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Georgia Female School Superintendents: Perceptions of Isolation

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GEORGIA FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS:
PERCEPTIONS OF ISOLATION

by

JULIANN PAYNE ALLIGOOD

(Under the Direction of James F. Burnham)

ABSTRACT

The researcher's purpose of this study was to describe the perception of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents. A qualitative method was used to conduct the study.

The research instrument used in conducting the study was comprised of 13 open-ended interview questions which were designed to elicit responses to the research question and subquestions. The researcher interviewed ten Georgia female school superintendents concerning their positions as female school leaders.

The researcher recorded the interviews with audio tapes, had tapes transcribed by a trained transcriptionist, and coded the transcripts for recurring theme and patterns. To validate her findings, the researcher enlisted the assistance of methodologist, Dr. Michael D. Richardson, who also coded transcripts.

The ten Georgia female school superintendents were chosen through convenience sampling. Of the participants, 8 were Caucasian and 2 were African American. After determining the participants of the study, the researcher contacted the superintendents via telephone and email to determine a convenient meeting place, date, and time. The researcher assured the superintendents that their identities would remain confidential;

therefore, each superintendent was given a fictitious name, and the participants' responses were presented with the assigned name.

In this study the researcher explored the superintendents' backgrounds, perceptions of isolation related to the superintendency, and the strategies that they used to cope with isolation. All Georgia female school superintendents participating in the study acknowledged, at minimum, a modicum amount of isolation related to their positions.

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PERCEPTIONS OF ISOLATION

by

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

To the love of my life, the sunshine in my soul, and the driving force behind all of my hopes and dreams. This dream would never have become a reality without your ever-present encouragement. Thank you for the financial support, thank you for the emotional support; thank you for teaching me to dream, but most importantly, thank you for teaching me how to love. Your love has made all the difference in my life. I dedicate this work of heart to the man who encouraged me to never give up.

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Dr. James Burnham, chair of my dissertation committee guided me through the fundamental process of writing the most complex piece of literature that I had ever attempted. He is an encourager and a mentor, not only in the doctoral program but in my career as well.

My methodologist, Dr. Mike Richardson, lent not only his encouragement but also his unparalleled wisdom regarding qualitative studies. He instilled in me the perseverance to finish a project that seemed daunting at times and the courage to relentlessly pursue a position in the field of educational leadership.

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The ten Georgia Female School Superintendents who participated in my study were not only helpful but were gracious in lending their time and experiences. Their insight and their stories made my study all the richer.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“First of all,” he [Atticus Finch] said, “if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—“

“Sir?”

“—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee, 1960, p. 30).

Words of wisdom penned by Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, Harper Lee, were spoken by Atticus Finch to his young daughter Scout as the lawyer father tried to impress upon his young child the importance of trying to understand another’s conviction. The complex life-lesson of empathizing with another’s plight may be valuable in many areas of life, particularly in education. However, before climbing into the skin of female superintendents, an understanding must be gleaned concerning the history of the superintendency as well as the intricacies of the office.

History of Administration

Dating back to the one-room schoolhouse, American schooling has evolved into a multi-faceted, complex entity. Community based schools that once served only a small number of students began to grow over the years. An increase in population necessitated the creation of school districts, and the foundations of grammar and high schools were

put into place. What are now known as contemporary, educational facilities often serve thousands of students at a single site. While the smaller community-based schools needed little administrative support, contemporary schools employ many administrators whose duties are both specific and diverse (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

Teachers of one-room schools managed their own administrative duties, with perhaps a little help from parents and other community members. As schools began to expand and more teachers were added, one of those teachers was named “headteacher.” This individual maintained some authority over others and thereby also accepted extra responsibilities such as managing school resources (Blount, 2003). From the colonial period through the mid-nineteenth century, teachers and head teacher posts were male-dominated. However, by the 1850s, female teachers were becoming more prevalent, yet local and state officials were, at the same time, reserving the school administration domain for men (Blount, 2003).

By the nineteenth century, school administrators became prevalent in many schools, particularly in urban areas. However, no professional development or training took place to prepare these individuals for the tasks and responsibilities of their newly acquired administrative duties. Individuals were appointed to these authoritarian roles because of their propensity for management, because of their instinct, and simply because they were men (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993).

By the mid 1800s in larger cities, and by the 1920s in smaller towns, teaching had become a woman’s profession that was controlled by men, and educational administration was becoming recognized as a legitimate field of study and practice (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). As opportunities for men increased in the arena of school

administration, schoolmasters began leaving the teaching to the women (Blount, 2003). The need for school superintendents arose when larger cities spawned larger, more complex educational organizations. Typical duties of the inaugural superintendents included coordinating educational programs among district schools, managing resources both systematically and efficiently, and allocating funds (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993).

Men have traditionally held more leadership roles in schools than their female contemporaries, and during the early to mid-twentieth century, most Americans agreed that men were more suited to the superintendency because of their natural, authoritative manners. Male leaders were comfortable to employ the top-down approach to leadership, thus making direct, concrete decisions with little regard for the opinions and input of subordinates (Eakle, 1995; Montgomery & Growe, 2003).

By the mid 1980s, the managerial, directive styles of leadership were being questioned, and much thought was being given to alternate leadership styles. In the wake of the effective schools movement, much regard was being given to transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and the ideas of shared governance. Inherent in some of these leadership styles are the very characteristics that set female leaders apart from their male colleagues (Björk, 2000). The collaborative, site-based approaches to leadership, therefore, may have provided women with the necessary vitality to take their stand in the male-dominated field of educational administration. No longer did the terms *nurturer* or *communicator* imply a weak leader (Anderson, 2000; Eakle, 1995).

Attributes of Isolation and Loneliness

The concept of isolation and the often-subsequent reaction of loneliness have been studied and analyzed by many social theorists, including Marx and Weber. Peplau

and Perlman (1982) defined professional isolation as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations at work is deficient in some important way (p. 38). Rook (1984) noted that loneliness is an enduring condition of emotional distress that arises when a person feels estranged from, misunderstood, or rejected by others. Based on the work of Peplau and Perlman and of Rook, the constructs of loneliness and isolation cannot be separated, since much of the research concerning isolation also addresses the emotional reaction of loneliness. Thus, based on the work of the aforementioned researchers, loneliness at work and professional isolation are considered synonymous for the purpose of this study

Females in the Superintendency

By the late twentieth century, women were no longer satisfied to do a large part of the work in education only to be excluded from leadership (Richardson, Flanigan, Smith, & Woodrum, 1997). With the push for more contemporary approaches to leadership, women's inherent characteristics were being seen as the crux of effective leadership. Montgomery and Growe (2003) stated that the vision behavior, the people behavior, the influence behavior, and the values behavior, more often exhibited by women than by men, were necessary for contemporary leaders. These leadership behaviors were vital in molding more contemporary and effective learning communities.

As nurturers, women were no longer viewed as weak, soft, or afraid to make a decision, for nurturers in the sphere of education were those who exhibited care and concern for all involved in the educational process. By demonstrating such concern for subordinates, female leaders were likely to aid all stakeholders in becoming a part of the educational team. Thus, female leaders transformed people's self interest into

organizational goals more easily than male leaders did (Harris, Smith, & Hale, 2002; Montgomery & Growe, 2003).

Further, women were viewed as natural communicators. As communicators, leaders guide subordinates to a common vision by listening, echoing, and summarizing. Together, all involved in the educational organization may realize a prominent vision; however, this must be attained by a leader who can truly communicate the essence of togetherness (Harris, Smith, & Hale, 2002).

Although the populace would agree that the stereotypical woman naturally fits the mold of the contemporary leader, the group would also have to acknowledge that only 13% of superintendents across the United States today are women (Wolverton & Macdonald, 2001). Ironically, the stereotypes that seemingly equate effective, contemporary leadership styles often undermine a woman's opportunity to rise to the pinnacle of the educational organization. Educational enthusiasts may wonder why women are so underrepresented in the superintendency when they demonstrate concern for individuals and value educational productivity (Richardson, Flanigan, Smith, & Woodrum, 1997). Delision (2001) stated, "People expect you [female superintendents] to work harder because you are a woman" (para. 10). Delision has articulated what educational leaders may have already suspected. Society has set a higher standard for women who hold leadership positions.

Because women are underrepresented in the superintendency, they sometimes lack the proclivity to build strong, sustained professional bonds with peers. Women are often excluded from male cliques as a result of gender differences and interests (Shakeshaft, 1989). This exclusion, coupled with the inherent isolation associated with

the position of superintendent, often leaves females entrenched in loneliness. Thus, the adage, “It is lonely at the top” is particularly true for women (Weis & Gore 1997, para. 1).

Isolation and the Superintendency

The concept of loneliness and the concept of isolation are complex paradigms that are not easily separated. Although research on loneliness and isolation may be considered prolific, Stuewe-Portnoff (2001) indicated that the concepts are elusive. He described loneliness as a conceptual umbrella sheltering many different experiences, and further indicated that loneliness is the experience of isolation, disorientation, or lostness within a dimensional domain of meaning. Oshagan and Allen (1992) defined loneliness as an area of social psychological interest. Becker (1962) stated, “Loneliness is a suspension in the very fashioning of identity” (p. 108). Similarly, Rook (1984) noted that loneliness occurs when a person’s existing social relationships are discrepant from the person’s expected or desired relationships. Resulting from social deficiencies, loneliness is considered a subjective experience that is not synonymous with the objective paradigm of social isolation. Therefore, people can be alone without being lonely (Stuewe-Portnoff, 2001).

Isolation is frequently considered a detriment to the personal and professional success of all leaders, particularly to superintendents, and is further considered a condition in which achieving success is difficult (Dussault & Barnett, 1996). According to Trueman (1991), “The forces that lead to isolation are very powerful. Today’s workload creates extraordinary levels of fragmentation in an organization that make it very difficult to take the time you need to get closer to your people or your customers”

(para. 5). Ultimately, the constructs of loneliness and of isolation are considered interrelated for the purpose of this paper.

Throughout educational history, many events, situations, and mandates have contributed to the stress of superintendents and ultimately to the feelings of isolation among superintendents. The Soviet's launching of *Sputnik* in 1957, the racial tension and substance abuse of the 1970s, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and the effective schools movement of the 1980s were the impetus for restructuring and renovating education, and ultimately, the position of the superintendent (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). The twenty-first century continues to call for excellence, with educational accountability measures in place across the United States and in the state of Georgia. Superintendents must respond to the call for better, more effective educational organizations by leaving the compilation of reports and managerial duties to subordinates (Pierce, 2001). Superintendents must promote the development of schools that produce higher levels of learning for all students and must lead a competent, forward-thinking instructional leadership team. They must become stewards of the vision and mission of their school districts (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

The duties of the superintendent are daunting at best, and researchers indicate that such burdens may cause more of a proclivity for isolation among superintendents. Society is calling for superintendents to exhibit increasing knowledge as educational, managerial, and political leaders, in addition to being change agents (Björk, 2000). The burdens being placed upon superintendents are likely to promulgate negative factors for these leaders, both personally and professionally. Such demands on a superintendent's time may prohibit him or her from networking and creating professional cohorts. While

the superintendency is considered the zenith of a school administrator's career, Jones (1994) likened these leaders to lightning rods, for superintendents are highly visible symbols of what people do not like about schools, communities, and themselves. Jones further indicated that loneliness is more inherent in higher positions. Pierce (1995) concluded that the isolation is both physical and psychological.

Isolation is especially wearisome for superintendents. Jones (1994) indicated that in many ways the superintendent is perceived as the lone ranger, riding into town with a promise to effect change. Accordingly, the leader's isolation is enhanced by his moving around and by his stance as a change agent. Male superintendents may experience time constraints, yet they develop comrade-like relationships that suffice for networking and social bonding. However, the problem of isolation may be exacerbated further for female superintendents. Because only 13.2% of superintendents are females, a woman at the helm would feel much more removed (Hall & Klotz, 2001). Eakle (1995) insisted that isolation for female administrators is not diminishing, even though there are twice as many female superintendents as there were 10 years earlier (Hall & Klotz, 2001).

Top leaders in both business and education may prompt some of their own loneliness, as they feel the need to project a strong image and as they wish to showcase their individual achievements for board members and other stakeholders (Gumpert & Boyd, 1984). Female leaders as superintendents, or as top business executives, have an even stronger proclivity for building and sustaining a staunch and solid identity. With so few women at the helm in any organization, they would be studied and examined as in the proverbial fish bowl affect (Baker, Graham, & Williams, 2003).

Researchers disagree on the impact that loneliness may actually have on leaders. Rook (1984) stated that loneliness may serve as an impetus to personal and professional growth; however, some researchers refute this belief, stating that isolation may have an adverse affect on decision-making and that professional isolation may slow down professional development and contribute to resisting proposed change (Dussault & Thibodeau, 1997; Gumpert & Boyd, 1984).

To combat isolation in the workplace, Jones (1994) asserted that both male and female superintendents must become involved in community activities, must develop school board alliances, and must become entrenched in the “good-ole-boy” atmosphere for peer relationships. Hall and Klotz (2001) indicated that professional, peer relationships may be beneficial for superintendents, particularly female superintendents. They agreed that a mentor, also considered as a teacher, advisor, counselor, role model, coach, guide, and sponsor, who assisted in the professional growth, development, and maturation of a protégé, may alleviate isolation. Such mentors may help with both career functions and psychosocial functions. Further, Jones suggested that national alliances through various professional organizations may help superintendents form professional bonds. Finally, he noted how vital classroom visitations can be for superintendents. A classroom visit with students may serve to remind superintendents why they spend countless hours trying to make the schools in their systems the best they can be. Female superintendents may benefit most from such visitations because of their natural inclinations for nurturing and instruction (Jones, 1994).

The complex phenomenon of isolation may be a factor in the tenure of female superintendents. Examining the perceptions of isolation among Georgia female school

superintendents may provide researchers and educators with an understanding of the phenomenon, and identify factors that may influence Georgia female school superintendents to build stronger schools and school systems, or conversely, to leave the superintendency as they perceive the factors associated with isolation as too daunting to overcome.

Statement of the Problem

The push for educational accountability, not only in the state of Georgia but across the United States, has spurred educators to attempt to produce positive results on high stakes tests and other measures of accountability. Pressured in many instances to perform miracles, educational leaders are anxious to find ways to ensure success for their students and ultimately for their schools. These leaders must be steeped in the knowledge needed to move the organization toward established goals, must be well-versed in the political arena in which they exist, and they must be efficient and supportive catalysts for change in their schools. The climate produced by the demand for increased measurable academic performance, as well as the daily pressures of school management, can leave school leaders feeling isolated and, in some cases, desperate.

Isolation has become more pronounced in all leadership positions, particularly among school superintendents. Female superintendents may be more isolated than their male counterparts due to their under representation in the male dominated superintendency. Competition among schools and school systems may deter all superintendents from sharing with others in similar posts. Consequently, female superintendents may consider themselves a world apart from male colleagues because of the cultural implications of their gender differences. Some superintendents believe they

cannot share troubles and burdens with subordinates. They may want subordinates to feel that some aspects of their respective organizations are healthy, effective, and prosperous. Female superintendents may be even less at liberty to share with subordinates, as doing so may inaccurately portray them as vulnerable and inept.

Professional isolation, therefore, would seem to be a key element in not only building effective school organizations but also in hiring and retaining effective, female leaders. However, little research exists to substantiate the effect of isolation on female superintendents. Nothing in the literature addresses whether female leaders can be effective when ensconced in feelings of isolation. Further, existing literature does not address whether or not female leaders can channel the negative forces of isolation into positive, effective leadership strategies.

Therefore, the researcher's purpose was to develop a descriptive analysis of the perceptions of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents.

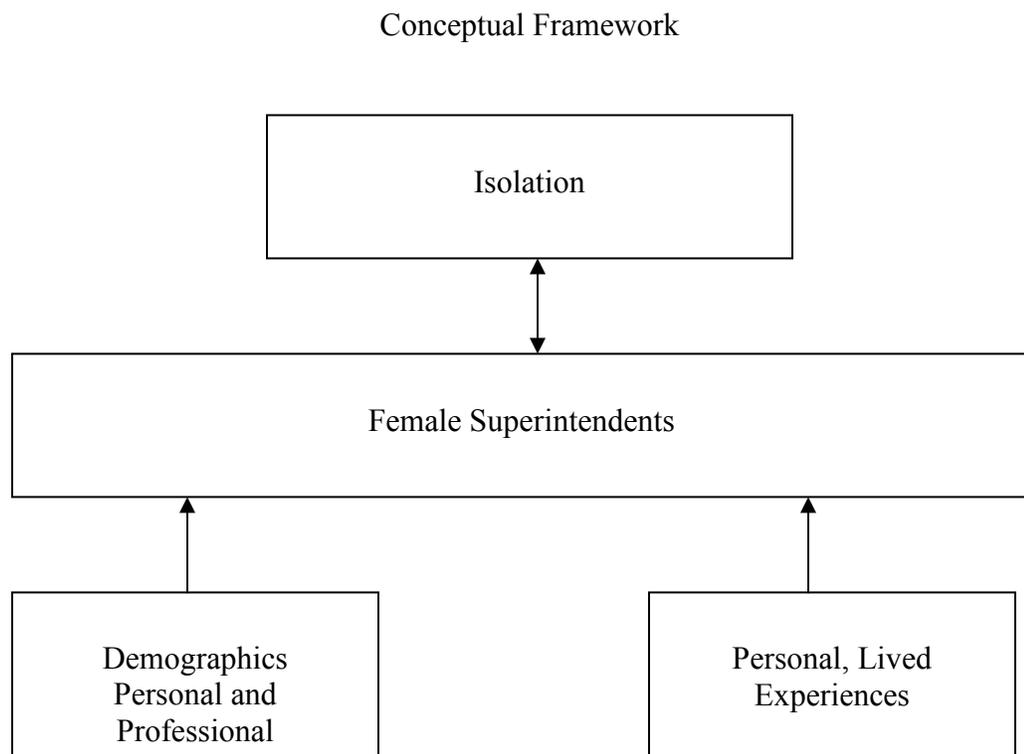
Research Questions

The researcher, through this study, planned to answer the following overarching research question: What are the perceptions of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents? The following sub-questions will also be considered:

1. In what ways do female school superintendents in Georgia perceive themselves to be isolated?
2. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the professional lives of female superintendents in Georgia?
3. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the personal lives of female superintendents in Georgia?

4. What strategies have Georgia female superintendents used to manage perceived isolation?
5. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Georgia who perceive themselves to be isolated?

Figure I



Significance of the Study

While much literature has been written concerning isolation in the fields of psychology and business, little regard has been given to isolation in relation to the superintendency, particularly in relation to female superintendents. A study of isolation

among female superintendents may aid researchers and practitioners in identifying the factors associated with the complex phenomena of isolation. Further, the researcher's findings may aid in the implementation of strategies that minimize the perceptions of isolation and minimize isolation itself among Georgia female school superintendents. Thus, the study of isolation among Georgia female superintendents may also identify how female superintendents cope with perceived isolation and remain productive, both professionally and personally.

After studying isolation and identifying an array of means to manage it, the researcher is confident that other female leaders may use the findings to bolster their resilience in the male-dominated field of the superintendency. Similarly, educational leadership programs at various universities may use the findings to guide the curriculum and practice of preparation programs. Further, Department of Education officials may see the need to initiate programs for superintendents with the goal of helping them combat their feelings of perceived professional isolation.

The researcher has gained interest in this subject as she has seen more males at the pinnacle of the profession, even though females outnumber males in public education. While women are not stereotypically considered to be the managerial style leaders, their innate attributes actually parallel the attributes of the more effective contemporary leadership styles. As natural nurturers and communicators, women have much to offer at the highest level of educational administration. The study of perceived isolation among female superintendents may enable researchers to explain a portion of the anomaly associated with the disparate percentage of females in one of the loftiest positions in school leadership.

Procedures

Research Design

The design of this study was a qualitative, descriptive analysis of the personal and professional experiences of selected female superintendents in Georgia. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 10 female superintendents to investigate the research questions through the experiences of the participants. Usually, descriptive data are collected through a questionnaire, survey, interview, or observation. The in-depth interviews employed in this study were semi-structured, and the questions were open-ended. Thus, they served as a guide to spur discourse with the participants and are much more like conversations than formal events with a researcher's predetermined purpose. Using in-depth interviews, the researcher respected how the participant structured and framed her responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

This qualitative research study employed a phenomenological approach. Glesne (1999) succinctly stated, "A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experiences of the phenomena under study" (p. 7). According to Creswell (2003), researchers who employ the phenomenological approach identified the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon. Participants themselves described their experiences as they relate to a particular phenomenon.

Population

Of the 180 Georgia school superintendents, approximately 39 were females. These Georgia female school superintendents served as the population for the study. The researcher selected 10 female Georgia school superintendents from the population. The

researcher mailed letters introducing the research project to all Georgia female superintendents. Included in the mail-out was a response card and a questionnaire. Female superintendents selected whether or not they wished to participate in the research study. If the superintendent did not wish to participate in the study, she marked the appropriate box on the response card, signed it, and returned it in the addressed and stamped envelope. If the superintendent wished to be a part of the research study, she marked that she would be willing to participate, signed the card, and filled out the brief questionnaire. Both the card and the questionnaire were returned in the stamped and addressed envelope. The researcher selected participants by a purposeful convenience sampling of the female superintendents who varied in demographic or geographic descriptions, thus increasing the probability of a wider range of perspectives.

Instrumentation

Fourteen open-ended questions comprised the researcher-developed interview instrument. The questions were used to guide participants in describing their professional experiences. Interview questions were constructed based upon the research questions, the literature on the subject of isolation, and the culture of the superintendency. Demographics were included in the interview questions.

Content validity was established through examination of the interview questions and their connection to the literature. Also, face validity was determined by the researcher's sharing questions with a minimum of three other female leaders in education. These female administrators noted whether or not the questions asked what the researcher intended.

