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## Content Analysis of Dissertations on Women Superintendents from 2017-2020

Pauline M. Sampson  
SFA, sampsonp@sfasu.edu

Te'yana Ridyolph  
SFA, teyana212@gmail.com

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## Content Analysis of Dissertations on Women Superintendents from 2017-2020

### Cover Page Footnote

Women superintendents have increased in number of positions held in the United States, but they are still underrepresented in the superintendent role. Women continue to be studied in their representation in the superintendent role. In this study, a content analysis was conducted of 51 U.S. dissertations relating to women superintendents located in the ProQuest database for the years of 2017 – 2020. Five major themes mentioned in a range of 31 to 40 dissertations or (60% to 80%) were discovered: gender inequality, characteristics of women superintendents, career pathways, history of women superintendents, and the role of superintendent. Common themes voiced in 21 to 29 dissertations (40% to 59%) were clustered into ten categories of leadership styles of women, low numbers of women superintendents, school board discrimination, cultural/society expectations, power, barriers of family needs, overcoming barriers, racial discrimination, instructional leadership and stereotyping. Twenty-two themes were included in 10-20 dissertations (20% to 39%) and considered by the researchers as minor themes.

## **Introduction**

Superintendents of U.S. school districts are the chief executive officers, and the majority of school superintendents remain predominately male. There has been an increase in the number of women superintendents in the United States with 13% identified in 2000 (Glass, 2000) to 24% in 2014 (Kowalski et al., 2011). Due to the continued underrepresentation of women superintendents, the researchers chose to expand their previous research and examine current dissertations from 2017 to 2020 pertaining to women superintendents. This study is still important because there remains gender inequity in the superintendent position.

The researchers conducted three previous studies on women superintendent dissertations from 2014-2016. The first study examined the authors publishing on the topic of women superintendents by researching dissertation reference lists (Gresham & Sampson, 2017). The major authors cited in the 43 dissertations were: Björk, Brunner, Glass, Grogan, Kowalski, Shakeshaft, Skrla, and Tallerico (Gresham & Sampson, 2017). The identification of major themes from the first study was from the headings in the literature reviews of the 43 dissertations. The major themes were women/female, superintendents, leadership, school districts, and men/male (Gresham & Sampson, 2017). The second study of 43 dissertations examined whether major authors on women superintendents were still researching that area and if there were new authors publishing in the area of women superintendents. It was determined that five of the major authors no longer have publications on women superintendents (Gresham & Sampson, 2019). Three authors, Grogan, Kowalski, and Shakeshaft continued to have publications up to 2016. The third study conducted by Gresham and Sampson was an in-depth analysis of the literature reviews of 43 dissertations on women superintendents between 2014-2016. The results showed nine major themes as low numbers of women superintendents, gender inequality, history of women superintendents, support systems, career pathways, characteristics of women superintendents, leadership styles, barriers, and school board discrimination (Gresham & Sampson, 2017).

This current study was a continuance of the third study with an update of the years 2017-2020 to determine if the themes displayed on women superintendents had changed in the last four years. Content analysis methodology was again employed to deeply review literature review chapters to ascertain areas that warrant further investigation in the future. Since women superintendent numbers still remain low, this topic continues to be important for study. The research question for this study was: What were the major themes pertaining to women superintendents included in the literature review sections of 2017 – 2020 U.S. dissertations?

## **Literature Review**

The literature review for this current study was based on themes identified from the researchers' third study. The major themes were the number of women superintendents, gender inequality, history of women superintendents, support systems, and career pathways to the superintendency. Current literature revealed that the first theme, numbers of women superintendents, indicated a small change in the numbers of women superintendents in the United States as revealed by Björk., Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno in 2014. Björk et al., (2014) determined that approximately 24% of the U.S. superintendents are women. A 2020 AASA study shared that there has been an increase to 27% of the U.S. superintendents being women; however, that is still low considering that over 75% of the educators in schools are women (Perry, 2020; Ramaswamy, 2020). Secondly, current literature connected to gender inequity showed why there might be fewer women as superintendents.

