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Power Factors that Define Gender Inequity Within the Missouri Public School Superintendency

Kristina Alexander, Frank D. Grispino, & Phillip E. Messner

Although women have access to the superintendency power position, evidence has shown that women have not been able to break the glass ceiling. A review of the literature failed to identify specific and practical employment factors that must be resolved or overcome if women are to reach power parity in Missouri. This study was undertaken to identify those variables that best define negotiating and access power barriers for Missouri women superintendents.

Russ (1994) suggested that power was the leader's ability to influence others' behavior and change a course of events. Leaders in public service, such as the President of the United States, are in a position to exert great power. The public school superintendency differs only in scope from the presidency and has been described as a power position by Lunenburg and Ornstein (1996). Although many types of power exist, negotiation and access power have been identified as two of the most influential types of power available to the public school superintendent (Keller, 1999). Alexander (2002) defined superintendency negotiation power variables as those associated with employee compensation and access power variables as those associated with years of experience and school district size.

"Glass Ceiling Effect"

Hutchinson (2001) reported that historically there has been a salary compensation gap between men and women superintendents in Missouri. Other authors have reported such salary gaps throughout the United States (Malone, Walter & Supley, 2000). The economic and social impact of the gender gap has been referred to as the "glass ceiling effect" (Keller, 1999). Women, trying to break through the "glass ceiling," are looked upon as "outsiders" (Keller, 1999; Schein, 1992). Although women have access to the superintendency power position, evidence has shown that women have not been able to break the glass ceiling. Negotiating and access power can be measured by compensation and employment variables, as suggested by

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Alexander (2002). Missouri women superintendents may face “glass ceiling” barriers that prevent them from fully benefiting from their acquired positional power. This study was undertaken to explore this hypothesis. The following discussion provides the methodology and results.

Statement of the Problem

Historically, men have been appointed to more positions of power (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Morgan (1997) stated, “It often makes a great deal of difference if you’re a male or a woman!” (p. 191). Organizations are dominated by gender biases that favor one gender over the other (Morgan, 1997). Many organizations frequently segment opportunities in ways that provide men more negotiation and access power, allowing men to more easily gain prestige and power than women do.

The United States has become more aware that genders are stereotyped in the workforce. These stereotypes continue to persist in the Missouri public school superintendency. Although the number of female superintendents has increased (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002-2003), aspiring women still have a long way to go before they can experience gender equity in the superintendency. A review of the literature failed to identify specific and practical employment factors that must be resolved or overcome if women are to reach power parity in Missouri. Therefore, this study was undertaken to identify those variables that best define negotiating and access power barriers for Missouri women superintendents.

Purpose of Study

This study was undertaken to identify those factors that best define and discriminate power differences between the genders employed as Missouri public school superintendents in 2001. Negotiating and access power measures gleaned from public records were investigated to define power barriers faced by women superintendents in the state of Missouri (see Table 1). It was anticipated that the findings of this study would benefit women educators in Missouri and throughout the nation by more clearly defining the ubiquitous term, "glass ceiling."

Review of Literature

Historically, women have been held "outside" traditional American male dominated power positions. Although women continue to gain "insider" access and negotiation power (Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, & Snyder, 2000) they have had to break through a "glass ceiling" (Keller, 1999) in order to achieve power equitable to men.

Access and negotiation power encompass opportunities including advancement, key positions of leadership, and financial rewards for service that has been traditionally different for the genders. As recently as 1995 to 2000, gender income gaps have not changed significantly (Income Gap, 2002).

Gender bias in the past. Much of the early investigation of males and females has concentrated on the "gender gap." Roles and myths about women date back to prehistoric times. Although female reproduction power was revered, infant girls were not always welcomed and women have not always been highly respected. Female babies who needed the same care as male babies were more likely to be left behind. Girls were thought of by the dominant male gender as less useful than boys and therefore more likely victims of infanticide (Edson, 1987; McKenna, 1997; Tavis, 1992).

Gender bias in the workplace. Workplace gender biases have been recognized and studied for some time (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1996; Schein, 1992). Traditionally certain stereotypes were created for various races, gender, religions, and classes (Kanter, 1993). Biases in business and education will be reviewed to help understand the history and current standing of women in the work force today and historically.

