letter.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no known major risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to sit with the researcher in person or online for up to one hour. Some interview questions will ask you to describe personal leadership experiences and retellings of stressors impacting your career, which may cause mild emotional discomfort.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to share your expertise with other present or future female superintendents who may benefit from your knowledge and experiences. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of best practices for transforming school district culture to promote a healthy balance and positive working environment. The results of this study will be used to inspire aspiring female leaders.
ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study. You will be assigned a participant number. The recorded interview session will not reference your name in document title or URL. During the recording, the researcher will not refer to you by name. This will also hold true for any school name, school district name, county, or state. Any names used by the participant during the recorded session will be redacted from the transcript. The interviews will be transcribed, reviewed, and maintained only by the primary investigator on a password-protected external server.

You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact the researcher, Mrs. Peterson, by phone at (209) 329-6792 or email monica.p.peterson@gmail.com. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Very Respectfully,

Monica Peterson
Principal Investigator
APPENDIX C
Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Stress and the female superintendent: Contributing factors of stress and stress management strategies from the voices of CA Female Superintendents.

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Monica Peterson, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Research Participant’s Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify personal and professional factors that create stress for California female superintendents, describe the strategies used to manage stress, and provide recommendations for addressing stress from California female superintendents.

In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in a recorded semi-structured interview, which will be conducted in-person or online using the Adobe Connect Webinar platform. The interview will take up to one hour, and will be audio-recorded. During this interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share the various stressors impacting your career, the stress management strategies used and recommendations as a female superintendent.

I understand that:

a) There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour online. However, the session will be held at the location of your choosing to minimize this inconvenience, as long as there is an internet connected device available. Some interview questions may cause mild emotional discomfort.

b) There are no major benefits to you for participation, but a potential may be that you will have an opportunity to share your expertise with other present or future K-12 superintendents who may benefit from your knowledge and expertise. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of best practices for transforming school district culture to achieve a 21st century model of education. The results of this study will be used to develop a common language for leading and implementing district-wide change for the 21st century.

c) Money will not be provided for my time and involvement.
d) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Monica Peterson, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mrs. Peterson may be contacted by phone at (209) 329-6792 or email at monica.p.peterson@gmail.com.

e) I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

f) I understand that the study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project.

g) I understand that the audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio and electronic interview transcripts will be kept for a minimum of five years by the investigator only on a cloud-based server.

h) I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call of the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures(s) set forth.

_________________________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party                      Date

_________________________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Witness (if appropriate)                            Date

_________________________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator                                Date

Brandman University IRB May2017
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

A study on female superintendent’s contributing factors of stress, stress management strategies, and recommendations.

Part I. Researcher’s Introduction

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and share the factors that have contributed to stress across your career and the strategies you’ve employed to overcome these stressors. This interview is scheduled to take approximately 60 minutes. I want to ensure that we have enough time to gather valuable information from you so it is important to this space and time be uninterrupted. Are you able to commit to this time frame? You have previously receive and signed the Informed Consent to participate in this study. A copy of the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights is being provided to you today for your review. It is your right to not answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, or discontinue at any point. If you do not have any questions at this time, I will begin recording.

This is Monica Peterson, a doctoral student with Brandman University. Today’s interview date is__/__/__ and the time is __am/pm. I am honored to be sitting with __________ who has willfully consented to the terms of this interview. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, notes will be taken by the researcher.

Part II. Personal Demographics

1. Please state your name, position, name of your school district and where this interview is taking place.
2. What is your age, marital status, and ethnicity?
3. Do you have children? If so, how many? What ages?
4. How long have you been working as a superintendent?
5. Please share your educational background. Include colleges attended, credentials, and formal degrees.

Part III. Research Questions

Research Sub Question 1.

1. What personal factors have created stress in your life?
2. How has balancing work and life impacted your career?
3. Have you felt stress beyond “healthy tension” as a result of these personal factors?
Research Sub Question 2.

