

The Glass Maze and Predictors for Successful Navigation to the Top Seat to the Superintendency

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Abstract

A predictive model of assistant superintendents willingness to become superintendent was created using three factors: personal (age, gender, marital status, and parenthood), professional (district size, district needs, and being mentored), and volition (willingness to appear for multiple interviews, give up their current position, be interviewed by search firms, build alliances within the community, and the desire to lead a district). One hundred and forty-nine assistant superintendents in diverse areas participated in a survey distributed in New York, 70 females and 79 males. The results showed the most influential variables in the assistant superintendent's willingness to become a superintendent are district size, type of mentorship, and volition for both females and males but to differing degrees.

Key Words

Superintendent ascendancy, assistant superintendents, gender

Introduction

Ella Flagg Young was the first female to hold the position of superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, superintendent in any major U.S. city, and president of the National Education Association. In 1909 she stated, “In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast educational system” (Blount, 1998, p.1). Although women made significant gains in school district leadership over the next several decades, the end of World War II brought the beginning of a steady decline in the number of women occupying the top position. From 1945 to 1970 the number of female superintendents declined (Blount, 1998), which continued into the 21st Century.

An analysis of the demographic trends in school administration from the early 1920s to 2010 revealed that gender inequity existed in the position of the superintendent of schools. The percentage of female superintendents was not proportionate to the percentage of females in the field of education or to the general population of the United States. A 2010 survey of superintendents conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) indicated women account for less than a quarter of the nation’s superintendents; yet they make up 75% of the teaching force (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011).

With women outnumbering men in school administration graduate programs, why do they continue to lag so far behind men in the acquisition of a superintendent position? There are several theories explored in the literature including unfavorable working conditions and gender bias (Harris, Lowery, Hopson, & Marshall, 2004; and Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Whitaker and Lane (1990) found that

gender “determines the role an individual will be assigned in education.” Wesson (1998) noted that organizations fill positions in upper management with candidates that fit the organization’s existing schema. Men are seen as being better at handling discipline, working with school boards, and navigating the politics of the superintendency (Logan, 1998).

Organizations often see women as less favorable candidates for leadership positions, and when they do occupy leadership roles, displaying traditional leadership behaviors is seen negatively (Eagly & Karau 2002). Eagly and Karau go on to explain that societal beliefs hold that gender roles ascribed to women are in direct contradiction to traits required for successful leadership. In a study conducted by Elsesser and Lever (2011), however, there found to be an improvement in the perception of women in leadership roles.

This study examines the data collected from a survey developed by Hunter (2012) that was administered to 200 assistant superintendents in Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties in New York with 149 responding. The instrument was originally designed to measure how the willingness to compete for a superintendent position was affected by internal motivators, external motivators, internal barriers, and external barriers. This study realigned the survey items to create a new variable, volition.

The purpose of this paper was to investigate if personal variables (gender, marital status, and parenthood), professional variables (district size, current position within the district, and being mentored), or volition predict the level of willingness an assistant superintendent has for pursuing the role of

superintendent. The research question guiding this study was as follows: was willingness to pursue a superintendent position influenced by personal variables, professional variables, and volition in females and males?

Literature Review

Volition

Vogel (1985) developed a four-factor model that delineated the lack of volition for women to become superintendents. The first factor, woman's place, identified women as caretakers and men as leaders. The second factor, discrimination, found that men were promoted over women based on gender, and school boards advanced men over women. The third factor, meritocracy, the implementation of advancement based upon intellectual talent, deemed men were more intelligent. The fourth factor, economic, indicated women worked for lower pay and the few leadership positions commanded a higher pay.

Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) used the *Superintendents' Professional Expectations and Advancement Review* (SPEAR™) survey and found that superintendents were leaving education due to lack of proper preparation for the position. This unpreparedness resulted in many school boards filling superintendents' positions with retirees, decreasing opportunities for women and other traditionally disenfranchised groups to become a superintendent (Wolverton & Macdonald, 2001). Glass (2000), Wolverton and Macdonald (2001) suggested that volition to become a superintendent arose from opportunities afforded to the individual.

