The Experience of Women Teachers in Two State-controlled School Districts:

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Boston College
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Curriculum and Instruction

THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN TWO STATE-CONTROLLED SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Dissertation by

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory case study examines the experience of twelve women teachers who taught in two state-controlled school districts that had been taken over by the state authorities due to low academic performance and operational mismanagement. The qualitative methodology of exploratory comparative case analysis allowed for the consideration of the two districts as two parts of the same case, and the foundation for future research in this field (Streb, 2010). Twelve semi-structured interviews, teacher climate survey responses, and fifty-three state government documents were analyzed using an iterative coding process (Yin, 2015, pp. 196-197; Saldaña, 2015).

The analysis found that structural and cultural barriers prevented the study participants from succeeding personally and professionally. Their skills as experienced educators were under-utilized and their perspectives as women were not acknowledged. Structurally, the internal organization of the districts asked a great deal of the teachers without recognizing them as professionals or women. Culturally, their gender identities as women placed them at a disadvantage with school and district leadership. The gendered barriers were woven into the fabric of the workplace so that the women teachers were unable to have access to those with power or influence.

This study lays the groundwork for larger research endeavors on women in state-controlled schools, as well as policy implications for the state control of public schools and school turnaround. This study contributes to the field by specifically bringing women teachers’ voices into the discussion of school reform and improvement.
Acknowledgments

It has been a great privilege for me to share the voices of women teachers. The aspiration of this study is to improve the experiences of all women teachers by adding their perspectives to the field of educational research. With this dissertation, I begin a journey of finding additional ways to advocate for women teachers in the United States and abroad. This journey would not be able to start at all without the support of many who have generously assisted me in the course of writing this dissertation.

First and foremost, I thank the twelve women who volunteered to participate in this study. You shared your heartache, frustrations, fears, and anger with me in hopes that your stories could help other women. Thank you for trusting me with your experiences. Together, we will improve teaching for all women educators.

Next, I thank Dr. Andy Hargreaves for serving as my dissertation chair. My ideas and writing have flourished and strengthened with his thorough feedback. I am very appreciative of the standards you have set for me to meet, Andy, for this final product is all the better for it. You have offered detailed reviews at a time that is particularly busy for you professionally and personally. Thank you for your dedication to this work, Andy. You have granted me a great gift in your feedback, and I will make the most of it.

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Even with the help and support of all these fine folks, I would not have been able to achieve a modicum of success without the unwavering love and support of my family. While my children will always be my greatest legacy, I hope they understand that steady, hard work can help one reach higher goals. Thank you Anna, Jack, and Lucy for trying your best to help Mama get her homework done. Thank you Sue Burns for watching the children, cooking meals, helping with laundry, and a million other things while I toiled away at the library. I am grateful to my father Mel Gurry and my sister Bonnie C. Gurry for helping me keep my eyes on the prize.

And most importantly, I am honored to thank my husband Jared Burns for all he has sacrificed, adjusted, changed, done alone, and figured out so I could get my work done. You have believed in my ideas from the very start and never let me turn back. Thank you for your faith in me and this work.

I humbly dedicate this manuscript and the work that may come from it to my mother, Marilyn Gastel Gurry, who pushed me to have big goals and take on complicated projects. To an exceptional teacher, colleague, and mother: may I continue to work towards your goal of better schools for all students and all teachers.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The communities of Oakwood and Milltown, located in the United States (US), were once bustling, prosperous metropolises, home to the latest technology and innovation. The public libraries in each town celebrate this history with ceiling-to-floor murals of working men and women, alongside the proud industrial magnates. Photographs of civic clubs gathered on the entrance steps, and plaques of their donations to the libraries remind today’s patrons of this proud history. Oakwood and Milltown grew successfully in part because of a readily available, educated workforce. A century later, these towns have declined in stature and population, and their school systems are now in the control of the state.

Taking over these districts is a massive endeavor, as the future of these towns depends, in part, on schools that can more successfully graduate young men and women ready for college and careers. Turning schools around and getting whole districts back on track is a relatively new strategy in this state. This approach to school improvement offers a research opportunity to learn what the turnaround experience is like for the teachers employed by these districts. More specifically, the state’s intervention provided the occasion to explore what women teachers experience, as the field has not often included women teachers’ voices.