1. Describe the strategies you use to address personal factors creating stress in your life.

Research Sub Question 3.

1. What professional factors have created stress in your life?
2. How has the stress from work impacted your personal life?
3. Have you felt stress beyond “healthy tension” as a result of these professional factors?

Research Sub Question 4.

1. Describe the strategies you use to address professional factors creating stress in your life.

Research Sub Question 5.

1. What recommendations do you have for aspiring female superintendents regarding addressing personal and professional stress?

General Probes.

1. Can you tell me more about that experience?
2. Can you describe what type of stress you felt in that situation?
3. Can you provide another example of a strategy you used?
4. What other advice would you offer aspiring women leaders?

**Part IV. Closing**

1. Do you have any additional comments or recommendations about personal and professional stressors?
2. Do you have any additional comments or recommendations about strategies used to manage stress?

Thank you, again, for taking the time out of your busy schedule to share your valuable insight. This interview has concluded. It is __:__ am/pm.
APPENDIX E

Participants’ Bill of Rights

Brandman University

Research Participant’s 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 may also contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University 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, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX F

NIH Clearance

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Monica Peterson successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/14/2016.

Certification Number: 2074556.
APPENDIX G

ACSA’s Women in School Leadership Forum 2017: Overview,

Schedule of Events

Women are underrepresented in all areas of school leadership. Let’s work together to level the playing field. The Women in School Leadership Forum is the premier networking and educational experience designed to engage, enlightening and empower women education leaders from across the country.

This joint collaborative event hosted by ACSA, NASD and NASSA is sure to be a powerful experience for all participants.

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Schedule-at-a-Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:00 - 6:00pm: Registration</td>
<td>8:30 – 10:00 a.m. General Session</td>
<td>8:30 – 9:30 a.m. General Session</td>
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<tr>
<td>6:00 - 7:00pm: Sponsored Reception</td>
<td>10:15 – 11:15 a.m. Breakout Sessions</td>
<td>9:45 – 10:45 a.m. Breakout Sessions</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11:20 a.m. – 12:20 p.m. Breakout Sessions</td>
<td>10:55 – 11:55 a.m. Breakout Sessions</td>
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<td>12:30 – 2:00 p.m. Keynote Luncheon</td>
<td>12:30 – 2:00 p.m. Luncheon</td>
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<td>2:15 – 3:15 p.m. Breakout Sessions</td>
<td>2:15 – 3:15 p.m. General Session</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3:20 – 4:20 p.m. Breakout Sessions</td>
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</table>
ACSA’s Women in School Leadership Forum: Detailed Schedule

**Wednesday, September 27**

3:00pm  
**Opening Reception**

**Thursday, September 28**

6:00am  
**Sunrise Yoga**

8:15am  
**Opening General Session: Monique Morris**

9:20am  
**Are you a Leadership Catalyst?**

- Being Generationally Savvy: Working Effectively Across Generations
- Mind, Body, Soul: Self Care for Educators
- Perfecting Your Brand: Just Do It!

**Most Important**

11:00am  
**10 Steps to Cultural Proficiency**

- From Barriers to Breakthrough: A 23-Year Longitudinal Study of Women Superintendents
- Mindful Leadership: Finding Calm, Developing Resilience
- Troubleshooting Leadership: How to Lead Challenging People and How to Lead in Challenging Circumstances

12:15pm  
**Lunch and Keynote**

2:15pm  
**Equity Working Group Panel**

- Addressing and Avoiding Microaggressions: Becoming a Courageous and Compassionate Communicator
- Smart Interview Tactics
- Take Control: Putting Your Online Presence to Work for You

**Most Important**
### ACSA’s Women in School Leadership Forum 2017: Detailed Schedule Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:30pm</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Fostering Success in Increasingly Diverse Schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Opening Doors for Equity and Access for Women in Leadership</td>
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<td>What’s Holding you back? Strategies for Success and Overcoming the Bamboo and Glass Ceilings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Women Leaders: Building Capacity &amp; Making Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:15pm</td>
<td>Reception</td>
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#### Friday, September 29

