Research Article

Female Superintendents' Perceptions of Unconscious Gender Bias In The Superintendency: An Exploratory Quantitative Study

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Abstract

This nationwide study of 532 female school district superintendents, the largest such sample to date, offers compelling evidence that unconscious gender bias exists on the job and further inhibits equitable female representation in the superintendency. A modified version of Tran et al.'s (2019) Perceived Subtle Gender Bias Index (PSGBI), was confirmed as a valid instrument for assessing female superintendents' perceptions of unconscious gender bias and produced the same four factors as the original PSGBI. Findings support Joan Acker's (1990) theoretical assertion that gender inequality is deeply embedded within organizational structures, patterns, and processes. Respondents reported that gender bias occurs more frequently than the profession acknowledges and suggested that it derives primarily from sources other than superintendents' colleagues. Recommendations offered.

Key Words

female superintendent, unconscious gender bias, perception, perceived subtle gender bias index (PSGBI), Joan Acker, theory of gendered organizations

Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), 76% of public school teachers are women. However, only about 27% of superintendents are female, according to the preliminary findings released from the School Superintendents Association's (AASA) 2020 Decennial Report. Data from this report show a less than 3% increase in female superintendents over the past 10 years (from 24.1% to 26.68% in 2020). When one considers the teaching force as the pipeline to the superintendency, the question is why the predominantly female (76%) teaching force does not equally reflect a predominantly female educational leadership force. Despite the slight progress of women filling the superintendency role over the past decade, full parity between men and women in the field is far from present.

Tinsley and Ely (2018) argued sex differences seen in the workplace are not due to fixed gender traits but rather "stem from organizational structures, company practices, and patterns of interaction that position men and women differently, creating systematically different experiences for them" (p. 115). This perspective, which aligns with Joan Acker's (1990) systematic feminist theory of organization, underpins this study. These organizational structures, practices, and patterns can be difficult to describe because they are built into the perceptions people hold about gender and customary societal norms. They frequently are unspoken.

As Fiarman (2016) explained, those who engage in unconscious gender bias may not be aware they are doing so. As such, gender-biased practices then become the norm in the workplace. Female superintendents who perceive unconscious gender bias may well be discouraged enough to consider leaving the superintendency; perceived gender bias might also discourage other women from pursuing the role. This, in turn, contributes further to the gap between the goal of equity in the workplace (i.e., gender parity in the role) and the disappointing reality.

In a 2015 study by the International Labour Organization, "Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum," women reported barriers to their own leadership, including discrimination and unconscious gender bias. Such barriers include the social roles of men and women, the general belief that management is a man's job, masculine corporate culture, stereotypes against women, and gender bias in recruitment and promotion (International Labour Organization, 2017). Unconscious bias is woven into customary workplace norms and is a challenge for women across the world as one of a number of barriers they face.

Through an experimental survey design, this study answered the following research questions: What is the nature of unconscious gender bias in the superintendency as perceived by female superintendents? Are there any demographic differences in how female superintendents perceived gender bias?

Theoretical Framework

Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations, including its notion of the five processes that reproduce gender in organizations, offered the fundamental lens through which the findings of this study were viewed. Acker (1990) explained gendering within an organization occurs in at least five interacting processes: (a) division of labor along lines of gender, (b) cultural symbols, (c) individual identities, (d) workplace interactions, and (e) organizational logic that includes underlying assumptions and practices that reproduce a gendered structure.

This study used the theory of gendered organizations as a lens through which to explore female superintendents' experiences and to understand the relationship between female superintendents' perceptions of the nature of the unconscious gender bias they face in their role, and how such bias relates to certain processes, demographic factors, and subfactors that may contribute to the bias.

For the purposes of this study, unconscious gender bias will be defined as "unintentional and automatic mental associations based on gender, stemming from traditions, norms, values, culture and/or experience" (International Labour Organization, 2017, p. 3). Demographic factors were considered when analyzing how female superintendents perceived gender bias including age of superintendent; superintendent's ethnic group; number of years in education; years of service as a superintendent; care-giving status (i.e., motherhood); and community type (urban, suburban, rural) of the superintendent's district.