Gender Equity and Title IX. Federal law enacted through Title IX has set a precedent in an attempt to reach equity for males and females in an educational environment. Salaries of coaches, scholarships, participation, class offerings, budget allocations, all have worked toward reaching equity for males and females in education. Although primarily directed and focused

on athletics, the overall impact has been significant for women in all levels of educational work including the superintendency (University of Iowa Statistical Report, 2001).

Gender bias in the superintendency. According to Logan (1999), an under-representation of women in all levels of school administration was in stark contrast to the total number of women in all of education. Historically, few women enter the field of education preparing for the school superintendency. More women are entering preparation programs for leadership roles than ever before; however, research showed that K-12 women superintendents number only 7 to 10% of the total and only 9 to 16% of the women choose the secondary principalship as a career (Haring, 1998). In a ten-year examination by the American Association of School Administrators (2000), it was found that women accounted for only 297 of the 2,262 superintendents who responded to their studies.

In his work, Glass (2000) suggested that the two most widely cited reasons for the shortage of women in the superintendency were that they were discouraged early in life and they were not hired by school boards. Glass noted that there was no substantive data to support these reasons yet he believed that they were true.

Glass-ceiling barriers. Women superintendents have dealt with the unique problems of their gender. Malone et al. (2000) identified several barriers to the superintendency, these were the absence of mentors, poorly developed professional networks, and a lack of formal and informal training, encouragement, membership in the good old boys network, and sponsors who had influence. According to the AASA (2000), women have been discouraged from preparing for the superintendency, and school boards have not traditionally hired them. Seven major factors were identified by AASA as to why women were scarce in the superintendency.

1. Women have not been in positions that normally led to the superintendency. Since most women were elementary school teachers and a small percentage were assistant principals, elementary teachers must jump straight from the classroom to the principalship and that was a difficult leap.
2. Women were not getting superintendent's credentials in preparation programs. Nationwide, data indicated that more than 50% of graduate programs had female enrollments and they were getting doctorate degrees at about the same rate as males. Yet, only 10% were working for credentials as superintendents while working on the doctorate or specialist degrees.

3. Women were not as interested or experienced in district-wide fiscal management as men. While showing much interest in instructional matters, most boards are interested in the fiscal management of the school. Very few women have administrative experience in finances.
4. Women were not interested in the superintendency for personal reasons. Since the superintendency was a time consuming job, more than 50 hours a week average, this type of work-week was not appealing to women accustomed to child-centered teaching.
5. School boards were reluctant to hire women. Most school boards were made up of men. School boards tended to view women as unable to handle district finances.
6. Women entered the field of education for different purposes. Until recently, women were excluded from accounting, law, dentistry, medicine, engineering, and law. The women who enter teaching today were more likely to want to be teachers and not administrators.
7. Women enter too late. Women have tended to teach in the classroom more years than men and, therefore, were older when they enter the superintendency. Most men start the process at about 27 years of age and enter into administration in their early 30s. Women might reach the central office in their 50s, so do not have the desire to move up.

The current status of women superintendents in Missouri. The 1997-1998 *Missouri School Directory* reported that only 48 (10.6%) women headed Missouri school districts. This percentage increased to about 15 percent in 2001-2002. Hutchinson (2001) reported that although 36.6% of those receiving superintendent's certificates in Missouri between 1990 and 2000 were women, the percentage employed as superintendents has not increased greatly. In 1993, women superintendents were paid an average salary of \$49,656 while their male counterparts were paid an average salary of \$56,424 (Joyner, 1999). By 1997-98, the gap had narrowed to a difference of \$5,002 for an average of \$63,394 for women and \$68,396 for men.

Studies of the Missouri assistant superintendency have reported that there were 50 women assistant superintendents in Missouri in 1997-98 (Hutchinson, 2001; Joyner, 1999). The average salary during these years for women was \$79,189 and for men \$76,757. Surprisingly, the average salary for women assistant superintendents was higher than the average salary for fully titled superintendents. This difference was attributed to the observation that the majority of assistant superintendents were employed in larger districts. In turn, the majority of women superintendents were in smaller

districts and larger districts typically offered higher salaries than smaller districts.

