

DISSERTATION APPROVED BY

3-18-20

Date

Cassandra Caruso-Woolard

Cassandra Caruso-Woolard, Ph.D., Chair

T. Guetterman

Timothy Guetterman, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jennifer Moss Breen

Jennifer Moss Breen, Ph.D., Director

Gail M. Jensen

Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean

EMPOWERING WOMEN TO BECOME SUPERINTENDENTS IN
OKLAHOMA:
A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY

By
DALANA HAWKINS

A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

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Abstract

The problem identified was the great underrepresentation of women as superintendents in Oklahoma. This qualitative dissertation in practice sought to understand the empowerment process experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The constructivist grounded theory research design aligns to the social constructivist worldview of the researcher. The following research question framed critical inquiry interviews: what explains the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? Theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis led to data saturation and the development of a tentative theoretical framework. The tentative theoretical framework, the empowerment process model, is a visual representation of the findings that comprised the following process: 1) contexts: working in education and grit; 2) concepts: building self-efficacy and balancing work and family roles; 3) the causal condition: an encouraging mentor; 4) the central phenomenon: feeling empowered; and 5) the consequences: risk-taking and becoming superintendents. The tentative theoretical framework informed the proposed solution, to recommend a secondary leader internship in a large, public, Oklahoma school district. The proposed solution intends to strategically enhance the empowerment process of women teachers and counselors. The implementation plan of the proposed solution embeds strengths-based, transformational leadership skills potentially improving practices of educational leaders. The conclusion includes implications for practical, future social research, and leadership theory.

Keywords: underrepresentation, women, gender, self-efficacy, mentor, grit, leadership, superintendent, education policy, empowerment

Dedication

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

-Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*

For the women who shared their experiences of embracing their power to lead, and the individuals who encouraged them.

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I embarked on this journey with intentions to learn and improve as a leader. However, I soon realized I would not complete the journey alone. I owe a great amount of gratitude to the many others who have guided me, encouraged me, criticized me, and continued to love me, throughout this struggle and growth.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background

The traditional stereotype of a leader is a white, middle-aged, man (Haslam et al., 2011; Northouse, 2019). However, in the last half-century, women and marginalized groups have increasingly earned leadership positions as top executives of private corporations as well as powerful government appointments, such as Secretary of State and justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. The journey for women to leadership no longer ends at a glass ceiling. Over the last thirty years, the journey has become a labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Page (2017) cited respect for cognitive diversity, integral to innovation and creativity, as necessary skills of leaders for the future of the knowledge economy. The demand for leadership skills attributed to women, such as patience, care, and respect for diversity, has grown in both private and public sectors (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Northouse, 2019). The foundational underpinnings of democracy and public education theoretically promote diversity. However, diversity of leadership in the United States public education system continues to perpetuate the traditional stereotype of a leader, as the number of women in the superintendency has remained far less than the number of men (Glass, 2000; Bollinger & Grady, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Education is an industry dominated by women. In more than 14,000 local education agencies (LEA) in the United States, women were 75 percent of teachers, 52 percent of school principals, and 78 percent of central-office administrators (Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Glass et al, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). However,

27 percent of the superintendents in the United States were women (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Bollinger & Grady, 2018). Although the number of women hired as superintendents in the United States has doubled since the 1990s, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents endures (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Glass, 2000; Superville, 2016).

In midwestern states, the gender gap of men and women superintendents was even greater. Bollinger and Grady (2018) reported Ohio, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and Utah were five to ten percent below the national average of female superintendents. In 2018, 20 percent of all superintendents in Oklahoma were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). Approximately 10 percent of the superintendents employed full-time, or those not partially retired, sharing the position with another individual, or working as a principal and superintendent in a rural district, were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). Therefore, the problem identified was the underrepresentation of women as superintendents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to understand the process of empowerment experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined empowerment as the promotion of self-actualization. The research questions and sub-questions framed data collection and constant comparative analysis.

Research Questions

This qualitative, constructivist grounded theory dissertation in practice explored the experiences of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The findings led to the development of a tentative, theoretical framework, or process model, for the following research question and sub-questions: what explains the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? What motivations (thoughts and feelings) explain the empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? What actions explain the empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? The research question and sub-questions aligned to the aim of the study.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a tentative, theoretical framework of the empowerment process experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The constructivist grounded theory research design presented flexibility to uncover embedded networks, situations, and relationships, visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity, by exploring participant experiences (Charmaz, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Charmaz (2014) proposed a process model was a visual representation of the contexts, concepts, causal conditions, central phenomenon, and consequences that emerged throughout data collection and analysis.

Definition of Relevant Terms

The following terms were used in this qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study to understand the empowerment process of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The terms were intended to clarify concepts related to the empowerment process described by the women. The contexts of the terms used in the study were included.

Board of education: a group of individuals (generally four to six) elected by constituents who live in the geographical region served by the school district who control the educational system (United States Department of Education, 2019).

Contexts: in grounded theory research, the set of conditions (social, political, professional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) within which the concepts occur (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Consequences: positive, negative, or neutral outcomes of thoughts, feelings, or actions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Constructivist Grounded Theory: a less structured approach to grounded theory research that incorporates the researcher's views; uncovers experiences with embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships; and makes visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity (Charmaz, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Empowerment: to promote the self-actualization of women who aspire to become a superintendent (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Local Education Agency (LEA): a school district that includes multiple school sites and led by a superintendent (United States Department of Education, 2019).

Mentor: A person with power or authority who intentionally supports improvement and professional growth of a follower (Johnson & Smith, 2016).

Motivation: the desire, thoughts (cognitive processes), feelings, intentions, aspirations, and inspirations (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Process model: a visual model representing the thoughts, feelings, actions, contexts, and consequences of the women's experiences of empowerment to apply for a superintendent position in Oklahoma (Charmaz, 2014).

Rural: A small town in Oklahoma with a population less than 20,000 and more than a two-hour drive from a large city (United States Department of Education, 2019).

School district: an area of a city or county that includes multiple school sites under the same administration; may be urban, an area of a larger city or one large city, or rural, multiple school sites in one small town. A school district serves all students who live in the defined geographical area (United States Department of Education, 2019).

Superintendent: a leader of a school district hired by a board of education or city management council or committee (United States Department of Education, 2019).

Theory: a plausible statement or statements that provide an explanation of the phenomena of the empowerment process of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma, derived from complex, multiple realities of participants (Charmaz, 2014).

Urban: A metropolitan area with a population over 20,000 people within a two-hour drive to a large city (United States Department of Education, 2019).

The terms above clarify the definition and context of their use in the proposed study. The terms were applied in relation to the dissertation in practice because some terms may be used in a different context in other studies.

Methodology Overview

Social constructivists seek to gain a better understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998). As a woman who has worked in education for 15 years, I desired a deeper understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. Mills et al. (2006), described the constructivist grounded theory research design as a qualitative method of research used to explore the rich, complex realities of individual experiences. Therefore, the qualitative, constructivist grounded theory research design was most appropriate to explore the experiences of the empowerment process for women who became superintendents in Oklahoma.

Table 1

Steps in the Research Design Based on Charmaz's (2014) Constructivist Grounded Theory

Practiced memoing, reflexivity, and methodological self-consciousness in each step below.

<u>Step</u>	<u>Research action</u>
One:	Developed a topic and research questions.
Two:	Recruited and selected participants. Emailed invitation and consent form. Scheduled web-conference interview.
Three:	Data collection Conducted web-conference interview with each participant. Applied constant comparative method throughout steps three and four.
Four:	Initial coding, simultaneously conducted during data collection and analysis. Examined data during collection for codes and categories within the data or from new data. Theoretical sampling throughout continued data collection and analysis
Five:	Focused coding and categorization Considered questions raised from incomplete understandings of codes and categories and developed the descriptions of emerging categories from within the data or from new data. Determined saturation during focused coding and categorization. Conducted follow-up interviews as needed.
Six:	Developed the tentative, theoretical framework, the empowerment process model.
Seven:	Wrote the findings, updated the literature review, and wrote the findings and conclusion.

The constructivist grounded theory is a qualitative, inductive approach of social science research that began with post-positivist roots (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz developed the constructivist grounded theory as an approach that provided flexibility and structure to qualitative research (see Table 1). My personal bias, as an experienced woman educator, was inherent in data collection and analysis of the constructivist grounded theory dissertation in practice study (Babbie, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Delimitations, Limitations, and Personal Bias

Roberts (2010) described delimitations as factors that affect the study within the control of the researcher. Roberts described limitations as factors that affect a study not within the researcher's control. The constructivist grounded theory emphasized collaboration between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, the disclosure of delimitations, limitations, and personal bias was necessary to describe restrictions and relationships that may influence this dissertation in practice study.

Delimitations

I invited current women superintendents in Oklahoma to participate in this dissertation in practice study. The participants have experienced the process of empowerment to become a superintendent. However, I did not invite the following: 1) women who were qualified, but decided not to apply for superintendent positions; nor 2) women who were in the process of applying and interviewing for superintendent positions, not yet hired. Therefore, the scope of the dissertation in practice study was bound to the experiences of women who have become superintendents in Oklahoma. Further research of the experiences of women who chose not to become a superintendent,

or have applied but not hired, may contribute to an expanded understanding of the empowerment process.

Limitations

The Oklahoma State Department of Education employment database (2018) facilitated the identification and invitation of more than half of the women superintendents in Oklahoma. However, successfully enlisting the women superintendents to participate was a limitation. Two potential participants scheduled interviews, but canceled last minute due to unexpected events. The erratic demands of the superintendency constricted participation. I requested the assistance of three gatekeepers, to encourage participants to prioritize the interview in scheduling. Although the experiences shared were multiple and complex, a larger sample may have contributed to an expanded collection and analysis of heterogeneous data.

Personal Bias of the Researcher

My personal bias was my experience as a woman who has worked in public education more than 15 years. I was a high school social studies teacher, a middle school principal, a high school assistant principal, and an instructor for a regional university. As I considered the future of my career, I developed a desire to explore the experiences of the empowerment process of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. I did not feel I was ready to lead a school district and I was unsure of the next step. With these considerations in mind, the focus of my research, exploring the experiences of women superintendents in Oklahoma, developed. Creswell (2013) suggested practicing reflexivity to reduce the subjective influence of personal bias. My reflexive practices

resolved from my current reality, as a woman who has reached a critical phase in decision-making related to career ascension in educational leadership.

Reflections of the Scholar-Practitioner

I have been fortunate to work as an assistant principal in a large, public school throughout most of the Ed D program. My job has provided me opportunities to apply and practice leadership theory such as characteristics of servant, authentic, transactional, and transformational leadership styles. Within the last month, the high school principal of the school in which I work has taken another job and will not return next year. The director of human resources position has opened in a nearby public-school district. I have applied for both positions because I feel ready, or empowered, to take the risk.

Reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness throughout data collection and analysis afforded me opportunities to consider my own abilities, thoughts, feelings, and strengths, identified in the Gallop (2020) survey at the beginning of the doctorate journey. My strengths were deliberate, responsibility, context, relator, and command. I have applied learned content to my practice as a leader, to enhance my strengths as well as improve my abilities to collaborate with and compliment others' strengths. I listen more attentively; I collect and analyze data more effectively; I am more resourceful; and I communicate more clearly in writing and speaking.

As I reflect on the dissertation in practice study, I considered the findings of the study and the research of gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment. The high school principal position most often led to an individual, primarily males, becoming a superintendent (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Bollinger & Grady, 2018). Women became superintendents

following experience as a district assistant superintendent (Davis & Bowers, 2019; Farmer, 2007). It may be ironic that I have recently applied for a high school principal position and an assistant superintendent position. I prefer the high school principal position, primarily due to my experience and career focus, which is contrary to the path most often taken by women to the superintendency, as shown in the findings of this dissertation in practice study as well as scholarly research (Davis & Bowers, 2019; Farmer, 2007). If hired, I would be the fourteenth principal of the large, public school, and the second who was a woman. However, as I have learned in the process of this dissertation in practice study, societal expectations of communal and agentic characteristics, gender stereotypes, and gender bias of leaders will play a role in the hiring decision of the school board and district leaders. At this juncture, I remind myself whether I am the principal, the human resource director, or I continue to serve as an assistant principal, I have improved my practice as a leader.

The study of the empowerment process of women superintendents in Oklahoma was important for several reasons. First, this dissertation in practice study may contribute to scholarly research of the intersectionality of gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment. Many qualitative studies of the experiences of women superintendents were phenomenological or narrative research designs, grounded in theoretical frameworks of social justice, critical race, or feminism (Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Davis & Bowers, 2019; Glass, 2000; Kelsey et al., 2014; Sampson, 2018). Few qualitative studies of women superintendents explored the lived-experiences of career ascension, scrutinized through

the conceptual lenses of gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment.