Different factors affect women's volition to pursue the role of superintendent. Leadership resilience, or the ability to bounce

back from adversity, enables women to take risks regardless of criticism and challenges (Patterson, Goens, & Reed, 2009). The key factor toward advancing to the role of superintendent involved stamina to sustain challenges rather than abilities or experience. MacTavish (2010) found cumulative education, experience, and endorsement from mentors the most salient factors contributing to a feeling of readiness to ascend to the position of superintendent.

Gender

The perception of gender differences originated from the time of Aristotle where he viewed women as defective (Jones & Montenegro, 1982), lowering women's contribution to society. The important attributes for a superintendent such as competitiveness, assertiveness, and aggressiveness were perceived negatively in women (Marshall, 1986). The societal schemata of women and work historically emphasized child caretaking (Patton & McMahan, 2006). Caceres-Rodriguez (2011) echoed this societal perception as a cultural norm deeply ingrained in organizational structures. This perception may have prevented many women from attaining higher leadership positions.

Hegemonic perceptions about the creation of organizations and valued experiences of members in organizations were based on males (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) viewed gender inequity as the primary reason women do not advance in the executive suite, which prevents many from attaining their professional goals. Although women make up a larger portion of the teaching profession, men were 40 times more likely to become superintendents as compared to women.

Teaching, then, became a *feminine role* while administration became a *masculine role* (Tyack & Strober, 1981; Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). According to Poll (1978), women constituted 85% of elementary school teachers, 20% of elementary school principals and 1% of superintendents.

The most recent available figures indicated that approximately 18% of superintendents in the USA are female (NCES, 2003). The 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey supported Poll's (1978) finding that women were not proportionately represented in the position of superintendent (Shakeshaft, 2011). In 2009, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction indicated that 80% of the teachers were female while 82% of the superintendents were male (Shakeshaft, 2011). With this trend, women would not hold the position of superintendent at the rate of their male contemporaries for 77 years.

Growe and Montgomery (1999) indicated, "one reason so few women are hired for educational administrative positions is due to the gender gap". They discussed three theories on why women have not dominated leadership positions in the education field. One theory is psychological and tied to power. The way women use power to empower others may be viewed by others as not desiring power for themselves (Growe & Montgomery, 1999). Gupton and Slick (1996) cautioned women about creating their own glass ceiling by doubting themselves and their potential to succeed in leadership positions. Other theories regard limitations placed on women through structure within the educational system and social norm discriminatory practices (Growe & Montgomery, 1999).

For the last twenty years, there was an increase in gender equity issues in the leadership of public education (Blount, 1998; Glass, 2000). Women continued to receive inequitable treatment in terms of pay, promotions, and authority (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Fernandez (2007) reported public policies to change gender inequity provided a limited effect.

In 2010, Congress, through the Government Accountability Office (GAO), investigated women's representation in management positions and pay differences. Their investigation determined a need for additional information about the challenges women face in advancing their careers (Sherrill, 2010). Although structural barriers impede women from advancing to the position of superintendent, researchers noted internal barriers might contribute to the willingness of some women to advance to the position of superintendent.

For example, Growe and Montgomery (1999) noted in addition to the gender inequity embedded in the infrastructure of many educational systems, some women use power to empower others and not necessarily themselves. Gupton and Slick (1996) identified some women might have self-doubt regarding their potential and choose not to seek the position of superintendent, which perpetuates the normalization of social norm discriminatory practices (Growe & Montgomery, 1999).

When female leaders advance in their organizations, they tend to "emphasize empowerment, affirm relationships, seek ways to strengthen human bonds, simplify communications and give means an equal value

with ends” (Helgesen, 1990, p.52). These characteristics highlight the development of shared values, traditions, and ideas administrators tend to focus on as they serve as the catalyst to create a learning community (Sergiovanni, 1992, 1996).