Data Collection

Targeted Georgia female school superintendents were sent a letter by the researcher requesting their participation in this study, *Georgia Female School Superintendents: Perceptions of Isolation*. The letter was followed-up by a phone call placed by the researcher to the superintendents. At this time, the researcher logistically determined the time and place that the interview should take place. Interviews were conducted at the superintendent's office, or in another such suitable location at the respondent's convenience.

The researcher collected the data by personally interviewing participants. Data were electronically recorded on a cassette recorder. A back-up was available in case of equipment failure, and the interviewer took notes during the interview.

Data Analysis

Interviews with all participants were electronically recorded by the researcher and transcribed by Tonya Coleman, a trained transcriptionist. Further, participants were given the opportunity to read and clarify their answers to all interview questions. The researcher analyzed the data for recurring themes and patterns. Further, the researcher employed the expertise of Dr. Michael D. Richardson, methodologist, to code for comparisons, thereby validating initial researcher analyzation.

Limitations

The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. The assumption was made that participants would respond honestly to the researcher's questions.

2. This study may have been limited in that the researcher may have been unintentionally biased in seeking themes and patterns.
3. The use of only female superintendents eliminated the ability to make comparisons between males and females.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study were as follows:

1. The focus of this study was on female superintendents who were employed as superintendents at the time of the study.
2. Only female superintendents in Georgia were considered as participants for this study.
3. Female school superintendents' perceptions of professional isolation were examined using a phenomenological interviewing strategy consisting of a semi-structured and in-depth interview format designed by the researcher. This qualitative research method was the best method for answering the research questions.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. *Loneliness* refers to the psychological state that results from discrepancies between one's desire and one's actual relationships (Peplau & Perlman, 1982).
2. *Mentors* are individuals who, through usually informant means, guide, teach, and advise another (Hall & Klotz, 2001).
3. *Occupational stress* is an experience arising from a perceived imbalance between work-related demands and an individual's capability, power, or motivation to meet demands (Whan & Thomas, 1996).

4. *Peer network* refers to the network of associates or colleagues who may meet together to exchange profession-related discourse.
5. *Professional isolation* refers to the unpleasant experiences that occur when a person's network of social relations (at work) is deficient in some way (Peplau & Perlman, 1981).
6. *Social or personal Isolation* refers to the unpleasant experiences that occur when a person's network of social relations (outside work) is deficient in some way.
7. *Superintendent* refers to the chief executive officer of a school system.

Summary

While public education is laden with females, few women ever attain the position of superintendent. This pinnacle position in leadership is fraught with stress and other such barriers that put all superintendents at odds with their contemporaries. Increased demands regarding accountability at both state and federal levels have placed further burden on superintendents. Therefore, researchers must examine obstacles to educational success, such as professional isolation. While the phenomena of professional isolation has been cited as a common problem to administrators, particularly to superintendents, little is known concerning the extent to which it is perceived and the strategies that superintendents may use to combat its negative effects. In particular, female superintendents may succumb more easily to the negativism associated with isolation as there are fewer women present in the office of the superintendency.

A qualitative approach was used to identify the perceptions of professional isolation among Georgia female school superintendents. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten Georgia, female, school superintendents. The

researcher hoped to make several contributions relevant to the field of education. The researcher hoped to aid other researchers and practitioners in identifying the factors associated with isolation, and in the implementation of strategies to minimize the perceptions of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents.

In the words of Harper Lee, climbing into the skin of female superintendents by examining their lived experiences was a way for the researcher to examine the superintendency and its stresses. Also, climbing into the skin of Georgia female school superintendents may be the thrust for improvement as well as the impetus for reformation in the office of the superintendency.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Many issues plagued the office of the superintendent, particularly at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Schools had been dealt more responsibilities through both federal and state mandates. Such mandates and accountability measures were instituted in the name of progress. However, this progress did not come without expense. Students, teachers, and administrators felt the pressure to perform. At the helm, leading schools and school systems through such change, were the superintendents. These men and women were faced with immense pressures as they attempted to implement these changes. Because they were fewer in number and because they lacked the larger support networks available to men, female superintendents may have experienced these same pressures to a greater degree than their male counterparts. Such pressures and stress levels may have resulted in feelings of isolation among female school superintendents.

Role of the Superintendent

Over the last 150 years of formal, organized education, the role of the superintendent has changed considerably. Superintendents were first appointed in larger districts to assist school boards with administrative responsibilities. The citizens of Buffalo, New York, appointed the first superintendent in the United States on June 9, 1837, and the citizens of Louisville, Kentucky, appointed their first superintendent the next month. (Sharp & Walter, 1997).

Skrla (2000) noted that the position of superintendent has undergone a cultural shift, evolving from cleric to master educator to expert manager to chief executive officer for the board of education. Therefore, earlier superintendents functioned primarily as instructional leaders for district schools. In the early 20th century, the duties of the superintendents expanded to include fiscal affairs as well as school construction and maintenance (Sharp & Walter, 1997). While the duties of the school's chief executive officer have evolved over the years, the superintendent has always been viewed as the primary leader for the school system (Skrla, 2000).

The last few decades contributed to a revolution in the superintendency. Not only did superintendents report directly to the boards of education and oversee the financial and instructional operations of the school, but they also were directors of policy, whether they were involved with the local board in creating policy or directing the implementation of policy mandated by the local board, the state, or the federal government (Pierce, 2001). Other functions for which the superintendent was responsible included supervising and organizing both professional and non-teaching personnel, ensuring compliance with directives of higher authority, preparing the school budget for the board's perusal, leading the long-range planning goals, developing and evaluating curriculum and instructional programming, and determining the internal organizational flow (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000). While lending attention to all of the aforementioned minutia, the superintendent had to remain focused on the big picture or the district view that was unique to his or her position in administration (Sharp & Walter, 1997).

The many responsibilities of superintendents, along with the constant pressure from school boards, community groups, teachers, parents, and students, contributed to their high profile job, and consequently to the often brief tenure of superintendents (Bruckner, 1998; Grogan, 2000; Patterson, 2000). While the tenuousness of the position of superintendent may seem to be a contemporary issue, it has actually pervaded the office of the superintendent for nearly a century. An article appearing in a 1913 issue of the *American School Board Journal* stated that there had been a “storm of unrest” in the Middle West that spurred resignations, dismissals, and new appointments to the office (Callahan, 1962). More recently, according to Jones (1994), the tenure of superintendents nationwide was an average of 6.2 years, and in urban areas, superintendents on average lasted only 2 years. Tenure for superintendents has continued to decline. These researchers noted that such pressures and constraints on time often contributed to a superintendent’s dissatisfaction both on and off the job. Furthermore, Bruckner indicated that the long hours, evening activities, and constant phone calls left superintendents feeling as though they were always on the job. Guptill (2003) noted that the superintendents viewed their positions as “professionally challenging and personally demanding” (p. 1). Guptill further noted that the first 5 years in the position are the most difficult and volatile. Concerning the satisfaction of superintendents, Zartow stated, “For every superintendent, there is a period of ascendancy, plateau, and descendance. As a superintendent, everyday you die a little. It takes a toll on you” (as cited in Patterson, 2000, p. 47).

To counter the demands of the superintendency, Sharp and Walter (1997) insisted that all superintendents need to interact with some people who really understand their

situations, yet have no ambition for their jobs. Thus, the researchers stressed the importance of superintendents interacting with superintendents in neighboring districts. While each superintendent is responsible for his or her own decisions, he or she may find that discussing and networking often help superintendents feel more connected.

Historical Perspective of Female Leaders

While the first female school superintendent was not named until 1909, researchers would be remiss in not examining the historical view of female leaders as a whole (Blount, 2003). For centuries, the royals claimed the only females endorsed as leaders, and the few women who ascended to the throne in a leadership role often did so because there was no male heir. While Elizabeth I reigned for over 44 years, she did so at the expense of her personal life. She had many tumultuous yet platonic relationships with men, and died The Virgin Queen (Thomas, 2003). As radio and television entertainment became popular in the early to mid twentieth century, stereotypical images of female leaders began to form. Television brought about such imaging in a greater capacity than any other medium. Hill and Ragland (1995) noted that inaugural sitcom women were most often portrayed as silent martyrs. *Leave It To Beaver's* June Cleaver, known as Beaver's mother, ironed in her pearls and pumps and mediated for the men in her life. *Gunsmites's* Miss Kitty silently attended the saloon and the town's problems, in all cases deferring credit to Marshall Matt Dillon. Finally, Edith Bunker, Archie's wife, was ridiculed and embarrassed as she attempted to fix Archie's messes in the popular 1970's sitcom *All in the Family*. Throughout this short media history, women were often seen as soft-spoken housewives, ladies of the night, or buffoons, all stereotypical images that in most cases painted politically correct images for women. More modern portrayals

of women in leadership roles over the last two decades would classify them as “manipulative, adversarial, bitchy and distasteful” (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 8).

Whether or not the media can be blamed for the tainted perception of women leaders remains undetermined. However, little has changed for female educational leaders over the last ninety years (Anderson, 2000). In 1909 Ella Flagg Young, the first female school superintendent, stated that women were destined to rule schools (Anderson, 2000). Concerning her new post, Young further noted,

In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast educational system. It is woman’s natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied the leadership. (as cited in Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 2)

Young’s idealistic forecast may have been directly associated with the politically charged suffrage efforts in the early 1900s (Funk, Pankake, & Schroth, 2002). Still, 95 years later, according to a census statistic, men were 40 times more likely to advance from teaching to the top leadership roles in schools than were women. Regardless of Young’s prediction for women, gender bias was an inherent characteristic reinforcing the glass ceiling (Dobie & Hummel, 2001).

Throughout educational history, women who participated in education were considered unmarried, harsh prudes. Their lives were lived only through school existence, and many considered their profession a divine calling. Earlier on, they were even allowed leadership roles as long as they accepted the responsibility with no authority (Hill & Ragland, 1995). The percentage of female leaders did indeed grow, albeit slightly. In the 1930s the percentage of women superintendents rose to 13 percent

but declined again following World War II. Since that time the percentage of female school superintendents has remained less than 7 percent (Skrla, 2000). Therefore, women make up most of the educational workforce, yet this majority does not ascend into educational leadership positions, giving credence to the possibility of a “glass ceiling” that prevents women from establishing recognized leadership roles.

The Glass Ceiling

Various empirical research studies and the media’s widespread use of the term *glass ceiling* have lead to much ambiguity concerning the understanding of this phenomenon. Therefore, researchers found it essential to clearly understand the concept before considering whether it represented a clear, distinct disadvantage for women in the workplace (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, Vanneman, 2001).

According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, *glass ceiling* referred to “artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities” (p. iii). Further, the commission noted that the glass ceiling is the “unseen yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements” (p. 4). Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vannemen (2001) asserted that labor market inequality as well as labor market discrimination are indicators of the presence of the glass ceiling effect. Mainiero (1994) simply stated that the term *glass ceiling* is actually a metaphor that explains the “paucity of women in upper management” (p. 5).

While a federal commission exists to substantiate the existence of the glass ceiling phenomenon, some women refused to acknowledge the presence of the glass ceiling. Carleton Fiorina, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Hewlett-Packard, noted that no limits

existed for women; she emphatically noted that there was no glass ceiling for women. Ironically, Fiorina was the first CEO of a Fortune 500 company (Mainiero, 1994).

With only 5 percent of America's women cited as breaking the ceiling, researchers were left to ponder how they actually managed such a feat. Mainiero (1994) concluded that the key to overcoming the invisible barrier is the honing of political skill. In fact, she stated, "...breaking the glass ceiling without shattering hopes for a promising executive career requires delicate political skill" (p. 6). However, the researcher noted that many executives disagreed with this assessment. The female executives who refuse to acknowledge political skill as the determinant for success, insisted that they penetrated the glass ceiling as a direct result of hard work, dedication, intelligence, luck, and opportunity. Mainiero (1994) noted that many of the 55 top-level executive women that she interviewed actually believed that the absence of political skill and influence helped them to attain their positions. However, after conducting interviews and listening to situations, Mainiero found that managing politics is a vital skill for effective performance at the executive level.

To recognize the glass ceiling as a separate, distinct form of discrimination in the workplace, Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman (2001) conducted a study through models and data to determine the criteria of the glass ceiling effect. Differences not explained by job-related characteristics, differences only at higher levels of outcome, chances of advancement into higher levels, inequality increases over the course of the career, were all found to be criteria that indicate the presence of the glass ceiling.

The intangible, yet very real, phenomenon of the glass ceiling has been defined, and criteria for its existence have been identified. Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and

Vanneman (2001) identified these criteria to include the following: job ladders, personnel policies, limited enforcement of employee laws, employer discrimination, low aspiration among women, conflicts between work and family. Northouse (2001) broadly categorized the barriers contributing to the glass ceiling: organizational barriers, interpersonal barriers, and personal barriers. To differentiate, organizational barriers referred to conditions that put women at a disadvantage compared to equally educated and qualified men; interpersonal barriers referred to those obstacles that occur in the workplace such as prejudice, lower support, and lack of mentors. Finally, personal barriers referred to elements of personal life and lack of knowledge that impeded advancement. Such personal barriers included lack of political savvy and non-work responsibilities (Northouse).

The glass ceiling may be a genuine obstacle that women must face in education, as well as in business, if they wish to reach the pinnacle of the educational profession. They must overcome barriers innate to the gender: family responsibilities, lack of mentors, lack of mobility, and others (Dobie & Hummel, 2001). Thus, many of the attributes positively associated with motherhood and homemaking, women's traditional cultural roles, are viewed negatively in the arena of educational leadership and contribute to a negative bias against female leaders.

Cultural Identity of Female Leaders

Guptill (2003) further stated that women have been socialized to care for others throughout their lives, for such connectedness is a part of women's identity development. Many researchers see this cultural role as antithetical to leadership (Anderson, 2000; Eakle, 1995). Boards of education have often viewed female superintendents as less

effective, calling them “too much of a team player” and “not directive enough,” (Eakle, 1995, par. 42-43). Negative views of female leaders, those being lack of discipline, too emotional, and physically weak, have often contributed to the belief held by many that women cannot lead (Anderson, 2000). Anderson (2000) noted that women must market themselves as decision makers and must see themselves as leaders.

Over the last several decades, many researchers devoted attention to studying various leadership styles (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000). As more women entered leadership roles, researchers have questioned whether or not there was a possibility that the leadership styles of men and women differed significantly (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). While there were many recognized styles of leadership, a few models have withstood time. Tannenbaum and Schmidt’s (1973) leadership style continuum focused on a continuum between the boss-centered leadership extreme and the subordinate-centered extreme. Blake and Mouton’s (1994) Leadership Grid defined two dimensions of leader orientation as concern for production as opposed to concern for people. The researchers’ grid portrayed five styles: authority-obedience, country-club management, impoverished management, organization and management, and team management. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) developed the Situational Leadership Theory, which noted that a leader’s behavior is either task oriented or relationship oriented. Perhaps the most popular contemporary theory is Bass’s Transformation versus Transactional Leadership Theories. According to Bass (1997), transformational leaders had an outstanding impact on their organization. These leaders motivated subordinates to do more than originally expected. Transformational leaders listened and communicated with subordinates (Anderson, 2000). They sought counsel from subordinates and

together tried to improve the organization (Harris, Smith, & Hale, 2002). Conversely, transactional leaders focused more on the task at hand and primarily wanted to be assured that the job would be completed (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

After examining various styles of leadership, researchers returned to the question: Do women and men lead differently? Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) intimated that differences in styles might actually be consequential. For example, such differences or perceived differences, actually may affect the views individuals may have about the ability of women to lead and progress up the organizational hierarchy. On the other hand, Entine and Nichols (1997) charged that people are individuals and that gender is an unreliable guide to real-world behavior. Much disparity exists in the literature concerning the relevance of leadership styles.

Popular myth has stated that female leaders lead their companies differently than typical male leaders. Usually, women employed compassion, encouraged participation, and enhanced other's self worth (Entine & Nichols, 1997). In fact, many of the characteristics were innately attributed to females naturally. For example, most women, by nature, were communicators. They used language that encouraged community building; they, as a whole, were polite and cheerful, and they expressed courtesy, gratitude, respect, and appreciation to all subordinates (Harris, Smith, & Hale, 2002). However, orthodox leadership was male-dominated (Coleman, 2003). Therefore, research on leadership style has had favorable implications for the increased representation of women in leadership.

Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that women's leadership styles were more democratic than men's in all situations. Later, in 2001, the researchers continued their

study on female and male leaders and leadership styles when they studied male and female leadership styles' effectiveness as related to transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles. In their study, female leaders exceeded male leaders especially on the female-stereotypic transformational dimension of individualized consideration, and scored higher than men on two additional subscales of transformational leadership as well as on the contingent reward scale of transactional leadership. In contrast, men exceeded women on the active and passive management-by-exception and laissez-faire subscales. Patterns of such findings were more complex than generally acknowledged by social scientists and writers of management books. Further, leadership theory findings from experimental research situations were gender-stereotypic (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). The traditional role of women as enablers and encouragers was evident in their leadership, and these tendencies allow of female leaders to focus on the success of all involved in the educational process.

Female Superintendents

To learn and understand more about the superintendency when occupied by women, McCabe (2001) surveyed female superintendents in 45 states. The women were asked to complete the statement, "A superintendent is..." Over half of the created metaphors mentioned *leadership*, and over one third of the metaphorical responses concerned the superintendent as *facilitator*. Thus, many female superintendents described the traditional views of leadership, but placed an emphasis on empowerment of others as well.

Skrla (2000) questioned, "How does a woman become identified as 'in charge' without also being identified in negative or 'unfeminine' ways?" (p. 298). Essentially,

can a woman be a good leader and still cling to her naturally feminine ways? Can collaborative and nonhierarchical behaviors be innately instinctive to quality female leaders (Anderson, 2000; Patterson, 2000)? Educational enthusiast and former school superintendent, Ruth B. Love, stated,

Women are quietly making history by taking their places as top level leaders in the educational institutions of this country...I am convinced that we will institute a whole new form of management, a feminine form that is rooted in solid, human values, that nurtures everyone connected with it, that accomplishes practical results with no loss of idealism". (as cited in Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 18)

Thus, women could succeed to the superintendency while being true to themselves, whether that included being a lady or not (Patterson, 2000).

Conversely, women have not proven to be accepted leaders in the educational hierarchy, even though they comprise 75% of education's work force. They have had to face marked discrimination upon entering a leadership position, or they have faced myriad forms of discrimination after achieving their position. Regardless, women have learned to downplay isolation and sexism to successfully gain positions and complete their tasks at hand (Skrla, 2000). To fully understand the position of superintendent, especially when occupied by a woman, researchers must develop a clear working knowledge of isolation and loneliness.

Isolation and Loneliness

Since both isolation and loneliness are similar concepts, the two phenomena could not be considered entirely independent of each other. In fact, the terms are so closely identified that they are considered interrelated. Often in defining one term, the other term

is used. Examination of both terms is essential to the understanding of each concept and crucial to a complete cognitive understanding of this research study.

The fields of psychology and business have devoted much literature focusing on isolation and loneliness. However, for concrete, in-depth definitions and differentiation of isolation and loneliness, researchers must look toward the field of psychology (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Concerning the definition of loneliness, Peplau and Perlman (1982) stated,

Loneliness is defined as an enduring condition of emotional distress that arises when a person feels estranged from, misunderstood, or rejected by others and/or lacks appropriate social partners for desired activities, particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacies.

(p. 1391)

Medora and Woodward (1986) noted in their study on loneliness in adolescent college students that loneliness is a response to the absence of an adequate positive relationship to persons, places, or things.

Less precisely defined is the concept of isolation. While business and education literature cover isolation, less information is present in the psychological literature. Dussault and Thibodeau (1997) noted that the two causes of isolation are precipitating events and predisposing factors. Tolson (2000) further added that the pursuit of personal vision contributes to isolation. Mercer (1996) stated that isolation is self-induced, for heads isolate themselves from their colleagues because they cannot cope with implications for their authority if they were emotionally close to their colleagues. While literature is not ultimately clear on where isolation originated, Guptill (2003) countered

that isolation actually emerged from the bureaucratic structure of educational institutions and resulted in stress and alienation.

Studies Associated with the Phenomenon of Loneliness

In 1959, Fromm-Reichmann acknowledged that loneliness is "... one of the least satisfactorily conceptualized psychological phenomena" (p. 1). Although loneliness was considered a pervasive human condition, it was not widely studied by social psychologists until the 1970s (Howard, 2002). In a comprehensive review of the scientific study of loneliness, Peplau and Perlman (1982) discovered that out of 208 English publications from 1932 through 1977, only 6 percent were published before 1960. A majority of the 6% were actually clinical psychologists' reports concerning medical patients. Ultimately, these research psychologists reported in 1982 that by this time research on the phenomenon of loneliness was flourishing.

Before tracing the studies concerning loneliness and determining how the literature base has grown, modern researchers may find it beneficial to recognize the difficulty that inaugural researchers of loneliness had in simply defining and characterizing loneliness. Fromm-Reichmann (1959) suggested that the term loneliness was actually a conceptual umbrella encompassing at least 10 different concepts; however, modern researchers disagree on whether loneliness is a unidimensional or a multidimensional concept. Weiss (1973) noted that loneliness is a multidimensional concept entailing two distinct dimensions: social loneliness and emotional loneliness. According to Weiss, social loneliness generally referred to a deficit in one's social relationships, social networks, and social support. When considered as a unidimensional concept, loneliness imbued all aspects of one's interpersonal, social, cultural, and

psychological experiences. All of these areas were affected by the paradigm of loneliness, and no distinction was made between the various types (McWhirter, 1990). Conversely, emotional loneliness indicated a lack of close, intimate companionship. Although Weiss's interpretation of loneliness is most often accepted, researchers still did not wholly subscribe to a single, shared conceptualization of loneliness (Oshagan & Allen, 1992).