This exploratory case study examines the experiences of women teachers working in these two school districts in the same state in the US. The research question asked, “How do women teachers in state-controlled districts experience leadership during a school turnaround?” The teachers were employed by public school districts that had each been taken over by the state authorities due to low academic performance and mismanagement. Women teachers in state-controlled public school districts can provide new perspectives on
turning schools around by sharing their observations and experiences as recipients of leadership during the process. This study contributes to the field by specifically bringing women teachers’ experiences into the discussion of school reform and improvement.

**A Review of State-Control of Public Schools**

This study takes place in the context of districts taken over by the state after years of academic decline. The terminology used here and throughout the study comes from the body of literature on school improvement and state-control. Mintrop (2004) found that a variety of labels are used to describe such state-controlled entities: “schools on probation, schools under reconstitution, schools in decline or in crisis, schools under review, immediate intervention schools, schools eligible for assistance” (p.2). “Failing,” is based on a small set of numerical performance indicators, accountability systems identify putative underperformers that are given a limited period of time to reverse growth deficits or decline and that are threatened with more severe penalties upon failure to do so. (p. 2)

The districts of Oakwood, and then Milltown, were placed into many categories leading to their state takeover, from “underperforming” to “ineffective” (see Appendices A & B).

Failure and success are not as absolute as these labels may imply. The districts are in a state which has what is considered to be one of the most robust public-school systems in the United States (NCES, 2018). A national report highlighted this state for having high, rigorous standards with high achievement (reference shared confidentially with committee to protect anonymity). It has been lauded for its high-performing system in national forums on several occasions. This state proudly claimed its status as one of the highest performing states in the nation on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). Districts neighboring Milltown whose 4th and 8th graders participated in the NAEP also laid claim to this honor (State Department of Education, 2018).
However, the stark reality is that despite being residents of this high-performing state, students in towns such as Oakwood and Milltown have continued to struggle to compete with their peers educationally, economically, and socially. Labels and categories can be misleading or represent only a small aspect of the situation. If this state had been considered its own country in 2012, it would have been second in the world on several ranking tables of international assessments. At the same time, in 2012, the state was labeled “failing” under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards (Ravitch, 2013). Thus, “failure” as a school district in the nation’s highest performing state is a complex label to receive, as the reputation and brand of the state rests in part on this designation. As Duke (2016) explained, this state’s department of education was given expanded powers in 2010 to request turnaround plans for schools at Level 4, the lowest performing 20% of schools. The state was then able to take over individual schools and districts deemed failing. The Oakwood and Milltown districts fell into Levels 4 and 5 starting in 2013, leading to state control.

The frequent change in school and district leadership in both towns has caused disruptions in their school systems, contributing to the students’ academic decline (Appendices A & B). The problems of struggling schools and districts across the US are often exacerbated by weak leaders (Duke, 2008), whose ineptitude can lead to state takeover (Duke, 2016; Peck & Reitzug, 2014; Wong & Shen, 2001; Zebarth, 2002). By contrast, research on the other state-controlled district in this state indicates that steady state-appointed leadership and reform efforts can result in improved academic performance (Schueler, Goodman, & Deming, 2017). However, while state intervention and takeover may raise academic metrics, the experiences of teachers during the district turnaround have not been considered or assessed empirically. The implication of this research regarding academic
metrics is that teachers in turnaround districts who experience leadership in particular ways, are not currently included in the state’s analyses of such districts. These reforms assume local leaders and teachers have failed to meet their mandate to provide a free and appropriate education. The internal structures of school turnaround methods and rationales are designed to maintain and reinforce the authority of the state.

**Turning Schools Around: Educational Reform Efforts**

Public schools and their teachers are evaluated, compared, and ranked, as state and federal authorities determine institutions’ effectiveness in educating children. Governing authorities intervene in schools and districts deemed inadequate or “failing,” based on such metrics (Downey, Von Hippel, & Hughes, 2008; Mintrop, 2004). These interventions, techniques, and strategies have become known as school turnaround (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). The reasons schools fail to meet their mission to educate students and prepare them for society have been extensively studied in the US. Takeover districts include large urban settings and smaller suburban systems, in many states and regions. The efficacy of state intervention is debatable. Research has found significant variation in the ability of government to improve educational achievement amid complex contextual realities (Duke, 2016; Schueler, 2016; Schueler et al., 2017).