Cultural Fit

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents on Cubiks international survey on job and cultural fit (<http://www.cubiks.com/survey/Pages/default.aspx> 2015), indicated that they would be in favor of dismissing a high potential candidate if they were out of step with the organizations culture. Chatman (1991) stated that organizations devote resources in maintaining a good fit for their employees and organization because they assume some employees are better suited to perform certain jobs compared to other employees. As Rivera (2015) argues that cultural fit, or organizational fit can be positive, it can dilute the organization and create feedback loops that exclude highly qualified candidates who may not meet what the expected culture of the organization or leadership of the said organization.

Hewlett, Leader-Chivée, and Sumberg (2012), stated that sponsorship and development of pipelines is important with moving up within organizations and grooming leaders through sponsorship within the organization. While Rooth (2010) stated that individuals members of organizations that hold gatekeeper roles, such as recruiters, may have an unconscious association bias, which adversely impacts people not in the proscribed norm.

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implicit bias is due to perception of organizational fit and creates an adverse impact on people who do not seem to fit within the norm (Kayes, 2006). Promotional opportunity is prevented when decision-makers dilute the individual’s accomplishment by not taking into account the individual’s merit, but rather the perception of their merit through the lens of a stereotypical bias of the observer (Kayes, 2006).

Cubik (2013) used the International Survey on Job and Cultural Fit and found 59% of the respondents indicated that they would be in favor of dismissing a high potential candidate if they were out of step with the organizational culture. Rivera (2015) argues that although cultural fit, or organizational fit, can be positive, it can dilute the organization and create feedback loops that exclude highly qualified candidates who might not meet the norms of the expected organizational culture as it pertains to leadership practices within the organization.

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Mentorship

Grove and Montgomery (1999) stated that for women to succeed in attaining administrative positions in education, mentoring must occur. In the early twentieth century, organized efforts to mentor and advocate for men in administrative positions included The Male Teachers' Association of New York City (Blount, 1998).

Women, however, needed more education and more experience as compared to men for the same administrative position (MacTavish, 2010; Weatherly, 2011). Negative views about the position of superintendent as an *old boys' network* contributed to women's belief that the position of superintendent was unattainable (Ottino, 2009; Weatherly, 2011; Wickham, 2007).

According to Askren-Edgehouse (2008), 50% of female superintendents surveyed in Ohio reported having male mentors who helped them attain the position of superintendent. Ottino (2009) found that 18% of women pursuing the position of superintendent perceived mentors and networking as affecting their chances of achieving the position of superintendent. However, women did not feel empowered to change the *old boys' network* and would prefer to keep their less stressful job, which supports what Ceniga (2008) identified as mentors and networking are seen as infrastructural barriers.

MacTavish's (2010) mixed-method study illustrated how superintendents used mentors, sponsors, and networks. Mentors were seen as "one who helps teach and aspirant the job responsibilities and norms of the superintendency and who helps the aspirant

grow personally and professionally in pursuit of that position" (MacTavish, 2010, p.8). Sponsors are defined as "one who actively champions and make contacts on behalf of an aspirant in order to gain a desired position" (MacTavish, 2010, p.8).

Findings indicated mentors included their own district superintendent, outside district superintendents and university professors. Three sources of sponsorship for women aspiring to become a superintendent were their own superintendent, a board member, or a professional colleague. Zachry (2009) found that it was important for female superintendents to target and encourage potential female educational leaders through mentorship, networking, sponsorship, and advocacy.

Women were less likely to seek a sponsor because of possible challenges associated with a male sponsor; there is greater scrutiny of the sponsorship relationship due to issues surrounding sexual harassment (Hill & Ragland, 1995; Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2010; MacTavish, 2010). Hewlett *et al.* (2012) concluded that beyond mentors women needed sponsors, advocates who create a pipeline to senior leadership positions.