Sample

This study's sample was drawn from 41 of the 50 states in the United States. I studied superintendents who identify as women and who are currently employed as public school district superintendents. I aimed to obtain the largest sample size possible for the study to be considered valid, reliable, and generalizable. I did so by recruiting participants through accessing publicly available email addresses, academic listservs, superintendent listservs, personal networks, professional organizations, and social media outlets. The result was a nationwide study of 532 female school district superintendents, the largest such sample to date.

To generate rich data to answer each of the study's research questions, an enhanced version of Tran et al.'s (2019) Perceived Subtle Gender Bias Index (PSGBI), a survey designed to assess perceived and subtle gender bias among women in the STEM field of academia, was created (named the Perceived Subtle Gender Bias Index: Drake Edition or PSGBI:DE).

I emailed the PSGBI:DE to as many female superintendents as had a publicly available contact email, a total of 2,439 of 3,645 female superintendents in the United States. Of these, 532 surveys were returned, a 21.81% return rate.

Method

Specific questions contained in the PSGBI:DE can be found below in Table 1. Two open-ended questions were added to the PSGBI:DE Survey: Question 29 ("If you do receive formal mentoring as a superintendent, please note your mentor's job title") and question 33 ("In your opinion, what are the major causes, if any, of unconscious gender bias in the superintendency?").

All 532 of the respondents answered question 33 and a qualitative approach was used to analyze those responses. Responses were coded and an analysis was conducted to view patterns in the data. The following codes were used most frequently: Traditional (202 times), Division by Gender (132 times), and Cultural Symbols (112 times).

For all other analysis of PSGBI:DE data, quantitative methodology was used to examine the relationships between and among variables to answer the research questions and to identify patterns or trends in the data collected from the survey. This method was

selected for the influence its results could have in the policy arena. Stone (2012) attested to the power of numbers and the need for action that using numbers or measurement creates, such as policy change and development.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to explore the resulting data set that followed administration of the PSGBI:DE to ensure the same four factors identified in the Tran et al. (2019) study were indeed the same four factors observed among female superintendents.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the PSGBI:DE produced the same four factors as the original PSGBI (Tran et al., 2019): Gender Inequality, Collegiality, Institutional Support, and Mentorship. Therefore, the PSGBI:DE was indeed a valid instrument for assessing female superintendent' perceptions of subtle (or unconscious) gender bias.

Table 1

Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis Comparing the 21-Items of the Perceived Subtle Gender Bias Index (PSGBI) and the PSGBI:DE

Scale Items (Women in Academia/Female Superintendents)	Women in Academia				Female Superintendents			
	GI	Col	Ment	IS	GI	Col	IS	Ment
#1/12 In my various interactions with superintendent colleagues, I have observed other female superintendents experiencing gender bias	**.72**	.12	-.03	.19	**.80**	.00	.05	.10
#2/13 I have seen male colleagues (superintendents or otherwise) jump in when a woman is speaking and take over the conversation.	**.74**	.11	.13	.17	**.79**	.04	.10	.06
#3/14 Compared to female superintendents, male superintendents receive more respect from other superintendents.	**.75**	.30	.06	.11	**.82**	.11	.09	.06
#4/15 People see ambitiousness differently for men and women (i.e., "strong minded" vs. "bossy").	**.74**	.14	.07	.13	**.76**	.07	.05	.03
#5/16 Some people are not comfortable being subordinate to a woman.	**.75**	.15	.15	.08	**.66**	.08	.08	.00
#6/17 Men with whom I work are unsure how to treat women superintendents.	**.70**	.26	.14	.11	**.71**	.22	.12	-.02
#7/18 Some of my male colleagues are only superficially supportive of women's struggles with inequities.	**.80**	.18	.24	.15	**.72**	.13	.22	.10
#8/19 There are times when male administrators continue to meet after the women have left the meeting.	**.65**	.11	.22	.14	**.59**	.12	.11	.01