### *Gender inequity*

Research revealed that gender inequity was found in many promotions and leadership roles including the school district superintendent position (McLean et al., 2016). Leadership positions in many businesses have similar inequities for women and the inequities included obtaining leadership positions, unequal pay, and treatment from others (Acker, 2006). Further, it was discovered that the term “gender bias” was often used to describe gender inequity. Whitaker (2006) studied nine aspiring women superintendents who had experienced gender bias. The women indicated that there was a lack of mentorship but also power networks that kept them out of the advancement opportunities. Another study of 35 California women superintendents found similar results to Whitaker (Bañuelos, 2008). The women superintendents in Bañuelos’ study shared that gender bias was revealed from disrespect and their authority challenged. Another area of gender inequity was noticed in the search and hiring procedures for superintendents (Tallerico, 1992; Munoz, 2014; Skrla, Reyes & Scheurich, 2000). However there has been some mixed results on inequity for the hiring practices. Wiggins and Coggins (2001) found that school boards did not display bias for 15 Oklahoma school districts. Next, a theme used to review current literature was the history of women superintendents.

### *History of Women Superintendents*

A few authors in current literature described the role of superintendent starting with a prominent figure in the history of women superintendents, Ella Flagg, who was a Chicago superintendent (Smith, 1979). Other authors shared that when the United States had county schools, the majority were led by women. However, after World War II, servicemen returned to the U.S. in need of jobs. Additionally, professional organizations led by men worked hard to make the superintendent position a certification position requiring more advanced college education which led to more domination of males in the superintendent position. So, after World War II, the women superintendents were pushed out of the role (Blount, 1998) and have never reached equal representation since that time. Literature review revealed that one reason why women numbers in the role of superintendent remain low is their chosen career path.

### *Career Paths*

Career paths leading to the superintendent position are often described as different between men and women. A review of literature revealed that the majority of male superintendents were teachers and high school principals prior to the superintendency, while women spent more time as elementary teachers, elementary principals, and central office administrations prior to their superintendent positions (Davis & Bower, 2019). Therefore, women enter the superintendent role at an older age (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Review of current literature showed that career pathways are different for women but support systems differ for women and men also.

### *Support Systems for Women Superintendents*

Research indicated that support systems for aspiring women superintendents consisted of them reaching out to male superintendents to gain support and assistance (Superville, 2017). Another reason aspiring women chose male mentors is that some researchers found that women did not support other women in the advancement of leadership roles (Sampson, et al., 2015). Fewer women helping other women to aspire to or attain the top leadership role in the school system came from a sense of competitiveness (Sampson, et al., 2015). However, there is some research that shows women are starting to use support systems of networking by joining professional organizations.

Women network in a different fashion than men and for different reasons than men (Muñoz et al., 2014). Women network for social reasons of support and friendship (Peters, 2010), while men show a tendency to use networking as a means to advance their careers (Singh et al., 2006). Higginbottom and Robinson (2019) shared that there are fewer women superintendents which led to fewer potential mentors who could help aspiring women leaders with ways to balance their career and life. Further, women may not even seek out mentoring and network systems (Searby & Tripses, 2006; Whitaker, 2006). Women leaders shared that their desire to be mentors was based on wanting to set a good example (Allred, et al., 2017). One study showed that 72% of women superintendents had served as a mentor because they saw a decrease in mentoring or had only had a passive relationship in their own mentorship (Robinson, et al., 2017). Additionally, women superintendents mentored as a way to help teachers and others aspire to leadership roles (Higginbottom & Robinson, 2019; Wiley, et al., 2017)). Higginbottom and Robinson (2019) found that women superintendents often found their support from their family, staff, and community members. Further research is needed in mentorship and supports for aspiring women leaders (Allred, et al., 2017).