Wickham (2007) found that perceptions of success differed in high school and elementary school administrative positions. Administrators at the elementary level who aspired to become a superintendent involved acquiring a doctoral degree and exhibiting high-level curriculum vitae while administrators at the high school level who aspired to be a superintendent employed the use of a mentor.

Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen and Tetric (2009) found hidden issues for advancement such as the lack of mentors and networking. The absence of mentors and networking was a significant factor contributing to the lack of women ascending to the position of superintendent (Weatherly, 2011). Weatherly examined female superintendents' perception of importance of 11 types of mentoring functions in Texas. Eighty-eight out of 140 women responded to an online 5 point Likert scale survey.

The results indicated the following mentoring functions were important to attaining the position of superintendent: sponsoring, coaching, challenging assignments, exposure and visibility, friendship, role model, and acceptance. The intersection of networking, mentorship, and sponsorship forms a complex synergistic effect that promotes one becoming a superintendent.

District Size

Grounded in motivation environmental theory, Laramore (2010) studied factors that positively influenced superintendents and non-superintendents in applying for the position of superintendent.

In terms of district size, male superintendents from large districts were more satisfied than females. In comparison, female superintendents from small districts were more satisfied than their male colleagues. Conversely, for non-superintendents, large districts appealed to females while small districts appealed to males.

Bolla (2010) found the size of the district affected how female superintendents

approached the role of superintendent more than male superintendents. Differences in the size of the district impacted public relations as well. In smaller districts female superintendents spent less time on politics than female superintendents in large districts.

Consequently, aspiring female superintendents needed to be aware of district size differences to determine their best option (Bolla, 2010).

Methodology

Design

The study examined both male and female assistant superintendents and their willingness to move up to the superintendent position. Using SPSS version 19 for statistical analysis, a binary logistic regression was conducted after the data file was split by gender to find the best model to predict willingness for assistant superintendents' ascension to the position of superintendent.

The dataset came from a larger study conducted by Hunter (2012) who examined barriers and motivators that men and women encountered in route to the position of school district superintendent. One hundred forty nine female and male assistant superintendents within Suffolk, Nassau, and Westchester counties in New York responded to the survey.

In order to examine the willingness to be superintendent a predictive model was created using three factors: personal (age, gender, marital status, and parenthood), professional (district size, district needs, and being mentored), and volition (willingness to appear for multiple interviews, give up their current position, be interviewed by search

firms, build alliances within the community, and the desire to lead a district).

Those factors were chosen because other variables in the dataset were found to be non-significant in the prediction of willingness. A factor analysis was conducted to establish the construct validity of the instrument (Hunter, 2012).

The willingness to pursue the superintendent position was taken into consideration within the survey (Hunter, 2012). A variable called volition was generated from the following items:

- q62 How willing are you to appear for multiple interviews with the board of education?
- q61 How willing are you to give up your current position?
- q63 How willing are you to be interviewed by search firms?
- q65 How willing are you to build alliances within the community for the schools?
- q33R Lack of desire to lead a district

Volition in this study has been defined by the willingness of assistant superintendent's to appear for multiple interviews, give up their current position, be interviewed by search firms, build alliances within the community, and the desire to lead a district. The dependent variable chosen was item *q60: How willing are you to pursue a job as a superintendent?*

The high and low levels were established by recoding the 5-point Likert

scale. The low level was a combination of the Likert choices of not willing at all and a little willing (1 & 2). The high level was a combination of the Likert choices of willing and very willing (4 & 5). Volition had a Cronbach Alpha Reliability of 80%. (Note *q33* was a reverse question and was recoded (shown as *q33R*).

Participants

Participants for the study were holding a position as an assistant superintendent within Suffolk, Nassau, and Westchester Counties in New York from a pool of 125 school districts; specifically 69 from Suffolk, 56 from Nassau, and 47 from Westchester respectively. Two hundred assistant superintendents were invited to participate and complete the survey; 149 participants returned completed surveys for a 75% response rate.