The state may need to intervene in those districts that are unable to provide free and adequate education to their students. In studying the pathology of failure, educational research has examined public school takeovers for decades and has critically considered the decisions of all involved, from educational commissioners to classroom teachers (Duke, 2006, 2008, 2016; Mintrop, 2004). The legal mandate that authorizes state intervention understands and assumes that teachers are critical factors in the formula for improvement
(State Department of Education Regulation 603). So, like replacing numbers in a mathematical equation to get a different sum, the state department of education has the authority to remove, replace, or adjust teachers’ classroom assignments as it sees fit in order to change the outcome. Teachers either meet the decreed metrics, or they are summarily removed (Mintrop, 2004). Academic struggle becomes something that can be isolated from the context, treated, and prevented in the future.

By considering state intervention and reform from the perspective of women teachers, this research offers a different approach to what turning a school around can mean for those involved. Statistically, a majority of those involved are women: 77% of all US public school teachers and 89% of all elementary teachers are women, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2017). Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey (2014) noticed this employment trend in 2014 when examining decades of labor data and national surveys of professionals. The American teaching force has consistently employed more women than men for over thirty years. Despite a long history of frequent questioning of their professional abilities (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lagemann, 2002; Tamboukou, 2000), women continue to become teachers in large numbers (NCES, n.d.). These women teachers are finding themselves in more stressful work environments, particularly when their schools are underperforming.

The demands on public education for accountability, measurable academic progress, and more evident college or career paths for students have resulted in greater scrutiny of teachers and schools (Meyers & Darwin, 2017). Districts taken over by the state authorities receive much more attention and higher expectations to meet these objectives. The legislated expansion of federal and state authority into daily educational operations has been used to
enact a relatively rapid turnaround. However, the experience of teachers during this period of reform remains unclear. The research field does not often document the political and social pressures exerted upon teachers, nor does it often consider the gender dynamics that arise when a school or district is taken over by the governing authorities. Gender dynamics are not often considered in efforts to enact educational change (Datnow, 1998). Indeed, gender is “largely absent, at best marginal, in discourses … of educational reform” (Blackmore, 2000, p. 468). Gender is not included in reform designs, partly because reforms do not consider teachers’ individual, personal, and life characteristics when turning around schools. Typically, metrics of improvement are focused on student academic measures but if teachers are to be implementing reforms, then consideration of their experiences should be included.

A Brief Overview of Research and Women Teachers

The role of women in teaching has been a topic of discussion and study for nearly two centuries in the US (Lagemann, 2000). “Once a predominantly male occupation, school teaching became a predominantly female occupation in the United States in conjunction with the spread of common schooling between roughly 1830 and 1865” (p. 1). Women teachers’ experiences are not often specifically included in discussions of accountability or school turnaround. Instead, research studies have focused on women leaders. From studies on how some women lead (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lambert & Gardner, 2009), to the unique experience of certain types of women leaders, such as African-American women teacher leaders (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dillard, 1995), women are increasingly included as educational leaders but knowing how women teachers experience leadership is less well understood.
This study examines women teachers’ experiences within the context of state-controlled districts. The question is informed by the research available both on women teachers, and women in professional settings more broadly. The experience of US teachers in 2017 resembled the experience of Australian women teachers in the 1990s when a reorganization of the governing structures and bureaucracies took place in the name of reform. For the teachers, the restructure resulted in a gendered organizing of work: the highest levels concentrated the financial and decisional power, which were predominantly staffed by men, while the less powerful ‘peripheral labour market’ of the teaching force was predominantly staffed by women (Blackmore, 1996).

The re-gendering of the US educational labor market has occurred almost continuously for years, regardless of the presidential administration, secretary of education, or political or economic milestone occurring (Ingersoll et al., 2014). More and more teachers are women in the US. At the same time, policies and practices have undermined the profession, such as the selection of scripted curricula and standardized tests in place of teacher-designed, tailored lessons. Teachers, mostly women, are not gaining more benefits — monetary or in-kind — while the hierarchy of school and district management has expanded. This expansion has resulted in a top-heavy distribution of financial resources, leaving fewer resources for school level staff.

Women teachers experience the profession in ways that are distinct from their male colleagues. Research has noted the emotional labor they invest in their practice (Blackmore, 1996; Grumet, 1988; Hochschild, 1985), as well as aspects of their own formal and informal leadership approaches (Shakeshaft & Grogan, 2013) that focus on relationships and try to maintain a balance in the workplace. Although there is a growing body of research on women
teachers from kindergarten classrooms to high school halls (Krüger, 2008; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010), there have not been any studies of women teachers’ experiences during state-takeover and turnaround of schools in the US.