The earliest theoretical research writings involving loneliness came from Fromm-Reichmann (1959). Much of his writing centered on conceptualizing the essence of loneliness during the 1960s. Peplau and Perlman (1982) noted that 64 new publications appeared regarding loneliness during the decade of the sixties, many of them investigating loneliness and social isolation among the older adult population.

Weiss's (1973) publication, *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation*, was the impetus for the growth of studies of the phenomenon of loneliness in the empirical literature. In his in-depth study, he not only noted that loneliness was a deficit condition involving both social and emotional isolation, but he contended that a social network would not substitute for a specific loss. Further, he stated that a specific figure would not substitute for a lost social network. Also, in this work, Weiss distinguished between grief and loss and noted that the cure for loneliness is a reattachment to a figure or a system like the familiar, lost one (Weiss, 1973).

After spending much time in the empirical literature, Peplau and Perlman (1982) uncovered several agreed-upon points concerning the core of the phenomenon of loneliness: it results from deficiencies in a person's social relationships; loneliness is a subjective experience; and it is often unpleasant and distressing.

Negative Associations of Loneliness

Many negative factors have been associated with loneliness. Fromm-Reichmann (1959) summarized this when he stated that loneliness is devastating to the psyche. Moustakas (1961) also examined the loneliness that accompanies all positions in public life. Specifically, the researcher contended that the office of the President of the United States entails endless, searching hours of loneliness. The President is surrounded constantly by people who are trying to sway and influence him, is exploited by every news medium, every word scrutinized, and is subjected to malicious and slanderous gossip. Yet, the President makes most all decisions in isolation. Concerning the office of the Presidency, Harry S. Truman (1956) stated,

No one can know all the processes of his thinking in making important decision. Even those closest to him, even members of his immediate family, never know all the reasons why he does certain things and why he comes to certain conclusions. To be President of the United States is to be lonely, very lonely at times of great decisions...The pressures and the complexities of the presidency have grown to a state where they are almost too much for one man to endure. (preface)

In addition to the President of the United States feeling some semblance of loneliness, many others who are in the forefront of the public eye admit to some feelings of loneliness. Her position as the divorced wife of Prince Charles and her role as the mother of the future king both contributed to the lonely life of Princess Diana. She was constantly surrounded by people; she was a celebrity, an icon, and the essence of a true princess, yet her loneliness led her into periods of depression (Graham, 1997).

More recently, fellow English Prime Minister Tony Blair experienced a great deal of isolation from many different political parties when he initially sided with President Bush in reference to the Middle East crisis (The loneliness of Tony Blair, 2002).

Likewise, all political leaders, because of their passions and beliefs isolate themselves from others who passionately follow their own course.

Positive Associations of Loneliness

In addition to the negative factors related to loneliness, other psychological investigators have associated loneliness or solitude with positive consequences (Rook, 1984). Moustakas (1972) linked loneliness to spiritual and creative growth. Hence, spiritual leaders and artists may derive creative expression from the solitude that is linked to loneliness. According to Moustakas (1961) loneliness was a condition of existence, which led to “deeper perception, greater awareness, and insight into one’s own being” (p. 50). He noted that creative genius is often nurtured in isolation. For example, the American poet, Emily Dickinson, lived in almost complete isolation for over a quarter of a century. Her loneliness and isolation allowed her to live in accordance with her own beliefs and to realize her talents. She expressed such contentedness in her poem:

How happy is the little stone
 That rambles in the road alone.
 And doesn’t care about careers
 And exigencies never fears—
 Whose coat of elemental brown
 A passing universe put on,
 And independent as the sun

Associates or glows alone,

Fulfilling absolute decree

In casual simplicity (*Emily Dickinson: Collected Poems*, 1993, p. 97).

Thus, poetry helped Emily Dickinson to maintain an inner life of solitude and to grow in isolation (Moustakas, 1961). Other literary geniuses purposefully withdrew from society to pursue a life of isolation and so sparked their creative flair. Emerson and Thoreau sought solitude at Walden Pond. American poets who were a part of this Transcendental movement considered these periods of loneliness and isolation opportunities to grow spiritually (*Prentice Hall Literature: Timeless Voices, Timeless Themes: The American Experience*, 2005). While loneliness and isolation are obvious states of the human condition, measuring these abstract feelings has been the subject of some debate.

Common Instruments of Measurement for Loneliness

In spite of the lack of agreement on the definition and actual properties of loneliness, scholars have come to an agreement on the strongest means by which to measure loneliness (Mayers, Khoo, & Svartberg, 2002; Oshagan & Allen, 1992). The UCLA Loneliness Scale was the most frequently used scale in measuring loneliness; however, the scale did not succinctly correlate to Weiss's commonly agreed upon bifold view of loneliness. Rather, the UCLA Loneliness Scale correlates to a one-dimensional view of loneliness. Developed by Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson (1978), the UCLA Loneliness Scale was developed to assess subjective feelings of loneliness and isolation. Questions were worded in a negative or lonely fashion and were based on statements that lonely individuals used to describe their loneliness. In 1980, a revised version of the scale was published. The revision included 10 items worded in a lonely direction and 10

items worded in a non-lonely direction (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). Finally, the UCLA Loneliness Scale was revised more recently to simplify the wording of the items to more easily facilitate its administration among the elderly population (Russell, 1984).

In addition to the commonly used UCLA Loneliness Scales, the Loneliness Deprivation Scale and the Emotional/Social Loneliness Inventory are other measures of loneliness. Used less frequently by researchers, these instruments, nonetheless, have contributed to the empirical literature regarding loneliness. The Loneliness Deprivation Scale is a nine-item instrument that measures loneliness in a one-dimensional construct. It assessed feelings of loneliness due to a lack of friendships, feelings of emptiness, and feelings of abandonment (Oshagan & Allen, 1992). The Emotional/Social Loneliness (ESLI) Inventory distinguishes between emotional and social loneliness and isolation. The ESLI is a 30 item scale with 15 items measuring loneliness and 15 items measuring isolation. The authors of the ESLI, Vincenzi and Grabosky, defined loneliness as a feeling of deprivation and a reaction to a perceived state of isolation (Oshagan & Allen, 1992). Succinctly, while loneliness and isolation can be defined separately, they are closely associated and are generally viewed as co-dependent because one causes or leads to the other.

Education and Isolation

The culture of isolation is inherent in the fields of business and education. In fact, the educational hierarchy lends itself to keeping members isolated and departmentalized (Guptill, 2003). Hill and Ragland (1995) noted that since the one-room schoolhouse, teachers have been kept in relative isolation within their classrooms. They were not encouraged to talk; rather, they were encouraged to stay in their rooms, and to isolate

themselves from colleagues at lunch. DeSanctis and Bloomberg (1979) stated that the average duration of teachers' interactions with their colleagues was less than two minutes per day.

Teacher-isolation was not the only isolation naturally prevalent in the school building. Mercer (1996) noted that in any organization, the most senior position naturally experiences feelings of isolation. The nature of the working conditions reduced the possibility of interaction with others. Indeed, the culture of isolationism may be a school's "tradition," but school leaders more recently have been encouraged to break this mould (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 89). To do this for the benefit of all involved, Barth (1990) believed that the school organization needed to become a community of learners.

The greatest step toward creating a more ideal environment was establishing mutual trust. Leaders began to see others as sources of much needed advice (Trueman, 1991). To combat such isolation among principals, Ventura County, California has instituted two separate groups to engender support and to make networking possible. The VIP, Ventura Institute of Principals and the APEX, or Assistant Principals for Educational Excellence, allowed school leaders the opportunity to meet together in a more formalized way to combat the isolation which may envelop them (Weis & Gore, 1997).

Less formal networks are also important in producing healthy environments. According to Krackhardt and Hanson (1993), informal networks represent the "central nervous system driving the collective thought processes, actions, and reactions" (p. 104). For example, developed by the Far West laboratory in San Francisco, the PAL program, or the Peer Assisted Leadership Program was designed to reduce isolation and increase

the networking and professional contacts. In the PAL program, participants select a peer partner to periodically observe them and conduct a reflective interview, which allowed the observed principals to explain the intention of their behaviors. Through this nonjudgmental approach, partners began to trust each other and ultimately began to seek advice (Dussault & Barnett, 1996). Forty-one educational managers took part in the PAL study, and results indicated that school managers felt significantly less isolated after the PAL training. Similarly, various districts throughout the state of Georgia have instituted Leadership Academies to hone the skills of future educational leaders within the district. According to Judy, a superintendent interviewed for the purpose of this study, her district considers people from within the system for leadership positions only if they have been through the leadership academy that is offered by her district. Concerning the leadership academy, she stated, “It has allowed us to grow our own [leaders]” (4/05/05).

If time and attention are not spent fostering a community of learners, professional isolation may generate dissatisfaction toward the working environment (Dussault & Thibodeau, 1997), may cause stress-related, physiological illnesses (Gumpert & Boyd, 1984; Rook, 1984), may have an adverse effect on decision-making (Rook, 1984), and may possibly produce a diminution of performance (Dussault & Thibodeau, 1997).

Dussault and Thibodeau (1997) studied professional isolation and principals’ performance at work. In their study, 109 principals in a suburban district of Quebec were administered the UCLA Loneliness Scale and the Self Appraisal Instrument for Community College Administrators. Researchers found a negative, yet significant correlation between isolation and self report of performance at work of school principals.

Isolation and Female Superintendents

Women may dominate the field of education serving as teachers, elementary administrators, and even central office personnel; however, in the office of the superintendent, there is much disparity between the number of men and the number of women holding the position (Blount, 2003). In a 2000 study of the American school superintendency, researchers concluded that 13.2 percent of the nation's superintendents were female. Because there are so few women at the apex of America's public school districts, the assumption that they would be entrenched in feelings of isolation may naturally follow, particularly since researchers have noted an absence of mentoring relationships (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1989). Regarding perceptions of isolation, there have been few empirical research studies addressing the relationship between isolation and female superintendents. Several researchers acknowledged the component of isolation in studies addressing women public school superintendents. For example, Pipkin (2002) addressed whether or not female superintendents described feelings of loneliness at the top in her work, *A Descriptive Analysis of Women Public School Superintendents in Georgia*. Of the six superintendents interviewed, four admitted feeling lonely at the top. Shakeshaft (1989) and Sharp, Malone, Walter and Supley (2000) indirectly addressed the component of isolation when noting the importance of networking for females. Shakeshaft's book addressed the necessity of a network for women. Sharp, Malone, Walter, and Supley (2000) in their Three State Study of Female Superintendents noted that 55.2 percent of responding female superintendents recognized that the lack of a professional network had been a barrier to their becoming superintendents. Also, isolation was indirectly addressed in the work of

Hall and Klotz (2001). Both authors noted the importance of mentoring for aspiring superintendents. Further, according to Gupton and Slick (1996), job dissatisfaction and exit from the superintendency were in part spurred by a sense of isolation and lack of support of women.

Shakeshaft (1989) conceded that even though female superintendents spent a great deal more time with principals, teachers, and students than their male counterparts, the female superintendents experienced a great deal of loneliness in their role as leader of the school. In fact, the researcher reported that women superintendents, because they are tokens, and because they are not included in all-male activities, often reported less collegueship and more isolation at the top.

In her study, *A Descriptive Analysis of Women Public School Superintendents in Georgia*, Pipkin (2002) addressed the interrelated concept of isolation when ascertaining information concerning job satisfaction in the qualitative portion of her mixed method study. Pipkin interviewed 6 female school superintendents to clearly define women in their position of superintendent. The respondents were divided in regards to the question: "Do you feel a sense of loneliness in you position?". Essentially, four out of the six superintendents expressed a sense of loneliness while two superintendents adamantly denied any feelings of loneliness.

Similarly, Guptill (2003) cited evidence concerning job satisfaction. She indicated that the effect of isolation, both geographic and perceived, had an effect on overall job satisfaction of female superintendents. The eight female school superintendents in suburban and rural New York, who were the research participants in her qualitative study, overwhelmingly agreed that significant people in their lives and a

thorough understanding of the demands of the job contributed strongly to not only their success but also to their job satisfaction. Thus, feelings of connectedness stanching feelings of isolation. Shen, Cooley, and Ruhl-Smith (1999) indicated that emotional “aspects” ranked second only to “the opportunity to do something more rewarding” in their study, which focused on potential reasons for deciding to leave school administration (p. 359).

Professional support and job satisfaction may, in fact, negate the negative influences of professional isolation. The need for personal and professional support for job satisfaction and success were essential for the success of female school superintendents (Hall & Klotz, 2001; Polleys, 1999; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2000). In their three-state study, Illinois, Indiana, and Texas, Sharp, Malone, Walter, and Supley (2000) surveyed 118 out of the total 212 female school superintendents who agreed to participate. Fifty-five percent of respondents agreed that a lack of professional network was a problem, with 12.1 percent noting that such a lack was a serious barrier to their success. Furthermore, 50.4 percent of respondents stated that exclusion from the Good Old Boys network was somewhat of a barrier while 17.1 percent agreed that it was serious. Therefore, the researchers concluded that the respondents, through self reflection and analysis, recognized that professional mentor relationships were essential in not only accessing the office of the superintendency but also in achieving and maintaining any measurable success in the position. Since isolation, and its counterpart loneliness, seem to be problems for leaders, particularly for superintendents, researchers have devoted literature and studies to identify and promote coping and management strategies for isolation.

Coping and Management Strategies

In their study of small business owners, Gumpert and Boyd (1984) found that 450 small business owners cited loneliness as a major difficulty. To reduce such feelings of loneliness in the business realm, the researchers suggested the rearrangement of the work environment, the participation in peer groups, the attentiveness to family, and ultimately the modification of attitudes that reinforce job-related isolation.

Rooney (2000) articulated ways to combat loneliness in the fields of education, particularly through the eyes of the leaders. Respecting the heroes of the past, meeting each teacher and department chair, locating the power in the educational system, keeping the central office abreast of decisions, finding friends and mentors, listening to others, taking care of oneself physically and emotionally, learning by attending professional meetings, and learning to pick one's battles were suggestions that could lead to less isolation and more productivity (Rooney).

Leaders, who are absorbed by feelings of isolation, tend to be considered lonely, social failures who are often reluctant to discuss experiences (Rook, 1984). Therefore, improvements in decision-making and improvements in financial results could be benefits of remedying the problem of isolation among these leaders (Gumpert & Boyd, 1984).

Mentoring and Networking

A recurring theme in the study of isolation was the concept of mentoring or networking. Mentors or peers lend professional support and ultimately confidence. Jones questioned, "The higher you climb, the more isolated you are. But is loneliness the inevitable price of success?" (p. 26). Most researchers agree that isolation does not have

to be the price of success (Anderson, 2000; Guptill, 2003; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Patterson, 2000). Superintendents and CEOs in business are inherently lonely, for the buck stops with them. They are the ultimate decision makers and firefighters for every proverbial fire that must be extinguished within the organization.

Mentoring and networking are cited as old concepts that date back to Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus entrusted his son Telemachus to Mentor, friend of Odysseus. In Odysseus's extended absence, Mentor guided Telemachus. Defined as the means to guide, train, and support a less skilled person, mentoring was a strategy that could be successful when employed among superintendents—experienced and novice (Hill & Ragland, 1995). In the context of educational leadership, Guptill (2003) noted that mentoring is a relationship between an experienced administrator and a fledgling one. A similar concept, networking, was the establishment of a connection for anyone wanting to grow personally or professionally (Hill & Ragland). For school superintendents, Guptill recognized networking as simply a group of superintendents coming together to socialize and access information.

Both mentors and mentees benefit from sharing ideas. Daresh and Plyko (1990) stated, "Individuals are able to clarify their personal 'visions' of what educational leadership means and also to develop a sense of commitment to a career in the field of administration" (p. 8). Plyko suggested that, when experienced leaders help novice leaders, they, too, can reap an intense reward.

Both male and female administrators need professional mentors. A leader's strong foundation could be attributed to influential individuals (Patterson, 2000). However, women may have an even stronger need for mentorship than men, particularly

in the field of education and the superintendency. Both mentoring and networking are cited by Hill and Ragland (1995) as practices that aid women in increasing political savvy and career positioning. Polleys (1999) conducted a study concerning the importance of mentoring in the career advancement of female school superintendents. In her study, the author surveyed three female superintendents out of the twenty superintendents that were contacted. The respondents agreed that there were definite career benefits from informal mentoring.

Male administrators have become more proficient in exchanging information on how to handle problems, and even on exchange of information on job openings. Anderson (2000) suggested that women should do the same thing. Encouragement and support were the primary benefits of mentorship; however, the mentoring concept helped establish connections, influence broader views, and provide a safe sounding board for discussions and growth (Anderson, 2000; Hill & Ragland, 1995). Thus, mentoring went a long way in helping women keep feelings of loneliness and isolation at bay.

Journaling

In addition to networking and mentoring, Cooper and Quick (2003) intimated that one of the simplest methods of dealing with the effects of isolation is journal writing. Because top executives tend to be bombarded with troubling issues all day long, they turned to journal writing to bring closure to the issues. Pennebaker (1997) discovered that writing promoted self understanding; therefore, when a top executive wrote about troubling issues, he was in effect not only sharing his thoughts, but he was also objectively looking at the situation.

Perhaps top leaders could do little to allay the nature of isolation within their positions. However, these managers and executives could become consciously aware of the problem and take measures to address the issue (Cooper & Quick, 2003).

Summary

The role of the school superintendent has changed drastically since the inception of the position. Indeed, the role has grown to include many responsibilities in addition to manager of the school system. Considering the demands on time and the high pressure decision-making, superintendents are often leaving their posts prematurely due to stress factors.

Since the naming of the first female superintendent in the United States in 1909, the presence of women in the superintendency has remained sparse. The stereotypical, cultural identity of females, coupled with real but invisible barriers, such as the glass ceiling, may have been responsible for the lack of representation of women. Because of the under representation of women in the position of superintendent and because of the inherent stresses related to the job, many researchers concluded that female school superintendents may be isolated and alone.

Throughout the review of the literature, the researcher has attempted to define the paradigms of both *isolation* and *loneliness*. Ultimately, while the two terms are not synonymous, the researcher countered that they indeed are interrelated and that they may contribute to job dissatisfaction. Conversely, some researchers concluded that there are also positive associations with loneliness.

Chief executive officers in many fields of work have experienced isolation and loneliness; however, the field of education has been inherently lonely. Teachers have

little colleague interaction. Building administrators likely have less colleague interaction, and superintendents have, by far, less interaction. These men and women have few people in which to confide.

Because there are so few women in the superintendency, the women have a much smaller number of people with whom they can bond. Ultimately, some researchers have concluded that this fact along with the exclusion from the “Good Old Boy” network leaves female superintendents more isolated and alone.

To successfully continue in their post as superintendents, these women have employed strategies to help them cope with their isolation. Researchers have suggested that finding good mentors, networking with other female superintendents, and journaling are merely a few ways that women can achieve a sense of connectedness in their positions as superintendents.

Table I

Studies Related to Female School Superintendents

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Polleys (1999)	Investigate the career advancement of female superintendents	3 female superintendents in a southern state	Quantitative: survey	Determined the glass walls around which professional women must maneuver: shortage of mentors, need for mentoring from powerful men, sexism, the conflictual nature of ambition, self limiting behavior, family concerns, gender stereotyping, and highly developed personal characteristics such as risk-taking.
Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley (2000)	To investigate female superintendents' perceptions about forms of discrimination they faced, help they received from professional organizations, university programs, or informal networks, the superintendency on family life and barriers to the superintendency for women.	Female superintendents in Illinois, Indiana, and Texas (118 responding)	Quantitative: survey	Recognized a lack of professional network as a barrier, did not feel restricted to a particular sized school district, and did not feel restricted because of spouses' jobs.

Table I (continued)

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Dobie & Hummel (2001)	To examine the gender imbalance in the top administrative positions in Texas	2 female Texas superintendents	Quantitative: interview	Interviews proved positive in that they revealed a number of strengths and characteristics that these women possessed. Through the study the researchers have concluded that gender bias exists in the top level administrative position.
McCabe (2001)	To learn more about the role of superintendent when occupied by women	273 of 735 superintendents completed surveys 218 of 735 superintendents completed the metaphor portion of the study	Mixed Methods Quantitative: survey Qualitative: Responding to "A superintendent is..."	1. leadership 2. facilitator 3. versatility 4. visionary
Funk, Pankake, & Schroth (2002)	Identify professional and personal characteristics and styles of leadership in order to develop archetypes of six outstanding female superintendents in Texas.	6 female superintendents (current or retired) who had been nominated for or awarded the Texas Association of School Boards' Outstanding Superintendent of the Year Award	Qualitative: Interviews	Revealed strengths, styles, attitudes, and beliefs of women who have been highly successful in the demanding and often difficult role of the superintendent.

Table II

Studies Related to the Glass Ceiling

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vannema n (2001)	To use four specific criteria to determine whether or not a glass ceiling exists.	Panel study of Income Dynamics – Men & women 25 – 39 in the civilian labor force	Empirical?	Identified a partial list of factors that may contribute to a glass ceiling – job ladders, personal policies, limited enforcement of employment laws, and employer discrimination.