#9/20 More situations of gender bias occur than are acknowledged in my profession.	**.70**	.34	.02	.24	**.82**	.05	.11	.06
#10/21 I receive positive feedback about my abilities from colleagues.	.09	**.74**	.21	.15	.05	**.68**	.02	.25
#11/22 I have a collegial work environment.	.25	**.79**	.14	.21	.12	**.81**	.10	.05
#12/23 I have a good relationship with most of my co-workers.	.19	**.81**	.09	.15	.065	**.81**	.09	.02
#13/24 My ideas are valued within the workplace.	.27	**.77**	.18	.11	.11	**.84**	.11	-.07
#14/25 Many people in my workplace are supportive of my work.	.20	**.72**	.32	.20	.11	**.87**	.10	.03
#15/26 In my profession, female superintendents feel valued.	.42	**.67**	.17	.16	.49	.46	.26	.17
#16/27 Female superintendents receive informal mentoring from colleagues *(consider beyond your specific school district when responding to this question).*	.15	.39	**.71**	.12	.10	.15	.21	**.76**
#17/28 I receive one-on-one formal mentoring *(can consider mentors beyond your specific school district when responding to this question).*	.12	.18	**.82**	.15	.04	-.00	-.04	**.85**
#18/29***PSGBI: I have a mentor who is in a senior leadership position***	.21	.21	**.79**	.09	XX	XX	XX	XX
PSGBI:DE: If you do receive formal mentoring as a superintendent, please note your mentor's job title								
#19/30 My profession is attuned to women superintendents' professional needs for success.	.28	.20	.13	**.72**	.36	.15	**.59**	.35
#20/31My school district provides supports for balancing work and family demands.	.18	.26	.12	**.79**	.08	.07	**.82**	-.05
#21/32 I work in a profession where policies emphasize equity.	.26	.18	.13	**.77**	.25	.21	**.72**	.11
Cronbach's α	.91	.90	.79	.78	.91	.86	.67	.55

Note. N = 532. Tran et al.'s (2019) PSGBI factors are named as follows: Gender Inequality (GI), Collegiality (Col), Mentorship (Ment), and Institutional Support (IS). Women in Academia refers to women who work in the STEM fields of academia

Since the factors found within the PSGBI:DE results were determined to be the same four factors as Tran et al. (2019) found in their study, I conducted a series of ANOVAs to answer Research Question 2, which asks if there are any demographic differences in how female superintendents perceived gender bias. Specifically, one-way ANOVAs (with post hoc tests, where appropriate), Kruskal-Wallis H tests, and independent samples *t* tests were employed.

Analysis

Descriptive analysis of the categorical variables

Of the 532 female superintendents who completed the PSGBI:DE, 87.2% identified as being older than 45. The most common age

band of respondents was the 45- to 54-year-old age group, which represented 53.2%.

The predominant majority (88.2%) of respondents identified as White, with Black or African American (5.8%) and Hispanic or Latinx (3.9) as the next most common ethnic groups. The majority of respondents (61.1%) indicated they were *not* a mother or guardian to non-adult child(ren). Of those who indicated they were mothers, 72.4% had two or more children. The majority of respondents (422, or 79.3%) identified as being married. Additionally, 74 or 14.1% identified as being divorced, and 22 or 4.1% reported being single (never married).

Most respondents identified as working in rural school districts (58.3%). Suburban districts were the next most common; 30.6% of respondents indicated working in suburban districts. The northeastern and midwestern regions both received roughly the same number of responses with 183 (34%) and 174 (33%), respectively, and together represented approximately two thirds of the overall sample (67%). Of the 50 United States, 22 were represented by more than five responses.

The average number of years superintendent respondents worked in education was 27, ranging from 3–51 years of experience. Despite the fact that superintendents spanned a 49-year range of years of experience working in education, surprisingly, of the 532 responses, respondents most frequently reported that they had only been superintendents for 2 years.

Analysis of the PSGBI:DE responses

RQ#1: *What is the nature of unconscious gender bias in the superintendency as perceived by female superintendents?*

As evidenced by the responses depicted below in Table 2, unconscious gender bias is a problematic issue in the superintendency. PSGBI:DE respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each question from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *agree strongly* (results reverse coded where necessary).