The field of educational research has rarely viewed women teachers as women. Even though the proportion of teachers who are women continues to grow (Ingersoll et al., 2014; NCES, n.d.), there have been few studies of their perspectives as women (Blackmore, 2000; Blase & Blase, 2003; Grumet, 1988). Research on women teachers’ experiences in turnaround schools is rarer still, despite the common practice of men directing reform efforts, and women teachers implementing them (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

Here women teachers have borne the brunt of turnaround reforms while exercising the least professional or personal agency. In takeover schools, the focus of the state falls on the individual teacher's instructional abilities, rather than the context in which the teacher works. Teaching evaluations are “in isolation from the organization,” in a way that is disconnected from the political, social, and gendered structures that impact student learning (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012).

The historical and social spaces in which teachers work impact what academic improvements they are able to implement. It would be shortsighted of state authorities to disregard poverty or an influx of English language learners in districts taken into state control. It is equally myopic not to account for women teachers. As the findings of this study demonstrate, the participants reported dealing with structural and social barriers that prevented their professional success and the academic improvement of the district schools. As Bahlieda (2015) argued, such gender and power dynamics in schools have "ensured that education was (and still is) controlled from the outside by largely male forces … This
remains unchanged despite the increasing number of women in positions of responsibility" (p 205).

Gender and Educational Reform

It is essential to understand the development of education reform itself to see why gender is considered insignificant. For nearly four decades, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have worked to define and address inequities and challenges within educational systems (Meyers & Darwin, 2017). Teachers have participated in reform efforts in a variety of ways, depending on the policies put in place and the perceived needs within schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Duke, 2016; Fusarelli, 2004; Haney, Madaus, & Kreitzer, 1987; Lortie, 1975, Sarason, 1971). In the US, standardized test scores and increased graduation rates determine improvement and have had significant implications for teachers as these student measures have become the main indicators of academic success. Many international counterparts, from Austria to New Zealand, have done so as well (Townsend, 2007), to the point that Harris (2002) contended that “school improvement has come to be an expectation of all schools across many Western countries” (p. 1).

The expanded knowledge of school effectiveness and school improvement research has brought new ideas in policy and practice. Contextualization at the local level is needed for school turnaround to have an impact (Thrupp, Lupton, & Brown, 2007). A better understanding of the social, historical, political, and economic aspects of the school or district could result in tailored turnaround efforts for each community. Yet metrics derived from high-stakes test scores continue to inform decisions by those leading turnaround efforts, despite being called the wrong set of "drivers" (Fullan, 2011).
These “drivers,” standards-based approaches, may not be as effective as desired. A review of results from mid-sized and large US cities found that school takeover structures result in "ambiguous achievement trends" (Wong & Shen, 2003, p. 102). Elementary students show measurable progress, while middle and high school students do not. It is possible that the oldest students are not able to compete with their age-level peers in other districts as a result of weak instruction and poor leadership. There may have been too many years of inadequate schooling for older students, but there was still time to intervene with younger ones.

Indeed, the academic success of reforms may be measurable initially after state intervention occurs, but are “superficial,” for little will have been done to cultivate an "internalized commitment" to really change systems (Fullan, 2005, pp. 175-176). The reforms may be unsustainable because they were implemented without a mission to guide them, having no greater purpose than to change the bottom line (Bujis, 2005). These schools, which have suffered through mismanagement and personnel turnover, may also lack a mission and vision, so reforms and changes take place without clear direction. Without the focus of a mission, schools and districts in need of reform are susceptible to quick fixes and programs that do not take the school community into account. Despite decades of questions about the effectiveness of interventions, some reform strategies, such as district and state competition (Race to the Top, for example) have gone on to become national policies for school turnaround efforts. The teachers impacted by these initiatives and policies — mostly women — are rarely included in their evaluation. As Apple and Weis (1986) asked,

[h]ow can we understand elementary schools in the United States, for example, without placing them in the dynamics of class and gender? A huge majority of elementary school teachers are women, an overwhelming number of the principals are
men, and these employment patterns are part of the sexual and social divisions of labor. (p. 18)

Building on the work of Apple and Weis, among others, four sociological constructs have been identified for this case study to capture the experience of women teachers in turnaround schools.