Second, this dissertation in practice study contributed to the few constructivist grounded theory studies of the empowerment process of women superintendents in Oklahoma. The tentative, theoretical framework may lead to further research of empowerment, as a process rather than a cognitive state of an individual. Previous empowerment studies by Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined empowerment as a psychological state or promotion of self-actualization. Continued research of the contexts, concepts, causal conditions, and consequences presented in the findings of this study may lead to future research and contribution to scholarly literature related to empowerment, motivation, leadership theory, and positive psychology.

Finally, my role and responsibility as a leader was to embed practical, strength-based, transformational leadership characteristics throughout the implementation plan of the proposed solution to: 1) to apply the findings, as a current educational leader in an Oklahoma public school, to enhance the empowerment process of women educators; and 2) to propose a strategic framework for educational administrators of a large, public, Oklahoma school district to practice characteristics of strengths-based, transformational leadership. These practical applications suggest change for the greater good in the potential to empower more women educators to become superintendents by providing strategic opportunities aligned to the results and scholarly literature of this dissertation in practice study.

Summary

The problem presented was the underrepresentation of women as superintendents in Oklahoma (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Glass, 2000; Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to understand the process of empowerment experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The following research question framed the dissertation in practice study: what explains the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? The aim of this constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a tentative, theoretical framework of the empowerment process experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. I defined key terms used in the study for clarification and context.

The methodology of the dissertation in practice was qualitative, constructivist grounded theory. The constructivist grounded theory acknowledged my subjective role and required thorough reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2008; 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I described delimitations, limitations, and personal bias to clarify quality, scope, and reflexivity.

I provided a reflection of my journey through the Ed D program, the relationship of my journey to my future, and the practical application of the skills I have learned. I described the significance of the dissertation in practice study to existing scholarly literature. I concluded the reflection with my role and responsibility as a leader. These duties emerged throughout the dissertation in practice study and a duality developed: 1)

to enhance the empowerment of women to become superintendents, and 2) improve leadership practices of a large, public, Oklahoma school district.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to understand the process of empowerment experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. I framed data collection and analysis in the research question: what explains the empowerment process of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? I scrutinized the data through the following lens of conceptual frameworks: gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment.

I began the literature review with an extensive search of peer-reviewed, professional journal articles using databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Education Source, and Academic Search Premier. I scoured academic journals such as *Leadership Quarterly*, *The Academy of Management Learning & Education*, and *Educational Administration* as references in gender and leadership theories, studies of women as superintendents, and empowerment. Finally, I organized and documented articles.

I referenced each article based upon Roberts (2010) process for writing a literature review. I read pertinent articles, saved the articles on a flash drive, printed, and organized the articles in a color-coded notebook. I created notecards for each peer-reviewed journal article and textbook. Notecards for each article included a brief description of methodology, population and sample, findings, and memos. I wrote memos and used color tabs on each notecard to designate themes and sub-themes, as suggested by Charmaz (2008). The following themes and sub-themes emerged: 1) gender and leadership, subthemes: stereotypes and gender role bias, and role incongruity; 2) the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, sub-themes: experience of women

related to the superintendency, career path ascension, and challenges for women; and 3) empowerment, sub-themes: psychological empowerment, empowerment and self-efficacy, and empowerment and grit.

Gender and Leadership

The study of gender and leadership has often led to more in-depth research of the differences and similarities of male and female leader characteristics. Quantitative research attributed male and female characteristics of leadership to perceived effectiveness. The research has led to theory development in gender stereotypes and gender role bias, as well as role incongruity.

Stereotypes and Gender Role Bias

Quantitative and qualitative studies indicated male and female leaders were associated with personality traits defined as agentic or communal (Northouse, 2019; Watson et al., 2018). Male leaders exhibited agentic traits, such as dedication, charisma, intelligence, determination, aggression, and competition. In contrast, female leaders exhibited communal traits, such as care, sensitivity, honesty, understanding, compassion, and sympathy (Akinola et al., 2018; Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012; Hoyt, 2012; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013; Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Lanaj & Hollenbeck, 2015; Meister et al., 2017; Northouse, 2019; Watson, et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2018). Gender-role theory proposed common characteristics of male and female leader behaviors influenced followers' perceptions of effectiveness (Heilman, 2012; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Haslam et al. (2011), reported traditional characteristics of effective leaders were masculine, or agentic. The traditional characteristics, described by Haslam et al. (2011),

were intelligence, decisiveness, aggression, risk-taking, and competition. Akinola et al. (2018), based upon previous studies of Eagly and Carli (2007), conducted a quantitative study of gender differences and delegation practices of leaders and reported women are less likely to delegate. Delegation was a critical skill of perceived effective leadership. Akinola et al. (2018), provided the reason women were less likely to delegate was due to women's propensity to exhibit communal traits, more specifically, sensitivity. Because women expressed sensitivity, they associated feeling guilt with the act of delegating others (Akinola et al., 2018).

Women leaders were more effective and encountered less discrimination when they exhibited both agentic and communal traits, such as being sensitive as well as intelligent and decisive (Dreaconu & Rasca, 2015; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Therefore, Northouse (2019) suggested women leaders should intentionally take risks, behave decisively, and exhibit confidence in decision-making to improve follower perception of effectiveness. Women leaders who did not embrace their communal skills and intentionally apply agentic skills encountered the double-bind, or feelings of misidentification between responsibilities of leadership and perceptions of role incongruity (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman, 2012). Role incongruity and the double-bind may cause bias in promotion and career advancement (Eagly & Karau, 2016; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013; Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Northouse, 2019).

Role Incongruity

Role incongruity, described by Eagly and Carli (2007) and Koenig and Eagly (2014), as the feeling of internal conflict when expectations of behavior contradict with responsibilities in job duties. Women who struggled as leaders reported feeling conflict in

personal identity and social identity (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Watson et al. (2018), proposed women who lead male-dominated industries, such as engineering, technology, and construction, experienced the greatest role incongruity. Although women superintendents lead industries dominated by women (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016), they reported experiencing role incongruity and the double bind, as they attempt to balance work and family roles (Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Davis & Bowers, 2019). The work and family roles, or societal expectations of women to be effective in job duties as well as wives and mothers, result in both internal and external conflict.

Women reported spending more time on household duties, such as cleaning or childcare, than men. Married women were responsible for more than two hours of childcare for every hour contributed by married men (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In addition, the weekly average of the number of hours women dedicated to childcare has increased since 1965, although more women work outside the home today (Bianchi et al., 2006). In contrast, women have earned more advanced degrees than men in the last 30 years (Northouse, 2019). Research indicated overall, the number of women earning advanced degrees, advancing in leadership roles, and dedicating time in domestic roles, has increased over the last 30 years. Therefore, the responsibility of women to balance family and work roles has increased.

The Underrepresentation of Women as Superintendents

Scholarly research has documented the underrepresentation of women as superintendents throughout the last 40 years. The AASA and the National Center for Educational Statistics surveyed educators each five to ten-years, beginning in the 1990s.

The most recent mid-decade study conducted by the AASA (2015) indicated 27 percent of all superintendents in the United States were women. In 2015, the AASA continued quantitative data collection specific to gender inequality in educational leadership. The mid-decade AASA study (2015) led to an increase in scholarly research of the similarities and differences in experience, career path ascension, and challenges and barriers of women and men.

Experience of Women Related to the Superintendency

Glass's (2000) analysis of the AASA survey proposed the primary reason 13 percent of superintendents in the United States were women was because women did not apply for the position. Glass (2000) reported women did not apply for superintendent positions because they had limited support, immobility, and were not prepared for the position due to less experience and less access to formal mentor networks. Brunner and Kim (2010) responded to the Glass (2000) analysis by conducting quantitative research and found women were adequately prepared to be superintendents in experience related to curriculum and instruction and student academic achievement. More women attended administrative preparation programs than men (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Connell et al., 2015). However, women reported fewer professional opportunities to practice leadership skills, such as extra-curricular management and financial decision-making (Brunner & Kim, 2010). The limited access to leadership practice, mentor networks, and social capital were also related to women's career path ascension to the superintendency.

Career Ascension

Davis and Bowers (2019) and Farmer (2007) studied superintendent career path ascension and revealed most white men ascended to the superintendency from the

secondary principal position (vertically). Kim and Brunner (2008) reported women and minorities ascended to the superintendency from the assistant superintendent or district director positions (horizontally). Women began careers in education as elementary and secondary teachers, followed most often with promotion to elementary or middle school principals, which then led to promotion to district curriculum and instructional leaders prior to the superintendency (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Bollinger & Grady, 2018). However, men began careers in education most often as secondary teachers with coaching duties, followed with promotion to assistant secondary principals, and finally high school principals, prior to the superintendency (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Bollinger & Grady, 2018). Therefore, although the percentage of women superintendents increased, women's ascension to the superintendency required more time and was horizontal rather than vertical (Davis & Bowers, 2019).

Challenges for Women

Women encountered additional and different challenges in becoming a superintendent such as gender role bias, fewer promotion and leadership opportunities, less mobility, decreased confidence as a leader, limited partner or spouse support, and a lack of formal mentor networks (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Connell et al., 2015; Davis & Bowers, 2019; Kelsey et al., 2014; Polka et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2017; Sampson, 2018; Sampson & Davenport, 2010; Sherman, 2005; Skrla et al., 2000; Sperandio, 2015; Sperandio & Devdas, 2015; Reed & Patterson, 2007; Wiley et al., 2017; Wyland, 2016). However, women superintendents perceived strong work ethics and tenacity contributed to their ascension to the superintendency more than education preparation programs or

access to formal mentor networks (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Sampson & Davenport, 2010).

Robinson et al. (2017), conducted a secondary analysis of the AASA (2015) mid-decade survey and reported the inequality of preparation for men and women had decreased; however, men and women superintendents perceived they were hired for very different reasons. Fifty-two percent of women perceived the reason hired was strengths in leadership of curriculum and instructional. Fifty-nine percent of men perceived the reasons hired were personal characteristics and administrative experiences (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Robinson et al., 2017). Therefore, research conducted in the last five years proposed women and men have different perceptions of the reasons hired as a superintendent.

Bollinger and Grady (2018) provided further evidence of the confidence of women as instructional leaders. In a qualitative study by Bollinger and Grady (2018), women superintendents reported satisfaction with their abilities to be strategic, create a vision, lead instruction and curriculum, build relationships, and develop others. These strengths aligned to the increased demand for improved academic achievement of students, outlined in federal and state education policy changes (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2016). However, the strengths reported by the women also indicated less confidence in personal characteristics and administrative experiences.

Empowerment

Dust et al. (2018), and Zhang and Bartol (2010), defined empowerment as a transfer or endowment of power, to an individual, bestowed by another, who possessed power. Muller (1994) conducted a qualitative study of six women leaders to examine the phenomenon of the experience of empowerment. Muller (1994) reported the definition of empowerment was “the process of acknowledging the latent potency of others and assisting them to act purposefully and assertively to reach their growth potential” (p. 79).

Gloria Steinem, a feminist and political activist of the 1970s and 1980s, described empowerment as the process of taking power (as cited by James, 2016). Conger and Kanungo (1988), defined empowerment as the promotion of self-actualization. This definition was complementary to Steinem’s, which considered empowerment as a psychological state of mind derived from an individual’s perceptions, experiences, motives, and actions. The variations of the concept of empowerment in scholarly literature led to study of the relationship between psychological empowerment, empowerment and self-efficacy, and empowerment and grit.

Psychological Empowerment

Scholarly literature proposed psychological empowerment theory was a construct with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive components developed by an individual through interpersonal relationships (Christens, 2012; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The conceptualization of psychological empowerment, in research, as a cognitive state included individuals who experienced the state felt meaningfulness, competence, choice, and impact, through phases of environmental events, task assessments, and behaviors (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). This

conceptualization of psychological empowerment presented a relative similarity to self-efficacy and positive psychology in the scholarly literature reviewed.

Empowerment and Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) and Zhang and Bartol (2010), presented self-efficacy as a cognitive state in which the individual believes in the abilities of him or herself to accomplish a task or goal. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory proposed four sources of influence on an individual's confidence and positive psychology: 1) Mastery experiences; 2) Vicarious experiences; 3) Verbal persuasion; and 4) Emotional and physiological state. Bandura (1977) reported experiences contributed most to an individual's perception of self-efficacy. Further examination of each element of self-efficacy provided additional depth of the conceptual background and intersectionality with the underrepresentation of women as superintendents.