#### *Content Analysis*

The methodology of content analysis has been used by many researchers to analyze data in dissertations and other texts as it is a means to examine trends and patterns in documents (Knippendorf, 2004; Leary, 2007). Some examples of content analysis in review of dissertations was used in social work (Horton & Hawkins, 2010), nursing (Metz, 2014), cooperative learning (Dirliki, et al., 2016), context (Atmaca, 2016) and educational administration (Weber, 1990). Content analysis of dissertation documents is the method chosen to reveal the current state of research in the area of women superintendents, specifically the researchers chose to analyze the literature review chapters of 2017-2020 dissertations because these chapters should reveal the most current research available in the area of women superintendents.

#### **Methodology**

The current study of 51 dissertations from 2017-2020 was an expanded study similar to the third study of dissertations from 2014-2016. This study also used content analysis which is a form of qualitative research with textual data (Knippendorf, 2004; Leary, 2007). It uses descriptions and interpretations of the data resulting in the identification of themes that emerged from the examination. The textual data was from the literature review chapter of dissertations on the topic of women superintendents. The dissertations were found from a search through ProQuest, a theses and dissertation database, using the terms “women superintendents and female superintendents”. There were 1000 abstracts identified from the search. The abstracts were read to determine if the research topic was only related to U.S. women superintendents. Fifty-one dissertations met the researchers’ criteria. All 51 dissertations’ literature reviews chapters were downloaded and read several times to identify the themes. The researchers coded the textual data from the analysis and identified themes that related to the previous study conducted by the researchers for dissertations on women superintendents from 2014 to 2016. The themes were then categorized with examples of statements that led to the categorization. Two different researchers read the documents to determine the themes. The researchers independently coded the text and then discussed together the categories for the statements found in the literature reviews.

## Findings/Results

The research question for this content analysis on 51 dissertations was: What were the major themes on women superintendents from the literature review chapters of 2017 – 2020 U.S. dissertations? The 51 women superintendent dissertations obtained from the ProQuest database were downloaded, read, and analyzed for themes. The identified themes were marked on a table counting each theme only one time for each dissertation, even if there were multiple sentences related to that theme. Table 1 indicates the frequency and percentage of themes displayed. The themes were then tabulated and major themes, common themes and minor themes were identified. Major themes were themes identified in 60-80% of dissertations, common themes were identified in 40-59% of dissertations, and minor themes were next determined by 20-39% of dissertations

**Table 1**

*Number and percentages of themes of literature reviews*

Theme	Number of times the theme was displayed	Percentage the theme was displayed
Gender inequity	40	78
Characteristics of women superintendents	36	71
Career pathways to the superintendency	34	67
History pertaining to women superintendents	33	65
Role of the superintendent	31	61
Leadership styles of women	29	57
Low numbers of women superintendents	27	53
School board discrimination	25	49
Culture and society expectations	22	43
Power	22	43
Barrier-family	21	41
Overcoming barriers	21	41
Racial discrimination	21	41
Instructional leadership	21	41
Stereotyping	21	41

Barrier – self-imposed	20	39
Diversity	20	39
Balancing family and work	19	37
Politics	19	37
Relationship building	17	33
Good ol’ boy practice	17	33
Search procedures to fill the job of superintendent	16	31
Glass ceiling	15	29
Gatekeepers blocking women	15	29
Barrier – mobility	14	27
Preparing for the role of superintendent	13	25
Research need in the area of women superintendents	13	25
Role conflict for women superintendents	13	25
Preparation programs for the superintendency	12	24
Stress of the job	12	24
Urban districts	12	24
Women superintendents helping other women	11	22
Self-awareness	11	22
Age entering the superintendency	10	20
Resiliency of women superintendents	10	20
Working conditions of the superintendent	10	20