The future may be brighter for aspiring women superintendents. Shepard (1998) surveyed 77 Missouri school districts to determine the number of retirements that would be occurring in administration. There were responses from 66 of the 77 polled. They reported that 144 of the 360 administrative positions had changed in the previous two years and 44% planned to retire in the next three years with an additional 23% planning to retire within five years. With these retirements, avenues for women could become more prevalent.

Summary of the literature. Women throughout history have experienced barriers to power. This has also been true for those women who have aspired to the public school superintendency. These barriers have been referred to as a “glass ceiling.” In the State of Missouri, the glass ceiling phenomenon has been primarily associated with gender gap differences in salaries between men and women public school superintendents. Gender inequity continues to be experienced by women seeking employment as public school superintendents in Missouri.

Research Methodology

A survey methodology was used to investigate the research question and null hypothesis (Bruning & Kintz, 1997). Public archival survey data reported in 2000-2001 Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) district superintendent annual activity reports and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) *Missouri School Directory* (2000-2001) constituted the data base from which the findings and conclusions were drawn.

Research question 1. Are there differences in negotiating and access power between men and women superintendents in Missouri?

Research question 2. What negotiating and access power variables best discriminate between men and women superintendents in Missouri?

The study group. Active full-time superintendents during the academic year 2000-2001 included in the resource documents constituted the study group ($n = 435$). Superintendents, whose duties were combined with the responsibilities of the principal, were not included. Interim superintendents were also deleted from the database. As shown in Table 1, 382 men and 53 women superintendents were included in the study. The study group included

Table 1
Frequency of Selected Superintendency Characteristics

Group Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	382	87.8
Female	53	12.2
District Enrollment		
Less Than 500	141	32.4
More than 500	294	67.6
Highest Degree		
Ed. Specialist	272	62.5
Doctorate	161	37.0
Masters	2	0.5

representation from all 114 counties in the state of Missouri. The majority of the subjects were employed by school districts with more than 500 students and 99% of the superintendents held a degree of Educational Specialists or higher.

Data analysis methods. The means, ranges, and standard deviation values were calculated separately for female and male superintendents for each variable. A check for normal distribution (Bruning & Kintz, 1997) was conducted. Tests of significance were then applied as appropriate. Finding a lack of normality, the Mann-Whitney U-Test non-parametric test was used for interval data sets as suggested by Bruning and Kintz. They also suggested that Chi Square Analysis methods should be applied to nominal data sets. Discriminate analysis methods were applied to identify glass-ceiling variables that best define the gender gap between men and women superintendents (Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973). The confidence level of 0.10 was used to challenge each null hypothesis (Patten, 1997).

Variables studied. One independent variable, superintendency gender was identified. Nine negotiation power and five access power variables, "glass ceiling" variables, served as dependent variables.

Findings and Discussion

Of the 14 "glass ceiling" variables investigated, only five were found significant in regard to differences between the genders. Men superintendents in Missouri were more highly paid (\$10,137 more per year); managed districts with higher average assessed valuation

Table 2
Significant Glass Ceiling Variables Between Male and Female Superintendents

Interval Variables	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>U*</i>	<i>p</i>
Annual Salary	m = 271 f = 40	\$78,173.48 \$68,036.87	\$18,454.36 \$15,926.09	3310	.000**
District Assessment	m = 382 f = 53	\$144,000,000 \$40,612,488	\$354,993,843.97 \$83,290,023.19	7139	.001**
Total Years Experience	m = 382 f = 53	25.07 22.77	6.39 7.63	16173	.020**
Total Years as Superintendent	m = 382 f = 53	9.16 6.94	11.61 7.25	16173	.020**
Nominal Variable	<i>n</i>	% Male	% Female	<i>Chi Sq (df=2)</i>	<i>p</i>
District Size	>500 = 382 500 >= 53	28.8 71.2	58.5 41.5	3.28	.00**

* U = Mann-Whitney Test for Universality

** Significant Difference = < 0.10

(\$103,387,512); had more total years (2.3 years) and years in the superintendency (2.2 years); and men (71%) compared to women (41%) were employed in large districts. These findings suggest that if women are to break through the glass ceiling these five factors must be addressed.