An analysis of the descriptive statistics (see Table 2) demonstrates PSGBI:DE respondents indicated the greatest perception of subtle gender bias when answering Question 4/15: “People see ambitiousness differently for men and women (i.e., “strong minded” vs. “bossy”)” with a mean score of 5.12 out of 6. This was followed closely by respondents’ answers to Question 5/16: “Some people are not comfortable being subordinate to a woman,” which resulted in a mean score of 5.02 out of 6. The third highest response was to Question 9/20: “More situations of gender bias occur than are acknowledged in my profession,” with a mean score of 4.69 out of 6.

All three of these questions are found in the Gender Inequality subscale, which describes subtle gender biases respondents perceived in their current workplace. Therefore, it appears that the nature of unconscious gender bias in the superintendency as perceived by female superintendents equates to the notion of gender inequality.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Subtle Gender Bias Index (Female School Superintendents) / PSGBI:DE

Scale Items	*M*	*Mdn*	Mode	Min	Max	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
#1/12 In my various interactions with superintendent colleagues, I have observed other female superintendents experiencing gender bias	4.02	4	4	1	6	1.37	-0.60	-0.45
#2/13 I have seen male colleagues (superintendents or otherwise) jump in when a woman is speaking and take over the conversation.	4.20	5	5	1	6	1.48	-0.57	-0.74
#3/14 Compared to female superintendents, male superintendents receive more respect from other superintendents.	4.48	5	5	1	6	1.36	-0.72	-0.32
#4/15 People see ambitiousness differently for men and women (i.e., “strong minded” vs. “bossy”).	5.12	5	6	1	6	1.09	-1.50	2.23
#5/16 Some people are not comfortable being subordinate to a woman.	5.02	5	5	1	6	0.98	-1.18	1.73
#6/17 Men with whom I work are unsure how to treat women superintendents.	3.58	4	4	1	6	1.31	-0.27	-0.65
#7/18 Some of my male colleagues are only superficially supportive of women’s struggles with inequities.	3.95	4	4	1	6	1.35	-0.37	-0.684
#8/19 There are times when male administrators continue to meet after the women have left the meeting.	3.58	4	5	1	6	1.48	-0.05	-1.15
#9/20 More situations of gender bias occur than are acknowledged in my profession.	4.69	5	5	1	6	1.16	-0.93	0.71
#10/21* I receive positive feedback about my abilities from colleagues.	2.14	2	2	1	6	0.96	1.30	2.45
#11/22* I have a collegial work environment.	1.84	2	2	1	6	0.82	1.46	4.01
#12/23* I have a good relationship with most of my co-workers.	1.66	2	2	1	5	0.63	0.78	1.60

#13/24* My ideas are valued within the workplace.	1.70	2	2	1	5	0.72	1.29	3.43
#14/25* Many people in my workplace are supportive of my work.	1.73	2	2	1	5	0.70	1.03	2.20
#15/26* In my profession, female superintendents feel valued.	2.83	3	2	1	6	1.06	0.73	0.55
#16/27* Female superintendents receive informal mentoring from colleagues *(consider beyond your specific school district when responding to this question).*	2.68	2	2	1	6	1.16	0.90	0.41
#17/28* I receive one-on-one formal mentoring *(can consider mentors beyond your specific school district when responding to this question).*	3.35	3	2	1	6	1.65	0.17	-1.35
#19/30* My profession is attuned to women superintendents' professional needs for success.	3.62	4	4	1	6	1.22	-0.03	-0.70
#20/31* My school district provides supports for balancing work and family demands.	3.09	3	2	1	6	1.35	0.51	-0.56
#21/32* I work in a profession where policies emphasize equity.	2.91	3	2	1	6	1.13	0.57	0.049

Note. N = 532. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each question from *strongly disagree* (1) to *agree strongly* (6). *Items are reverse coded. #18/29 excluded (open-ended)

PSGBI:DE respondents indicated the lowest perceptions of subtle gender bias when answering Questions 11/22–14/25, with mean scores ranging from 1.66 – 1.84, all of which fell within the Collegiality subscale that describes gender biases respondents perceive in their relationship with colleagues. This suggests that although female superintendents did perceive gender bias in the superintendency, it came primarily from sources other than colleagues.