Of the completed surveys, 60 respondents (40%) came from Suffolk, 57 respondents (38%) came from Nassau, and 32 respondents (22%) came from Westchester. Of the participating 149 assistant superintendents, 55 (36.9%) reported their current positions as the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, 53 (35.6%) as the Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance, 15 (10.1%) as the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, 11 (7.4%) as the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel, 2 (1.3%) as the Assistant Superintendent of Operations, 11 (7.4%) as the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education, and 2 (1.3%) reported their assignment as other. Table 1.1 provides a breakdown of the district size for the assistant superintendents within this study.

Table 1.1

District size (number of students enrolled in district)

	Total Frequency	Female Frequency	Male Frequency	Percent
1,000 – 2,999	40	22	18	26.8
3,000 – 4,999	56	24	32	37.6
5,000 – 9,999	44	21	23	29.5
10,000 +	8	2	6	5.4
No response	1	1	0	0.7
Total	149	70	79	100.0

The district type of a majority of the respondents was suburban (89.3%). The remainder were from rural (3.4%), small town (4.0%), and urban (3.4%). The district needs levels were categorized as 28 high needs (18.8%), 57 moderate needs (38.2%), and 64 low needs (43.0%).

The respondents' genders were 79 male (53%) and 70 female (47%). From the 149 respondents, 136 self-identified as *White* (91%), 5 self-identified as *Black* (3%), 5 self-identified as *Hispanic or Latino* (3%), 1 person self-identified as *Asian* (>1%), and 2 self-identified as *other* (1%).

One hundred twenty two (82%) of the respondents self-identified as *married*, 9 (6%) respondents self-identified as *single* (never married), 15 (10%) self-identified as

divorced/separated, and 3 (2%) self-identified as *widowed*.

The age range of the respondents was from 33 to 69. The age distribution of the respondents: 14.8% of respondents were ages 33 to 41; 27.5% of respondents were ages 42 to 50; 38.9% of respondents were ages 51 to 59; and 18.8% of respondents were ages 60 and 69.

Table 1.2 revealed that 46% of the respondents reported having a mentor. Twenty-three respondents reported that their mentor was a superintendent in their district, 8 respondents reported that their mentor was a superintendent in another district, 37 respondents reported that their mentor was someone who was not a superintendent. Fifty-four of the respondents reported that they did not have a mentor.

Table 1.2

Mentor

	Total Frequency	Female Frequency	Male Frequency	Percent
Yes, the Superintendent in my district mentored me	23	11	12	15.4
Yes, the Superintendent in another district mentored me	8	5	3	5.4
Yes, someone who was not a Superintendent mentored me	37	15	22	24.8
No, I did not have a mentor	81	39	42	54.4
Total	149	70	79	100.0

Results

The initial logistic regressions included a predictive model of the willingness to be superintendent based on three factors: personal, professional, and volition. The data were split by gender, and the result or best-fit model only held onto the volition variable, the district size, and the mentor types. The other variables, such as marital status, age, district type, and district needs level showed no

significance in the prediction of willingness to become a superintendent. The dependent variable was high-low willingness. The independent variables (volition, district size, mentorship—see Table 2) are significant predictors of willingness to advance into the position of superintendent, with a large effect size of approximately 60%.