Decision making willingness

10

20

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### Major Themes

Analysis of the major themes, were identified as those themes that appeared in 30 to 40 dissertations. The first major theme identified in 78% of dissertations was gender inequity (n=40), showing discrimination and different treatment due to gender. Some examples of these themes in the dissertations were the unequal treatment of women in comparison to their male counterparts, hinderances to the accessibility of leadership positions for women, male school boards seeking to hire male leaders, the education profession largely represented by women yet still showing large disparity in women leaders. Several references shared the larger representation of women in the teaching field; however, there was a large representation of males in the education administrative fields (Bowles, 2013; Superville, 2017; USDOE, 2016; Young, 2005). Other researchers shared in the literature review showed that men were four times more likely than women to hold the superintendent position (Robinson, et al., 2017). Other literature reviews highlighted that gender inequity was not just in the United States, but was seen in many societies and nations (Sharma, 2015).

The second major theme was the characteristics of women superintendents which was identified in 71% of dissertations (n=36). Characteristics of women superintendents included leadership style and the emotional nature of women such as caring and nurturing. A representative statement of this caring was noted, “female principals and superintendents are characterized as employing a leadership style that incorporates an ethic of care; that values relationships, inclusion, and connectedness; and that empowers others to work toward common goals in a collaborative and participatory approach” (Kamler, Shakeshaft, & Brunner, 1999; Davis, 2010; Edgehouse, 2008; Wickham, 2007, as cited in Morilo, 2017 p, 21). A similar statement was “The researchers found that “encouraging the heart” was the exemplary leadership practice with the most significant difference between women and men.” Additionally, this was quoted in dissertations, “Shakeshaft (as cited in Armistead, 2017, p. 20) wrote of the feminine culture that women create in schools, finding that morale is higher among students and staff, as are their participation levels, and that women’s unique focus on performing the job to build collaboration within the school organizational structures tended to elevate student achievement.”

Another characteristic of women superintendent was their age and ethnicity. A sample of this was, “In the only large-scale, national study on female educational leaders, Brunner and Grogan’s (2007) *Women Leading Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*, the most common personal demographics of female superintendents were identified. Brunner and Grogan’s (2007) study found that 93% of female superintendents in the United States were Caucasian, (70%) less than 55 years old, married (76%) and had children. Other dissertations had statements such as, the modal age for the 2015 survey respondents was 50-59 years 74 leading Finnan et al. (2015) to suggest superintendents are an aging population. Glass and Franceschini (2007) suggested the increase in the mean age of superintendents could be related to time spent in central office positions and the increasing number of females entering administration later in their careers (p. 5). Typically, female survey respondents have been, on average, older than male survey respondents (as cited in Foster, 2018, pp. 73-74).

The third major theme was career pathways to the superintendent position identified in 67% of the dissertations (n=34). The dissertations discussed career pathways with statements such as “The most prevalent position included in the career pathway to the superintendency is the high school principal and few women hold this position” and “non-traditional career pathway



may be chosen due to reasons such as mobility, support, and consideration of a spouse” (as cited in Steeber, 2019, p. 34). The career pathways for women superintendents was revealed from studies that showed around 75 percent of elementary classroom teachers are women today. Before serving as a central office supervisor or superintendent, nearly 75 percent of superintendents did not teach at the elementary level. According to AASA research, of the 297 female superintendents, 130 were former elementary teachers. Therefore, more than half came from a secondary background where a considerable number are male teachers (Glass, 2000). Another representative statement in the literature review was that women superintendents had more experience in curriculum and instruction than male superintendents (Davis & Bower, 2019; Pruitt, 2015). One study cited in the literature review indicated that about half of the women were in a central office position prior to obtaining a superintendent position (Montz, 2004). Further, illustration for this theme was reported from an AASA study finding that women superintendents had served in central office positions at a larger rate than the male superintendents. Additionally, Murphy (2009) found that the career path may have been a barrier for women to obtain a superintendent position because it did not follow the traditional path of the men. Many male superintendents obtained their position after being a high school principal. Lastly, a common statement was, “Several studies found that female superintendents had spent significantly more time as a classroom teacher compared to male superintendents (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, Björk, & Brunner 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989 as cited in Morillo, 2017, p. 28).