Table III

Studies Related to Professional Isolation

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Dussault & Thibodeau (1996)	Investigate the relationship between professional isolation of school principals and their performance at work.	109 principals of a suburban area of the province of Quebec Canada.	Quantitative: questionnaire	<p>The feeling of professional isolation experienced by school principals was moderately and negatively correlated with their scores on the self appraisal questionnaire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional isolation would be related to self-depreciation of principals • Professional isolation can generate dissatisfaction toward the working environment
Guptill (2003)	To examine the effects of professional support on the longevity of superintendents in New York state	8 female superintendents from New York state	Qualitative: multiple case study design	<p>Respondents believed that informal mentoring was necessary for female superintendents, that networking was valuable, that family support was necessary to success. Rural superintendents admitted to being geographically isolated and stated that they rarely attended conventions and meetings.</p>

Table IV

Studies Related to Mentoring

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Dussault & Barnett (1996)	To determine whether or not the Peer Assisted Leadership (PAL) program reduces professional isolation and whether or not PAL increases the extent of the informal networks of communication of educational managers.	41 educational managers (12 women & 29 men)	Quantitative: questionnaire (2 sessions – 6 months apart)	Results confirm that educational managers' professional isolation is significantly reduced as a result of participating in PAL. Data reveal positive effects on French Canadian school managers; however, no evidence exists to suggest these same results with other populations.
Hall & Klotz (2001)	To gather descriptive data on female and male superintendents involved in a mentoring relationship and to examine the perceived helpfulness of career and psychological mentoring functions as provided by their mentors in regards to career advancement	Public school superintendents from South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi	Quantitative: survey – two part questionnaire	There were no statistically significant differences found between same-gender and cross-gender mentor/protégé groups scores for helpfulness on career and psychosocial mentoring functions with the exception of sponsorship, friendship, and exposure, which were significant.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The researcher's purpose for this study was to describe Georgia female school superintendents' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of isolation. The researcher focused on female superintendents' perceptions of isolation encountered in their professional lives and to a lesser extent their personal lives. The researcher also identified the strategies that Georgia female school superintendents employed to cope with isolation. The researcher, through qualitative study, sought to make meaning from the lived experiences of the participants.

Research Questions

The researcher designed a process to answer the overarching research question: What are the perceptions of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents? The following sub-questions were also considered.

1. In what ways do female school superintendents in Georgia perceive themselves to be isolated?
2. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the professional lives of female superintendents in Georgia?
3. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the personal lives of female superintendents in Georgia?
4. What strategies have Georgia female superintendents used to manage perceived isolation?

5. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Georgia who perceive themselves to be isolated?

Methods

The researcher's primary purpose was to describe the perceptions of professional isolation of Georgia female school superintendents. Through the study the researcher further examined the strategies that the Georgia female school superintendents used to cope with perceived isolation. Because the nature of this study was dependent on the respondents' perceptions, the researcher selected a qualitative research model. Creswell (2003) noted that in qualitative research, meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the subjects' realities that the researcher wishes to construct.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena. At the heart of this study, the phenomenon in question was isolation. Therefore, the researcher employed phenomenological inquiry in the study. Seidman (1991) noted that the goal of phenomenological study is to have the participants reconstruct their experiences within the phenomenon, which in this case was isolation. Creswell (2003) further added that the researcher analyzes specific and significant statements of the participants within the context of the phenomenon being addressed.

In addition to collecting the realities of respondents, the researcher must intently examine the culture of the superintendency, for the inherent culture of the position will lend credence to the respondents' experiences and perceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Schein (1985) stated, "We simply cannot understand organizational phenomena

without considering culture both as a cause and as a way of explaining such phenomena” (p. 311). Thus, understanding the culture of the superintendency was instrumental in developing and understanding the phenomenon of isolation, its causes, and strategies superintendents may employ to neutralize its negative effects.

Using the interview method, the researcher gathered data to study the culture of the superintendency and the phenomenon of isolation. Concerning this method, Seidman (1991) stated, “It [interviewing] is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experiences of the individuals whose lives constitute education” (p. 7). The open-ended questioning format was employed in the process. Open-ended questions established the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction he or she wanted (Seidman, 1991). Known as the “universal mode of inquiry” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 1), interviewing allowed the qualitative researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of other people and the meaning that the participants made from that experience (Seidman). The interview archetype was a naturally effective means for qualitative researchers to collect data. Seidman insisted that interviews are consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language and satisfy the researchers who are interested in the stories of others. Further, he indicated that interviewing can affirm the importance of the individual participant and still recognize the importance of community and collaboration.

Perhaps more than any other means of data collection, researcher interviewing is reliant on human interaction (Glesne, 1999). Consequently, the researcher had to set boundaries for the study (Creswell, 2003). The researcher also recognized the

importance of establishing and developing a rapport with participants. If the appropriate interviewer/interviewee relationship can be established, a bond of trust should follow.

Once an appropriate rapport was established, participants became more comfortable in sharing their stories, which was the focus of interviewing with open-ended question (Seidman, 1991). During the course of the interview, the interviewer became a listener, constantly questioning the “goings on” (Glesne, 1999, p. 81). Marshall and Rossman (1999), succinctly extolled the essence of interviewing,

Typically, qualitative, in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participants’ views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses. This, in fact, is an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: The participants’ perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it. (p. 108)

Data Collection

Research Design

The design for this study was a qualitative descriptive analysis. A qualitative design for this study was a logical choice. While some researchers argue that quantitative research methods turn people into numbers, these same researchers often espouse qualitative methods as more moral (Seidman, 1991). Marshall and Rossman (1999) purported that qualitative methods are best employed when the phenomenon in question is complex and data regarding the phenomenon are scarce. Further, researchers contended that a study focusing on individuals’ lived experiences is best explored

through qualitative measures, for human actions and experiences could not be understood without understanding the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptions of the participants (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Essentially, employing qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to gain more understanding concerning female superintendents' perceptions of isolation.

The researcher's purpose was descriptive: The researcher builds rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are largely unexplored in the literature (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Thus, through the study of isolation, the researcher documented and described the phenomenon.

More specifically, this research design included in-depth interviews of participants. Useful in gathering large amounts of data quickly, in-depth interviews allowed participants to construct their own stories from which meaning and ultimately data may be gathered (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Participants

The participants in this research project were the Georgia female school superintendents who were selected by the researcher as the sample. All Georgia female school superintendents were sent introduction letters (See Appendix D) detailing pertinent information about the researcher and the research. Enclosed with the letter was a reply postcard (Appendix E) on which potential participants checked whether they were willing to participate in the project addressing the phenomenon of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents. Also enclosed was a brief questionnaire (See Appendix F).

The questionnaire served a two fold purpose: it gave the researcher quickly obtained information that aided in the interview process, and it provided demographic data for sampling purposes. After sorting through the returned postcards and questionnaires, the researcher constructed a convenience sample that was geographically and demographically representative. The questionnaire was only returned by superintendents who were planning to participate in the study. Items included on the questionnaire that helped the researcher construct a sample included data such as the following: age, ethnicity, geographical location, size of school district, pathway to the superintendency, and marriage and children. Having this information enabled the researcher to compile a representative, diverse sample.

Population

The population used to answer the research questions for this project was two-tiered. Thirty-nine Georgia female school superintendents were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Twenty of the aforementioned superintendents represented the first tier of the two tiered population. This group responded that they would participate in the study. The second tier was composed of the 10 superintendents who were selected to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

After studying qualitative methods in both a mixed methods course and in a qualitative methods course, the researcher was confident in utilizing the in-depth, open ended interview method with which she had had experience.

The researcher was guided by semi-structured interview questions (See Appendix B) that probed participants to consider their experiences in relation to isolation in their

profession. The researcher-developed instrument was constructed after her intense examination of the related literature. Not only had the researcher examined related literature before constructing interview questions, but also she had examined several related qualitative instruments. Researcher-developed, qualitative interview questions by Charlotte Holland Pipkin (2002) and Molly Parrish Howard (2002) were examined. Both Pipkin and Howard formulated questions from a broad to narrow perspective. Both employed open-ended interview questions that did not lead the respondent.

Further, questions were constructed based on the theme of Marshall and Rossman (1999):

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument: Her presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study is fundamental to the paradigm. Whether that presence is sustained and intensive, as in long-term ethnographies, or whether relatively brief but personal, as in in-depth interview studies, the researcher enters into the lives of the participants. (p. 79)

Interviews were conducted at the offices of the participating female superintendents or at a location suggested by the respondents. The researcher took special precautions to ensure that the location was interruption-free.

The researcher was the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation. Also, the researcher developed close personal contact with the respondents. Therefore, the credibility fell on the researcher's skill and on the validity that she could prove for her study (Patton, 2002). To determine the face validity for the researcher-developed interview instrument, the researcher discoursed with three female administrators concerning the questions. In sharing interview questions with these administrators, the

researcher gauged whether there was any ambiguity within the questions that may have inhibited the respondents' understanding or answering appropriately.

Related to objectivity, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) noted that the degree to which the instrument reflected or depicted what the researcher was examining is known as content validity. The researcher sought the assistance of experts in the fields of educational administration (See Appendix A).

Treatment of the Data

The semi-structured interviews were electronically recorded by the researcher and transcribed by a trained, business transcriptionist, Tonya Coleman. All interview tapes were securely stored in the home of the researcher, except during the time of transcription. To insure accuracy, the researcher gave participants the opportunity to read and review transcriptions to identify any inaccuracies that may have been present or to clarify their comments. Further, participants were offered the opportunity to delete any information from the transcriptions. The anonymity of all participants was assured as participants were assigned pseudonyms for reference within the study.

The researcher examined data in transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns. Further, she employed the expertise of Dr. Michael D. Richardson to validate findings within the transcripts. His coding was independent of the researcher's. His coding and notes were used to validate the findings of the researcher. According to Glesne (1999), identifying patterns and themes was referred to as coding: "a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose" (p. 135).

After the completion of the research study, all audiotapes of interviews and all transcriptions will be destroyed by fire. The researcher will destroy confidential material no later than one month after the completion of the study.

Summary

The researcher's study was designed to investigate the existence of the phenomenon of isolation as it related to female superintendents in Georgia. The researcher collected data through employing the in-depth interview model with open-ended interview questions. Such inquiry allowed the researcher to gain an understanding concerning the phenomenon of isolation from the superintendents' lived experiences. The researcher recorded the interviews, transcribed the tapes, and coded the data for recurring themes and patterns. To validate her findings, the researcher employed the expertise of Dr. Michael D. Richardson. After synthesizing the results of the study, the researcher used the findings to gain insight into isolation as it related to the professional culture of the superintendency and as it affected, to some extent, the personal lives of Georgia's female school superintendents.

Table V

Item Analysis of Interview Questions

Interview Question	Literature	Research Sub question
1. Personal Profile	Gumpert & Boyd (1984); Guptill (2003); Peplau & Perlman (1982); Rook (1984)	5. Demographics
2. Professional Profile	Blount (2001); Jones (1994); Guptill (2003); Sharp & Walter (1997)	2. Impact on Professional Life
3. Pathway to Superintendency	Blount (2001); Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vannemen (2001); Dobie & Hummel (2001); Hill & Ragland (1995); Mainiero (1994); Northouse (2001); Shakeshaft (1989)	2. Impact on Professional Life
4. Time Demands	Dussault & Barnett (1996); Northouse (2001)	3. Impact on Personal Life
5. Relationships with Colleagues, subordinates, and students	Daresh & Plyko (1995); Jones (1994); Rook (1984)	2. Impact on Professional Life
6. Reform efforts	Dussault & Thibodeau (1997); Peplau & Perlman (1982)	2. Impact on Professional Life
7. Magnified fishbowl	Mercer (1996)	1. Perception of Isolation
8. Confidants	Dussault & Barnett (1996); Hill & Ragland (1995); Guptill (2003); Medora & Woodard (1996); Patterson (2000); Rook (1984)	4. Coping strategies
9. Networking	Anderson (2000); Guptill (2003); Hill & Ragland (1995); Krackhardt & Hanson (1993); Polleys (1999)	4. Coping strategies

Table V (continued)

Interview Question	Literature	Research Sub question	Interview Question
10. Support Systems	Anderson (2000); Eakle (1995); Hall & Klotz (2001); Medora & Woodard (1996); Sharpe, Malone, Walter, & Supley (2000)	1. Perception of Isolation	3. Impact of Personal Life
11. Fun & Relaxation	Jones (1994); Rook (1984)	4. Coping strategies	
12. Isolation & Loneliness	Daresh & Plyko (1995); Dussault & Thibodeau (1997); Fromm-Reichmann (1959); Jones (1994); Mercer (1996); Moustakas (1961, 1972); Oshagan & Allen (1992); Peplau & Perlman (1982); Pipkin (2002); Weiss (1973)	1. Perception of Isolation	
13. Helping others	Anderson (2000); Daresh & Plyko (1995); Polleys (1999); Weiss (1973)	2. Impact on Professional Life	4. Coping Strategies
14. Strategies for Personal Satisfaction	Dussault & Thibodeau (1997); Entine & Nichols (1997); Harris, Smith, & Hale (2000); Patterson (2000)	4. Coping strategies	

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

If superintendents are going to thrive and become or remain effective leaders, they must learn to manage the phenomenon of isolation or loneliness. However, before taking steps to manage this phenomenon, it must first be identified, defined, and understood in the context of the personal and professional lives of Georgia female school superintendents.

In this study the researcher examined the perceptions of isolation of Georgia female school superintendents. The overarching research question and the subquestions focused on aspects of the position of the superintendency that may lead to feelings of isolation, on the impact of isolation on the superintendents' personal lives, and strategies that Georgia female school superintendents use to cope with feelings of isolation and loneliness. The overarching research question of the study was the following: What are the perceptions of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents? The following subquestions were designed to support the overarching question and render greater understanding of the topic at hand.

1. In what ways do female school superintendents in Georgia perceive themselves to be isolated?
2. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the professional lives of female superintendents in Georgia

3. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the personal lives of female superintendents in Georgia?
4. What strategies have Georgia female superintendents used to manage perceived isolation?
5. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Georgia?

Chapter four presents an analysis of the data collected through in-depth interviews conducted with ten of the 39 female school superintendents in Georgia. The researcher employed the qualitative research approach to discern more information about the personal, lived experiences of the Georgia, female school superintendents. The essence of the interview questions was as follows:

1. Personal profile
2. Professional profile
3. Pathway to superintendency
4. Time demands
5. Relationship with staff and colleagues
6. Accountability plans
7. Magnified fishbowl
8. Mentors
9. Networking with other superintendents
10. Family/spousal support systems
11. Fun and relaxation
12. Lonely at the top
13. Personal coping strategies

Data Analysis

The researcher chose 10 participating superintendents through convenience sampling. Of the participating female superintendents, 8 were Caucasian and 2 were African American. In the letter mailed to all Georgia female superintendents, the researcher guaranteed the superintendents that their identity would be completely anonymous, and they would, therefore, be assigned pseudonyms. Furthermore, the researcher edited research contents to eliminate any reference to actual school districts, cities, counties, and any other material that might reveal the identity of any superintendent. Ellipses (...) were used by the researcher to omit unrelated phrases and information, and brackets [] were used by the researcher to add clarifying words or phrases.

To establish a foundation for the analysis of data, the researcher organized the responses to the interview questions according to the five research subquestions. The researcher analyzed the transcripts and identified common themes, behaviors, and patterns that may give insight on the participants' perception of isolation. In order to validate the findings, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a colleague to code transcripts and thereby validate the findings. The interview questions were organized into the five research study subquestions:

1. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Georgia?
(Subquestion 5)
 - (a) Personal profile (Interview question 1)
 - (b) Professional profile (Interview question 2)

2. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the professional lives of female superintendents in Georgia? (Subquestion 2)
 - (a) Pathway to superintendency (Interview question 3)
 - (b) Relationship with staff, colleagues, etc. (Interview questions 5)
3. In what ways do female school superintendents in Georgia perceive themselves to be isolated? (Subquestion 1)
 - (a) Accountability plans (Interview question 1)
 - (b) Magnified fishbowl (Interview question 7)
 - (c) Family support systems (Interview question 11)
 - (d) Lonely at the top (Interview question 13)
4. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the personal lives of female superintendents in Georgia? (Subquestion 3)
 - (a) Time demands (Interview question 4)
 - (b) Family support systems (Interview question 11)
5. What strategies have Georgia female superintendents used to manage perceived isolation? (Subquestion 4)
 - (a) Mentors (Interview question 8 & 9)
 - (b) Networking (Interview question 10)
 - (c) Personal coping strategies (Interview question 14)

Profiles of Georgia Female School Superintendents

What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Georgia? (Research subquestion 5)

The first interview question invited the respondent to enlighten the researcher on the respondent's personal background. Further, it was designed to make the superintendent feel comfortable with the interview, and it sought to establish a rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. Answers to this personal and demographic question led to the foundational basis for the analysis of other responses, and it served as a frame of reference for other issues including time demands, relationships and coping strategies.

Additionally, the first interview question provided information for the personal and professional demographics. Such information was compiled and reported by the researcher in the form of profiles of the interviewed Georgia Female School Superintendents.

Respondent 1- Judy

Judy, a 59- year-old Caucasian, held a specialist degree. She was divorced and remarried. In fact, she was married to her second husband for twenty-two years and widowed only 18 months prior to the interview. Judy has two daughters, two stepdaughters, and a total of nine grandchildren, all five and under. The current superintendency represents her first, and she has served the district for four years as their superintendent. Her growing suburban district, with 23,500 students, was one of the largest represented in the study, and Judy is a native of her district.

Respondent 2- Fleeta

At age 46, Fleeta was the youngest superintendent who participated in the study. She held a master's degree and has completed the coursework for her doctoral degree. A native of the district, Fleeta was married to her high school sweetheart, and they had two sons, one in college, the other a high school freshman in the district. She has completed her first year in the superintendency in a district with 3,014 students. Her district is in a rural area of the state, and she is of African-American heritage.

Respondent 3- Grace

Married for 33 years, Grace, age 57, has been in her superintendency for one and a half years. She is Caucasian. She has two children, a daughter who was married and a son who was engaged, and one grandson who was 3 years old. Grace had a doctorate degree and has been superintendent in her district for 18 months. She was not a native from the district, but prior to becoming superintendent, she served as an assistant superintendent for several years in another area of the state. Grace's district, composed of 7,500 students, is in a rural area of the state.

Respondent 4- Betty

The longest running superintendent participating in the study, Betty had been a superintendent in the district for nine and one half years. This appointment represented her first. Prior to becoming a superintendent, she served as an assistant superintendent for instruction and personnel and as a high school principal in other districts. Married for 33 years to a fellow educator, Betty has two daughters and one new grandchild, an adopted three-year-old. She had a doctorate degree. Betty's suburban district maintained a student enrollment of 3,200.

Respondent 5- Melanie

Melanie was the second youngest superintendent represented in the study at 47 years of age. She had been married for 25 years and had three daughters, two of which were in college and one in high school in a neighboring district. Her husband, too, was an educator. Prior to becoming a superintendent two years ago, Melanie was the Executive Director of School Improvement in a larger, nearby district. Melanie had a specialist degree. Her small rural district had an enrollment of 850 students.

Respondent 6- Patti

A superintendent for slightly less than one year, Patti has been divorced for 27 years and has one son, age 32. In her educational career, she served as Hospital Homebound teacher, a Director of the Leadership Academy with the Department of Education, the Executive Director of the Regional School Service Center, also with the Department of Education, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction at the state level and Assistant Superintendent. The current superintendency represented her first. She had her doctoral degree and served a district with 3,034 students.

Respondent 7- Nancy

Not only was Nancy not native to her district, she spent the majority of her career in another state. At 56, Nancy has experienced many administrative career opportunities. She was Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent, and Curriculum Director in a district in a neighboring state. Additionally, she served as the state's Department of Education Curriculum Specialist. Upon arriving in Georgia, Nancy served as a professor in educational leadership at a mid-size university, taught high school English for a short tenure, and became superintendent in the same district. She and her husband have been

married for 28 years and have one daughter, age 20. Thus, her current superintendency is her second, and she holds a doctorate degree. Nancy's district is composed of 8,460 students.

Respondent 8- Georgia Anne

Age 59, Georgia Anne completed her three years in the superintendency and was to retire at the end of the 2005 school year. She was a native to her district, where she had taught high school English for 17 years, was a middle school assistant principal, elementary school principal, and a high school principal. Georgia Anne entered the superintendency from the high school principalship. She had one son and one daughter, both of whom were educated in the district. She recently became a new grandmother. Georgia Anne and her husband have been married for 21 years. She had a specialist degree. Her rural district was comprised of 4,000 students.

Respondent 9- Clarice

In her second superintendency, Clarice, age 57, had completed nearly nine years in the superintendency. Her first appointment was in a northern state. During her tenure in education, she had moved to four different states, and in addition to superintendent, she had also served as Deputy Superintendent, General Director of a Leadership Academy, High School Principal, and teacher. Clarice is African American with Native American heritage. She is divorced and has one grown daughter. Her growing suburban district maintains a student enrollment of 52,438.

Respondent 10- Elaine

At age 54, Elaine is in her second superintendency. She has a total number of 10 years in experience as superintendent. Prior to her first superintendent appointment at age 44, Elaine was a teacher for 20 years and a principal of a K-12 school. She is married and has one child. Her rural school district is comprised of 1,164 students.

Summary of Principals' Personal and Professional Background

As a result of the qualitative inquiry, the researcher discovered that the interviewed female superintendents represented a demographic variety. Of the 10 interviewed female superintendents, two were African American and the other eight were Caucasian (Table VIII), and they ranged in age from 46 to 59 (Table VII). The majority (60%) of the superintendents were married for the first time (Table IX). Twenty percent were divorced and remarried, and 20% were divorced and single (Table IX). One hundred percent of the superintendents had children (Table IX). Professionally, 50% of the superintendents reported having a doctorate degree while 40% had specialist degrees (Table VI). One superintendent held a master's degree. She had completed coursework for her doctorate and would be awarded her specialist degree pending the approval of her dissertation proposal (Table VI). The professional lineage of the interviewed female school superintendents varied somewhat. Ninety percent began their careers as classroom teachers. The other began as a hospital homebound teacher. While 80% of superintendents had spent time as building administrators in at least one school system, 20% did not have this experience. These two superintendents representing this percentage served as system level administrators without ever serving as building administrators.

The school systems over which these superintendents served ranged from a total of 850 students to 52,438 students (Table VI).

The researcher analyzed the demographic data to discern and identify patterns of personal and professional background that impacted the superintendents' perceptions of isolation. However, the researcher found no single variable or combination of variables that appeared to influence their perceptions of isolation.