Bandura's (1977) first source of influence in self-efficacy was mastery experiences. Women who became superintendents reported limited opportunities to experience and practice leadership skills (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Connell et al., 2015; Davis & Bowers, 2019; Kelsey et al., 2014; Polka et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2017; Sampson, 2018; Sampson & Davenport, 2010; Sherman, 2005; Skrla et al., 2000; Sperandio, 2015; Sperandio & Devdas, 2015; Reed & Patterson, 2007; Wiley, et al., 2016). Therefore, literature proposed increased opportunities for women to practice and experience leadership skills may contribute to self-efficacy of the women.

Bandura's (1977) second source of influence in the process toward self-efficacy was vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences occurred through mentor relationships

and colleague networks. Approximately 90 percent of the full-time, public school superintendents in Oklahoma are men (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). Therefore, women who aspired to become a superintendent in Oklahoma had limited access to female mentors or mentor networks. Johnson and Smith (2016) proposed great differences in cross-gender mentor relationships, and stressed the importance of men mentoring women, to promote cognitive diversity among leadership teams and individual growth.

Bandura's (1977) third source of influence in the process toward self-efficacy was verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion was a condition of the process of an individual who has encouraged another individual in risk-taking, toward promotion or career ascension. The limited number of female superintendents provided few conditions for women to experience verbal persuasion from a mentor who experienced similar challenges. In addition, role congruity theory and prejudice of women as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002), has resulted in an absence of verbal persuasion.

Bandura's (1977) fourth, and final source influence of self-efficacy as a positive emotional and physiological state. Eagly and Karau (2002) described the increased emotional and physiological stress of women who perceived family and work roles as contradictory to one another. Eagly and Carli (2007) proposed women dedicated more hours of the day to home and family responsibilities than in the past, in addition to taking on more work responsibilities. Therefore, women's efforts to balance work and family roles effectively reduced the potential a positive emotional and physiological state in scholarly literature. Comparatively, research conducted by Robinson et al. (2017), indicated women superintendents perceived hard work and determination as important

factors in becoming a superintendent. Therefore, the examination of scholarly literature related to hard-work, perseverance, and passion for long-term goals, or grit (Duckworth, 2016), contributed to this dissertation in practice literature review as a foundational concept.

Empowerment and Grit

In the last 15 years, grit research posited that hard-work, combined with passion and perseverance, was more positively related to goal achievement than intelligence (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007). Embedded in the study of grit were self-discipline, vision, and motivation theories. Scholarly literature reported women encountered additional and different challenges to become leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Robinson et al., 2017). Duckworth et al. (2007), defined perseverance as actions of an individual founded in self-discipline and motivation that lead to overcoming challenges.

The hardships, obstacles, and challenges reported by women who became superintendents were stress, health concerns, job loss, and loss of relationships (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Connell et al., 2015; Davis & Bowers, 2019; Kelsey et al., 2014; Polka et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2017; Sampson, 2018; Sampson & Davenport, 2010; Sherman, 2005; Skrla et al., 2000; Sperandio, 2015; Sperandio & Devdas, 2015; Reed & Patterson, 2007; Wiley et al., 2017; Wyland, 2016). Studies of women superintendents conducted by Kowalski and Stouder (1999) and Sampson and Davenport (2010) conveyed the women felt hard work and tenacity were the most important behaviors in becoming a superintendent. Therefore, scholarly literature presented a potential relationship between women who overcame challenges to become superintendents, empowerment, and grit.

Summary

The introduction of the literature review described the steps taken to search and organize the conceptual framework of the empowerment process of women who became superintendents. The following themes and sub-themes emerged and were described: 1) gender and leadership, subthemes: stereotypes and gender role bias, and role incongruity; 2) the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, sub-themes: experience of women related to the superintendency, career path ascension, and challenges for women; and 3) empowerment, sub-themes: psychological empowerment, empowerment and self-efficacy, and empowerment and grit. The literature review included a description of the relationships between the scholarly literature of the themes and sub-themes. The relationships identified in this dissertation in practice study may contribute to the few constructivist grounded theory studies related to the intersectionality of gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to understand the process of empowerment experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined empowerment as the promotion of self-actualization. The research question and sub-questions framed data collection and constant comparative analysis.

Research Questions

The following research question and sub-questions framed the dissertation in practice study: what explains the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? What motivations (thoughts and feelings) explain the empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? What actions explain the empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma?

Method

I employed a qualitative, constructivist grounded theory research design to understand the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The constructivist grounded theory approach aligned with my social constructivist worldview, to understand the world in which I lived and worked (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The tentative theoretical framework developed included context, concepts, causal conditions, and consequences of the empowerment process described by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma.

Research Design Overview

Charmaz (2014) developed the constructivist grounded theory approach to qualitative research based upon Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory methodology. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original grounded theory research design has branched into at least three versions: 1) Emergent grounded theory (Glaser, 1992); 2) Systematic grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990); and 2) Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The systematic grounded theory research design utilized existing theories as the framework of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the constructivist grounded theory research design utilized data collection and analysis to develop a theoretical framework. Charmaz (2014) stated, "Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves" (p. 1).

Babbie (2017) and Charmaz (2014) reported social scientists who favor quantitative research methods criticized the constructivist grounded theory for the following reasons: a) the number of participants was small; b) the ability to generalize results to other populations was reduced; and c) there was an increased potential for forced data collection. However, Charmaz (2017) counters this critique with the suggested use of critical inquiry interviews, constant comparative analysis, and theoretical sampling as structured elements of the constructivist grounded theory research design that facilitate the emergence of concepts in data collection and analysis. In addition, Charmaz (2014) argued the subjective bias of the researcher was inherent to most research designs.

Researcher's Role

My personal bias, as a woman who is an educational leader with more than 15 years of experience, provided an additional, unique lens in data collection and analysis. To reduce the potential for forced data collection and focus on the shared experiences of participants, I employed methodological self-consciousness, a constant self-critique of my experiences, bias, and opinions (Charmaz, 2014), and reflexivity, a consistent reflection and memo writing of my thoughts, and feelings (Creswell & Poth, 2018), throughout data collection and analysis. Although my subjective bias was inherent in the constructivist grounded theory research design, methodological self-consciousness and reflexivity provided additional data in memos and observations.

Description of Population and Sample

The population was women superintendents in Oklahoma. The OSDE (2018) database reported 548 superintendents in Oklahoma. Of the 548 superintendents in Oklahoma, 110, or 20 percent, were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). Only 10.6 percent of the superintendents employed full-time in Oklahoma were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). In addition, 52 of the 548 superintendents in Oklahoma have continued advanced education to earn a doctorate degree. Of the 52 superintendents in Oklahoma who have earned a doctorate, 15, or 30 percent, were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). Five of the 15 women superintendents who have earned a doctorate in Oklahoma participated in this dissertation in practice study.

The sample included ten women (N=10) who were superintendents of public Oklahoma school districts in the 2018-2019 school year. The school districts were in

different geographical regions of the state, were small and large, and were rural and urban. Nine of the participants of this study were employed as full-time superintendents (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018), which accounted for approximately 15 percent of the population. One participant of the study was not a full-time superintendent. She was a half-time superintendent and half-time principal of a pre-K through sixth grade, rural, public school. I did not report demographics of individuals, to ensure confidentiality, but overall, participants were over 40 years old and ethnically diverse.

Data Collection

I began the data collection and analysis procedure with an email to 54 women superintendents in Oklahoma, from various geographical regions and school sizes. The sample size resulted in the participation of 10 (N=10) women superintendents, after theoretical sampling led to data saturation. The data collection procedure I employed emphasized the critical inquiry interviews (Charmaz, 2014). I recorded video and audio during web-conference interviews using Zoom online web-conference software (Zoom Video Communications, 2020). I transcribed voice to text with Dragon (Nuance Communications, 2019), the cellular phone voice to text application, as I conducted the interviews.

Data Collection Procedure

I informed participants the audio/video recording could stop at any time, if requested, first in the consent form (see Appendix B) and a second time in the introduction of the interview (see Appendix C). I memoed observations throughout each interview. I typed, reviewed, corrected, and uploaded into data analysis software. I followed the interview protocol by asking the scripted, focused, open-ended, interview

questions. However, I remained flexible and utilized probing questions to encourage participants to elaborate and invoke detail in the women's descriptions of experiences.

The average interview time was 48 minutes. I conducted the web conference interviews in the summer months of the school year, to reduce scheduling interruptions and cancelations. Participants selected the site of the web conferences. Most participants selected locations that were private and quiet with reliable internet, at a time of day interruptions were less likely. The day, time, and location selected by participants indicated similarities or differences in schedule, routine, and time management of the participants. For example, some participants scheduled early morning interviews, some were later in the afternoon, some were in the office and some were at home. A few participants selected locations that were less private, such as an office where the phone rang. The more private, quiet locations provided the participants the opportunity to practice increased focus and reflection. The private, quiet location also ensured the confidentiality of participants.

Theoretical Sampling

I conducted theoretical sampling until data was saturated. In the first step of theoretical sampling, I cross-referenced the Oklahoma superintendent salary list with the superintendent demographics list from the OSDE public database (2018). The result was one list of all female superintendents that included email addresses and demographics such as gender, education level, district, education, and name. From this list, I selected 34 women superintendents of public schools, from different geographical regions of the state, school district size (small or large), and school district type (urban or rural). I scheduled and conducted five interviews from the email invitation sent to the 34 women

superintendents. During the first five interviews, I memoed the emergence of similar codes and concepts.

In my second step of theoretical sampling, I invoked the assistance of two of the three gate keepers, to encourage participation of women superintendents from a larger geographical area. The first gate keeper was the director of the Oklahoma Association of Secondary School Principals (OASSP). The second gate keeper was a woman superintendent in Northern Oklahoma. She was my supervisor and therefore, not invited to participate, to reduce the possibility of power dynamics that may cause bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I asked the gate keepers to call or forward the email invitation to women who may be interested in sharing experiences of becoming a superintendent in Oklahoma.

Parallel to the assistance of the two gate keepers described above, I expanded the sample by emailing the invitation to 19 additional women superintendents. Therefore, I invited 53 of the 110 women superintendents in Oklahoma to participate. The second step resulted in three additional interviews. After I conducted eight interviews, applying constant comparative analysis throughout, I discovered the continued emergence of similar codes and concepts in participant responses, transcripts, memos, resumes, and observations. I determined additional testing of the emergent codes, categories, and concepts should include a woman superintendent from each geographical region of the state.

I continued theoretical sampling with a third gate keeper's assistance. My data analysis indicated the first eight participants were from the northeast and southeast regions of the state. To test the similar emerging codes and patterns, I sought

intentionally sought participants from central and northwest Oklahoma, to promote heterogeneity of geographical regions. The third gate keeper was the education department chair of a regional university in northwest Oklahoma. After the third gate keeper's assistance, I scheduled and conducted two interviews; one participant was from northwest Oklahoma and another was from central Oklahoma.

Data Collection Tools

I employed the following data collection tools: an email invitation, critical inquiry interviews based on an interview protocol, observations, memos, and participant resumes. I provided the purpose of the study and a brief description of the data collection process in the invitation email (see Appendix A).

I attached the consent form (see Appendix B) to the email invitation. The consent form informed participants they may leave the study at any time, as well as the intent and procedures employed to maintain confidentiality, such as pseudonyms for all identifying information. I considered models of other qualitative interview procedures as I developed the consent form (Harvard Committee on the Use of Human Subjects, 2018). Creighton Institutional Review Board determined a signature was not necessary for consent. The review board designated the study exempt because it posed little to no risk to participants. Therefore, I emailed an invitation to participate that included a brief description of the study. When an individual replied to the email invitation, I emailed a response to the potential participant that included the weblink, day, and time for the web-conference interview.

I structured the open-ended interviews with an interview protocol (see Appendix C). I designed the interview protocol by examining samples for open-ended and critical

inquiry interview protocols (Babbie, 2017; Charmaz, 2017; Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jacob & Ferguson, 2012; Leech, 2002). I asked participants ‘grand tour’ style questions (Babbie, 2017). I designed the questions during a mock interview I conducted in a previous methodology course. My final step in question design was discussion and feedback with my dissertation committee. Based upon feedback from my dissertation committee, I included prompting phrases in the interview protocol, such as “*That is interesting, tell me more....*” Charmaz (2014) and Roberts (2010) also suggested this practice to invoke participant elaboration. I included (see Appendix C) a chart for notes and memos related to observations of the scheduled day and time of the interview, the environment, and body language and facial expressions of the participants in the interview protocol.

Finally, the documents I collected were interview transcripts, memos, and the professional resumes of the participants. I imported all documents to MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI Software, 2018) for data analysis. I wrote a grant to study the empowerment of women in June, 2019. I received an honorable mention and license from VERBI Software (2018) for one year. I organized data and conducted line-by-line analysis and coding of all documents in the qualitative data analysis software (VERBI Software, 2018).