The fourth major theme was the history pertaining to women superintendents. This theme was identified in 65% of the dissertations (n=33). The history of women superintendents is described in the dissertations by statements related to the beginning of the superintendent positions, such as “In the early 1600s, schools in America began with itinerant school masters who brought their books to private homes to teach a few students for a certain period of time (Sharp & Walter, 2004, as cited in Armistead, 2017, p. 11). Others discussed, “the position of a school district superintendent was established in the mid-1800s, with 13 larger urban districts hiring an individual for this role. The role of school-district superintendents in the United States has evolved since the introduction of the position during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014 as cited in Steeber, 2019, p. 9). Many dissertations discussed the first superintendents such as “On June 9, 1837, Buffalo, New York, appointed a superintendent, with Louisville, Kentucky, the next month, doing the same” (Sharp & Walter, 2004, as cited in Armistead, p. 12) and “the late 1830s showcased the first usage of the term superintendent with primary school superintendent and appointments showed up in Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky” (Kowalski et al., 2011, as cited in Brunner, 2018, p.43). As well as dissertations citing the first woman superintendent, “Ella Flagg Young became the first female superintendent when she assumed the superintendency of Chicago Public Schools in 1909. At that time, she declared, “Women are destined to rule the schools of every city” (Blount, 1998, p. 1). Her statement, however, has not translated into the reality of public school administration.” (as cited in Morillo, 2017, p. 17)

The fifth major theme was the role of the superintendents. This theme appeared in 61% of the dissertations (n=31). The literature reviews touched on this topic with statements like, “Over the years, the role of the superintendent has increasingly become more complicated” (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011, as cited in Steeber, 2019, p. 9) and “the success of a school district is dependent upon stable and consistent leadership provided by the superintendent as reported by the American Association of School Administrators” (AASA, 2018). Another example was, “The role of the superintendent is complex, challenging, rarely understood” (Glass &

Franceschini, 2007, as cited in Torres, 2018, p. 24). Additionally, a representative statement was, “School superintendents work in an educational environment and are charged with delivering leadership that drives instructional programs in dynamic system” (Bjork, 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2006) “while communicating effectively and responding appropriately to the social and political pressures of a diverse group of stakeholders” (Rohland, 2002). Another description of this theme was that the role of the superintendent was often challenging because of financial issues, legal issues and competing community interests. Some dissertations, showcased the variety in the superintendent roles with descriptions, “as executive educators, the superintendents’ role encompasses a myriad of responsibilities, including that of leader and manager within their district. Superintendents support instructional leadership, fiscal management, community relations, board relations, personnel management, and operations management (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, as cited in Torres, 2018, p. 24). Further, the dissertations described the changes in the role of the superintendent with statements like, “In recent years, the role of the superintendent has shifted from the leader’s ability to manage fiscal, physical, and resources to that of visionary” (AASA, 2017, as cited in Torres, 2018, p. 26).

#### Common Themes

Common themes were identified as themes that appeared 40%-59% of the dissertations. The ten common themes were leadership styles of women, low numbers of women superintendents, school board discrimination, culture and society expectations, power, family barriers, overcoming barriers, racial discrimination, instructional leadership and stereotypes.

#### Minor Themes

There were 22 minor themes noted in 20%-39% of the dissertations. Minor themes included: diversity, balancing self-imposed barrier, balancing family and work, politics, relationship building, good ol’ boy practice, search procedures, glass ceiling, stress, gatekeepers blocking women, mobility, preparing for the role of superintendent, research needed on women superintendents, role conflict, preparation programs, urban districts, self-awareness, women helping other women, age entering superintendency, working conditions of the superintendent, and willingness for decision making.