Table VI

Profiles of Georgia Female School Superintendents

Respondent	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Degree	Yrs of Super. Exp.	System Size	System Location
Judy	59	C	W	6	4	23,500	S
Fleeta	46	A	M	5	1	3,014	R
Grace	57	C	M	7	1.5	7,500	R
Betty	59	C	M	7	9.5	3,200	S
Melanie	47	C	M	6	2	850	R
Patti	58	C	D	7	.75	3,034	S
Nancy	56	C	M	7	6.5	8,460	U
Georgia-Anne	59	C	M	6	3	4,000	R
Clarice	57	A	D	7	8.2	52,438	S
Elaine	54	C	M	6	10	1,164	R

Ethnicity of Respondent

A indicates African American
C indicates Caucasian

Marital Status

D indicates Divorced
M indicates Married
S indicates Single
W indicates Widowed

Degree of Respondent

5 indicates Masters
6 indicates Education Specialist
7 indicates Doctorate

System Location

R indicates Rural
S indicates Suburban
U indicates Urban

Table VII

Age of Georgia Female School Superintendents

Age range	N=10	Percentage
Under 40	0	0%
40-44	0	0%
45-49	2	20%
50-54	1	10%
55-64	7	70%

Table VIII

Ethnicity of Georgia Female School Superintendents

Ethnic groups	N=10	Percentage
African-American	2	20%
Caucasian	8	80%
Hispanic	0	0%
Other	0	0%

Table IX

Georgia Female School Superintendents' Marital Status and Number of Children

Marital Status	N=10	Percentage
Married – 1 st time	6	60%
Married – 2 nd time or more	2	20%
Divorced – Single	2	20%
Number of Children		
0	0	0%
1	4	40%
2-4	6	60%

Perceptions of Isolation

In what ways do female school superintendents in Georgia perceive themselves to be isolated? (Research Subquestion 1)

The participants were asked to respond to the question: “Is it lonely at the top?” Most affirmatively responded that they indeed found it to be lonely at the top. Some noted that the superintendency by virtue of its position demanded much isolation because of the confidential nature of many issues.

It is. It is absolutely lonely. But it is lonely because you have to be so guarded about the impact of your opinions. It requires some personal and professional retreating to just get in touch with what you believe in versus the policies and procedures that you have to enforce. There are few colleagues as far as female superintendents with whom you can share all of the aspects of what your job requirements are. It doesn't have to be as lonely when you have a good team of folks around you. If you have a good trust factor, it is not nearly as lonely as I think it could be. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 32)

It is lonely at the top. There are some things that I'll say I've used my husband as a sounding board. But there are things that he doesn't understand because he's not been there. He's not had that responsibility. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 21)

It is very. Because you have to be very selective on what you share with whom, and like you asked about a mentor. You want, sometimes you think you want to know somebody's opinion about something but you're leery to ask that person because they're out, that's not in their realm of understanding. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 32)

It is lonely at the top. Nobody knows. There's no one that really knows. I mean, you can talk to people but until you've been in the seat, you don't really know... (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 17)

It is lonely at the top. I think if it would be just where you could vent. A teacher can always vent to a teacher, and you always have that collegiality. Superintendents are so busy, and they are so far away. Sometimes, it's not as accessible. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 16)

It can be. Yes. When you go home, and you know that you've talked about the discipline that you guided but hard decisions to make. And not all of the times do you have all of the board's support. And that includes... personnel issues and things like that. It gets real lonely. It really does. And you know, ultimately, I'm

the one who's saying you're not coming back, we're not going to have you back, or we're non-renewing you, or you've got to change or whatever. And I try to take all of that responsibility on my shoulders. When the good times come, I'm always wanting to praise someone else. So yeah, it can be real lonely at the top. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 19)

Absolutely the truth for a number of reasons. You have to make sometimes very unpopular decisions. Even when everybody recognizes that this is the decision that's made for, in the best interest of the children, still, it didn't go their way, there's some feeling there about it. This is true not only of superintendents but it's true of principals. I know. There are very few people you can talk to about anything for a lot of different reasons. You can't, you can't tell people things that are confidential at all. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 15)

On the other hand, others noted that the superintendency really did not have to be lonely because there were subordinates that could bear some of the professional burden. Further, other superintendents and similar educational professionals could also lend support and advice on matters that could alleviate feelings of loneliness.

It can be [lonely at the top]. But it doesn't have to be. That's part of what I was saying about wanting to be a mentor. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 21)

Clarice seemed to agree with Betty's opinion to a certain extent. When asked to respond to "It is lonely at the top," Clarice stated,

It is. Because there are some things that happen to me in the course of the day, in a course of the week that I just can't tell anybody about. There are some things that I think about as a result of something else that's happened... I've sat with 7 people on my cabinet and we brainstorm some things. I know ultimately, I've got to make the decision to go either right or go left...whatever it is...The buck stops with me. (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 25)

However, when asked what she did to cope with feelings of isolation and loneliness,

Clarice responded,

I don't have a lot of feelings of isolation and loneliness. I think it's because I reach out to talk to someone. Now, I may ruminate over things, but at some point, I pick up the phone and I'm going to say 'What do you think about this?' (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 26)

Elaine responded somewhat differently to the prompt concerning whether or not it was lonely at the top. She directly related feelings of loneliness to the board for whom she worked. Concerning this relationship, she stated,

It can be very lonely at the top. Some of that depends on your board. Now, when I was in [another county], and I don't mind saying this...I had the best board in the world. And we were just and it did change some through the years. But we were solid. And I was very protective of them because they were elected. I was not. I didn't let them take a lot of heat for decisions we made. And they were very appreciative of that. They were always following behind me. When I came into [this county], I came into a spit board. Because the prior superintendent had had some real difficulties here. So sometimes I have felt pretty lonely...

She continued to not only note that the relationship with the board could leave a superintendent feeling lonely, but noted the factors related to the job.

It's just a really very bad feeling to realize that somebody's dropped the ball on something and that everybody is looking at you for a resolution to it. I think experience helps with that. The first few years, you panic. I do [feel responsible for all negativity]. You ask yourself, 'What could I have done to prevent that? Could I have influenced this person not to act as he did?' But then, I think sometimes, it's important for a superintendent or anybody else in a leadership position to realize that other people are going to make mistakes. Now the buck does stop with us...Certainly the superintendent is going to be isolated because you're not going to be pleasing two of them [board members]. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 21-24)

Time Demands

None of the interview participants recalled spending less than 60 hours a week on the job. While they recognized this responsibility as demanding, the superintendents all conceded that the time commitment was indeed part of the job. While some of them managed their time demands differently from others, they seemed to all be resigned with the time commitment and recognized it as part of the job. Aside from the strain of the regular work week, most interviewed superintendents stated that they had to be available nearly 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Okay, I'm generally at the office ten hours a day. That's an average because there are days that I'm there 12 or 14 hours. Depending on what's going on. Um, then, if you count the, you know the meetings that are not school related meetings but that you, because you're a superintendent you're on this board or that board. Usually you're gone two days a week to other committee meetings and board meetings. And in my county, we have um, a seven-member board. And so we have committees within the board. And so we have, in addition to our regular board meetings, we have committee meetings. And they're not, not regularly scheduled but then, those take uh, time. Like last Thursday night, we had a committee meeting that started at 6:00 and I didn't get home until after 9:00. So, you know, three-hour committee meeting. Yeah, it varies. I'd say, you know I'd say an average of ten hours, I mean I rarely ever spend less than 10 hours at the office. Then you know sometimes it's 12 or more and then you know, I like when I go home I sometimes I'm e-mailing or I'm looking up something or working on something at home too. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 7)

I'm always on the job. I mean certainly, I have my family time, and I go to church, and I go out to dinner, but I carry my Nextel radio with me 24-7. And I never turn it off unless I'm in church or in a meeting or something. It's by my bed. I'm very fortunate that I guess most superintendents do these days but the board has or the school district has a lot of technology and so I have my Blackberry that I am always linked with to my e-mail. I have my Nextel radio; I have my computer set-up at home. So the first thing I do when I get up is go to the computer and check my e-mail, and the last thing I do before I go to bed is check my e-mail again. I'm not a nut about it but I'm going away tomorrow, it's spring break so I am going to be out of town for about four days, but I will have my cell phone, probably my radio will work, and so I will stay in contact, and they will let me know if there is something that I need to know. Most days, I'm here nine or nine and a half hours in the office, but it is rare that there is not either a lunch meeting or one or two or three things after work. As a superintendent, you're never away from the job. (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 6)

I don't know how anyone can do it less than 12 or at least 10 hours a day. Most are 12. I get phone calls. Some days before I come to work and into the evening. I do need to keep that balanced. I have a 14-year old, and at that age he needs good attention from me. When my husband is home, and he only gets home on the weekends, I have to commit that time to him. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 9)

I get here at 7:00 in the morning. I have to get here really early, and some of my folks come in shortly after I do. And occasionally, I do take work home with me. And, of course, I'm available 24-7 on that telephone. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 21)

Well, it, of course, it's never a week that I put in less than 40 hours, but I would say an average week is 60. Average. And lots of weeks more than that. But, I now...I do all the community stuff here. I mean if it's a chamber program, I'll be

there. It it's a wedding or a funeral of somebody in the community, I'm there representing the school system. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 5-6)

Well, shoot. I come in around 7:30 or 8:00, and I went home Monday night at 8:30. I went home Tuesday night around 7:30. I went home last night around 7:00... and then when I get home, I have my little green satchel here and I ... but again, I don't have anybody at home. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 16-17)

I put in; I don't take too much work home in a briefcase. I never have done that type of thing. What I'm much more likely to do is just stay and work and do it and then leave it there when I leave. But you know; this job like a high school principal's job is one where you have a lot of night appearances and weekend things that you have to do. So it's not all just what you do in the office. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 4)

Twelve hours every day just about. And I spend a lot of time, since [my daughter's] married. I would say that I have about a 65 hour or 70 hour week... I try to keep everything here and once I'm home, it's home. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 4)

In this school system I'd say ten hours every weekday at least. That's minimal. I still do some grants [grant writing]. If we're working on grants or when there are events in the school, certainly [I spend] more than that. Now when I was in [the previous county as superintendent], I did not have the support staff, and it was literally seven days a week. I was back in there on Saturdays, back there on Sundays... (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 5)

On the average, it might average out to twelve, thirteen, fourteen hours a day times five. When I put in really long hours like that, I try not to do a Saturday and Sunday but sometimes I have to come in one of those days from about two or three hours. Just to move the paper. (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 8)

Magnified Fishbowl

The superintendents recognized that they figuratively exist in a magnified fishbowl. While they viewed this situation as a violation of privacy, they noted that it actually was a rite to passage for their positions. Essentially, most noted that a good superintendent will be well known to her constituents and, therefore, will be recognized in public places by the public eye. Some respondents indicated that they had a tendency to avoid public places when possible while others did not change their routine.

Judy stated that there were two ways to look at being in the magnified fishbowl. Sometimes, being scrutinized could build trust throughout the community according to this superintendent; however, the scrutiny could also cause her to realize the immense responsibility of the superintendency. She stated,

You don't know what you're getting into. But I've been in the fishbowl for a long time. My husband was Chief Superior Court Judge, so I'm kind of accustomed to that. You just have to realize when you go to the grocery store you may have to talk about things that are going on in the schools. It also gives you an opportunity to talk about the positive things that are happening. You have to be reasonable; you have to be out there and that helps you gain the trust. Yeah, people will just come out of the blue and ask you questions. You know, you're sitting there and you're getting your nails done, the person next to you will ask you something or a topic will come up about schools, and I want to, before they say something, you want to make sure they understand. You don't want to embarrass them. I'll say, 'uh, I'm, I'm superintendent'. And they usually say, 'oh, I know. I know you.' And a lot of the times, you go to the grocery store or you'll be out at dinner and uh, you know, you want to order a glass of wine with your dinner and you have to look around. I'm not saying that I don't ever do that. I think we have a huge responsibility. (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 10,14-15)

Uh, when I go to Wal-Mart, which is in [a nearby town], I always run into, I mean, I rarely leave there without running into ten people from here. A lot of students-- Well, I don't go without make-up, and I don't wear short shorts or anything like that. But people recognize me in my county, wherever I go, and the kids do too. They know me. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 12)

People in my county, they will speak to you but most, mostly they respect it. I mean they are very friendly and yes they do that but I get...it's very positive. I've, only during that one situation with the coach did I ever have any negativism but it was at a ball game...(Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 10)

Betty and Georgia Anne noted that immense responsibility came with the position of superintendency. They could not simply leave the title and the stress at the office. Rather, they felt the pressure of being in a magnified fishbowl 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Such status affected the decisions that they made in their personal lives.

People find you. Especially in a little town. Or you start to go to the grocery store at 11:00 at night or 6:00 in the morning. But people find you. It's amazing. Uh, just yesterday, I was at a chamber meeting, and they're talking about having a Casino

night. I won't do that. Uh, you know, I can't have people saying that the superintendent was drinking and gambling. Not a good thing. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 10)

I am the superintendent of schools twenty-four hours a day. And if I'm in the grocery store, I'm still the superintendent of schools. And people don't hesitate to come talk to me about school things. And if I'm out, you know, for a social occasion with friends, I still hear about the school things. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 4)

Both Patti and Fleeta recalled trips to the store in unprofessional attire without the usual hair and make-up do's. The looks and the comments that they received led the two superintendents to believe that they were indeed scrutinized and held to a higher standard.

I mean, I might see somebody and stop and chat, but the only time I don't want to see anybody is when I might go over there like I went over there the other afternoon. Saturday afternoon. I'd been working all day in the yard. I did not put on make-up, comb my hair. You know. And I had been pulling weeds about 2:00 I thought. I have got to make a cake because I was going to the family reunion on Sunday. So I had to go the grocery store and get a few things. And when I went in there I thought, I hope I don't see anybody. Well, I saw about four people. 'Hi, how are you?' And I thought, 'Oh, dear.' So people watch you and I suspect that there's other people that watch who know who I am but I don't know who they are. I've always had to live that way. Even prior to [being] superintendent. Because I was single... I watched what I did and said. I was always reserved. Because even as assistant superintendent, here and in [the other system], I watched what I did because I knew people were watching me. You know, the people are cruel. And then they are really mean and vicious. They want somebody to talk about. So you know, I am very careful not to drink a beer or a glass of wine or something like that because somebody would take it out of context and it, it would not be understood. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 24-25)

Yes, from a very personal level to a very professional level [I feel as though I and my family are in a fishbowl]. You know, I've been dressed in my Saturday in-the-yard attire and had to go and get more gas for the lawn mower. And people will make the oddest comments to you. Like, 'God, I didn't know you even wore blue jeans.' Well, I don't mow the lawn in a suit... I'm a pretty low-key person and actually sometimes, there's a good bit of stress associated with being a private individual. I prefer my alone time. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 15-17)

Clarice recognized the magnified fishbowl concept in regards to her superintendent position; however, she looked at it in a humorous fashion and derived some enjoyment from it. She related a situation that occurred on a shopping trip.

I was over at Cosco one day, and now this is what I loved. I was walking into the store. A woman came out of the store and she stopped me and said, ‘You know, you look like that that superintendent at [our county schools].’ I said, ‘I do?’ She said, ‘I bet you people tell you that all of the time.’ I said, ‘They sure do.’ (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 10)

Contrary to the responses from other superintendents, Elaine did not feel as though she were in a magnified fishbowl. She stated,

I think in larger districts there’s probably more of that because they socialize more. In smaller districts I’ve just not felt that way. I remember recently, another female superintendent who’s retiring told me that one of the reasons that she was retiring was that she was just so weary of not being able to go anywhere without make-up. It’s just the expectations people don’t really expect me to worry about things like that because I never have. And so they just, you know it’s just [me]. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 13-14)

Accountability

With the recent institution of both national and state accountability standards, the interviewed Georgia female school superintendents were questioned concerning the high stakes regarding testing. Some superintendents admitted that they felt more pressure. However, all superintendents described that they had always felt an immense accountability to the students, parents, and staff members in their districts.

I really consider myself more accountable to [my county]. And I hear over and over again from our teachers and our administrators that they feel like that they are in great shape for the Georgia Performance Standards and everything else that we’re doing. We had done a lot of work up front and are ready... We try to look at it as we are always trying to build capacity. We’re not looking at this as just compliance issues. (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 8-9)

There’s a great deal of pressure, and one of the things that I have found that is raising the expectations, raising the bar has been a little bit, has been a little bit difficult. Because I came from a system where, excellence was the standard and I mean, you know... there was never any question about it. I decided that they [the current system] were satisfied with the way things are and I’m not satisfied. So that has been an interesting mix in trying to raise that bar without being too critical. Yes, I do [feel as though I’m on a shaky limb] because when I got there we had a school that was at the point of restructuring. They [the state] had actually moved an assistant principal from one school and moved a new assistant principal in there to look at some things

the principal was to try out. So fortunately, we've got a new principal nonetheless and we don't have to worry about that. And they [the school] did make AYP last year. But I mean they had been on the list long enough that they were at the point of having some major, major things to come along. So when you go into a situation like that, it really puts some pressure on you on what you are going to do. And then this year, we have made some changes and obviously anytime you make changes you worry about the implementation dip. And some of those changes were a little bit controversial. There were things that people didn't really want to do. And that had to do with curriculum more than anything else. Because with five elementary schools they just basically did their own thing in reading. They used whatever book they wanted and it didn't matter what textbook the system had adopted. It was a little bit shaky. You want to be sure you're doing the right thing. And it's, I feel like I'm on a limb sometimes. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 11-13)

Betty noted that the new accountability measures mandated by the state were not really making her feel any sense of apprehension because she and her system prepared for the onslaught before it began.

About eight years ago, we started talking about the fact that we are all accountable and that we feel accountable for everything that happens to every child here. And we spent some time putting together an administrative evaluation instrument. At first the principals were very antsy about what it was going to mean. But after they did it for the year, they said that this is great. But again, we're in it together. We succeed together or we fail together. We're all accountable, one for each other. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 9)

Well, it does put extraordinary pressure and the pressure I see has to be being the one who has to disseminate the mandate. But, of course, it's great empathy that I have for principals and for teachers, because they're the ones in the trenches who have to make it happen. I can have ideas all over the world, but they have to make it happen. Uh, fortunately, we were one of few systems in Georgia where we met AYP system wide and by school, every school... I don't particularly think it's a very reasonable mandate that's come down. High expectations, yes. Accountability, yes. When I look at the pressure, particularly on Special Education children, I think that it's most irrational... And, I think that it is a noble thought, but I think that it's as unrealistic as a cat becoming a dog. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 12-14)

I don't think there's an educator in this state and probably not this country who doesn't feel that [pressure from accountability] now with No Child Left Behind. And a lot of it is, you wonder if what its aim is at times. You wonder if the real ambition of that whole thing is to really undercut public education all together. It sometimes appears to be that way. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 7)

For Melanie, accountability simply meant assessing a problem and attacking it the best way possible, even though the best way may not be the most popular way.

They [accountability measures] don't scare me. Well, you sort of like, take a bull by the horns... Because like three years ago. All the schools here were classified as failing schools. The current seniors when they were in eighth grade and they ranked 159 out of 159 reporting. And 94 percent of them passed the reading/language arts and 90 percent passed the math test on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. So that to me is phenomenal. The number one thing that will help you make a difference is a good quality teacher who cares about kids and who can do the job. And so yes, we've made a lot of changes. I became superintendent on December 2nd and on December 5th, I held a first personnel meeting and dismissed a person that had been here and had a six year degree. Between then and in January, I dismissed a 28 year old veteran with a doctorate and by the end of June, I had dismissed 16 people. I did that because there's no reason for these children not to be doing their very best. When I was Associate Superintendent, I was in the classrooms and I was observing and watching and I knew it. It was very obvious who needed to go and why and that kind of thing. And I just didn't make any bones about it. And we did, to date we changed out 24 people in our system. I don't have but 54 people, but that's made a big difference. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 9-10)

Nancy did not look at accountability as a frightening force. Rather, she chose to focus on the positive things going on in her district. Upon being questioned whether or not the accountability measures made her feel as though she were on a shaky limb, she responded,

No. I just looked at all the schools. We've got a couple of areas that we're trying to work on. All are in the top 50 percent in the state in comparison. And we have just won the state championship at both levels of middle school and high school science... We are competing well on the national scale... But we realize accountability is all the way through but I think we can compete. We're not perfect and we've got a long way to go. But we're doing pretty good in some, most areas. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 7-8)

No, because I do think the State Department of Education has again, is giving us opportunities to look for ways to accomplish these things. But I do wish there was more formula funding for us because we, in our case here, we've had to downsize, and that's just not good when you're trying to raise the bar... To meet national and state expectations and just to do what we need to do for the kids, we've really stepped things up in the high school. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 11-12)

Patti stated that the accountability measures added pressure to the educators and school systems; however, she noted that such measures are often helpful in that they force educators, school leaders, and students to stay focused on the task at hand, education. Concerning the added pressure, Patti stated,

Oh, yeah. Well with the AYP coming in and them saying if your school is needs improvement or your school is a Title I distinguished school, and we've got both. You know, we've got two schools that are Title I distinguished for six years. I mean that they exceeded the AYP. And then the high school this year just went into the first year of needs improvement. And it dealt with the special education scores and the area of black males in math. And this is an aside, but now the special education, that is just an unrealistic ideal from my teaching perspective... We're doing what we've got to do. But back in the 80s and early 90s, I guess it was. We had the Georgia standards. Well, it made you do what you that focused on what you were supposed to do. And I thought it was really a good thing. And of course they have since gotten away from it. And I thought that was one of the best accountabilities that we could have had. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 19-21)

Clarice did not feel as though she were on any sort of shaky limb because she recognized the work on accountability as part of another earlier study.