Data Analysis

I imported all memos, transcripts, and documents into MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI Software, 2018), the qualitative data analysis software. I organized and analyzed transcripts, resumes, observations, and reflexive memos inductively and deductively throughout data collection (Charmaz, 2014). I coded and employed the four stages of the

constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Babbie, 2017) throughout data collection and constant comparative analysis.

Coding

First, I conducted open coding during interviews to identify sensitizing concepts in information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, I conducted initial, line-by-line coding in MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2018), as I reviewed transcripts. Third, I conducted focused coding (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018) in data analysis software by reviewing open and initial codes, while highlighting key phrases and quotes, and writing memos. Charmaz (2014) refers to the secondary coding phase as focused coding and categorizing. During the focused coding phase, I charted data from interviews, observations, and documents by codes and then focused the categories that rose from the codes. For example, for the question, “*Describe your journey to become a superintendent,*” an initial code was *experience*. Overall, the code *experience* emerged 86 times in interview responses, memos, and documents. The experiences described by participants led to the emergence of the category *actions*. The concept *building self-efficacy* emerged from the code *experience*, and category *action*.

I identified categories inductively, or from within the shared experiences, as I focused on the core phenomenon, which were the thoughts, feelings, and actions described by participants related to the empowerment process of becoming a superintendent in Oklahoma. Some participants described the moment they felt empowered as a response to “Describe your journey to become a superintendent” in a story-telling format. I asked those who did not clearly identify the moment of empowerment the prompting question, “*At what moment did you feel empowered?*” I then

analyzed categories further to identify contexts, concepts, causal conditions, and consequences and develop the tentative theoretical framework, or process model (see Figure 1).

Constant Comparative Analysis

In the first phase of constant comparative analysis, I identified sensitized concepts that emerged during critical inquiry interviews, based upon similar thoughts, feelings, and actions of the participants. Charmaz (2017) described the use of emergent questions in critical inquiry of constructivist grounded theory research to encourage depth and flexibility. One question that emerged through constant comparative analysis from the first and second interview to the third interview was “*Describe the moment you felt empowered to become a superintendent.*” I began to ask this question after listening to the participants’ description of their journey to become a superintendent, before asking about the individuals who influenced them in the journey to become a superintendent. If participants described when they felt empowered in the description of the journey, I did not ask the participants to describe the moment they felt empowered.

In the second phase of constant comparative analysis, I memoed relationships among the concepts described by participants. For example, participants interwove education, leadership experience, mentor influences, and family roles and responsibilities in responses to “*Describe your journey to become a superintendent.*” I identified the individual emergent concepts in memos.

In the third phase of constant comparative analysis, I observed and memoed patterns of relationships among the concepts. I eliminated concepts that did not reoccur or were irrelevant to the research questions (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For

example, one participant described her decision to campaign for state superintendent of education. No other candidate shared this experience and it was not directly related to her experiences related to the process of empowerment to become a superintendent of a school district.

In the fourth phase of constant comparative analysis, I made reflexive descriptions of memos, notes, categories, and codes that I had identified in MAXQDA 2018 (VERBI Software, 2018), qualitative data analysis software. I analyzed the notes for bias and relevance. Evidence in codes, categories, and concepts were so similar no follow up questions were necessary.

The Process Model

Charmaz (2017) proposed critical inquiry of constructivist grounded theory research led to the development of a tentative, theoretical framework, the empowerment process model. The framework was based upon the mutual, complex realities of participants and the researcher, in a pragmatic manner. After conducting data collection, theoretical sampling, and constant comparative data analysis, I developed the tentative theoretical framework, the empowerment process model. The model is a visual representation of the empowerment process, as described by participants (see Figure 1). The empowerment process model exhibited the interrelationship of the contexts, concepts, causal conditions, central phenomenon, and consequences (Charmaz, 2006; 2017).

Methodological Integrity

The methods for verification were data triangulation and methodological self-consciousness. Data triangulation, or the examination of different data sources (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018), included my analysis and comparison of interview responses, observations, documents, and memos in MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2018). In addition, I practiced methodological self-consciousness by memoing my observations and reflections throughout preparation, data collection, and constant comparative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The erratic demands of the superintendency constricted participation. I requested the assistance of three gatekeepers, to encourage participants to prioritize participation in scheduling. Although the experiences shared were multiple and complex, a larger sample may have contributed to an expanded collection of heterogeneous data.

Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018) reported factors that facilitated data saturation were a simple research question, data triangulation, homogeneity of the sample, and the use of sensitizing concepts, such as codes and categories. The sample of the dissertation in practice was homogenous, as it included women superintendents of public schools in Oklahoma. The research questions focused on the central phenomenon, the empowerment process of women who became a superintendent in Oklahoma. The open-ended critical interview questions were clear and concise. I employed three phases in the theoretical sampling of the study. I determined data saturated after conducting constant comparative analysis of participant (N=10) transcripts, memos, and documents presented similar sensitizing concepts, codes, and categories related to the process of empowerment to become a superintendent in Oklahoma.

Ethical Considerations

The first ethical consideration was the confidentiality of participants. I scheduled the web conference interviews for 30 to 45-minutes, at a location determined by the

participant. I informed participants the recorded video and data will be saved on a computer and password-protected. I stored the computer in a locked file cabinet when it was not in use. I informed participants of this process on two separate occasions, in the consent agreement (see Appendix B) and the introduction of the interview protocol (see Appendix C). I will delete data after three years, as required by the Creighton Institutional Review Board (IRB).

A second ethical consideration was the role of the female superintendent designated gate keeper. I did not invite her to participate because she was my supervisor. I did not observe a bias or power dynamics throughout her assistance as gate keeper. She was supportive and encouraged participation of other women superintendents.

A third and final ethical consideration was the practice of social acceptance in the responses of participants that may have led to thin or weak data (Babbie, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To reduce social acceptance in responses as well as increase confidentiality, I notified participants of the removal of all identifiable information, such as name, age, or ethnicity, prior to the interview, in the consent form and the interview introduction. In addition, I used probing questions during interviews to encourage elaboration and reduce social acceptance in participant responses.

Summary

This qualitative, constructivist grounded theory dissertation in practice study sought to understand the process of empowerment experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The aim of this constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a tentative, theoretical framework, or visual model, of the empowerment process. The research question was: what explains the process of empowerment of

women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? The sub-questions further investigated the thoughts, feelings, and actions in the experiences of empowerment shared by the women. The findings led to the development of a tentative theoretical framework, or empowerment process model of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma.

Following the description of the research design overview, I described participants, and data collection procedures and tools. I described the steps in the theoretical sampling process. I then explained the data analysis method, detailing constant comparative analysis, coding, and the emergence of categories. I conclude Chapter Three with concepts for methodological integrity by stating the verification methods, re-stating limitations, and providing ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The problem presented in Chapter One of this dissertation in practice study was the underrepresentation of women as superintendents. The purpose of this qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study was to understand the empowerment process experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The aim of this constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a tentative, theoretical framework, or visual model, of the empowerment process experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The multiple, complex realities of the participants were the foundation of the findings (Charmaz, 2008; 2014).

The findings resulted from constant comparative analysis and coding. As suggested by Charmaz (2014), the following research question and sub-questions framed the dissertation in practice study: what explains the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? What motivations (thoughts and feelings) explain the empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? What actions explain the empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma?

The findings arose from emergent codes and categories during data collection and constant comparative analysis. I presented the contexts, concepts, causal condition, central phenomenon, and consequences in an objective, narrative format, derived inductively from data analysis, as advised by Babbie (2017). Findings included quotes from the participants as evidence of shared and individual experiences. The findings concluded with the presentation of visual representation of the empowerment process model.

Description of Participants

This constructivist grounded theory study included ten participants (N=10). Participants were women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The sample was homogenous and heterogenous, as participants were women superintendents of public schools in Oklahoma, yet were from different geographical regions of Oklahoma, diverse school district sizes, and earned various advanced degrees (see Table 2). Three participants reported two or more years of experience in secondary school leadership, and seven participants reported experience only in elementary school leadership prior to becoming an assistant superintendent (see Table 2). I did not report race and age, to ensure the confidentiality of participants. However, I noted, in observational memos, the women were older than 40 and ethnically diverse.

Table 2
Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Region of Oklahoma	Provided resume	Size of district	Highest degree	More than two years of experience in secondary school leadership
Alice	North, Central	Yes	Small, rural	Ed D Educational Leadership	No
Betty	Southeast	Yes	Small, rural	Ed D candidate, May 2020	No
Cindy	Northeast	Yes	Large, suburban	Ed D Educational Leadership	No
Deborah	Northeast	Yes	Small, rural	Ed D	Yes
Edith	Southwest	No	Small, rural	M Ed and Education Leadership Academy	No
Fran	Central, Southwest	Yes	Large, urban	Ed D Educational Leadership and Policy Studies	Yes
Gertrude	Central, Northeast	No	Small, urban	M Ed	No
Helen	Northeast	Yes	Large, suburban	Ph D	No
Isabelle	Central, Southeast	No	Large, suburban	M Ed	No
Jan	Northwest	Yes	Small, rural	M Ed	Yes

Results

The results led to the development of a theoretical framework, the empowerment process model (see Table 2), grounded in data collection, constant comparative analysis, and triangulation of interviews, documents, and observational memos. The following research question framed data collection and analysis: what explains the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? The contexts of the empowerment process were the women working in education and practicing grit. The concepts of the empowerment process were the women building self-efficacy and balancing family and work roles. The causal condition of the empowerment process was the influence of an encouraging mentor. The central phenomenon of the empowerment process was the moment the women reported feeling empowered to engage in risk-taking to become a superintendent. Therefore, a consequence of the women's empowerment process was risk-taking, when the women decided to apply for more than one superintendent position in Oklahoma.

Contexts: Working in Education and Practicing Grit

The participants worked in education and reported practicing grit, or passion and perseverance for long-term goals (Duckworth, et al., 2007), throughout the shared experiences. Therefore, working in education and practicing grit emerged as contexts of the process model. Most participants began careers in education in the 1990s as teachers. The participants described themselves as women who were passionate about education and children, and persevered to become a leader. The participants advised women to work harder, gain experience in a variety of roles, take care of themselves, and encourage

other women to grow. The participants advised more actions than thoughts or feelings to women who aspire to become superintendents in Oklahoma (see Table 3).

Table 3

Participant Responses Related to Contexts: Grit and Working in Education

Context	Example Quote
Grit	<p>“Be passionate.” (Cindy, large, suburban school district northeast Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Be yourself and be real.” (Gertrude, small, urban school district central northeast Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Push in to the conversations that are male-dominated. Keep pushing.” (Betty, small, rural school district southeast Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Do not get discouraged.” (Isabelle, large, suburban school district central, southeast Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Be prepared for ups and downs.” (Fran, large, urban school district central, southwest Oklahoma)</p>
Working in Education	<p>“Build your resume.” (Alice, small, rural school district north central Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Work harder.” (Helen, large, suburban school district northeast Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Take advantage of every educational leadership experience you can.” (Deborah, small, rural school district northeast Oklahoma)</p>

Within the contexts of working in education and practicing grit, two concepts emerged from the shared experiences of the women: 1) building self-efficacy; and 2) balancing family and work roles. The influence of an encouraging mentor emerged as a causal condition, throughout the women’s descriptions of experiences related to building self-efficacy and balancing family and work roles.

Concept: Building Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as a psychological and physiological state of confidence, or self-assurance. Bandura (1977) reported self-efficacy was based upon the development of a mastery of experiences, vicarious experiences, and persuasion. In interviews, as participants described the journey to become superintendents, they shared

thoughts, feelings, and actions that included desiring a leadership role as a site principal or district assistant. The women said they felt confident as teachers, and then felt a desire to practice mastering experiences, improving self-awareness, and building social capital through interpersonal relationships.

The women were candid in reporting they began a career in teaching with no goal to become a superintendent. The absence of a specific goal to become superintendent was memoed in the first interview and continued to emerge in each interview that followed. In memos, I noted the women laughing, some heartily, and some softly, as the first response when asked to describe the journey to become a superintendent. Experience and education permeated the journey described by the women to become superintendents, as they worked to build self-efficacy, rather than intention (see Table 4).