Table 2

Variables in the equation

Gender			B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Female	Step 1 ^a	Volition	.98	.32	9.39	1	.002	2.67
		District Size	1.07	.94	1.28	1	.258	2.91
		Mentor			3.46	3	.325	
		Mentor(Supt in district)	3.37	1.90	3.17	1	.075	29.17
		Mentor(Supt out of district)	-19.41	15706.88	.00	1	.999	.00
		Mentor(not a Supt)	2.02	1.56	1.67	1	.196	7.54
		Constant	-22.79	7.93	8.26	1	.004	.00
Male	Step 1 ^a	Volition	.69	.18	14.57	1	.000	1.99
		District Size	.75	.51	2.15	1	.143	2.11
		Mentor			2.39	3	.496	
		Mentor(Supt in district)	1.88	1.26	2.20	1	.138	6.53
		Mentor(Supt out of district)	-19.49	25038.53	.00	1	.999	.00
		Mentor(not a Supt)	-.02	1.26	.00	1	.991	.99
		Constant	-14.69	4.26	11.90	1	.001	.00

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Volition, District Size, and Mentor.

Table 2 is the final result of the logistic regression for females and males' willingness to apply for the superintendency. The volition, mentorship, and district size variables contribute to the predictive model. The volition and district size did add to the predictive model, but varied less across gender than mentorship. The mentor variable reveals that a mentor who is a superintendent from another district does not impact the willingness to move up for either gender. A mentor who is not a superintendent has some influence on both genders.

However, the impact is 7.5 times larger for females compared to males. The most influential type of mentor in this predictive model is a superintendent within the assistant superintendent's district. Yet again the power of this type of mentor is much larger for females; in fact they are 29 times more likely to increase the willingness for advancement. The males are affected by this mentor-type, but are only 6.5 times more likely to increase their willingness for advancement.

Limitation and Delimitations

The geographic location of the participants within this study from Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties in New York are regarded as relatively affluent in comparison to other regions thus somewhat a limitation.

Discussion and Implications

This study examined the personal and professional variables, including volition, gender, marital status, age, district type, district needs' level, district size, and the presence of a mentor, that contribute to an assistant superintendent's willingness to pursue the position of superintendent. It shows that the motivating factors for both men and women are

similar and include district size and mentor-type. Although the size of the district in which the assistant superintendent is currently assigned contributes the most to the predictive model generated in this study, there is no significant difference between its effect on females and males willingness to pursue the position of superintendent. This study found that regardless of gender, the individual level of volition affects both female or male assistant superintendents' professional perseverance and level of aspiration.

Volition and investment of mentorship to sponsorship support an idea of cultural fit within district leadership positions. Whereas, individual volition is promoted by feeling that the goal to the top seat is attainable and deserving by either one's own volition or mentorship support.

The results uncover the importance of close proximity of support to increase volition. Moorosi (2010) indicated that professional and family support positively impacted overall job satisfaction of South African female principals. A mentor or sponsor within the district would play a critical role in supporting and increasing the volition of female assistant superintendents to aspire for that top seat.

The type of mentorship is a significantly stronger indicator for women who have mentors within their school district. This finding supports MacTavish (2010) who found that female superintendents reported mentors and sponsors were most often superintendents from within their district. Hunter (2012) does not delineate the difference between a mentor and a sponsor. However, it is inferred that these mentors within their school district were actually sponsors who helped increase assistant

superintendents' willingness to become a superintendent, whereas, women who have mentors outside of the district did not have the same drive to move forward to the top position. Mentors outside of the district may not have the same access to influential people in the organization to provide anticipatory socialization, as well as navigate the political landscape of particular school districts.

This is an important observation because it describes how the perceived glass ceiling may actually be a glass maze and without sponsorship, women may become frustrated with navigating what Ottino (2009) describes as an *old boys' network*. A formal support system, well-developed networks and mentor/sponsor, are critical to undertake the necessary steps to move into the position of superintendent.

The absence of a mentor impedes advancement as shown in research conducted by Shore *et al.* (2009) and Weatherly (2011). Women who have mentors within the school district are 29 times more likely to pursue the role of superintendent, while males are 6.5 times more likely. This finding echoes Shakeshaft's (1979, 2011) work, which indicated that support and encouragement is necessary for women to move toward the position of superintendent.