No [it does not make me feel as though I'm on a shaky limb], and I'm going to tell you why. No Child Left Behind and all of the pieces to that were all part of a work from an organization called The National Alliance of Black Schools educators did in 1980. So using data was something I learned how to do in 1984 from Ron Edmonds. It's part of the effective school initiative. You've got to know what your data says about kids and you've got to break it apart according... to race, ethnicity, and sex. (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 15)

Subordinates

The interviewed Georgia female school superintendents experienced different levels of connectedness with their central office subordinates. Most indicated that they had at least one confidante in the office, and they further noted that this person represented a sounding board for various difficult decisions. All superintendents believed that regardless the closeness most decisions were ultimately the responsibility of the superintendent.

Betty described the importance of collaboration among subordinates in the office. When asked whether or not she relied on colleagues for professional dialogue on school matters, she responded, “Constantly.” She further stated,

We have a chain of command. It’s there on paper. But we really try to work a lot on the basis of all of us are colleagues... but um in this office, we don’t have a lot of staff here but we sit down and we talk about things together. We had a huddle in here yesterday morning about a problem that we had to try to figure out where it was coming from and what we were going to do and that’s constant. But you want input from everybody so that the decision that you make is informed and uh, certainly, um has the political support of those who helped you. At least they think they helped you make it. You’ve got to make people feel important. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 5-6)

Nancy also noted that discussing and reviewing issues with subordinates helped to build the concept of a team with everyone working together to accomplish the same goal of educational excellence. She stated,

Well, it’s a team effort, and so is building relationships and putting the right people in the right place. You got people on the bus in the right seat going in the same direction... We talk. We collaborate. I go by their offices, every office at least once a week. I go in and speak to every single person all the way through this building. And we talk about things and I learn a lot, then we have also staff meetings... we meet quarterly with everybody. We’ve done a newspaper for the community. Everybody contributes to those ideas. All those ideas, and I have an open door policy where they can come and talk and we’ve reorganized the central office so that people will be comfortable doing that. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 5-6)

Similarly, Fleeta noted the importance of having her subordinates as sounding boards for various issues. When posed the question: “Do you use a lot of your colleagues here as sounding boards for issues that are going on in the district,” she responded, “Absolutely.”

Absolutely. Uh, because of their areas of expertise, I’ve not been a principal, and some people think that you have to have had that step in your career. I realize that having folks who were principals can tell those their real life experiences to help keep some of my thoughts in reality. If I get off track or going down the wrong path, I appreciate their experience to help give me guidance. And, we’re just a very well put together team of people. We have great respect for one another. We have, I think, just the ultimate sense of professionalism toward one another. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p.9)

I have two assistant superintendents. One of them is working part-time. He retired last year and is just working part-time. And another, he's an assistant superintendent for operations. But, the other is the assistant superintendent for personnel, which is a little bit of an odd thing to have as an assistant superintendent. But, I have a Special Ed Director, a Staff and Student Services Director, a Director of Curriculum, a Finance Director, and an Administrative Services Director. And all of those people, most of them are in the same office but because that system has grown so much, there are two of those people who are in a separate office. But, we have, I think, a good, working relationship. When you go into a system, new, there is a sense of getting to know people. And getting to know who you can trust and who you can rely on. There is also a little bit of a jockeying for positions too. When you've grown up in a system or you come through that system, you know everybody and so everything just kind of fits together. But when you're the new person and then people are jockeying for positions of favor, I guess or whatever, that's been an interesting. [They're] trying to see that if a position comes open that they're the personal that you think of to put in that position or whatever. So that's been a little bit interesting being in a new system. But I think we have a good professional working relationship. There's not a lot of outside of school relationships. But you know, if we are going to a conference, we'll ride together and eat together and those kinds of things. And attend meetings together, but not a lot of socializing... Generally, I use them as sounding boards, but there are some things that you gotta do. There are some things that you can't talk to everybody about. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 9-10)

Not only did Judy hail her staff as being great, she also used the word trust several times in reference to the success that she feels is present in her system currently. She mentioned by name the Associate Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, the Associate Superintendent for Operations, the technology team, the facilities department, and the finance director. Judy stated, "I have a lot of people I depend on. And my associate that takes all the calls, yes, she's the go-to person that'll look into things for me and that I talk to on a daily basis, if not two or three or four times a day" (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 7-8)

While Melanie is not afraid to make a decision, she also realized the importance of talking with other professionals in her office. She intimated that she was always talking with people. Concerning this, Melanie stated,

Yes. I'm just always talking with people and saying, 'Now what do you think about this?' or, I'm not even suggesting that we do this but these ideas have been bouncing around, and take off on them and let's just talk and that's pretty much the way I operate. But, I'm not afraid to make a decision, and if it's mine to make, I'll make it. But I do like to go. I'll just be thinking about different things and just run down the hall and say, 'Okay, all three of you come out into the hall and let's talk. What do ya'll think about this?' And I always tell the administrators the principals and all the assistant principals, 'If you ever feel like I'm going off on a tangent, pull me back in and say, whoa, you're lost.' We just all talk and I, my way of doing things is to put it right out on the table. It is what it is. Good, bad, ugly, whatever. This is what it is and there's no sense in beating around the bush about it. Let's just talk about it. Let's face the brutal facts and let's just get on with it. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 7-8)

I listen to them. I'll ask them, 'What do you think?' I do that because I've told them all. I said we are a team and it takes all of us. I'll ask, 'What is your opinion of this?' And they've really not been asked that before. It's always been the decisions were made in here. They just sort of made and carried out but I feel like if people understand what we're doing then they support it more. And that's how I am. I'll ask them, 'How do you think about it?' or 'Let's talk about it.' I'm going to give them ownership in it. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 18)

I don't mind...asking for help [from colleagues]. I don't mind saying what do you think about this? Or how are you handling that? And I learned that when I was a high school principal. I guess I have enough self-confidence about myself that I don't think of it as being weak or not knowing... Well, let me tell you what I do with staff inside. I've created what I hope is a non-threatening situation. So that my style is to say, 'Look folks, here's the problem. These are some ways I've looked at it. I'd like to see, to hear what you think about it.' And so I've allowed them to tell me, 'Well, that's a bunch of malarkey.'...I think I've got a sharp cabinet of executive officers. They weren't sharp when I came. I had to teach them how to be sharp. And now, we are right on point. (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 13-14)

Elaine commented on the subordinates that she had in the central office as well as some of the principals that she had recruited to the system. Concerning her relationship with her immediate subordinates, she stated,

I have certainly enjoyed working with the central office staff. We [the vocational director and the curriculum director] always try to eat lunch together as many days as we can, and that's our time to brainstorm. We talk about how we can do this or how we can do that. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 8-9)

When asked whether or not she relied on her subordinate colleagues as professional sounding boards, Georgia Anne responded that it really depended on the issue at hand.

If it's one that requires input. You have a leadership team that is all the principals and county office leaders. And I get input from them. I have always been one to believe in shared governments. And I did. When I was a principal, my teachers used to laugh that they had not had too much of an opportunity to do that before I came in and then when they had the opportunity, they fairly quickly decided they didn't want that opportunity at all. But we worked at it, and I kept saying, 'Um, hum, this is your opportunity' and finally, they did embrace it. And after a while, I think that a person who went into that school with the idea that they were just going to dictate what happened, I think they had a very tough time with doing it. I don't think they would let them. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 5)

Summary of Perceptions of Isolation

Essentially, the researcher recognized that there were a myriad of factors that caused the interviewed superintendents to feel stress, pressure, and ultimately a degree of isolation or loneliness. When asked to respond to the statement "It is lonely at the top," all respondents admitted to at least a modicum of lonely feelings.

Certain factors contributed to these feelings. For example, the average 60 or 70 hour work week estranged superintendents from their families, both immediate and extended. Most of the interviewed superintendents admitted that they had to guard their at-home time as it was precious to them. The two superintendents that had children still living at home found it of utmost importance to carve out enough time to devote to their own children.

Another contributor to perceiving isolation in superintendents' lives was related to the concept of the magnified fishbowl. All superintendents stated that they felt as though they were always being scrutinized by the public eye. Some felt this invasion of privacy to be more of an intrusion than others did. But all interviewed superintendents noted that

they had to think carefully and consciously when acting or making decisions in public simply because of the positions that they held.

Another element contributing to the perception of loneliness among superintendents is accountability. The mandates for success generated by the federal and state governments have added to the stress burden of superintendents. At least 80% of the superintendents admitted that the accountability measures indeed added extraordinary pressure to an already high pressure job. Most superintendents countered that they were as prepared as possible for the mandates.

While all interviewed superintendents stated that they had a connectedness to subordinates within their offices, most agreed that they were ultimately responsible for all decisions. They noted the importance of collaboration in regards to as many decisions as possible; however, the factor of responsibility largely fell to the superintendents. All superintendents were complimentary of their staff members particularly their associate and assistant superintendents and stated that they relied heavily on their expertise.

Impact of Isolation on Personal Lives of Female Superintendents in Georgia

In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the personal lives of female superintendents in Georgia? (Research subquestion 4)

Relationships with Family Members and Friends

Because of the vast amount of time spent on the job, superintendents recognized that the burden often resulted in a lack of time with family. Most of the interviewed female superintendents responded with a sense of guilt and regret over the lost time from family members, particularly spouses, children, and parents. However, many of them

reported that their families understood the responsibilities and supported them in their endeavors.

Fulfilling the position of superintendent made cultivating friendships much more difficult for most of the interviewed superintendents. Not only the lack of time but the stress and political nature of the job nearly eliminated the opportunity to develop true, lasting friendships.

I think that's one of the challenges that I have had. I had a lot of family responsibilities. And that's good but a lot of the times; I do feel pulled with knowing that I could be helping my daughters with more babysitting. My elderly mother is 82. She's still living. Were it not for my two sisters living with her... I'm lucky. I'm lucky in so many ways that they are there to help her and I can go by and just run up there at lunch and you know check on her. (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 22)

I don't have a real broad circle of friends. People want to talk business. The job kind of isolates you. You really don't have a colleague an equal colleague. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 26)

You just have to be careful. So you just don't have quite the same degree of freedom. And personal relationships. If you're the principal, for example, you're out among people cheering at the football game. Or doing all those things. You're, you're a part of the action. Whereas, in this office, you are removed from that. No matter how hard you try to be a part of the action. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 14-15)

I think the hardest part for me is having the time to cultivate friendships. Friendships don't just spring up. They have to be cultivated. And, it's difficult to build that because the job is so all consuming. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 21)

It's a strange thing, but you can't maintain the friendships. For example, coming back here, I couldn't wait to get to the middle school to see my friends [that I had taught with earlier in my career]. But then I just was so aware that it was different. And it needs to be that way, really. You know, so from that perspective, you're always somewhat isolated. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 24-25)

My close friends have not had that kind of responsibility so I can't, they don't, understand. And working with people in the school as superintendent, you can have friendly relationships but you can't become too friendly. You still have to maintain that professional working relationship. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 21)

I have a friend; we used to walk early in the morning when I was teaching and she'd been in education but she had retired. I would, every morning when I'd first moved here, it was wonderful. We could walk at 5:15. We'd walk because I'd have to walk early. And that was fun. Some things would come up, and we could talk and laugh about it or just talk. Now, I don't think that's something you can talk about. Because it's really almost confidential. Almost every matter. And people like to think they have the inside on things. So I have to be real guarded about that. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 16)

A single superintendent, Patti desired companionship in the form of a friend, and admitted that she had some friends but probably few close ones. She extolled the importance of trust and noted that much time was needed to cultivate friendships grounded in trust, and with the superintendency, time was a rare commodity.

Also single, Clarice had family, an aunt, an uncle, and a niece, living with her. She stated that this was unusual as she had spent most of her professional, adult career alone with the exception of her daughter. Essentially, Clarice noted that she preferred not to share her day, but because of the family's access to the cable television, she was often asked pointed questions when public situations arose in the district. In response to the questions, she stated that she would "say a few words and move on to something else." (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 28)

Fun and Relaxation

Personal accounts from the interviewed female superintendents revealed several interesting points concerning chosen activities for fun and relaxation. While the majority of the interviewed superintendents felt chagrin for their isolation from meaningful people and relationships, most preferred solitude, or at least solitude with family, when given an opportunity to experience time off for fun. However, most superintendents connected their fun to their work stating that various aspects of their jobs were fun. Therefore, self-

selected, solitary activities and work-related activities were related as fun in most instances.

Fun is my grandchild. I don't know what we did before we had one. I just enjoy being with him and playing with him. I can let my hair down and seemingly not have to worry about anything else other than trains and race cars and building tunnels and bridges... My ideal vacation would be just to go someplace that had a nice big front porch and sit on the front porch and rock. I love to rock. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 19-20)

My ideal vacation is to go somewhere like the mountains because I have very delicate skin and can't do the beach very well, and sit on the porch with a swing and a good book and a fan. And no telephone. I don't get to do that very much. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 20)

I'm a fisherperson. And so I fish [for fun]...I learned how to sail three years ago. And so I've planned this summer, I'm going to go sailing. And then I walk. And I go off to the movies. And during the summer, I'm likely to walk off around two o'clock, go to a movie, then come back to work. It's kind of like a way to escape, and so I clear my mind with nonsensical anything. (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 23-24)

Fun is playing with my grandchildren. Yesterday afternoon, I took the afternoon off; my daughter's moving, and I kept three of my little grandchildren... Fun is also digging in the dirt. I like going to Pike's [Nursery]. That is a real treat. Going out to dinner, traveling. I'm a lifelong learner and so ideally, I like to travel to places that I haven't been that have historical significance and that I can learn. (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 15-16)

Fun is going to a wonderful outlet. Getting great bargains where you have a percentage off the already 75 percent. And having a phenomenal shoe collection. I enjoy the time alone and the time with my mother and sister who live here. And reading and cooking. I enjoy gourmet cooking. My ideal vacation is time with my husband. Just alone time with him. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p.a 26-27)

When asked to define fun, Melanie replied with a plethora of favorite activities.

The common element for them is family, and being away. She stated, "Camping, going yard sale-ing on Saturday mornings with my mom. Traveling with my husband. Going to flea markets and antique shows. Family. A lot of family. We just go and then we have certain routines, certain places we eat. Certain things we do." (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 18)

My family, we all like to fish. We like to sunbath. We like to read. My sisters come up a lot, even if I'm working, and I always have good books everywhere. My daughter, they have a pond house that has been fun, so we all enjoy that. We like family gatherings. I was a coach of tennis...I still love to watch that sport. I like a beach, a good book, and just sun early in the morning when you can see the sea oaks blowing. The ocean is very serene for me. I have a good spiritual base to draw from. And so I think that's important. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 15)

Well, right now, we visit my daughter often in Atlanta. We're in the middle of planning a big wedding for her. You know, things that she's involved with. We just feel fortunate to have her. I think as you grow older, you are just happier that you have a child...We both like sports, and so we go to ball games here and just things like that. A lot of what we do for entertainment is associated with the school district. I love the mountains. And we do occasionally go to the mountains for a weekend. I have not actually taken a vacation, and I guess this is kind of interesting since; its' been probably been eleven years since I've actually [taken] a whole week off. I've kind of gotten out of touch with leisure time activities. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 18-19)

Enjoyment for me sometimes is getting away from home and going somewhere for the weekend where I don't meet all the people in the grocery store asking me about Johnny's teacher or something like that. I like to go out to a good restaurant, and I like to read. I enjoy traveling, those things. I like to just go somewhere that I can relax and we go to Savannah a lot simply because our daughter is there but Savannah's just a good place to visit. I'm looking at perhaps going to Italy sometime in the next year. So that will be a biggie... My husband and I will go places where he can go and play golf and I can go to the spa and read and lounge around. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 11-12)

I love antique shops. And I love to look for pins... It wasn't long ago, I was in Savannah for a meeting and we got through about 3:00 and so I went down and I stayed in the shop and closed it down. But had a wonderful time and bought about five pins, antique pins... And got the history behind them. Which was really neat. There was this great big old case and all these pins, and I said my goodness and they said well, we've been selling out of this case for two years. I like to shop in different shops... And when I shop I like to bargain shop... Well, I just came back from one [ideal vacation]. We left the day after Christmas, the 26th, and went to Austria, Prague, and Budapest. I went with a group and so that was fun. I didn't have to make any decisions. All they did, they told me where to go. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 28-30)

Summary of Impact of Isolation on Personal Lives

The participants described how their experiences of isolation in their professional lives impacted their personal lives as well. Most of the superintendents admitted to

maintaining a few close-friend relationships but stated that they did not have the time to develop deep, meaningful friend relationships. Because of the vast amount of time spent on-the-job, few superintendents noted that they spent time with friends. Rather, the little socialization time that they had was more likely spent with family members. Many described a self-imposed isolation, for fun activities, and all superintendents expressed a desire for isolation from all except family.

Even though superintendents described feelings of isolation and loneliness as a detriment to the position, they sought sanctity of solitude citing that they had to have quiet time to think and reflect.

Impact of Isolation on Professional Lives of Female Superintendents in Georgia

In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the professional lives of female superintendents in Georgia? (Research subquestion 2)

Job Satisfaction

Not only the long hours but also the high stress situations and confidential nature of most situations are contributing factors in the superintendents' lack of satisfaction in several cases. While many superintendents recognized the great opportunities that they have had in their tenure to make a difference in their districts on a broad scale, others felt disconnectedness to children and the day-to-day educational process that once lured them into considering leadership roles.

When asked to consider whether her vocation had truly represented her avocation, Georgia Anne stated,

Fun in the job is when I get to do things in the schools that involve students. That's the paradox in education that the higher you go the further you are from what you really like to do. I think that's very true. I think teachers have a lot more job satisfaction in many ways that administrators do. Certainly principals have more

satisfaction than superintendents do. I think everybody has more satisfaction than superintendents do...I would consider that my entire career has been. My years of teaching were. My years as a principal were. My years as a superintendent, no. I don't think anybody could enjoy the superintendency. I've never heard a person say that they enjoyed it. The pressure and politics of it. It's very far from what you go into education for. And, I don't mean that I've hated it. Its given me the opportunity to do some things that I think really are helpful to children, but as far as getting personal satisfaction out of this job, no. It's a tough job. Now, when I was at the high school as principal for example, I many times, worked 80 hours a week. That was not even unusual. But there was a lot more satisfaction in what I did than now. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 11-14)

Grace intimated similar feelings of missing the contact with students even though she admitted to loving her work. She stated,

I would hate to say that I had to get up and go to work every day and not enjoy what I was doing. I don't, I look forward to getting up and going to work. And I spend long hours there. I would hate to know that I had to do that and not enjoy what I was doing. I love my work. I do [miss contact with children]. But one of the things that I am doing now is I'm doing a Junior Achievement Volunteer. I am going into two second grade classrooms and doing work. And I'll be doing that for five weeks, so I'm looking forward. I'm looking forward to that because it lets me get back into working with the children. And that's the part that I miss most about administration. As a principal you still had that contact with children. It was not so isolated. You weren't in the classroom but you still had contact with them. You move to the central office then you miss that. When I have an opportunity to do something that involves the children, I will take advantage of that. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 20-21)

Betty, Melanie, and Judy all countered that they could not imagine doing anything else in their professional lives although the stress was oftentimes over burdensome.

Elaine seemingly disregarded the stress when she spoke of her work. She stated that her jobs, all of the ones that she has had since entering the field of education, truly represented her avocation. Concerning this, she stated,

I never regretted going into education. Through the years, I hear so many people, so many other teachers say, you know if I could do something else I would. I never ever had any regrets about becoming a teacher. I enjoy and am so interested in everything that has to do with education...I don't view my job as something separate from my interests and I've always felt that way... but you have to feel like what you're doing is so important for so many kids. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 20-21)

Clarice noted that she truly enjoyed her job. However, she admitted that people often called her a work-a-holic. She further intimated that she enjoyed all that her job entailed: graduation ceremonies, football games, basketball games, plays, and music concerts.

Summary of Impact of Isolation on Professional Lives

Feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced in the position of the superintendency were bound to affect the professional lives of Georgia female school superintendents. In fact, the literature noted that there may be a link between job satisfaction and short tenures of superintendents. Likewise, several superintendents in this study recognized that their stresses coupled with their feelings of loneliness at the top counted for some feelings of dissatisfaction with their positions.

Strategies for Coping

What strategies have Georgia female school superintendents used to manage perceived isolation? (Research subquestion 4)

Networking

Nearly all interviewed superintendents recognized that networking existed in the circles of the superintendency. At the Bootstrap meeting of superintendents and in the RESA board of control meetings, they all reported that they indeed saw networking, particularly among the male superintendents. While networking with other superintendents can be a positive experience with one superintendent looking out for another, most interviewed superintendents focused primarily on the all male networking system that permeated the superintendencies.

When asked whether or not they believed that the good ole boy network existed, Betty and Melanie responded similarly,

Oh, yeah! Would you like to go with me to RESA board meetings... for the longest time, I tried to deny that that was a factor. But it is. Decisions are made based on buddy-hood rather than on logical, rational, open procedures. I think there are those who hold me with some measure of respect. There are others that think I am a loud mouth bitch. But sometimes you have to be louder in order to be heard. That's something I learned early. And probably have paid for it for having gone that route. But I refuse to tell a man a good idea so that he can repeat it and it be heard. And that's about the only way some ideas ever get heard-- is for you to give the idea to some man. But I think I've earned a measure of respect among the superintendents in our RESA area and somewhat through the professional organization. I'll never be President of the association or Queen of the realm or anything like that. That's not what's most important to me anyway. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 16-17)

Oh, yeah. Go to a bootstrap meeting this week and you'll see it in full force. You notice it when you get the agenda for bootstrap and it has this and this and then the golf tournament. And you know, it's mainly white male and they just. I just say, it just never phased me. I didn't care if you were a man, woman if you could do your job. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 14-15)

Judy and Grace recognized the existence of the all-male networking system on a broader scale, but really did not note experience with the good ole boy network personally in their own districts or areas to any great degree.