Table 4*Participant Responses Related to the Concept: Building Self-efficacy*

Building Self-efficacy	Example Quotes
Desiring a site or assistant district leadership role	<p>“One of my goals was to be an administrator in every level of school so that when I became a superintendent, I would have an intimate knowledge of what it was like at all those levels.” (Alice, small, rural school district, north central Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Well that's the funny thing, I fell into it backwards. I never, never intended to be a superintendent. I actually wanted to be an associate superintendent, which is what I used to do.” (Cindy, large, suburban school district, northeast Oklahoma)</p>
Mastering experiences	<p>“I always had the thought that I was gaining the experience in case I became a superintendent but the goal wasn't necessarily to be superintendent. I had thought about working in a larger school district perhaps in an assistant superintendent capacity.” (Deborah, small, rural school district, northeast Oklahoma)</p>
Improving self-awareness and confidence	<p>“I would align it back to when I was a classroom teacher and I realized, looking at the principals around me, and I thought if they can do this, I can do this.” (Betty, small, rural school district, southeast Oklahoma)</p> <p>“I planned to be a principal by the time I was 35 years old. I became a principal before that age.” (Gertrude, small, urban school district, central northeast Oklahoma)</p>
Building social capital through interpersonal relationships	<p>“Do not be afraid to ask for help.” (Isabelle, large, suburban school district, central southeast Oklahoma)</p> <p>“Build your inner circle; Use the fact that you are a female to build strong relationships and partnerships.” (Helen, large, suburban school district, northeast Oklahoma)</p>

The women described beginning careers as teachers. The women reported feeling confident as teachers and began desiring experience in a leadership role. The women’s goals after graduate school were to gain experience in a variety of roles to become a site

principal or district assistant leader. All participants had experience as an assistant superintendent, in positions related to leadership of curriculum and instruction, prior to becoming superintendents. The participants listed the positions on resumes and described being district assistant superintendents in interviews. Few of the women reported secondary leadership experience. One woman, “Jan,” a superintendent in a small, rural, northwest school district, recounted a disagreement she had with her supervising superintendent when she applied for the high school principal position. She explained he did not feel she could do it, although she had experience as a director of a juvenile detention facility and alternative school. She reported the superintendent told her he felt she would be more suited to the elementary principal position. She resigned from the district and relocated after the disagreement.

Another participant, “Helen,” a superintendent in a large, suburban district, told a story when she insisted with her superintendent that she could effectively lead the athletic department, although it was a position traditionally held by men. My memos indicate she laughed as she recalled the discussion with her superintendent.

The women said they felt confident when they described the decision to apply for district assistant superintendents, after serving as site principals or site leaders. However, the mood and tone of the women changed as they described the decision to apply for the superintendent position. Participant “Fran,” a superintendent of a large, urban, school district in central, southwest Oklahoma, described her feelings of building self-efficacy in becoming a superintendent:

I think, looking back, reflecting now all those years prior to that, I can see me, and I didn't see myself in the role. I did not have the confidence in my abilities to be successful in the role. I would say there was an element of fear. Once I had more experience, and I had the whole doctoral experience, that's when I realized, okay well this (being a superintendent) might be something I could do.

More than half the women felt a doctorate degree was necessary to compete in the hiring process to become a superintendent. Five participants have earned a doctorate. One was a published author and speaker, with a doctorate in philosophy. Three participants have earned doctorate degrees in education. One participant was a doctoral candidate, working on her dissertation. Only one participant, who did not earn a doctorate, submitted a resume. The participants who did not earn a doctorate continued education by completing certifications and attending leadership academies, to develop experience mastery.

Participant "Betty," a superintendent of a small, rural, school district in southeast Oklahoma, described her feelings related to her decision to apply for a superintendent position:

As women, we have to work harder and push in. I had to get a doctorate to even be considered, and that has taken me eight years. I applied for three superintendent positions, interviewed for two, and was hired for one. (Laughing) I really never expected to get the job, I was just applying for the experience.

The women emphasized improving self-confidence, gaining experience in a variety of roles, developing social capital, and continuing education as they were building self-efficacy. As the women described the journey to become a superintendent, they told stories of the struggles to balance family and work roles.

Concept: Balancing Family and Work Roles

The second emergent concept was the women balancing family and work roles (see Table 5). The women described stereotypical perceptions of others and the needs of their own family as significant influences on career ascension. Deborah, who began her career as a superintendent at a later age than others, explained she waited until she was an ‘empty-nester,’ or her children were adults, to begin applying for superintendent positions.

Only one woman did not have children. She was divorced. She explained she felt she would have experienced more difficulty becoming a superintendent if she had children. She reported feeling additional social scrutiny of her private life from the community because she was a woman. Participant “Helen,” who was divorced and had no children, described her experience of dating, “I had to go out of town to go on a date. A male superintendent in a nearby district, who had also divorced, did not have to go out of town to date.” Overall, the women reported differences in interview questions and actions of others, compared to men who applied for superintendent positions in large, small, urban, and rural public-school districts.

Table 5*Participant Responses Related to the Concept: Balancing Family and Work Roles*

Balancing family and work roles	Example Quotes
Managing time	“I waited to begin my master’s degree until my children needed me less, and after they were older, I began master’s courses and worked as a teacher. My children and I would work on homework together, in the kitchen, as I cooked dinner. I began my doctorate after my children were grown.” (Deborah, small, rural school district in northeast Oklahoma)
Earning an advanced degree	
Continuing education	
Caretaking of children and spouse	“I was asked by a school board member during the interview who will be cooking dinner for your family if you get this job? A man wouldn’t be asked that question in an interview.” (Edith, small, rural school district in southwest Oklahoma)
	“I was asked in an interview if I would be hiring a nanny to care for my home and my children if I got the job. This was not a question a man would be asked.” (Gertrude, small, urban school district in central Oklahoma)
Advancing to site and assistant district leadership	I knew I was locked in the area because this is where my family is and this is where my husband worked. (Isabelle, large, suburban, school district in central, southeast Oklahoma)

Most of the women reported one consequence was sacrificing time with their own children and family. The participant who did not have children explained she did not feel this was directly related to being a woman, because she felt male superintendents also miss time with their families. However, each participant who described the concern of ‘missing time’ with her children also related decision-making in career ascension to the ages and needs of her children and spouse, or family roles. The women made decisions in career ascension, such as attending graduate school and applying for promotion, with consideration to the responsibilities as a wife or mother. The women reported increased comfort in the roles, as they successfully managed the balance.

Causal Condition: Encouraging Mentor

The influence of a mentor emerged as a causal condition, from within the shared experiences related to building self-efficacy and balancing work and family roles. All the women described respected, powerful, mentors, mostly male, who provided opportunity to gain leadership experience in a variety of roles, recommended them for promotion, and verbally persuaded them to apply for superintendent positions. Participant “Jan,” who also campaigned for state superintendent, described her experience with an encouraging mentor, “I had a good mentor. This was very important. I had somebody who would help me. He believed in me. He believed in what I could do.”

The women reported the influence of at least one encouraging mentor while the women were building self-efficacy and balancing family and work roles, prior to the moment the women felt empowered to engage in risk-taking. The women described the encouragement of a mentor on a regular basis, as well as in times of need (see Table 6). The women’s responses indicated without the verbal persuasion of one or more mentors, they would not have engaged in risk-taking to become superintendents.

Table 6*Participant Responses Related to the Causal Condition: Encouraging Mentor*

Encouraging Mentor	Example Quotes
Following advice of mentor	“After my first year my principal sat me down and said that you know, I really don't want to lose you as a teacher. You really should consider going back and getting your masters and becoming an administrator.” (Fran, large, urban school district central, southwest Oklahoma)
Developing professional network	“I have benefited from people who have been open to maybe helping me move into better opportunities and keeping networks intact.” (Edith, small, rural school district Southwest Oklahoma)
Assisting a male supervisor or mentor	“I worked closely with my superintendent as an assistant superintendent. He recommended me for the superintendent job I have now.” (Helen, large, suburban, school district northeast Oklahoma)

Central Phenomenon: Empowerment

The women described building self-efficacy, balancing work and family roles, and the influence of an encouraging mentor that led to them feeling confident to engage in risk-taking to become superintendents. This moment was empowerment, or self-actualization, and designated the central phenomenon because the women reported feeling ‘ready’ and were able to visualize themselves in the role. The women reported the next step was applying for more than one superintendent position. Most of the women acknowledged the likelihood of relocation as a negative consequence. The women said they were fearful and excited. The women seemed aware of the consequences and persevered with passion (see Table 7).

Table 7*Participant Responses Related to the Central Phenomenon: Empowerment*

Empowerment	Example Quotes
Feeling empowered	<p data-bbox="708 411 1386 531">“I felt empowered, but again fear. I think those go hand-in-hand unless you just have a gigantic ego (laugh). I just can’t imagine not being a little afraid.” (Cindy, large, suburban school district northeast Oklahoma)</p> <p data-bbox="708 562 1386 741">“I always felt like I could hold my own with my resume and with my experiences, so I never went in thinking ‘Oh I’m not going to get this job because I am a chick’. I have felt like I am going to going in, and if I am the best person for this job or what they need they were going to hire me.” (Fran, large, urban school district central southwest Oklahoma)</p> <p data-bbox="708 772 1386 894">“I was excited and I’m like, ‘I totally can do this,’ You know felt like I was ready. So that’s kind of how it happened.” (Isabelle, large, suburban school district, central southeast Oklahoma)</p>

Consequence: Risk-taking

The women described feeling fear, anxiety, and confidence. These feelings climaxed with risk-taking as the women applied for more than one superintendent position. Participants felt relocation was necessary for promotion, which reportedly increased their anxiety. Women described they were gaining experience by applying for more than one superintendent position.

Participant “Betty,” a superintendent of a small, rural, school district in southeast Oklahoma felt relocation was absolute. She said, “In Oklahoma, when you start looking for an opportunity, you probably know you will be moving.” Some participants reported relocating with a male supervisor to a different district. After relocating, the supervisor promoted her to assistant superintendent, and later recommended her for the superintendent position.

Table 8*Participant Responses Related to the Consequences: Risk-taking*

Risk-Taking	Example Quotes
Applying for more than one superintendent position	“I began to think well why aren’t women trying to be superintendents? Then I started looking for a superintendent position.” (Fran, large, urban school district central southwest Oklahoma)
Relocating	“A woman colleague and I earned our doctorate together and applied for superintendent positions at the same time. A man with less experience than either of us was hired in the district we worked. We both had to move to different districts to be hired as a superintendent.” (Deborah, small, rural school district northeast Oklahoma)

The women expressed guilt was a consequence of relocating their families. Two women did not relocate, but commuted. One participant reported driving two hours each day to serve as a superintendent of a different district, because her husband had a good job and did not move. The guilt described by the women indicated additional conflict between the work and family roles.

The few participants who did not relocate became a superintendent in the same district they had worked as an assistant superintendent. Risk-taking decreased, without relocation, yet was a risk in career ascension. One woman who did not relocate when hired as a superintendent felt it was a result of her male predecessor’s recommendation. She has recently resigned as superintendent, and returned to an assistant superintendent position in the same district. She said her decision to step down was because, although she felt ready when she applied, she no longer felt ready after performing the job duties for one year.

Findings

The results led to the development of the tentative, theoretical framework, the empowerment process model (see Figure 1). Data collected were interviews, documents, and observational memos. The following research question framed data collection and analysis: what explains the empowerment process of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma?

The contexts, or set of conditions within which the feelings and actions occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), were working in education and practicing grit. The women went to college and began careers as teachers in public schools. The women described grit, or passion and perseverance (Duckworth et al., 2007), in their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Grit emerged in the earliest shared experiences, as a teacher who aspired to lead, and continued to the moment of empowerment. The women reported not giving up, pushing in, setting a goal, achieving the goal, and repeating the process.