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<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00am</td>
<td>Sunrise Yoga</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:30am</td>
<td>General Session - Kristen Hadeed</td>
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<td>9:45am</td>
<td>GRIT: Utilizing a Growth Mindset for Success</td>
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<td>Personalized Learning Leadership 101: Leading a Culture of Innovation</td>
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<td>Power Through the Female Perspective: How to Effectively Work with Your Board, Union, and Others</td>
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<td>Reconsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership</td>
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<td>Mock Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00am</td>
<td>4C’s of Leadership Coaching: Integrating Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, and Critical Thinking into your Daily Coaching Practices</td>
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<td>Ensuring Equity in a S.T.E.A.M Program</td>
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<td>Is She Armed and Dangerous? Removing Roadblocks that Exclude African American Women from Leadership Positions</td>
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<td>Maintaining a Commitment to Equity and Access in the Face of Criticism and Controversy</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00pm</td>
<td>Luncheon and Keynote - Assemblymember Christina Garcia</td>
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APPENDIX H

Articles Related to the Hiring of Female Superintendents and School Leaders

When will the best man for Fresno Unified’s top job finally be a woman?

BY BILL MCEWEN
bmcewen@fresnobee.com
AUGUST 01, 2017 11:24 AM

Now that Fresno Unified board President Brooke Ashjian has announced that trustees will select a new superintendent before the start of the school year, I am crossing my fingers they will pick the right woman for this demanding job.

It’s shocking but true. Never in the long history of California’s fourth-largest school district has the board seen fit to entrust a female educator with its top leadership position.

We’ve seen all types of leaders come and go. There have been smooth talkers (Santiago Wood), those selected by Fresno insiders (Michael Hanson) and those who might have steered the under-performing district in the right direction had they stayed long enough to give it a broad-shouldered effort (Carlos Garcia).

Women account for more than 70% of last year’s valedictorians. They’re at the top of their class, but that appears to be where they stay. More than three-quarters of public school teachers are female while only 30% of educational administrators are. Put simply, women are doing the work while men are making the decisions.

Culturally, we value male leadership above female. The disparity is evidenced by research out of North Carolina State University. In the study, an online college class was divided into four discussion groups. Those groups were split evenly between two course instructors. One instructor was male while the other was female. The two professors told his or her correct gender to one group and the opposite to the other. At the end of the course, students submitted final evaluations of their instructors. The results showed that students rated the professors they thought were male much higher than the professors believed to be female, regardless of the professor’s actual gender.

Feature

Where Are All the Women Superintendents?

AASA's latest study on the profession suggests seven reasons why female numbers still lag in top district posts by THOMAS E. GLASS

Of our nation’s 13,728 superintendents, 1,984 today are women. Yet 72 percent of all K-12 educators in this country are women, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Why then are there so few women heading school districts? Is there discrimination on the part of school boards and others involved in the hiring process? Or do women educators, for whatever reason, choose not to pursue the superintendency?

During the 1990s, women continued to be the dominant gender in professional education as well as in university-based professional preparation programs for administrators. Even though the percentage of women superintendants has nearly doubled during the 1990s—from 6.6 percent to 13.2 percent—the vast majority of superintendents (87 percent) are male.

A significant amount of attention has been focused recently on the role of women in the superintendency and principalship. Superintendent search firms have been more aggressive in identifying women candidates, while the gender composition of school boards gradually has shifted toward a more even distribution between women and men. Several books and an array of doctoral dissertations have examined women and the superintendency.

AASA Findings

So what accounts for the relative handful of women superintendents? What strategies might be used to attract and place more women in the superintendency?

The two most widely cited reasons for the paucity of women in the superintendency are that women are discouraged from preparing for the superintendency and school boards will not hire them. There is a certain amount of truth to these reasons even though they are not supported by

Appendix I

Articles Related to Wellness and Balance