I see the good ole boy network; I don't feel it here, but I see it. Like I said, in our RESA most of the majority of the superintendents are white males. I see it in nationwide. Like I said, if you go to AASA meetings, it's by far the majority are men. (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 13)

I think it may be eroding somewhat now. But I think that there has been that and when I did my dissertation, I found that it was there. I think in terms well just for instance, when we go to a superintendent's meeting, they have a golf outing. That's wonderful for the guys who like to play golf. But then there are, there are some women I'm sure who like to play golf too. But I guess it's a little bit of that kind of thing. And maybe with, you know, there's still some with getting interviews and making the right contacts and that kind of thing before. I see a little bit of it in our RESA board of control meetings, not too much. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 16-17)

On the other hand, Fleeta and Nancy admitted that such a system exists, yet they focused much of their comments on females becoming assertive and moving beyond this

network. Further, they extolled that education itself could assist women in transcending the all male networking system.

I think that the women I've met in the length of the superintendency have been very well because of where they are, they've had to be very assertive, very confident, so we make our presence known. I mean, some women of course are much more assertive in how they position themselves in just those predominately male groups. I've not found that the men snub the women. Actually, they are very paternal in how they interact with you. At least, that's been my experience. I am sure that they have their own internal network. A kind of funny phenomenon that we have when we have our superintendent training sessions is that the men often have golf as the end of the day activity. And the women superintendents have said that we have retail therapy...we would be left out of that [golfing], but I think that the women are particularly supportive of one another because there are so few of us. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 22-23)

I think there is that. I think you have a certain amount of that. But I think it's a matter of education and finding a better way of doing things... and then that's hard because I've come against that this week. Uh, because it's, the old way to do things... but I think our board has been pretty receptive for the most part of doing that. Yes, I think the good ole boy, especially in the sports programs, from what I hear my colleagues talking and about a lot of times how you might be more receptive to certain interest groups. I think some people feel pressured by the conversations I've heard. But I don't. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 14)

Elaine spoke of her networking experiences. She noted that in her first superintendent appointment she networked well with other superintendents in her RESA district. She recognized that they were mostly male, but denied their being a part of the good ole boy system. Rather, she saw them as being open, helpful, intelligent, sharp men whom she could turn to for thoughtful advice on puzzling situations. She further stated,

They [the men in her former RESA] were just really sharp people who deserved their positions. They weren't just good 'ole boys who got bumped in there because everybody in town like them. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 16)

Mentors

All interviewed superintendents discussed the importance of mentors. The Georgia Association of School Superintendents maintained the practice of assigning each

new superintendent a mentor superintendent with experience. This practice, along with the more personal means of procuring mentors and mentor relationships, helped superintendents feel more comfortable when faced with difficult decisions.

When asked whether or not she thought that mentoring was important to school leaders, Judy and Fleeta responded positively.

I absolutely do. I think it is critical. And I had a great mentor in [the former superintendent]. I had great mentors all along. When I did my student teaching in Clarke County years ago, I had a wonderful teacher I worked under and considered her a mentor. Now, the superintendent's association has established a mentor program for superintendents. It's really great to have formal mentoring programs. Sometimes, those informal mentors become even more meaningful (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 11)

I have had mentors along the way. Absolutely. Because those are the people who inspire you and guide you and just give good guidance. But, I have an officially assigned mentor. Georgia's School Superintendent's Association had a formal mentor assignment process. And I told him [my mentor] that it would go far beyond one year. He would be my mentor for life. We just happen to be well matched. He's a veteran superintendent. He is retired from Kentucky. And has been in Georgia just a few years, but has a wonderful, wonderful depth of knowledge that he has been so willing to share with me. And he won't tell me what to do. He guides me through the thought process of really considering outcomes, considering what in my formal training of looking at your intended and your unintended outcomes. He really has the wisdom to help guide me through that and he has been wonderful support. And I've called him at home. I have every contact number his wife has. Pager, cell phone, everything... I'm fortunate that some of the former superintendents, as a matter of fact, three of the former superintendents still live here. And when I run across something that some artifact or something that I need an historical perspective on, they can give it to me. And also, I have the best insight mentor, who is my dad, who was an assistant superintendent. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 21)

An older and longer running superintendent, Betty humorously responded to the question concerning mentors. She recounted having mentors in the past, and she noted that mentors were especially important for teachers and high school principals. As for her having mentors currently, she stated,

Honey, everybody that could be my mentor is either dead or retired! They're gone! I have always had good friends with good advice. (Betty, 4/15/05, p. 14)

All superintendents recalled that the Georgia Superintendents Association assigned veteran or retired superintendents as mentors to novice superintendents. Grace and Melanie reflected that these assigned mentors were actually very helpful from time to time, particularly when they encountered issues that only superintendents had to face. These two superintendents also noted that they had other people they considered mentors.

When I became a superintendent, I was assigned by the Georgia School Superintendent's Association a... coach, not mentor; it's basically the same thing. And they have had some training for working with superintendents. And so they're, you know, everybody, every superintendent is not a coach. But, I was assigned one in the Middle Georgia area. When she called periodically, and we would get together for lunch and we would talk about things. And if I needed something, I could call her and say, you know, tell me about this or whatever. And so that really helped. But I do have two former superintendents who I consider mentors of mine. And I'll, one of them is still a superintendent one of them is retired but I'll pick up the phone and call and say, let me ask you about this or tell me what you think about this. But, just to get their feel on something. I think it's very important to, you know, to have a mentor...I may talk to one of them once a month. Just, in an e-mail or something, but not weekly. And the other one, three or four times a year probably. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 15-16)

They [the Superintendent's Association] pulled us or put us up together and she came down and we talked and then we met another time or two and then right at first, I would call about some little questions. You know little stuff. She and I are pretty both head strong. And pretty much, hands-on and all that. But there were a couple of times that I called her up about at I said 'aw look, I just need somebody. I need to sound it off to somebody but it's gotta be a superintendent.' Because there is a time when you have to look at things from a superintendent realm, not as a director or a principal or somebody. You've got to be able to have that view from the superintendent seat. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 13-14)

While Georgia Anne did not consider the assigned mentor experience to be particularly negative, she stated that a mentor relationship was much more meaningful when cultivated on one's own.

Sure, I have the former superintendent here. He has been a mentor to me through many years of my career not just since I've been superintendent. But through my... Another person that has meant a great deal to me is Debra Harden with Georgia School Superintendent's Association. She has been great. And she's somebody that I can call up at any time that I need to. I've been through a couple of those things

where like an organization like Georgia School Boards will assign you a mentor and it's somebody you don't know and I haven't liked that as well because I think you find those people whose opinions are not likely to mesh with yours. And sort of forcing it with someone you don't know is not as meaningful. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 6-7)

Yes, I've got several. Well, through organizations I have some. I've had a friend that was a real mentor for me when I went to another system. He had been the superintendent and mentored me there and then went to the State Department but he was. So right now, I don't have one I talk to every day. But there are a number of people I can call if I have a question. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 25)

The researcher inquired whether or not Nancy had a mentor that she relied on from time to time to give her sound advice on various professional issues. She indicated that she indeed maintained such a relationship with a superintendent in a neighboring district. However, she elaborated in depth on her opinion of mentoring as it related to leadership within the district. In fact, Nancy noted that mentoring was important for the successful induction and retaining of quality leaders. Further, she contended that mentoring others and establishing a mentoring program for new leaders was a primary responsibility of the superintendent. She stated,

My most efficient person who's been excellent who has excellent skills in that [mentoring] area will go out and actually rotate between five new principals... Well, they won't be alone. It won't be an island because that's a lot of times why they [new leaders] don't succeed. We'll be doing school updates as well because I think that's sometimes a burnout for them. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 12)

Yes. I have one. He's 76. He's at the University of West Georgia. I met him in Tennessee when I was a graduate student and fell in love with him, and I guess he must have fallen in love with me too. But two years ago he said that he was very proud of me. He was here yesterday because he'd called me to do consulting work with him. And he said, 'I'm proud of you.' And he said, 'I think you're an excellent superintendent. I think you're a fine educator and I'm glad I know you. And I almost just cried because this man so impressed me in graduate school, and he wanted me to be. He made me want to be a superintendent because I never thought past just being a principal. I really hadn't, but just watching him teaching and listening to his stories, I thought I learned what kind of impact you can really have...on children's learning. (Clarice, 6/01/05, p. 17)

Elaine noted that she really did not have a mentor at all in her first appointment as superintendent; at least not the kind of mentor that she felt would have been helpful in her first, inaugural year.

No [I did not have a mentor]. And that really made the transition into the superintendent's position extremely hard. Now, it's not a problem because I've had enough experience, but my first year as superintendent in [my former county], I really had nobody to show me what to do. The superintendent left...and the bookkeeper retired with the superintendent. And so I had to figure out when she left, how to do a budget, which I was clueless because you just don't learn those things well enough in college. Now, at that time the State Department of Education did make available to us facilitators. My facilitator was able to come in and help me with some things. But there was no day to day [help]. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 14-15)

Spousal Support

Most interviewed female superintendents, who were married, believed that they had the support of their husbands in their professional endeavor; however, many intimated that their husbands could not fully understand their position as superintendent.

I don't think that I could find a more supportive man; he chooses to be what the Navy calls a Geographical Bachelor...I vent in moderation because he doesn't wanna hear it and neither do I want to regurgitate it, I guess. But he listens and he has a hard time sometimes understanding why I have to be so diplomatic. Because the military is much less tolerant of things than the educational world. A chain of command is an uncompromising thing in the military. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 3, 24)

Grace and Elaine also shared that they reveled in the support of their husbands. Although Grace questioned whether or not her husband could relate to education from his business background, she admitted that she enjoyed being able to problem solve things with him on occasion.

I guess one thing that makes it easier to be able to do that with him is that the fact that he doesn't know the people in my county. So I can talk about it a little bit more openly than I could if it were something that was happening in our home county where he would know who I was talking about. But yes, he is definitely, my sounding board or my supporter. Sometimes, he'll say, this may be the worst advice

that you'll ever get but this is what I think. I'll say well that's pretty sound advice or that you know may not work in this situation. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 18)

Elaine's husband had spent his entire career in education and had retired as a middle school guidance counselor. Not only did Elaine appreciate his educational background, but she also loved his willingness to help.

That's [my husband's support] is everything. My husband doesn't mind cooking dinner. He doesn't mind housework. And that does make a huge difference. He didn't mind helping my daughter find a prom dress. You know, those things that there were times that I just couldn't manage. When I decided to take the [first superintendency], we just sat down as a family and they [my husband and my daughter] wanted me to have that opportunity because they realized I didn't have much time left [before retirement]. So, we all agreed that things would just be very different. So it's wonderful to have that support at home. I think it would probably make all the difference. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 7-8)

When asked whether or not she confided in her husband and other family members regarding work-related issues, Nancy stated that she did not because she was on the job until very late. Further, she, like Grace and Fleeta, noted that her husband lived away, in her case, out of state. Nancy further stated, "When I go home and when it's home, it's home. And I have to do that to stay balanced. I really don't need to be discussing that with them." (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 13).

Although Georgia Anne's husband resided with her, she did not always share her day-to-day stresses with him. She noted that she had his support in her career, but she intimated that he did not always understand the paradigm of education. Concerning this relationship, she stated,

I don't go home and run through my whole day again with my husband at all. Once is enough. If something horrendous has happened I might but you know even then, confidentiality is an issue and there's just not much point in it. You know he is not all that likely to understand just how tough it is sometimes. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 9-10)

Personal Strategies

To cope with the stress of the superintendency, many female superintendents cited personal interests and hobbies that helped to balance the demands of the stressful job.

These activities were broad in number and ranged from infusing themselves with family, to exercise, to meditation and many other activities.

I call my husband. I'll ask somebody in the office to go to dinner or you know whatever. You know go get something to eat and then come back. Read. I do a lot of reading I almost forgot about that. That's what I do most of the time if I'm at home by myself. I like to read just the stuff that would take me away. Calgon. That commercial, that kind of thing. But then I also read. I like to read things on leadership and I learn a lot of things I can do with what's going on in schools. Like I just, we just did a book study on Robert Marzano's *What Works in Schools*. I like inspirational reading too. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 23-24)

I enjoy my quiet times to do a lot of reflection. Uh, I keep a little Norman Vincent Peale Booklet in my restroom there on how to handle tough times. I get to go and read and be regenerated. (Fleeta, 4/06/05, p. 33)

With my family and friends and I stay busy in my church. I have a great church and my Sunday School class and just being around making myself be around other people. But you just have to look to others and talk with other colleagues and take advantages of opportunities that you have... I don't travel all of the time but I do take advantage of opportunities to get away and network with other people. And you have to find time for yourself. That's hard to do sometimes you do just have [to]. One thing I didn't mention is walking. And since I've been superintendent but especially the last eighteen to twenty months, I guess now. I have to do that, that just helps me physically and mentally. [Also] you have to find the time for your family and I certainly don't want my family to ever feel left out. (Judy, 4/05/05, p. 19-20)

I go home and walk with my husband. We work in the yard. I love to do those kinds of things. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 25)

Talk to my mama. Talk to my mama and my dad and my husband, and a mentor of mine. And remember the blessings that it is to have a job like this. I think I could be without a job... And a lot of times, I'll go to the schools. If I get sick of it, I just throw it down and I'm going out to the schools and I'll go into the classrooms and talk with kids, talk with teachers, and I'll generally, I'll come away from it like that. (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 19-20)

I sort of change gears when I can. Uh, I try to , I'm not, I haven't done well lately on that but I try to work out several days a week. I try to go by the Wellness Place and

do a workout. I read a lot and that's a good escape for me. And I enjoy cooking. Not that kind of rush home and cook something for dinner type but... on the weekends I do cooking. (Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 18)

I'd just think about it [loneliness] and might go do something different and try not to think about it. I get lonesome but I stay busy and I work. I don't do well with down time. I don't just sit and rest and relax and prop my feet up. I'm always busy. And that's probably the runaway and staying so that the loneliness doesn't catch up with you. (Patti, 4/14/05, p. 34)

My family. And my sisters and my husband, and my daughter and son-in-law and we just have such a good relationship that I guess it's not so much quantity of time as it is quality of time. And we really enjoy being together. And like Thanksgiving and the winter break for Christmas and for the spring break and fall. Break. There's always, I always try to do something with our family. We always make some special memories. (Nancy, 4/25/05, p. 16)

Distributive Leadership

Although all of the interviewed, female superintendents stated that they were ultimately and singularly responsible for the decisions in the system, most subscribed to the view of distributive or participatory leadership. They indicated that the more that people are involved with the decisions of the school, the more supportive they will likely be in achieving common goals.

Nancy, Judy, and Patti noted the importance of delegating to others, particularly assistants, and encouraging them to form committees, gather information, and report back to brain-storm and problem-solve certain issues more. Allowing more people to become involved in decisions at the central office level helped to gain a greater level of support and understanding in most situations. However, these three superintendents concurred that many issues were of a confidential nature and could not be shared or distributed in any way.

Melanie, on the other hand, admitted that distributive leadership worked wonderfully; however, she stated that in a smaller system, there were very few assistants

that she could put in charge of developing committees and generating ideas and input because of the small number of people employed at the central office. She stated,

The problem in smaller systems is that the superintendent has to push every piece of paper that the one [superintendent] in Gwinnett pushes but yet he has a Title I Director and a Pre-K Director, and a Special Ed Director, and a Curriculum Director at every level, and a Transportation Director, and a Facilities Director... (Melanie, 4/15/05, p. 10-11)

Georgia Anne and Grace concurred that many times the decision was solely for the superintendent to make. Other times, though, they intimated that it was prudent to include other people, the right people for the issue at hand.

If it's a decision that is just either legally this or that then I just make the decision. If it's one that requires input. Like you have a leadership team that is all the principals and the central office leaders. And I get input from them. I have always been one to believe in shared governments. And I did. When I was a principal, my teachers used to laugh that they had not had too much of an opportunity to that before I came in...(Georgia Anne, 4/26/05, p. 5)

If I'm dealing with a personnel issue then I'm going to talk with the assistant superintendent of personnel. If we're talking about finances, the finance director. So, depending on what the issue is. Sometimes, I'm going to talk with more than one. (Grace, 4/09/05, p. 10)

Betty stated that her staff was small, but she noted that they all needed to feel as though they are a part of the action. Further, she stated,

"You want input from everybody so that the decision that you make is informed and certainly has the political support of those who helped you. At least they think they helped you make it. It's just people skills. You've got to make people feel important" (p. 7).

Elaine concurred with Betty in that everyone on the team should feel a part of the action. She further believed that allowing everyone the opportunity to help in the decision-making process would be beneficial to the organization as a whole. She noted,

I try to let them [administrators and teachers] certainly be a part of the decision making process. I didn't have that luxury necessarily in [my former county]. But again I tried to involve the teachers more there. (Elaine, 6/08/05, p. 9)

Summary of Strategies for Coping

While all superintendents recognized some continuum of loneliness at the top, they each employed different strategies to help cope with the phenomenon of isolation. One method may not have been better than another, but some superintendents may have been more comfortable with certain aspects. Still other interviewed female superintendents subscribed to multiple methods to staunch feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Networking was identified as a strategy of coping in the literature; however, when responding to networking, at least half of the superintendents did not look at networking in a positive light but rather focused on the all-male clique. A seemingly effective method to alleviate some feelings of isolation was mentoring. Most interviewed superintendents stated that mentoring was quite helpful, particularly in the early years of the superintendency.

Other strategies that seemed to be helpful in squelching feelings of isolation and loneliness included sharing with subordinates and distributive leadership. Although it was impossible to share everything, given the nature of the superintendency, all interviewed superintendents noted that sharing, when possible, alleviated some of the strain of the position while also allowing others to feel a part of the action.

Further, interviewed superintendents cited various personal strategies that they used to cope with feelings of isolation and loneliness. While it seemed somewhat

paradoxical, nearly all of the participants recognized solitary activities and/or activities with family as means to cope with feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Summary

The researcher gathered data from the interviews and analyzed it to describe the personal, lived experiences and perceptions of isolation among 10 Georgia female school superintendents. The interviews were open-ended, in-depth inquiries with each participant. With the exception of one, the interviews were conducted in the superintendents' offices. The researcher-constructed interview instrument was used to guide the discussions by the interviewees, and the interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. The researcher analyzed the data in the transcription texts to identify common themes, patterns, and practices in response to the research question and subquestions. The researcher utilized the assistance of Dr. Michael D. Richardson in validating the findings in the transcription texts. In order to maintain confidentiality of the participants, the researcher assigned fictitious names as pseudonyms in reporting the findings.

All of the participating Georgia female school superintendents reported that they agreed with the statement, "It is lonely at the top." However, they disagreed on the extent to which they felt lonely. From the findings, the researcher ascertained that loneliness, to a degree is inherent in the position of the superintendency. There were some common factors that seemed to predispose the superintendents to experience perceptions of isolation. Such factors included time demands, the magnified fishbowl existence, accountability demands, relationships with colleagues, and diminished job satisfaction.

To cope with perceived feelings of isolation, the interviewed superintendents employed various strategies to cope with feelings and stress inherent to both loneliness and their positions. The following strategies were most often identified: spousal support, family support, distributive leadership, mentoring, personal interests and hobbies, and a passion for the education of young people.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

At the apex of a community's educational hierarchy is the superintendent. The chief executive officer of the school system is constantly under fire from students, educators, parents, community leaders, politicians, and other policy makers. This stress, coupled with the confidential nature of most issues can create an artificial barrier between the superintendent and others. Federal and state mandates have added immense pressure and stress to the already stressful job. In addition to these culturally identifiable superintendent strains, near-unreasonable time commitments for superintendents can further estrange them from family members and close friends.

Introduction

The role of the superintendent has expanded from its inception in 1837. While the primary role of these inaugural superintendents was to lead instruction in a task-oriented fashion, their responsibilities may have varied slightly from district to district as the adoption of high schools came into existence and systems grew (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Sharp & Walter, 1997). However, superintendent duties have continued to grow in gargantuan increments since the beginning of the 20th century. Responsibilities of superintendents have grown to include fiscal affairs, school building construction, maintenance of schools, and more recently, policy mandates and political affairs (Sharp & Walter, 1997)

These immense responsibilities, combined with the culture of the position of superintendent, have left many superintendents feeling isolated and alone (Sharp and Walter, 1997). Perhaps female school superintendents may feel exacerbated levels of loneliness due to the fact that only 13 percent of superintendents are women (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Jones (1994) indicated that the higher one climbs, the more isolated he or she is. Such professional isolation can be debilitating to leaders in many ways.

The researcher's purpose was to explore the perceptions of isolation among a selected group of Georgia female school superintendents. The researcher employed an instrument consisting of 14 open-ended, in-depth interview questions that were used to guide inquiry and ultimately address the overarching research question and subquestions. The qualitative study was descriptive in nature and investigated the perception of isolation through the lived experiences of the selected superintendents.

The researcher, through convenience sampling, chose 10 Georgia female school superintendents out of a population of 39. The researcher took great care to gather a demographically and geographically diverse sample. In order to accomplish this, the researcher mailed questionnaires, along with informed consent letters, to all Georgia female school superintendents. Thus, when cards were returned indicating the superintendents' willingness to participate, they also returned questionnaires addressing scant amounts of information so that the researcher could construct a varied sample. Participants represented a diverse demographic group: eight were Caucasian and two were African American. Further, age, size of school system, and years of experience as a superintendent also varied.

The researcher collected data through scheduled, in-depth interviews with the 10 Georgia female school superintendents. The interviews were recorded via audio tapes and transcribed by Tonya Coleman, a trained business transcriptionist. To ensure anonymity, the researcher assigned fictitious names to all participants and voided all transcripts of any references to actual people, schools, and locations. The researcher read and coded material looking for common themes and patterns. To validate her findings, she enlisted the services of Dr. Michael D. Richardson, methodologist.

In Chapter 5 the researcher has used the findings to draw conclusions and make implications regarding the overarching research question as well as the research subquestions from the study. The overarching research question was the following: What are the perceptions of isolation among Georgia female school superintendents. The five research subquestions were the following:

1. In what ways do female school superintendents in Georgia perceive themselves to be isolated?
2. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the professional lives of female superintendents in Georgia?
3. In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the personal lives of female superintendents in Georgia?
4. What strategies have Georgia female superintendents used to manage perceived isolation?
5. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Georgia?