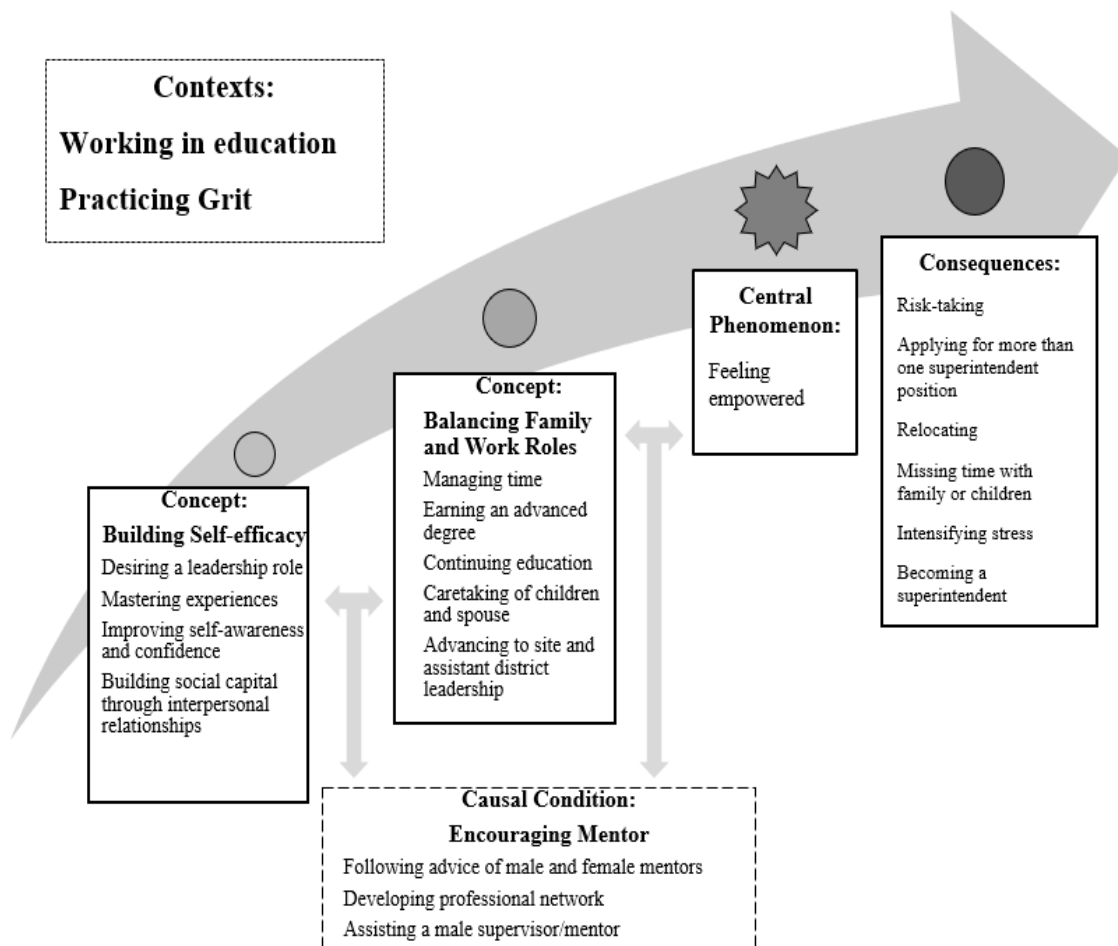
The first concept was the women building self-efficacy through desire, experience, and confidence. The women expanded their experiences in educational leadership, most in elementary schools, followed by assistant school district leadership positions. Few women practiced secondary school leadership experience. The second concept was balancing the family and work roles, as women, mothers, wives, graduate students, and educational leaders.

The causal condition that emerged during and between the concepts building self-efficacy and balancing family and work roles was the influence of an encouraging mentor. Each woman described the influence of a male mentor, and a few women described the additional influence of female mentors. This causal condition was

important in the empowerment process. The women reported the self-efficacy, balance of roles, and mentor encouragement led to the feeling of empowerment. The women then engaged in risk-taking by applying to become superintendents in Oklahoma, even if they had to relocate, as consequences of empowerment. The women conveyed positive, negative, and neutral consequences as they described thoughts, feelings, and events related to risk-taking, such as missing time with families, as they applied for more than one superintendent position.

Figure 1

The Empowerment Process Model of Women Who Became Superintendents in Oklahoma



Discussion

The erratic demands of the superintendency constricted participation of women superintendents in Oklahoma. The study of a larger sample of women superintendents in Oklahoma may improve the quality of findings by expanding heterogenous data collected and analyzed. For example, including women who have applied, not yet hired, and women who are qualified but have chosen not to apply may expand the sample and provide additional evidence related to gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment.

Prior literature related to gender and leadership reported traditional characteristics of effective leaders were masculine, or agentic (Haslam et al., 2011). To improve follower perception of effectiveness, women leaders must exhibit both agentic and communal, or feminine characteristics (Akinola et al, 2018; Eagly & Carli, 2007). In addition, increasing demands of duties and time related to work and family roles for women lead to internal conflict, a double bind, and the skill to balance the roles (Bianchi et al., 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Johnson & Smith, 2016; Northouse, 2019). The participants of the dissertation in practice study did not specify exhibiting male or female leader characteristics. However, most participants advised women who may be interested in becoming a superintendent to act, be aggressive, be persistent, be passionate, and be genuine, based upon their experiences in becoming a superintendent. Decisiveness and aggressive behavior are traditionally agentic characteristics (Akinola et al, 2018; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Haslam et al, 2011). Also, in relation to gender and leadership, the participants described examples of waiting to attain advanced degrees until their children

were older and traveling to and from work long distances when a spouse would not relocate.

Prior literature related to the underrepresentation of women as superintendents reported that although women earned more advanced degrees than men, they described less access to practice leadership skills and mentor networks (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Connell et al., 2015; Glass, 2000; Northouse, 2019). However, the participants of the dissertation in practice study reported access to quality mentors, mostly male, and experience in district assistant leadership positions. It is plausible women who meet qualifications to be a superintendent but do not apply have not had access to a quality mentor.

Scholarly literature reported women were more likely to become superintendents after working as district assistant leaders. Men were more likely to become superintendents after working as a high school principal (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Davis & Bowers, 2019; Farmer, 2007). Parallel to this research, the participants of the dissertation in practice study had limited secondary education leadership experience, yet all participants had assistant district leadership experience. It is plausible if there were more women hired as high school principals, they may later become superintendents. Women continue to have less secondary education leadership experience than men (Farmer, 2007)

Men and women perceived different strengths attributed to becoming a superintendent. Men reported personal characteristics and administrative experience. Women reported curriculum and instructional leadership (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Robinson et al., 2017; Kowalksi & Stouder, 1999;

Sampson & Davenport, 2010). The participants of the dissertation in practice study reported strengths in curriculum, instruction, personal characteristics, and administrative experience. Overall, the women reported they felt ready to apply for a superintendent position because they had experienced a variety of educational leadership roles, they balanced their family and work roles, and they had an encouraging mentor.

Prior literature described empowerment as a cognitive state that includes feelings of meaningfulness, competence, choice, and impact, occurring in phases of environmental events, task assessments, and behavior (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). This definition of empowerment was similar to Bandura's (1977) description of self-efficacy, a cognitive state in which the individual believes in the abilities of him or herself to accomplish a task or goal. The participants of the dissertation in practice study also described the moment of empowerment as the point in time each felt ready to apply for superintendent positions, even if it meant relocating.

Grit research has posited hard-work, combined with passion and perseverance, was more positively related to achievement than intelligence (Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007). Although each participant has earned an advanced degree, which indicates hard work as well as intelligence, the women encouraged others who may be interested in becoming a superintendent to persevere. Each participant explained struggles and obstacles she overcame or pushed through to become a superintendent.

The experience and education described by the women assisted them in building self-efficacy. The women told stories of balancing roles as teachers, principals, assistant

superintendents, mothers, daughters, and wives. The women credited mentors with encouragement and support.

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation in practice study was to understand the empowerment process of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The aim of this qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a tentative, theoretical framework, or visual model, of the empowerment process experienced by women superintendents in Oklahoma. The following research question framed data collection and constant comparative analysis: what explains the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma? The findings, grounded in the experiences of participants, led to the development of the empowerment process model of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma (see Figure 1).

The contexts of the process model of empowerment were working in education and practicing grit. The concepts arose from the following categories: building self-efficacy and balancing work and family roles. The encouragement of a mentor emerged as a causal condition. The central phenomenon of the process model was empowerment. The women reported feeling empowered after building self-efficacy, balancing family and work roles, and being encouraged by a mentor. Following the women reportedly feeling empowered they engaged in risk-taking by applying for more than one superintendent position. Therefore, risk-taking was a consequence of empowerment. The women described additional consequences, such as relocation, missing time with family, and successfully becoming a superintendent. The discussion conveys the limitations of

the study, prior literature related to results, and the similarities and differences between the results and scholarly research.

CHAPTER FIVE: PROPOSED SOLUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The underrepresentation of women as superintendents in Oklahoma is the problem identified in Chapter One. This dissertation in practice study sought to understand the empowerment process of women superintendents in Oklahoma. The study contributes to the few constructivist grounded theory studies of the interrelationship between gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment. I begin Chapter Five by reintroducing the Aim of the dissertation in practice study. Following the Aim Statement, I recommend the proposed solution and describe evidence supporting and challenging the solution. I then explain factors and stakeholders related to the proposed solution and the evaluation of the proposed solution. In conclusion, I provide implications for practical, future research, and leadership theory and practice.

Aim Statement

The aim of this constructivist grounded theory study was to develop a tentative, theoretical framework of the empowerment process experienced by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma. The constructivist grounded theory research design presented flexibility to uncover embedded networks, situations, and relationships, visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity, by exploring participant experiences (Charmaz, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Charmaz (2014) proposed a process model was a visual representation of the contexts, concepts, causal conditions, central phenomenon, and consequences that emerged from data collection and analysis.

Proposed Solution

I will propose the implementation of a secondary leader internship program to the principal and superintendent of a large, public, Oklahoma school district in spring of 2020. The internship aligns to the contexts, concepts, causal condition, central phenomenon, and consequences of the tentative theoretical framework, the empowerment process model of women who became superintendents in Oklahoma (see Figure 2). The tentative theoretical framework indicates women educators, who practice grit, feel empowered after engaging in the following process: 1) building self-efficacy by expanding leadership experiences and education; 2) balancing family and work roles; 3) the influence of an encouraging mentor.

All teachers and counselors who work for the district may apply for the internship, which comprises the contexts working in education and grit, as applicants will be volunteering for additional responsibilities and opportunities for professional growth. The district employs more women than men as teachers and counselors, and therefore provides an opportunity for the women not currently offered. The internship will rotate in two-week periods throughout the school year. During the two-week period, a principal or assistant principal of the high school will mentor the intern, as he or she performs duties of an administrator in a secondary school setting.

Embedded in the internship are the concepts building self-efficacy and balancing family and work roles. The intern will plan for a two-week absence from teaching or counseling. The intern will be responsible for additional duties, such as arriving to work by 7:30 A.M. each day, student supervision of evening events, and administrative meetings after school hours. Through the additional responsibilities, the intern will gain a

variety of experiences in many roles as a secondary administrator and plan for an increased absence from family.

A principal or assistant principal of the high school will mentor the intern. The assigned principal will support, encourage, and assist the intern throughout the two-week period. The principal and assistant principals will rotate as mentors throughout the school year. The mentorship will also provide an opportunity for the intern to develop social capital through professional networking, as the intern may not have otherwise worked with employees of the high school.

As presented in the tentative theoretical framework (see Figure 1), the moment of empowerment occurred after participants felt confident and engaged in risk-taking toward career ascension, by applying for the superintendency. The intern may not yet have met the qualifications to apply for a superintendent position. However, the potential opportunities provided in the experience in building self-efficacy, balancing family and work roles, and the influence of an encouraging mentor may enhance the empowerment process of the interns to proceed toward individual growth and risk-taking in career advancement.

Figure 2*Proposed Solution Alignment to the Theoretical Framework*

Framework	Element of alignment embedded in internship
Context: Working in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •All teachers and counselors are eligible to apply for the secondary leader internship. •The teachers and counselors are currently working in education.
Context: Practicing grit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The application process will assess grit. •By applying, the teachers and counselors are indicating a passion and perseverance to increase responsibilities.
Concept: Building self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The internship will provide opportunities to practice more agentic characteristics than offered in elementary or middle schools. •The internship will provide intentional, strategic opportunities to improve self-awareness and confidence. •The intern will complete a reflective survey at the end of the internship. •The internship will provide an opportunity to develop social capital by meeting new professionals.
Concept: Balancing family and work roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The internship will provide an opportunity to practice time management. •The internship will provide an opportunity to meet and discuss continuing education with experienced leaders. •The internship will require additional duties, which will make it necessary to practice balancing family and work roles. •The intership will provide a glimpse of secondary site leadership.
Causal Condition: Encouraging mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The intern will be provided a mentor, the principal or an assistant principal. •The intern and the mentor will complete the CliftonStrengths (Gallup, 2020) assessment prior to working together. •The strengths-based collaboration of the mentor and intern will utilize resources intended to assist growth and improvement aligned to individual strengths.
Consequence: Risk-taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Each intern will complete a biennial survey to assess career ascension.

Evidence that Supports the Solution

Few qualitative studies of women superintendents explored the individual, lived-experiences of career ascension, scrutinized through the conceptual lenses of gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment. The findings, grounded in the complex experiences of empowerment shared by women who became superintendents in Oklahoma, led to the visual representation of a tentative theoretical framework, the empowerment process model.

Davis and Bowers (2019) and Bollinger and Grady (2018) concluded women and men ascended to the superintendency through different paths; women promoted from a district assistant leadership position, and men promoted from a high school principal position. The prior research supported the findings of the dissertation in practice study, in that all participants ascended to superintendent from district assistant leadership positions. Only three participants reported secondary leadership experience.