### Conclusion

This study was a follow up from a previous study of 2014-2016 dissertations on women superintendents. The current study examined 51 dissertations on women superintendents from 2017-2020. The dissertations were found on the ProQuest database. Five major themes were identified as gender inequity, characteristics of women superintendents, history of women superintendents, career pathways of women to the superintendent position, and the role of the superintendent. Compared to Gresham and Sampson’s (2017) study where the similar major themes were gender inequity, career pathways, history of women superintendents and characteristics of women superintendents. The current study had one different major theme identified as the role of superintendents.

The major themes related to topics often researched in the field. Gender inequity was displayed the most in 78% of the dissertations and is supported by authors such as Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000), Acker, (2006), Bañuelos (2008), and McClearn, La Guardia, Nelson, and Richards (2016). Bruckmuller and Braun (2020) discussed that gender inequality is often referred to women’s disadvantages and not men’s advantages. They further shared that there are different frameworks for inequality such as the “underrepresentation of women vs overrepresentation of men” or “glass ceiling/labyrinth vs. old boys’ club (Bruckmuller & Braun,

2020). Other researchers presented work on the organizational level and reasoned that continued sustaining of inequality was due to “long work hours and the inescapability of women’s stalled advancement” along with the family and work concerns that impact the inequality (Padavic, et al., 2020). Similarly, Radey and Schelbe (2020) examined women’s reactions and responses that could lead to the structural inequality at work. They posited that men made the initiative more frequently for leadership as an entitlement, while women avoided some of that initiative because of experiences and avoidance because of their reservations (Radey & Schelbe, 2020). The experiences in the workplace dictated some of the inequality from past experiences. Clark (2020) identified the inequality as due to stereotypes, which was another theme in our findings, but also could have been added to inequity. Clark (2020) shared that there continues to be organizations that are gender-type of works that then leads to norms that dominate for that organization. The concept of gendered work is not a good example for the education field and schools as the majority of the work is held by women except for the top leadership position. Other researchers examined the inequality from leadership behaviors (Wolfram, et al., 2020). The examination of leadership behaviors might fit with characteristics, but in the context of inequity it is examined from the congruence of roles and social expectations between women and men in leadership roles.

The second major theme in this current study was characteristics of women superintendents. There is very little research beyond dissertations on this topic. A Google scholar search for this topic for 2020 only showed dissertations and no new journal articles. The characteristics of women superintendents and how they differ from men was noted in 53% to 71% of the dissertations and researched by Derrington and Sharratt (2009) and Superville (2017). Several researchers discussed the emotional strength of women shown in their leadership as caring, nurturing, and empowering others in a collaborative manner. This characteristic can also be seen with male leaders, but has been identified more frequently for women leaders. The research on demographics of superintendents show increases in the age of superintendents for both women and men. In the past, superintendent characteristics were studied by several authors (Brunner, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Davis, 2012; Edgehouse, 2008; Finnan, et al., 2015; Glass & Franceshini, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1988; Wickham, 2007).

Career pathways differ for men and women (noted in 67% of the dissertations) was supported by many authors. Researchers have showed differences in the career pathways between women and men that led to gaining a superintendent position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Davis & Bower, 2009; Glass, 2000; Montz, 2004; Murphy, 2009; Pruitt, 2015; Shakeshaft, 1989). The more recent emphasis on student achievement and accountability may be an advantage for women leaders who desire to ascend to the superintendent positions because of their previous experiences with curriculum and instruction both at the campus level and central office level. Offermann, Thomas, Lanzo and Smith (2020) posited that a life span approach to leadership would help understand the career paths of women by examining their “achievement orientations, career aspirations, personal and organizational factors, and family choices. Offerman, et al. (2020) shared that early leadership at the college level impacted later leadership achievements. Other researchers examined women entrepreneurs to understand the career paths and determined that women form different career identities from the different career paths (Merluzzi & Burt, 2020). The idea is that we should examine career paths, not from a single line of careers, but rather we should examine career paths from different paths to “allow for women’s variances”. Hartman and Barber (2020) further described self-efficacy and how it affected women’s career aspirations. They found that men had higher career aspirations than women.