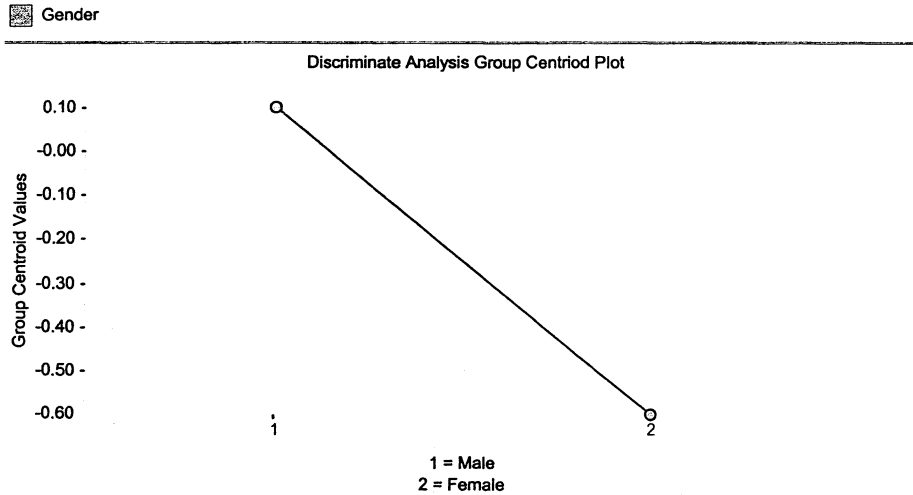
These findings were supported through a second type of analysis. Discriminant analysis was used to classify significant dependent variables into super factors that better define the equity relationship between men and women superintendents. Only one significant discriminate function was found (*Wilk's Lambda* = 0.937; *p.* = 0.017). This super factor accounted for 56.8% of the variance. Using the function matrix structure with a 0.35 cutoff value, it was found that four of the five previously identified "glass ceiling" variables could be constituted as the new super factor (salary, years in superintendency, total years experience, and district assessed valuation; the previously identified factor of district size was dropped in this analysis) and was therefore, assimilated into one rubric titled, "Superintendency Power Equity Score." Group centroid values were computed to determine the degree of equity discrimination between men and women superintendents. These values were graphed to provide a visual view of the non-equity differences, as illustrated in Figure 1. Male superintendents had the greatest level of access and negotiation power with a centroid score of 0.101, whereas, female superintendents were found to have a low power equity score of -0.660.

Conclusions and Discussion

A review of the statistical analyses results revealed that significant differences existed in public school district assessed valuation and school district size between those employing men and those employing women superintendents. Missouri women superintendents consistently score lower on the Superintendency Power Equity Score as defined by Alexander (2002). Lower power equity scores are directly translated into lower salaries, employment restricted to small rural districts, and lack of urban representation that women superintendents in Missouri have and continue to experience.

When access power is defined as access to wealth and the power that wealth provides, it is apparent that men have greater access to power than women superintendents in Missouri through their control of much larger school budgets. Men also had a higher average number of years experience in

Figure 1. Missouri men and women superintendent inequity is clearly illustrated by their respective “Superintendency Power Equity Score.”



the superintendency and total years of educational experience compared to women, thus creating a potential barrier for women who seek employment in more prestigious (i.e., larger and wealthy) public school districts. If women are to reduce the non-equity employment in the Missouri superintendency, they must gain access to the superintendency at a younger age. The literature suggested that another type of barrier delays women from entering this power position, that of child bearer. Although not investigated in this study, additional research conducted should be undertaken to determine the role of child bearing and rearing in delaying women in their pursuit of the school superintendency.

Recommendations

Women who aspire to the superintendency should consider the following suggestions if they are to increase their “Superintendency Power Equity Score.”

- Aspiring women superintendents should seek higher certification/degrees at younger ages.
- Qualified women should be encouraged to enter the superintendency at a younger age.
- Qualified women are encouraged to aspire and seek the superintendency in school districts that offer greater access to power.

- Aspiring women superintendents should seek and work with strong supportive mentors who are committed to the promotion of women into positions of power.
- Aspiring women superintendents should seek and develop peer superintendency networks that promote and advance women at a faster rate.
- Aspiring women superintendents are encouraged to be assertive in their pursuit of the superintendency.

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