Research describing the challenges unique to women in leadership, such as limited secondary educational leadership experiences, gender bias and stereotypes, and role incongruity theories also support the proposed solution (Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Dahill-Brown & Lavery, 2012; Davis & Bowers, 2019; Glass, 2000; Kelsey et al., 2014; Sampson, 2018). Participants of the dissertation in practice study reported experiences in which they perceived the actions of others were different toward them than men, and they responded to their observations of gender role bias with grit by ‘pushing in’ and ‘working harder.’ The participants told stories of individual strengths as leaders, overcoming obstacles, and making decisions as leaders. Therefore, the proposed solution recommends a framework for a secondary leader internship,

potentially enhancing the empowerment process of women educators to become superintendents in Oklahoma by offering leadership experiences not common to women educators, and expand opportunities for the women to practice communal and agentic characteristics of leadership.

Evidence that Challenges the Solution

Although the participants of this dissertation in practice reported the influence of an encouraging mentor as a causal condition of feeling empowered to become superintendent, Sampson and Davenport's (2010) qualitative research of women superintendents indicated a strong work ethic and tenacity were more important than the influence of a mentor. Therefore, prior research challenges the findings of this study. However, the proposed solution includes a mentorship and opportunities for the women teachers and counselors to practice work ethic and tenacity.

In addition, participants did not refer to the communal and agentic characteristics that may have contributed to becoming superintendents. Carli and Eagly (2007) and Northouse (2019) described the importance of women practicing communal and agentic characteristics to improve perceived effectiveness as leaders. Most participants had experience in elementary schools prior to becoming a district assistant superintendent. The leadership skills of elementary and secondary administrators are different, with elementary administrators exhibiting more communal characteristics such as care, concern, and compassion for younger children. Farmer (2007) proposed the secondary principal position adequately prepared individuals for the job duties of the superintendency. Therefore, based upon scholarly literature, the secondary leader internship is an expanded opportunity for women to practice agentic characteristics such

as decision-making, being aggressive, and exhibiting intelligence, as well as communal characteristics such as care, compassion, and concern.

Implementation of the Proposed Solution

The implementation of the proposed solution aligns to Bryson's (2011) ten-step change strategy cycle (see Table 9). Steps one and two will occur simultaneously in the spring of 2020 as I present the recommendation of a secondary leader internship program to the principal and superintendent of the school district. If approved, the superintendent will request school board approval. If the school board approves, an electronic survey, emailed to staff, will assess interest. I expect interest, as more than 10 teachers and counselors of the district have earned a master's degree in educational administration, but have no experience or leadership mentor.

Steps three through eight will occur in the summer of 2020. The superintendent and the high school leadership team, which consists of the principal and assistant principals of the high school, will meet to determine a name for the program that aligns to the school district vision, The Wildcat Way, an acronym for leadership and achievement. The leadership team will create an online application form for interested teachers and counselors to complete. Applicants must be working in education, in the school district as a teacher or counselor, and exhibit grit. The applicants may indicate a preference for a two-week internship at the high school. The leadership team will upload the application to the school website. District and school site administrators will educate the staff about the program in email and faculty meetings.

Each principal, assistant principal, and intern will complete the CliftonStrengths (Gallup, 2020) assessment online to determine top five individual strengths. The

leadership team will discuss the strengths and apply practices recommended by Rath (2007) to work positively and collaboratively with interns. The high school leadership team will then develop a list of secondary leadership experience opportunities, intentionally provided throughout the two-week experience, and aligned to state school accountability policy. These experiences align to the findings of this dissertation in practice, in that interns will be building self-efficacy, balancing family and work roles, and developing an encouraging mentor relationship (see Figure 2).

The high school leadership team will review applicants and select interns. The principal and assistant principals will rotate as mentors of interns throughout the two-week periods. The high school leadership team will create a calendar of the school year to communicate the interns selected, the dates of the two-week period, and the mentor of each intern. The principal will present the calendar to the superintendent and email to selected interns.

The high school leadership team will create a survey of open-ended or Likert-style questions for interns to complete at the end of the two-week period. The survey will ask the intern for feedback related to the experience. The high school leadership team will review the data quarterly, to drive adjustments, as needed. In addition, former interns will complete a biennial career ascension survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the secondary leader internship program in enhancing the empowerment process of women teachers and counselors in the large, public, Oklahoma school district. The first two-week experience of the secondary leader internship will begin in the fall of 2020.

Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Implementation of the Solution

“Everyone leads, and everyone is leading all the time” (Lowney, 2003, p. 272).

The administrators of the district and high school are integral to the success of the implementation plan of the proposed solution (see Table 8). The superintendent, principals, and assistant principals will be responsible for education and communication with other stakeholders. The high school leadership team will be responsible for modeling, designing, and evaluating the effectiveness of the leader internship program. The district leadership team will determine non-negotiables of the program, such as the vision of the organizational future, meeting norms, and intended outcomes prior to the potential program implementation. The leaders are responsible for ensuring cognitive and gender diversity in the selection of leader interns, based upon assessments embedded in the application process. In addition, the leadership team of the high school will be responsible for collaboration and the day-to-day support of the intern, as he or she practices secondary leadership experiences.

Burke (2014) and Rogers (2003) stressed the importance of two-way communication with stakeholders when implementing change or innovations. The stakeholders related to the proposed solution are the superintendent, the high school leadership team (principal and assistant principals), the staff of the district, parents, students, and community members. Throughout implementation, district and site administrators will communicate with staff, students, parents, and community members during faculty meetings, on the school website, and through social media, to prevent miscommunication or confusion. District and site leadership may use feedback from two-way communications with staff, students, parents, and community members to adjust

elements of the leader internship, as needed. In addition, assessments embedded in the proposed solution, such as the electronic survey of interns and the high school leadership team observations, will be data collected to as two-way feedback driving adjustments.

Timeline of Implementation, Assessment, and Evaluation

The implementation of the secondary leader internship will begin in the spring of 2020, with my proposal to the high school principal and district superintendent. If approved, the implementation will proceed through the summer of 2020 and the first cohort of secondary leader interns will begin in the fall of 2020 (see Table 9).

Table 9*Timeline of Proposed Solution Implementation, Assessment, and Evaluation, Based on Bryson's Ten-Step Change Strategy Cycle (2011)*

<u>Step</u>	<u>Leader Action</u>
One/Two: Initial Agreement and Mandates Spring, 2020	I will present the Leader Internship program to the principal and superintendent. If approved, the superintendent will request board approval. An electronic survey emailed to staff to assess interest in the leader internship program.
Three: Mission/Vision Summer, 2020	The school leadership team will align improvements to existing mission and vision of the school district in the application form, provide form on school website, publicize to teachers and counselors of the district.
Four: Assess Environment Summer, 2020	The high school leadership team will conduct assessments of principal, assistant principals, and intern strengths, leadership experience, and mentor experience.
Five: Address Strategic Issues Summer, 2020	Based upon the assessments, the high school leadership team will identify strengths of interns and educational leaders, design experience opportunities, and plan mentor support and resources. The superintendent, principal, and assistant principals will review leader intern applicants and select interns for the first semester of the school year.
Six: Strategy Formulation Summer, 2020	The high school leadership team will develop a calendar of interns, and mentors, meetings.
Seven: Strategy Plan Review Summer, 2020	The principal will present the calendar to the superintendent for approval.
Eight: Description of the Organization in the Future Summer, 2020	The principal, assistant principals, and department chairpersons will identify objectives for the leader internship to improve school progress on the state report card.
Nine: Implementation Fall, 2020 December, 2020	The leader internship will begin and will rotate each two weeks. At End of each internship, the intern will complete a survey to provide feedback about the experience. At the mid-year break, the superintendent, principal, and assistant principals will review applicants and select interns for the spring semester.
Ten: Strategy and Planning Quarterly, 2020-21	Each quarter feedback collected and analyzed by district and school leaders. Changes will be made based upon leader and intern feedback.
Process Evaluation Summer, 2021	At the end of the year, district and site leaders will analyze data collected from feedback provided in surveys of interns as well as qualitative feedback from observations of the leaders/mentors. Former participants' career ascension will be collected in a biennial electronic survey.

Policies Influencing the Proposed Solution

Kraft and Furlong (2018) stressed the importance of alignment in change initiatives to public policy in traditional institutions, such as education. States that received federal education funds submitted accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education aligned to Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) requirements for federal approval. For example, the *Oklahoma Edge Plan* (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2017) outlined the process of accountability reporting for every state accredited school within Oklahoma. The plan is a report card system based upon numerical scores for academic achievement, academic growth, attendance, English language proficiency, postsecondary opportunities, and graduation rate.

The implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) increased the demand for educational leaders who exhibit strengths in effective communication skills, leading curriculum and instructional practices, resource management, and community involvement (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Farmer, 2007; Polka et al., 2008). The proposed solution provides a framework for leader interns to practice a variety of leadership skills in a large, public, Oklahoma high school aligned to federal and state accountability policies.

Burke (2014) emphasized the alignment of proposed change to the organizational vision. In addition to the alignment of the proposed solution to federal and state policy changes, the school district in which the large, public, Oklahoma high school is located recently implemented a re-branding process to coordinate each site under one mascot and mission statement. The mission statement has become the vision of the school district. The re-brand is an acronym of work ethic, improve, leadership, discipline, compete,

attitude, and teamwork (WILDCAT) (Ponca City Public Schools, 2019). The leader internship implementation plan aligned to each concept comprising the acronym in the district vision. The proposed solution will be a practical model of the district vision.

Potential Barriers to the Proposed Solution

Potential barriers to the proposed solution are district policies, the number of interested applicants, the potential for negative parent and community response, and the financial cost. According to school district policy, the leader interns cannot suspend students or evaluate teachers. To prevent this policy from limiting the leadership experiences of the intern, the leader interns will have the opportunity to observe and assist administrators conducting student suspensions and observe peer teachers in classrooms. This is important because it is difficult for teachers and counselors who do not participate in the internship to observe classroom instruction and student discipline due to schedule restrictions.

The number of applicants is a potential barrier to the leader internship. Therefore, the principal, or assistant principal, will conduct a survey of current staff to assess the interest of district teachers and counselors prior to beginning implementation. If fewer than 10 teachers or counselors express interest, based upon the survey results, the district and site administrators may expand the implementation timeline to include educating the staff to increase demand for participation. However, currently more than 10 teachers and counselors have completed education and certifications for educational leadership, which indicates sufficient demand for the leader internship.

Finally, a teacher or counselor's absence may incite negative feedback from students and parents. Parents and students are important stakeholders of the school

system. Quality instructional time, led by a certified teacher, is important in academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Proactive communication with students and parents and the teacher preparing appropriate lessons will reduce the potential for negative feedback. The teacher who is participating in the leader internship may also be available to students who are struggling outside of regular class time.

Financial Cost of the Proposed Solution

The pre-assessment of strengths, CliftonStrengths (Gallup, 2020), completed by the district and site leaders who will collaborate and act as mentors in the leader internship, and a substitute for a teacher or counselor, are the anticipated financial costs for the district. There are currently 25 administrators in the school district who may mentor leader interns. The anticipated cost of the individual strength pre-assessment is \$19.99 each. For each administrator and intern applicant the estimated cost is \$1,500.00. However, the school district is already a member of Gallup (2020) educator services, and therefore may be eligible for a reduced price.

During the two-week period of the leader internship, the district will provide a substitute teacher or counselor. The anticipated financial cost of a substitute is \$55.00 per day, or \$550.00 per internship for a teacher. A counselor would not need a substitute. To reduce financial costs, I will suggest collaboration with four local universities to provide experiences for student teachers or counselors, as an alternative to substitutes.

Evaluating the Outcome of Implementing the Solution

The strategic implementation plan, framed by Olson and Simerson's (2015) research of strategic leadership and Bryson's (2011) ten-step strategic change cycle, includes a needs assessment, leader and intern strengths assessments, opportunities for

informal, formative observations, and a biennial, summative evaluation of the program. Formative assessments will occur during the leader internship in discussions of observations in weekly leader/mentor meetings and weekly high school leadership team meetings. In addition, the superintendent and the high school leadership team will observe and collect informal, formative feedback from staff, parents, students, and community members.

At the end of the two-week period, the leader intern will complete a brief survey designed by the high school leadership team. The high school leadership team will discuss formative assessments, such as observations, and implement minor adjustments, as needed. The district and high school leadership will collect and review data, such as intern surveys and mentor observations, to conduct quarterly assessments. Each summer, the high school leadership team and superintendents will analyze data collected quarterly and will implement changes to the internship for the next school year. After two years, a survey emailed to the participant will assess career ascension, as well as evaluate the program's effectiveness in enhancing the empowerment process of women teachers and counselors employed by the large, public, Oklahoma school district. The biennial survey will ask former interns Likert-style questions related to their continued education, experience, and career ascension.