Therefore, when considering the source of the perceptions of gender bias in the workplace, attention should be paid to those in the workplace who would not be identified as colleagues; in the superintendency, this might include members of the community, elected officials, parents, and board of education members. In their open-ended PSGBI:DE responses, female superintendents do indeed report a number of these sources as being responsible, in their opinion, for the major causes of gender bias in the superintendency.

This is not to say female superintendents perceive no gender bias from colleagues; Questions 1/12 and 2/13 indicate a

mean score of 4.02 and 4.19, respectively, which indicate superintendents agree slightly with the following statements: "In my various interactions with superintendent colleagues, I have observed other female superintendents experiencing gender bias" and "I have seen male colleagues (superintendents or otherwise) jump in when a woman is speaking and take over the conversation."

More detailed descriptive statistics for Question 14/25 ("Many people in my workplace are supportive of my work") were calculated to provide an even deeper explanation of results.

Upon comparing results to this specific question against demographic information, differences were found between responses when compared to ethnicity. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2(30, n = 532) = 45.56$, $p = 0.034$, with Cramer's V effect size = 0.13, which revealed slightly more Black or African American respondents "strongly agreed" with the statement, "Many people in my workplace are supportive of my work," than was expected. Conversely, there was also disproportionality among responses to this question for White respondents, however, to a lesser degree: Fewer Whites than expected "strongly agreed" with the statement, "Many people in my workplace are supportive of my work."

Question 15 ("People see ambitiousness differently for men and women [i.e., "strong-minded" vs. "bossy"]") is notable because its mode (6 = *agree strongly*) is the highest of all the questions, meaning most superintendents strongly agreed with the statement. Upon closer examination for any demographic differences within this question, significant difference was found between the way superintendents answered this question depending on the type of community (i.e., urban, suburban, rural) in which they work. A *t* test revealed superintendents who work in urban communities ($M = 5.53$) showed significantly more agreement with the statement, "People see ambitiousness differently for men and women," than superintendents who work in rural communities ($M = 5.02$), $t(118.39) = 4.29$, $p < .001$.

A deeper look at the descriptive statistics for Question 31 ("My school district provides supports for balancing work and family demands") sheds light on the mother/superintendent experience. Of the 532 respondents, 61% are not mothers. Of the 39% of superintendents who are mothers, 67% agree (i.e., chose "agree slightly," "agree," or "agree strongly") with the statement that their school district provides support for balancing work and family. This is an important finding because of its juxtaposition with a subsequent finding about motherhood and mentorship where non-mother superintendents showed a generally greater level of agreement that they received mentoring than mothers.

Analysis of ANOVAs

RQ#2: *Are there any demographic differences in how female superintendents perceived gender bias?*

Demographic comparisons

One-way ANOVAs (with post hoc tests, where appropriate), Kruskal-Wallis H tests, and independent samples *t* tests were employed. Table 3 presents those variables that produced significant findings against the four factors (Gender Inequality, Collegiality, Institutional Support, Mentorship) and those that did not. An explanation of significant findings follows.

Table 3

Demographic Differences in How Female Superintendents Perceive Gender Bias

Are there demographic differences in how female superintendents perceived gender bias?	
YES	NO
• Age of Superintendent • Number of Years in Education • Number of Years as Superintendent • Mothers vs. Non-Mothers • Community Type	• Ethnicity • Number of Children • Age of Children • Marital Status • State/Region

Age of superintendent

When comparing the age means against each factor, significant differences were found between the age-range group and the Mentorship factor, $F(4, 527) = 2.97$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = -0.02$. Scheffé post hoc tests revealed differences among the means between the 65+-year-old group ($M = 0.44$) and those in the 45- to 54-year-old age group ($M = -0.07$) with the 65+-year-old group reporting more mentoring.