Boards of education, superintendents, and other stakeholders should endorse formal mentorship programs in the district, as this might promote the idea of cultural fit as conceptualized by Hewlett *et al.* (2012) who indicated sponsorship and development of pipelines are important when preparing aspiring superintendents for the role. Sponsorship can assist aspiring superintendents with developing

leadership practices conducive to the growth and development of all members in the organization.

These normalized practices shape the organizational culture in that females aspiring to become a superintendent have more opportunities to enter the pipeline in the district size they choose. For this to occur, there has to be a shift in decision makers thinking regarding the knowledge, skills, and professional disposition that females contribute to the organization as well.

Appreciating the accomplishments and merit in performance requires viewing the accomplishments through a lens not rooted in stereotypical perception of those in the pipeline that were in the teaching profession (Kayes, 2006). That is, if there is an assumption, due to implicit and association bias (Rooth, 2010), whether the denial of access to the position is intentional or unintentional, the outcome is still the same: females are not in the role of superintendent to the same degree as their male contemporaries even though they make up the majority of the teaching profession.

There is a chance of a missed opportunity to recognize these pedagogical practices can inform leadership practices that focus on doing what is in the best interest of student engagement and learning, which are critical elements in the schooling process. Reducing and ultimately eliminating the navigation of the glass maze might provide a straight ascension to the position of superintendent, particularly for females with the volition to take on the role of superintendent, as the removal of structural barriers can provide a clear pathway for

qualified candidates and have more females in the pipeline.

Another consideration regarding the elimination of structural barriers is the recruiting firm. In order for traditionally disenfranchised groups to have an opportunity to participate in the interview process for the position, those providing the pool of qualified candidates to school boards of education must recognize the formal qualification, as well as appreciate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions females bring to the organization.

If the perception is contextualized in deficit thinking regarding females, including recruiters who share group membership, the opportunity for females to advance is stagnated. Thus, recruiters should have training that target implicit and association bias to become aware of what cultural fit in an organization should include—various lived experiences that inform leadership practices (Cubik, 2013).

Hewlett et al. (2010) indicated that without sponsorship and advocacy, qualified women would not have the support, opportunity, nor be inspired to advance. Many women have to deal with the precarious situation of being assertive and aggressive to find the right sponsor. In order to ascend to a top leadership position they cannot sit around and wait for acknowledgement of a job well-done (Hewlett et al., 2010). This concurs with Oritz's (1980) finding that females' silence about their aspirations and accomplishments perpetuated limited opportunities.

The educational landscape is an environment that requires leaders to be proactive and move forward with intention

toward student's educational attainment, as they should enter the workforce with the knowledge and skills required to become contributing members of the complete social structure. Those wishing to become superintendent to assist students in the process through their leadership, especially women, must position themselves in a way that garners sponsorship to expedite their journey through the glass maze of top-level leadership in order to acquire the position.

To some degree, what Growe and Montgomery (1999) discussed in the context of the gender gap, reasons why women have not dominated leadership positions in the field of education, should be a consideration when developing mentor and sponsorship programming.

Becoming aware of these nuanced differences might encourage more females to choose the position of superintendent by recognizing their contribution to the role of superintendent has value. Specifically, they noted the way women use power to empower others might be perceived by others as not desiring power for themselves. Awareness of this perception might allow women to leverage this aspect of a transformational leadership practice, empowerment, in ways that produce a more favorable outcome for them—securing the position of superintendent.

Suggestions for future studies are to investigate whom the mentors are within the school district and determine their influence, organizational knowledge, and gender. The exploration of the process to form successful mentor relationships should occur. Hewlett *et al.* (2010) indicated that sponsorship is more important than mentorship. Further research

should include examining the following: gaining access to sponsors in a school district; reasons for the sponsorship; and how gender affects potential decisions to sponsor a woman or man within the school district. An exploration of the confluence of issues in

networking, mentorship, and sponsorship, as well as their complex synergistic effects, will provide insight into changing deeply held tenets and propel women aspirants through the glass maze to the top leadership position.

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