Implications

This constructivist grounded theory dissertation in practice study of the empowerment process of women superintendents in Oklahoma presents implications for professional practice in education, future social research, and leadership theory and practice. The implications are based upon the findings and grounded in the multiple,

complex realities of participants. This dissertation in practice study contributes to the greater good in the following ways: 1) potentially enhancing the empowerment process of women educators in a large, public, Oklahoma school district; 2) recommending increased cognitive diversity of the leadership team, and 3) promoting evidence-based leadership characteristics.

Practical Implications

Northouse (2019) described the key to the empowerment of women in leadership is to understand the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal obstacles unique to women. This dissertation in practice study sought to understand the experiences of women superintendents in Oklahoma by exploring their lived-experiences. Therefore, this constructivist grounded theory research design aligned to social constructivism and the Jesuit charism *Cura Personalis*, or care and concern of the person (Creighton, 2019). By listening to the rich experiences of participants, I gained a practical understanding of the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal obstacles they experienced.

The first practical implication of this dissertation in practice study is the potential to enhance the empowerment process of women educators to become superintendents by providing intentional, strategic opportunities for women educators to practice building self-efficacy, balancing family and work roles, and developing a mentor relationship, in a secondary school setting. Scholarly research indicated secondary school leadership experiences, such as decision-making in school finances, athletics, and student college or career preparation, prepared educational leaders for the superintendency (Farmer, 2007; Sperandio, 2015).

Secondly, the proposed practice of the high school leadership team utilizing strengths-based, transformational leadership characteristics may increase cognitive diversity of the leadership. Page (2017) stressed the importance of cognitive diversity among leadership teams to promote creativity and innovation. As high school leaders mentor the interns and review feedback, who are teachers and counselors, and as interns practice administrative duties, the perspectives of different roles in the school district will be more effectively shared and communicated.

Third, the department of education in Oklahoma does not provide a research-based, leadership development program for public schools (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). The electronic survey of participants, or interns, conducted at the end of the two-week internship, will provide evidence related to intern experiences in building self-efficacy, balancing family and work roles, and developing a relationship with a mentor. The high school leadership team will collect and analyze the data. Adjustments will be determined based upon evidence. Because women and men may participate in the secondary leader internship, I will be able to conduct analysis related gender-based similarities and differences. If evidence indicates the proposed solution is effective in enhancing the empowerment process of women educators, I will apply to present the secondary leadership program at the annual Women in Leadership state conference, and other school districts may choose to implement it.

Finally, the implementation plan of the proposed solution embeds a duality in the potential for the expansion of my practical leadership skills resulted from this dissertation in practice study: 1) to apply the findings, as a current educational leader in an Oklahoma public school, to enhance the empowerment process of women educators; and 2) to

propose a strategic framework for educational administrators of a large, public, Oklahoma school district to practice characteristics of strengths-based, transformational leadership (Avolio et al., 1999; Rath, 2007). For example, in the implementation plan of the proposed solution, members of the high school leadership team and mentors will complete the Clifton StrengthsFinder (Gallup, 2020) assessment and plan experiences and collaboration with the guidance of the evidence-based resource.

Implications for Future Research

First, the population of this dissertation in practice study, women superintendents in Oklahoma, is small. Therefore, I recommend further qualitative research to explore the experiences of women educators who have met the qualifications to become a superintendent, but chose not to apply. The recommended future research will expand the population studied. The recommended future research may lead to additional empirical evidence related to the empowerment process of women to become superintendents by including the thoughts, feelings, and actions of women who decided not to become superintendents.

Second, further quantitative research of the contexts, concepts, causal conditions, central phenomenon, and consequences of the tentative theoretical framework (see Figure 1) may provide empirical evidence generalizable to a larger population. Following additional research to further validate the empowerment process model, a future researcher might create an instrument with a scale based upon the empowerment process model to assess building self-efficacy, balancing work and family roles, an encouraging mentor, and risk-taking to enter leadership positions. This research may include women and men, to identify differences or similarities for gender and occupation in the

empowerment process. Future research of empowerment as a process experienced by an individual, or theoretical framework, rather than a psychological or cognitive state of an individual, may contribute to scholarly literature and theory related to gender and leadership, positive psychology, motivation, and achievement theory.

Third and finally, future research of the data provided throughout the implementation plan of the proposed solution may hold potential for contributions to strength-based leadership or transformational leadership theory. For example, the electronic survey completed by interns and mentors at the end of the two-week period, the high school leadership teams' observations, and the electronic survey of career ascension, may or may not indicate support for strengths-based or transformational leadership styles.

Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice

“By focusing only on a leader’s decisive engagement on the world’s center stage, it diverts us from the years of preparation, the life habits, the values, and the self-knowledge gained through the stumbles that contributed to the defining moment” (Lowney, 2003, p. 272). The participants shared their experiences, or stumbles, that led to the defining moment each woman engaged in risk-taking to become a superintendent. The findings indicate the influence of a transformational leader, or an individual who encouraged them to continue to improve, was a causal condition of the empowerment process. The Jesuit charism *men and women with and for others* prevails in the findings, as the women described the important influence mentors, mostly males, who encouraged the women to engage in risk-taking to become superintendents (Creighton, 2019).

Research of leadership theory and practice indicates transformational leadership is the most appropriate leadership style to enhance the empowerment process of followers (Avolio et al., 1999; Johnson, 2015; Northouse, 2019). The following characteristics of transformational leadership related to leaders empowering followers: 1) to solicit solutions and new perspectives from followers; 2) to act as a coach and mentor; and 3) to consider individual circumstances of the follower (Avolio et al., 1999; Johnson, 2015; Northouse, 2019). Johnson (2015) reported followers of transformational leaders were more committed, worked harder, and persisted in the face of obstacles. This dissertation in practice recommends a proposed solution that embeds characteristics of strengths-based, transformational leadership throughout the implementation plan. For example, the leadership team of the high school will assess individual strengths and act as mentors to interns to promote growth and expand experience (Gallup, 2020; Johnson, 2015; Northouse, 2019; Rath, 2007). The formative assessments and evaluation of the proposed solution may provide additional empirical evidence of a potential relationship between the empowerment process and strengths-based, transformational leadership.

Summary of the Study

Women are underrepresented as superintendents in the United States (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Superville, 2016). In 2018, only 10.6 percent of the superintendents employed full-time in Oklahoma were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). However, women comprise a majority of teachers, counselors, and administrators at the site or assistant district levels in public education (Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Glass et al., 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The research focus is on the intersectionality of the

challenges and obstacles in becoming leaders for women, the differences in career path ascension to the superintendency for women and men, and empowerment.

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory dissertation in practice study is to understand the empowerment process of women superintendents in Oklahoma. Experiences of women superintendents, collected through critical inquiry interviews, observations, reflexive memos, documents, and constant comparative analysis. The tentative theoretical framework, the empowerment process model (see Figure 1), embodies the findings. The empowerment process model identifies the progression of the women from confident teacher leaders to superintendents. The progression includes the contexts: working in education and practicing grit; the emergent concepts: building self-efficacy and balancing family and work roles; the causal condition: an encouraging mentor; the central phenomenon: feeling empowered; and the positive, negative, and neutral consequences: risk-taking, becoming a superintendent, and relocating.

A proposed solution, based on the tentative theoretical framework, is the recommendation of a secondary leader internship in a large, public, Oklahoma school district, to strategically enhance the empowerment process of women to become superintendents in Oklahoma by providing support as women practice building self-efficacy, balancing family and work roles, and developing a mentor relationship. The internship will be a two-week, rotational experience of high school administrative duties and mentorship, open to teachers and counselors of the district. The implementation plan encompasses the following strategies: 1) pre-assessments of needs and mentor strengths; 2) two-way communication with stakeholders; 3) a detailed description of the roles of the leader(s); 4) formative assessments based upon intern feedback and leader observations;

and 5) the biennial electronic survey of the interns, intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed solution in enhancing empowerment of women educators to become superintendents. If approved, the first cohort of the leader internship will begin in the fall of 2020.

The effectiveness of the secondary leader internship's influence on the number of women who later become superintendents in Oklahoma will be assessed through the evaluation process in a biennial electronic survey of former interns. The practices of interns and leaders embedded in the proposed solution are founded in the results of this dissertation in practice as well as scholarly literature in leadership theory, gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as superintendents, and empowerment. The implications for evidence-based leader practices in the implementation of the proposed solution were a product of the study of leadership theory, and potentially contribute to the greater good of the large, public, Oklahoma school district by increasing effectiveness of leader practice and expanding cognitive diversity of the high school leadership team.

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*Appendix A***Sample Recruiting Email**

Dear (participant name),

I am emailing to request your participation in qualitative research of a dissertation study for the Ed.D. in Interdisciplinary Leadership program of Creighton University.

The topic of study is the underrepresentation of women superintendents in Oklahoma.

I intend to interview 20 to 30 female superintendents in Oklahoma to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the process of empowerment of women who became superintendents.

Throughout the study many measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

If you choose to participate, one 30 to 45-minute interview will be conducted over ZOOM®, the web conference software. Following the initial interview, brief additional contact by phone or email may be necessary if follow up questions or clarifications are needed. I will also ask you to share a current resume or vita by email or fax.

All identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms.

I appreciate your consideration for participation in the study. Your perspective is important to share, as you are a member of the minority of female superintendents in Oklahoma.

If you decide to participate, please read the consent form attached and reply to this email or call me to schedule the web-conference interview at a day and time within June or July that is most convenient for you. Respectfully,

DaLana Hawkins, phone: 580-763-4284 email: dalanahawkins@creighton.edu

*Appendix B***Interview Consent Form**

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this qualitative, constructivist, grounded theory study is to develop a process model that explains the empowerment of women to become superintendents in Oklahoma.

What you will do in this research: If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview and if necessary, follow up questions for clarification of conceptualizations. You will be asked several questions about your motives, actions, and the contexts of becoming a superintendent in Oklahoma. With your permission, I will record the web conference interview. You may request the video or interview stop at any time you like. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording. You will also email or fax a current resume or vita.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 30 to 45-minutes.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Benefits: This is an opportunity to share your experiences of empowerment to become a superintendent in Oklahoma.

Confidentiality: Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. Pseudonyms will replace identifying information. The recording will be erased and deleted as soon as it is no longer needed. The transcript, without your name, will be kept until the research is complete. Until that time, it will be kept in a safe location, under lock and password protection. All identifying information will be removed from your resume/vita as well. The data you provide will be used to inform the development of a process model that explains the empowerment of women to become superintendents in Oklahoma. It will be used to inform improvements of training intended to increase empowerment of women educators who may aspire to become superintendents in Oklahoma. I will not use your name or information that would identify you in any publications or presentations.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You may withdraw by informing the researcher that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked). You may skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

<p>To Contact the Researcher: If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: DaLana Hawkins, 580-763-4824. You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Dr. Caruso-Woolard, Creighton University, Email: SandyCaruso-Woolard@creighton.edu</p>

*Appendix C***Interview Protocol: Female superintendent**

The population will be female superintendents in Oklahoma.

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: D. Hawkins

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee: Superintendent

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in my study of the empowerment process of women superintendents in Oklahoma. All identifying information you provide will be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure your confidentiality. This interview will be used as qualitative research of the dissertation process for the Creighton University Ed D program. The consent form was attached to the invitation email and described the process of the interview. Video and audio recording will be transcribed. If at any time you would like to pause or stop the interview just say stop and I will cease the video/audio recording. We can pause or take a break at any time if one is needed. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions:

Please describe your school district- is it large or small? How many employees do you lead?

1. *Describe the actions you took to become a superintendent.*
2. *Describe the thoughts and feelings you experienced in your journey to become a superintendent.*
3. *Describe any sacrifices or challenges you overcame or persevered through in your journey to become a superintendent.*
4. *Describe any sacrifices or challenges you experienced that were related to you being a woman who aspired to become a superintendent.*
5. *Tell me about the actions of others who played a role in your journey to become a superintendent.*
6. *Imagine you are advising women on how to become a superintendent... what three pieces of advice would you give them?*

Probing questions that may be used, if necessary are:

1. *That is interesting, could you tell me more about that?*
2. *I see. Were there specific events that led to this decision?*
3. *Could you provide more details about this event/action?*
4. *Did you regret this action?*
5. *Was that a political, social, professional or personal decision?*

Additional questions for depth and breadth to the above questions:

Take me through your thought processes during that time.

I would like to hear more about that.

Would you clarify that for me?

What were the consequences?

What was your reaction to that behavior?

Conclusion:

Again, I greatly appreciate your participation in my research. I would appreciate you emailing me your resume or CV to be used as additional documentation.

Going forward, I may contact you by phone or email if any follow up questions or further clarifying questions are necessary.

I understand you are busy. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences related to the process of empowerment in becoming a woman superintendent in Oklahoma.

*Appendix D***Memos**

Length of interview:

Description	Reflective Notes
	Map of Room