Number of years in education

There was a significant difference between respondents' self-reported number of years in education and their perceptions of Collegiality, $F(2, 529) = 3.122$, $p = .045$, $\eta_p^2 = -0.01$. Scheffé post hoc testing revealed a significant difference ($p = .045$) between the 3–25 years of experience group ($M = .11$) and the 31–51 years of experience group ($M = -.15$). Respondents with the fewest years in education reported more collegiality than those with the greatest number of years in education. However, the breadth of the range of experience (23 years) must be considered when interpreting these results.

There was a significant difference between Number of Years in Education and their perception of Mentorship, $F(2, 529) = 5.099$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = -0.02$. Scheffé post hoc testing revealed a significant difference ($p = .010$) between the 3–25 years in education group ($M = -.16$) and the 31–51 years in education group ($M = .16$). This suggests those with more years of experience reported a higher level of mentorship. However, the mentorship factor did not approach "good" in internal reliability, so analyses regarding this factor should be taken with caution.

Number of years as a superintendent

Significant differences were found when comparing the means between Collegiality (Factor 2) and Number of Years as a Superintendent, $F(3, 527) = 4.639$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = -0.03$. Scheffé post hoc testing revealed a significant difference ($p = .008$) between the 0–2 years as superintendent group ($M = .1779161$) and 9–35 years as superintendent group ($M = -.2514484$), and a significant difference ($p = .043$) between the 3–4 years as superintendent group ($M = .1092219$) and 9–35 years as superintendent group ($M = -.2514484$). Respondents who reported the least amount of experience as a superintendent reported greater collegiality than superintendents with more experience.

There was also a significant difference between Mentorship (Factor 4) and Number of Years as a Superintendent, $F(3, 527) = 7.409$, p

< .001, η_p^2 = -0.04. Scheffé post hoc testing revealed three significant differences. There was a significant difference (p = .015) between the 0–2 years as superintendent group (M = -.29) and the 5–8 years as superintendent group (M = .09). There was a significant difference (p < .001) between the 0–2 years as superintendent group (M = -.29) and the 9–35 years as superintendent group (M = .25). There was also a significant difference (p = .040) between the 3–4 years as superintendent group (M = -.11) and the 9–35 years as superintendent group (M = .25). Respondents with the greatest number of years as a superintendent tended to report higher levels of mentorship. This squares with the earlier finding that those with more years of experience in education reported higher levels of mentorship.

Mothers and non-mothers

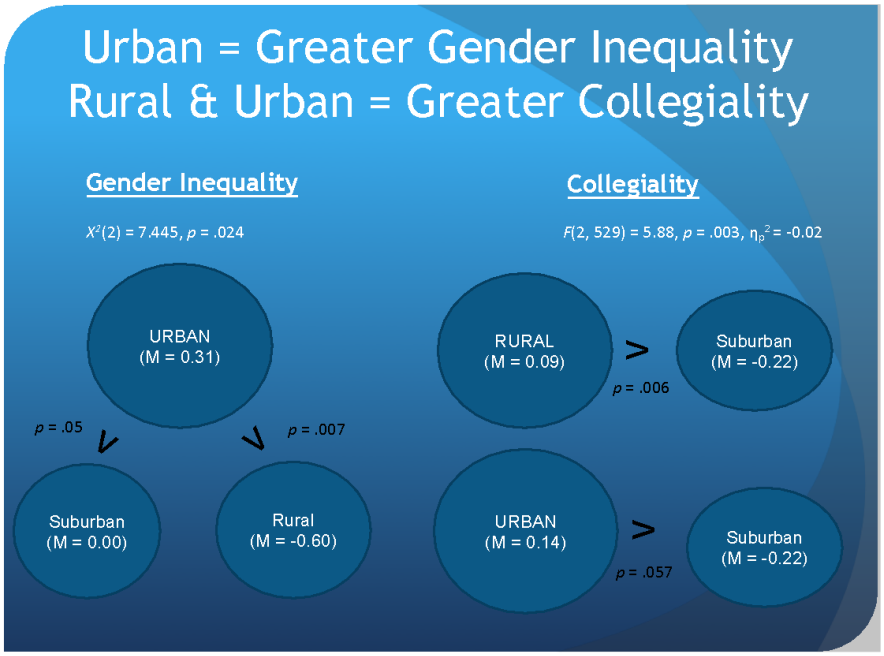
To examine possible differences between superintendents with children and those without, in relationship to the four constructs of gender bias, I conducted an independent samples t test. There were no differences between three of the factors; however, the test revealed there was a significant difference between mothers (M = -0.11) and non-mothers (M = 0.07) for Factor 4 (Mentorship), t(530) = -2.08, p = .038, with non-mothers showing a generally greater level of agreement that they received mentoring.