Discussion of Findings

The researcher's purpose in this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of isolation among a selected group of Georgia female school superintendents. The qualitative research design has allowed the researcher to delve into the personal, lived experiences of the superintendents through the in-depth interview process. The responses to interview questions were analyzed and reported in Chapter IV. In the present chapter, the researcher used the findings related to research subquestions to draw conclusions and to consider implications from the study.

What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Georgia?

(Subquestion 5)

Discussion

Because this study, *Georgia Female School Superintendents: Perceptions of Isolation*, is a study concerning the phenomenon of isolation and its relationship with female superintendents, the researcher recognized the potentially potent role of demographics. Oshagan & Allen (1992) and Rook (1984) cited that isolation was a complex social phenomenon. Data from these studies supported the argument that no single demographic variable was linked to the predisposition of superintendents to perceive isolation. Though the participants were chosen through a convenience sample method, the researcher considered the demographic backgrounds of the participants in order to give a more varied perspective. In particular, the researcher considered race, age, marital status, size of school system, and area of state. All superintendents expressed a great deal of pride in their systems, and whether or not education seemed to be an innate family trait, all indicated that they knew education was where they were

supposed to be. To further prove their devotion to education as well as their school systems, the researcher noted that seven of the interviewed superintendents: Patti, Elaine, Betty, Grace, Georgia Anne, Judy, and Clarice, were actually eligible to retire. Nancy had already retired from another state, yet fate seemingly guided her into superintendency.

Only one, Georgia Anne, planned to exit her post at the end of the school year. In fact, Georgia Anne cited that loneliness and isolation, a disconnectedness from real education had caused her job to become less satisfying and fulfilling.

Rather than a reliance on a demographic variable to discern a degree of perceived isolation, participants seemed to identify a dearth of support systems and the culture of the superintendency as primary instigating factors for perceived isolation. While all participants admitted to experiencing feelings of professional isolation and loneliness, they seemed to differ in the degree of intensity for the feelings of isolation.

Eight out of ten interviewed superintendents, Judy, Fleeta, Grace, Malanie, Patti, Nancy, Georgia Anne, and Elaine reported high levels of isolation and loneliness. All of these superintendents were married except for Judy and Patti. On the other hand, Clarice and Betty did not feel as isolated or lonely. Both of these superintendents only responded, "It can be" when questioned concerning whether or not it was isolated at the top. Both Clarice and Betty had the longest tenures when compared to other interviewed superintendents, 8.2 years for Clarice and 9 years for Betty. Further, Clarice was in her second superintendency. According to demographic variables, Clarice, divorced was 57, and Betty, married, was 59. Therefore, no single variable can necessarily be attributed to the lack of isolation or loneliness.

In what ways do female school superintendents in Georgia perceive themselves to be isolated? (Subquestion 1)

Isolation and loneliness, used interchangeably, are defined as the extent to which organizational participants perceive that they are estranged or isolated (Forsyth & Hoy, 1978). Conversely, Jones (1994) recognized that some superintendents feel lonely because they are always on or performing. Thus, when the responsibility of an entire organization, particularly one as large as a school system, rests with one primary leader, feelings of isolation and loneliness may follow. All interviewed superintendents admitted to experiencing feelings of isolation and loneliness. Half of the interviewed female superintendents admitted to feeling moderate to severe feelings of isolation and loneliness. Several superintendents responded passionately, focusing on the difficult decisions that they often had to make that left them ostracized by their boards by fellow subordinate leaders, and sometimes from community leaders.

In regards to Forsyth and Hoy's (1978) research, some superintendents related the lack of connection that they felt with students in their districts. These superintendents felt isolated from the passion that led them to pursue the most important position in a school system. These superintendents felt too removed from the action of education to feel connected.

Similarly, one third of the participants in this study, *Georgia Female School Superintendents: Perceptions of Isolation*, related that they enjoyed the opportunity of being able to share their experiences of isolation and loneliness. After the conclusion of formal, taped interviews, many superintendents inquired about other superintendents and their responses. Most were eager to read the results of the study. Recognizing that others

experienced similar feelings seemed to leave these females feeling a connectedness with others and, therefore, a little more comfortable in their feelings.

In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the personal lives of female superintendents in Georgia? (Subquestion 2)

The superintendency has essentially grown to such an enormous responsibility that leaders in this top-level position often feel isolated and alone. According to Hill and Ragland (1995), less time with family and friends was a personal sacrifice for those seeking the superintendency. Similarly, the participants in the study recognized that their high profile positions have led them, through their own feelings of isolation, from desired and meaningful relationships with personal friends. In fact, several superintendents expressed that they had scaled down their friendships to only one or two and that many of their friends had become acquaintances. Two interviewed superintendents noted that they had to be careful in maintaining friendships with school-related friends because they did not want to give the perception of favoritism to other school personnel.

In addition to relationships with personal friends, superintendents spoke a great deal about relationships with family members. The stories that many told were laden with expressions of regret for missed family time and were passionate about carving out time for their loved ones. In fact, the majority of superintendents described solitary activities and family activities for fun. Time with children, parents, and sisters seemed to be an important focus for superintendents.

At least half of the superintendents in this study expressed feelings of frustration regarding the magnified fishbowl existence that seemed to be inherent in their positions. Jones (1994) noted that the magnified fishbowl concept caused leaders to avoid parts of

normal, everyday existence such as grocery shopping and dining out at local restaurants simply to avoid questions and sometimes confrontations about school-related activities. While none of the superintendents admitted to a total halt to any of the aforementioned activities, they stated that they grocery shopped at non-peak times and dined at quiet, out-of-the way restaurants. This reaction to the magnified fishbowl phenomenon could actually isolate female superintendents from enjoyable activities.

In what ways has the perception of isolation affected the professional lives of female superintendents in Georgia? (Subquestion 3)

Discussion

Interviews with participating Georgia female school superintendents yielded much rich dialogue concerning the isolation that the superintendents felt in regards to their professions. Ultimately, the demands, the tenure, and the job satisfaction are all related to the superintendents' perception of isolation.

Feelings of being alone at the top were further intensified when faced with so many demands on time. Regardless of the size of the school system, all interviewed superintendents reiterated the immense duties involved in their superintendencies. While Judy and Clarice were heads of larger systems, they had many immediate subordinates to aid them in their everyday duties. Nonetheless, their large systems possibly had more potential for problems and, therefore, great demands on their time. On the other hand, Melanie and Elaine stated that much of their burden resulted from having so much paperwork and responsibility to complete alone. Both superintendents cited situations that made them feel isolated: asbestos studies, bus wheels, and facility construction. They intimated that large system superintendents would likely not be as directly involved

in such aspects of schooling. Therefore, their isolation at the top coupled with these foreign demands made them feel even lonelier. Likewise, Sharp, Malone, Walter and Supley (2000) acknowledged some of the same factors that perpetuated the feelings of isolation and loneliness for female superintendents.

Grogan and Andrews (2002) noted the importance of the focus on instructional leadership for superintendents. As a whole, female superintendents, regardless of their workload, always held the responsibility of instructional leadership high on their priority lists. Nearly all of the superintendents related a desire to be close to the schools. They wanted to be a part of what was going on in the classrooms. Many noted that they escaped to the schools for re-energizing when they felt overwhelmed by their responsibilities and somewhat isolated.

Three of the interviewed female superintendents were in their second superintendencies at the time of their interviews, and three of the superintendents had been in superintendent positions for 9 or more years. However, Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) stated that because of the high stress responsibilities, tenure for superintendents was roughly 5 to 6 years. Likewise, several of the superintendents had plans to retire at the end of the contract term, and for one superintendent that term was at the close of the 2004-2005 school year.

Other demands that further contributed to the perception of isolation in their professions included accountability mandates from state and federal governments. These mandates have forced superintendents to dispense unpleasant mandate to teachers and principals. Such actions further isolated superintendents from subordinates. Half of the interviewed superintendents noted that new standards for accountability made them feel

as though they were on shaky ground while the other half intimated that their systems had been preparing for the onslaught long before it was handed down.

What strategies have Georgia female school superintendents used to manage perceived isolation? (Subquestion 4)

Discussion

All ten participants in this study experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness in at least mild degrees. At least eight of the ten interviewed superintendents experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness in moderate to severe degrees. According to the findings of this study, there were strategies that could effectively reduce feelings of isolation.

Common themes and practices that participants acknowledged in guiding them against the plethora of isolation and loneliness included the following:

1. Spousal support
2. Family support
3. Mentoring
4. Distributive leadership
5. Passion for education

Spousal support was reported by all married participants. While two superintendents reported that they did not share day-to-day activities with their husbands, they indicated that they felt their support. Six superintendents recounted sharing job-related stories and noted that they used their husbands as sounding boards in many cases. One superintendent stated that her husband took up much slack in her absence. She detailed accounts of his prom-dress shopping, grocery shopping, and cooking. So, while

there existed varying degrees of support, all married participants strongly reiterated that their spouses were supportive of the extensive time spent on the jobs. In addition to spousal support, the participants recognized the support of other immediate family members as well as extended family members.

In *Women as Educational Leaders*, Hill and Ragland (1995) recognized that many sacrifices accompanied leadership positions. At least half of the female superintendents in this study called their professions a family commitment. These participants stated that they discussed time commitments and job stresses before they undertook their superintendencies. Because of the time demands placed upon these superintendents, most admitted to becoming more protective of quality time with their family members. Sisters and parents were strong support structures for participating female superintendents. Four superintendents recognized these extended family members not only as sounding boards but as coping strategies in their own right.

Pence (1995) recorded that mentoring was helpful to leaders in various ways. Mentorship, both formal and informal, provided both mentors and protégés an opportunity to reflect on situations and solutions and a way to gain a broader understanding of one's place in the profession as well as one's role within our culture (Hill & Ragland, 1995). It provided the leader with a strong sounding board from whom the leader, in this case the superintendent, could get good, sound advice on issues rarely faced. All of the interviewed superintendents recognized mentors as helpful. They mentioned former superintendents, superintendents in other districts, AASA assigned superintendents, former professors, and parents who had served as district level administrators and educators. Whether a formal or informal mentoring relationship, the

level of success largely depended on trust, mutual respect, friendship, commitment, and communication (Pence, 1995). Having someone to talk to during different, stressful situations seemed to help to ease the burden of isolation and loneliness that they experienced.

Schein (1985) noted, “Leadership [is] a shared set of activities rather than a single person’s trait, and a sense of ownership of group outcomes arises” (p. 197). Likewise, the superintendents in this study who experienced less isolation and loneliness than the others subscribed to distributive leadership. They believed in including and empowering others, so that they become stakeholders in important issues. Grogan and Andrews (2002) stated that the greatest structural change has been the move to site-based management...the shift from the idea of the superintendent as the sole, hierarchical leader of the school district toward the idea of shared, collaborative forms of leadership. In this study, superintendents stated that various subordinates in the central office and school principals can all attain ownership of goals and alleviate the stress and overburden of the superintendent in so doing. Essentially, they noted that being able to share the burden can help superintendents feel less isolated and lonely. However, Hoyle, English, & Steffy (1985) recognized that while distributive leadership is a good idea, it is also “equally important for school leaders to know when to share the responsibilities that come with leadership” (p. 26). All interviewed superintendents in this study agreed with Hoyle, English, and Steffy, in that many dilemmas faced by the superintendents do not lend themselves to collaboration or discussion.

Superintendents interviewed for the purpose of this study were asked to respond to a line in a poem written by Robert Frost entitled, “Two Tramps in Mud Time.” At the

conclusion of the poem, Frost stated, “Yield who will to their separation. My object in living is to unite my avocation and my vocation.” When asked whether or not they believed that they had indeed united their work and their hobbies, most not only indicated in the affirmative but also reiterated how fulfilling it was to be in a powerful position that enabled them to improve education for young people. Brunner (1998) stated that there were two primary focus points for female superintendents: relationships and the well-being of the children. Responding superintendents in this study overwhelmingly noted that they indeed did all that they did for the children. They had fervor for young people and educational excellence, and in their responses, they continually hailed their schools’ strong points as would the proud parent of a child. All superintendents remarked that they enjoyed going into the schools and classrooms, and they agreed that doing so was an activity in which they participated when feeling stressed and overburdened. Only one of the interviewed superintendents gave any indication that she clearly did not see the superintendency as her avocation. However, she too, admitted a passion for young people and for education.

Conclusions

The researcher drew the following conclusions from the findings of the study:

1. Isolation is inherent in the culture of the superintendency. Certain factors that are a part of the job superintendent actually predispose the superintendent to experience isolation in varying degrees.
2. Both isolation and loneliness are complex, multi-dimensional phenomena.
3. Personal and professional support systems can be effective in lessening the degree to which superintendents may feel isolated. Personal support systems may

include a spouse or a member of the immediate or extended family. Professional support systems may include mentors and predecessors whom the superintendent may approach for advice.

4. Immediate subordinates can be a source of social support for superintendents.

The level of support that they can offer is based upon the amount of trust that the superintendent feels for her associate.

5. Strong, successful superintendents incorporate time for family and friends while successfully running the school district's affairs. They maintain supportive relationships with subordinates, practice distributive leadership practices, maintain open lines of communication with mentors, and possess a strong sense of purpose.

Implications

The researcher considered that this research study would add to the body of literature concerning female school superintendents. More specifically, the researcher wished for the study to further the development of the study of isolation and loneliness and how it relates to female school superintendents. Based upon the findings of the study, the following should be considered:

1. Policymakers, state departments of education, and school board members should search for ways to reduce the immense demands on superintendents.
2. The state of Georgia should continue the formal mentor program for new superintendents.

3. Those who aspire to be superintendents should recognize certain aspects of the profession that can cause superintendents to experience isolation and identify strategies to decrease such emotional strain.
4. University leadership programs should develop coursework detailing the paradigm of isolation and its relationship to leadership. Such coursework should focus on managing the phenomenon.
5. Superintendents should create a balance of their personal and professional time.

Dissemination

Georgia school superintendents and those aspiring to be superintendents should review the results of this study. The participating superintendents provided great insight into the real requirements of the superintendency. In so doing, they were able to pass on both advice and inspiration to others in the field. Thus, the culture of the superintendency was addressed fully by participants, and others may be further inspired by the various coping strategies that most superintendents shared.

Board of education members should review the findings in order to become fully aware of the isolation and burden involved in the superintendency.

Graduate program coordinators in educational leadership departments should review the findings of this study in relationship to fine tuning coursework involved in the study for educational leaders. Essentially, the findings could not only better help coordinators better prepare leaders to become superintendents but the findings could also help prepare any leaders for positions.

The researcher had the study bound and placed in Henderson Library at Georgia Southern University for study and research purposes. Also, each participant was sent a copy of the finished study to read and retain for their purposes.

Recommendations

After a thorough examination of the data yielded from this study, the researcher recommends that the following studies are worth consideration:

1. Replicate the qualitative study with 10 more female school superintendents from another state to determine their perceptions of isolation.
2. Employ a quantitative format to compare the perceptions of isolation among all Georgia school superintendents.
3. Conduct a qualitative study examining the perceptions of isolation among 10 Georgia school superintendents, 5 males and 5 females.

Concluding Thoughts

The researcher's purpose in undertaking and compiling this dissertation study was to describe the perceptions of isolation among a selected group of Georgia female school superintendents. The qualitative study, through 14 open-ended interview questions, was designed to relate the personal and professional lived experiences of the ten interviewed Georgia female school superintendents. Such lived experiences related feelings of isolation that the participants had experienced. Furthermore, in addition to identifying perceptions of isolation, participants related strategies that participants had employed to cope with feelings of isolation.

Throughout the various interviews, the researcher became increasingly aware of the immense sacrifices that the superintendents had made to become female leaders at the

pinnacle of their profession. Each superintendent was under extreme stress and pressure from all stakeholders in public education: students, parents, teachers, legislators, community leaders, and tax payers. Such stress, coupled with confidentiality and the general loneliness of being at the top, led school superintendents to feel at least somewhat isolated. Sometimes funny, often sad, yet always personal stories led the researcher to more fully understand the roles these female superintendents maintained, as well as the responsibility that the position of the superintendency involves. Although the participants often felt entrenched in loneliness and over-burdened with responsibility, they seemed recharged with the empowerment to truly make a difference in the lives of young people.

Through the use of qualitative research methods, the researcher was allowed the opportunity to climb into the skin of Georgia female school superintendents. Just as young Scout Finch learned that there is a lot more to people than first meets the eye, the researcher concluded that the depth of character and the fervor to make a difference made Georgia female school superintendents in this study a powerful, yet impassioned, group of leaders.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PANEL OF EXPERTS

In-state panel of experts:

Mrs. Rachel Branch
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Coordinator, Laurens County Schools
Dublin, GA 31021

Mrs. Nancy Herrington
Former Principal, Twiggs Academy
Jeffersonville, GA 31044

Mrs. Susan Radford
Principal, East Laurens Middle School
Dublin, GA 31021

Mrs. Angie Wood
Former Superintendent, Johnson County Schools
RESA School Improvement Specialist
Statesboro, GA 30460

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

The following interview questions were driven by the overarching research question and sub-questions.

Question 1. Tell me some information about yourself personally. How old are you?

What is your marital status? How many children do you have? How old are they? (RQ5)

Question 2. Tell me some information about yourself professionally. What degrees do you hold? What teaching experience do you have? (RQ2)

Question 3. What pathway did you follow to the superintendency? How long did this take? Why did you want to become a superintendent? (RQ2)

Question 4. How many hours a week do you spend “on the job”? Does this time affect your personal life? How does this time affect your job satisfaction? (RQ3)

Question 5. Describe for me your relationship with your colleagues, subordinates, and students in the district. (RQ2)

Question 6. How have the recent accountability plans at the national and state levels affected your duties and responsibilities as superintendent? (RQ1)

Question 7. Do superintendents live in a proverbial fishbowl? How about families? (RQ1)

Question 8. Do you have a professional mentor? If so, who is it? How much assistance do you receive from this person, and how often do you speak with this person? (RQ4)

Question 9. Is networking with other superintendents vital for your success? (RQ4)

Question 10. Is your husband an effective source of support? Do you confide in him regarding job related issues? (RQ1,3)

Question 11. What do you do for fun, and how often do you engage in such activities? (RQ4)

Question 12. Respond to the adage: “It is lonely at the top.” Describe your feelings of loneliness. Do you feel isolated or alone in your work? If so, what impact has loneliness had on you? (RQ1)

Question 13. Do you consider yourself a mentor to other aspiring superintendents? (RQ2,4)

Question 14. How do you cope with any feelings of isolation and loneliness? (RQ4)

APPENDIX C
IRB APPROVAL

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-681-5465		Administrative Annex
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-681-0719	Ovsrigh@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Juliann Alligood
638 Hatchee Ridge Rd.
Dublin, GA 31040

cc: Dr. James Burnham, Faculty Advisor
P.O. Box 8131

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: November 10, 2004

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H05040**, and titled "**Perceptions of Isolation Among Georgia Female School Superintendents**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Julie B. Cole
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER TO GEORGIA FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Juliann P. Alligood
638 Hatchee Ridge Rd.
Dublin, GA 31021

Super's Name
Super's Address
City, State

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Juliann P. Alligood, and I am a graduate student enrolled in the doctoral program at Georgia Southern University. My dissertation topic involves the phenomenon of isolation and the perception of it as seen and experienced by Georgia female school superintendents.

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in gathering the necessary information for my study. Of course, your perceptions and your experiences are critical to the study. I sincerely hope that you will find it possible to take one to one and a half hours out of your busy schedule to allow me to interview you.

Please indicate whether or not you would be willing to share your experiences with me in an open-ended, in-depth interview by checking the appropriate statement on the enclosed postcard.

Not only will I be taking sporadic notes during the interview session, I will also be tape recording the session to insure accuracy and to allow me the opportunity to listen and respond to your comments. All interview tapes will be securely stored in my home except during the transcription. You may review transcriptions for any inaccuracies that may be present. In the written dissertation, you will be referred to by pseudonym to assure your anonymity.

Thank you for your participation and assistance in this study. If you have any questions regarding this research study, you may contact me at home, 478-676-2124, or at work, 478-272-3144. The coordinator or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs, 912-681-5465, may also be of assistance should you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Juliann P. Alligood

APPENDIX E
RESPONSE CARD

Please read the following and mark the appropriate box.

I have read the letter detailing the proposed dissertation study
concerning Georgia Female Superintendents'
Perception of Isolation

At this time I **would be** willing to participate in
study.

At this time I would **not** be willing to participate in
this study

Signed _____

Please print your name _____

APPENDIX F
QUESTIONNAIRE

Information At a Glance

Name _____

School System _____

What is your current age? _____

What is your ethnicity? Please circle.

Black Hispanic White other _____

Are you married? Please circle. Y N

If yes, how long? _____

Are you divorced? Please circle. Y N

If yes, how long? _____

Are you widowed? Please circle. Y N

If yes, how long? _____

What was your age at your first superintendent appointment? _____

Number of years as current superintendent _____

Number of total superintendency years _____

How many schools are in your district? _____ students? _____

List administration positions held before superintendent (professional lineage)

Number of years as a teacher _____

Number of districts as a superintendent _____

Years remaining on current contract _____

Is your immediate subordinate *male* or *female*? M F

APPENDIX G
FINAL APPROVAL FORM

Juliann P. Alligood
638 Hatchee Ridge Road
Dublin, GA 31021

Please sign below if you give your final approval for the transcripts to be included in Juliann P. Alligood's research entitled: Georgia Female School Superintendents: Perceptions of Isolation:

I give final approval for the transcript of my interview to be used in the research study. I understand that neither my name nor any identifying features will be used in the research study.

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

_____ Yes, I would like to receive a copy of the dissertation.