Additionally, Hartman and Barber (2020) shared that men and women with high self-efficacy were able to set their own career path; however, that people with lower self-efficacy might need encouragement to advance in their careers, regardless of the career path. Gullo and Sperandio (2020) looked at the career path in one state, sharing that women in leadership roles need to think about whether to pursue advancement within their district or the need to advance outside of their district because of gender bias. Birdwell (2020) referenced the advancement of women in the manufacturing industry and found their career paths were dictated by their use of power. The concept of “power” was another theme for our findings separate from career paths. Birdwell (2020) suggested that women use “expert power, coercive power and referent power when the power holder was male. However, men used networks in addition to the use of expert legitimate and referent power” (Birdwell, 2020, p. 5). The concept of power is included in this section because of the aspects related to career opportunities.

The history of women superintendents continued to be researched (Blount, 1998; Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigo, 2014; Kowalski, et al., 2011; Sharp & Water, 2004). At this point the majority of the content on the history of women superintendents has infrequently examined beyond the chronological aspects. The history is occasionally explored through culture and society differences, and less frequently about the women leaders’ personal choices and aspirations of leadership along with their personal and career preferences over time and with competition throughout history.

The role of the superintendent was a new major theme finding in this current study. This larger frequency might indicate a growing connection to the role of women leadership. Although at this point the majority of the content was not divided between differences in the role for women and men superintendents. The superintendent role was discussed more as a role that had changed over time and with more complexity and larger responsibilities now than from the past for any superintendent. Henrickson (2019) shared that the superintendent role is more multi-faceted and political. Further, Henrickson (2019) found that only about 5% of superintendents were told explicitly their roles when they were hired. Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, and Kowalski (2018) agreed that the role is more multi-faceted but it also has more pressures as there is an increased demand for higher student achievement. This expectation of higher student achievement comes with a higher level and more rigorous academic standards (Bell, 2019). Special interest groups have increased in school communities and superintendents are tasked with the role of school spokesperson on many controversial issues (Björk, et al., 2018). Other demands on the superintendent’s role is based on the increase of social media, lower involvement of parents, and in many places the decrease in student enrollment (Wright & Papa, 2020). The decreased enrollment has led to less resources along with lower funding for education (Bell, 2019). Superintendents now need to lobby more with the legislators to gain more funding of unfunded mandates (Björk, et al., 2018). The role continues to require good management skills of budgets, personnel, facilities, and public relations. However, there is an increased demand for instructional leadership (Björk, et al., 2018). The role of the superintendent does vary depending on the size of the school district. Superintendents in smaller school district handle a large variety of tasks, while superintendents in larger school districts often delegate more of their roles to assistant and deputy superintendents (Björk, et al., 2018, p. 183).

More research is warranted in the field of women superintendents going beyond the major and common themes displayed in the 51 dissertation literature reviews. Themes were very similar across many of the dissertations. Several of the common themes and minor themes could

have been combined and thus may have increased their frequency. For example, if all types of barriers were combined, the total might have been higher. It would have also diluted the variety seen in the types of barriers. Another example is the age of women entering the superintendent position. Age could have been combined with characteristics of women superintendents.

There continues to be areas related to women superintendents that need further study. The career pathways could be studied in more detail with an examination of women's early career experiences and the influences that impacted their career advancement in leadership. A more longitudinal aspect might show differences in women's advancement throughout their careers.

Recently, there are more dissertations written on race and the superintendent. This intersectionality of being a woman of color may also impact the ascension to the superintendent position. Current dissertations have been written on individual experiences of women superintendents, especially for African American women and Hispanic women. There were no dissertations found for Asian women superintendents. This is an area that needs further investigation.

Since there continues to be inequity in women superintendents in the United States, this topic deserves to be further examined and encouraged to be studied by doctoral candidates and others. There are areas of this field that continue to be unexplored. The doctoral studies of women superintendents and aspiring women leaders will hopefully lead to more equitable representation of women in the superintendent position.

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