Community type

Significant differences were found when comparing means between community type and both the Gender Inequality and Collegiality factors. Superintendents in urban communities reported more gender inequality than those in suburban and rural communities. Additionally, superintendents in rural communities reported more collegiality than those in suburban communities; those in urban settings reported marginally more collegiality than those in suburban settings as well. Figure 1 shows the comparative means between community type and both the Gender Inequality and Collegiality factors from the PSGBI:DE.

Figure 1

Comparative Means Between Community Type, Gender Inequality, and Collegiality



Conclusion

Research question 1: What is the nature of unconscious gender bias in the superintendency as perceived by female superintendents?

Overall, survey findings concluded unconscious gender bias in the superintendency is best described by the notion of gender inequality.

Here, female superintendents reported male superintendents receive more respect than women do and exhibit greater discomfort with female than with male leaders. To add to this, female superintendents reported people view ambitiousness differently for them than for their male counterparts. They also pointed to men's tendency to interrupt women and take over conversations.

It then follows that these responses aligned with respondents' agreement that more situations of gender bias occur than are acknowledged in their profession.

Research question 2: Are there any demographic differences in how female superintendents perceived gender bias?

Demographic differences were found in how female superintendents perceived gender bias. In particular, differences were found in the following demographic categories: age, ethnicity, number of years in education, number of years as a superintendent, mothers and non-mothers, and community type.

Disrupt the norm, raise awareness, call out the issue, and intervene

Members of the organization will continue to reproduce what they know and are used to until they are introduced to something new and better. There is a need to disrupt the norm and deliberately work to flatten the gendered hierarchy. This can be done by empowering women of all administrative levels to lead and give them authority to affect change. The resulting exposure of more women in power can help to shift mental models of what women are capable of. Ways to achieve this might include establishing power or hierarchy in organizations based on scope of influence rather than position (i.e., tapping into the plethora of female educators/leaders in the ranks below the superintendency), deliberately holding more gender-inclusive networking events, and/or giving women in the lower ranks of the educational hierarchy opportunities to lead.

Education officials should seize the opportunity to utilize the PSGBI:DE, a valid tool for measuring perceptions of gender bias, to measure unconscious bias more broadly. State level Departments of Education should administer PSGBI:DE to all the female superintendents in their state, analyze results, raise awareness, and design targeted interventions.

With this enhanced awareness of unconscious gender bias, it is incumbent on all stakeholders to call out the issue and intervene. Broadly publish results of PSGBI:DE administration, offer explicit training and exercises to educate and remediate, design longevity plans to deliberately support female superintendents' success in the role, offer female-specific mentoring (especially for mothers), establish branches of state administrators' associations specifically in support of female administrators if one does not already exist, and enlist men to participate in the effort.

The data contained in this study demonstrate that unconscious gender bias in the superintendency is indeed a problematic issue. Unconscious bias exists and has a significant impact on the lived experiences of women. However, to date, there has not been a study focused specifically on female superintendents' perceptions of unconscious gender bias in the superintendency. As such, there has been a need for more empirical evidence to demonstrate the existence of unconscious gender bias in the superintendency; the results of this study help to fill that void.

Author Biography

A knowledgeable and passionate advocate for gender equality in educational leadership, Julia DiSalvo Drake began her career as a teacher, coach, and principal in New York City. She currently serves as Springhurst Elementary School principal in Dobbs Ferry, NY. E-mail: drakej@dfsd.org

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