**The Four Constructs of Women Teachers' Sociological Experiences in School Turnaround**

Four sociological constructs provide the context of turnaround schools for this study on women teachers: micropolitics and masculinist systems of management undermine women teachers; the culture of schools, particularly those under state control; the high-threat environment created by state-control; and the persistence of individualism in the teaching profession. These four constructs (Table 1) provide the context from which the study asks:

*How do women teachers in state-controlled districts experience leadership during a school turnaround?*

Table 1

**The Four Sociological Constructs of Turnaround Schools**

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Micropolitics: Women Teachers and Masculinist Systems

Every school has its own social and political atmosphere that the community members must learn how to manage in order to succeed as educators and students. Laurence Iannaccone (1975) defined educational micropolitics as the interaction and political ideologies of social systems of teachers, administrators and pupils within school buildings. These may be labeled as internal organizational subsystems. [The micropolitical system] is also concerned with the issues of the interaction between professional and lay subsystems. They may be called the external systems. (p. 43)

Teachers navigate these choppy political waters regularly, and arguably more so in districts like the two in this study, where leadership churn and state control created an authoritarian climate. As Blase and Anderson (1995) explained: “the study of school micropolitics and our increased understanding of how power is exercised in social institutions enable us to map out the ways in which different approaches to leadership affect the life of teachers in schools” (p. 15). Researching school micropolitics during a turnaround is necessary for the field to understand how such non-academic factors impact learning and instruction. Including the gender of teachers, who again are mostly women, is necessary as well.

In the years leading up to NCLB and more state intervention in public schools, Amanda Datnow (1998) argued that school turnaround discussions neglected the “relationship of gender to the micropolitics of school change” (p. 3). She contended that turnaround reforms are influenced by how women teachers experience these dynamics. Twenty years later, micropolitics and school cultures are still disregarded by state authorities when evaluating schools and districts; their “cursory knowledge” of the school’s culture and context limits the influence of their initiatives (Harris & Jones, 2019, p. 123). The consequences of doing so may be significant. State departments of education in many
jurisdictions have great latitude during turnaround efforts to implement policies and reforms they deem suitable to correct problems. However, if the culture of the school and how women educators experience it is overlooked, then how effective will reforms be in such districts? This question was taken up, in part, during educational reforms in Australia. In their 2007 study of large-scale restructuring measures, Jill Blackmore and Judyth Sachs found that gender biases and gendered expectations featured prominently in the experiences of women educators.

These schools were "numerically feminized" and were asked to implement reforms to improve academic outcomes with a "management that is masculinist" (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007).

Restructuring … reinforced old gender regimes. The entrenched gender division of labor that located women in marginal, part-time, acting, or lower level positions, and with men tending to have tenure and located in upper level positions, meant institutions were predisposed toward particular ways of doing things. (p. 57)

The masculinist management style Blackmore and Sachs describe was also identified by Whitty, Power, and Halpin (1998) in their research on educational reforms. They found the principals of grant-maintained schools would “encourage and celebrate” masculinist styles of leading (p. 62). Masculinist management in schools has been discussed in the US context also. Apple (2004) described the impact of gendered state reforms and their masculinist tendencies in his article on educational policies and practices from several countries, including the US, noting the damage such top-down reforms can have on teaching.

US schools also share Australia's feminist-masculinist dichotomy in how the micropolitics of reform impact implementation. Datnow (1998) called for more research on the micropolitics "in the context of current school reform policies which propose dramatic changes to schools, as this is where the micropolitics of school reform are most evident" (p.
This case study contributes to this tradition of studying school cultures, micropolitics, and school reform systems by considering the experience of women teachers during state control.

**The Culture of Schools**

Much research has considered how schools respond to, and improve from, complex efforts to reform (Duke, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Marsh, Strunk, & Bush, 2013; Peck & Reitzug, 2014). However, fewer studies have focused on the experience of teachers in school turnaround. As Gu and Day (2013) contend, there is "an urgent need to investigate further the ways in which the personal, relational and organizational conditions of teachers' work and lives mediate the socio-cultural and policy demands and challenges for teachers" (p. 24).

Teachers working in schools under consideration for takeover may respond to the pressure by doubting their professional knowledge and accepting untenable situations. In his study of schools in state control, Mintrop (2004) found “teachers in low-performing schools [become] more susceptible to external directions" (p. 15). Three norms of the profession — egalitarianism, autonomy, and seniority — have been threatened under school turnaround. The “classroom is no longer inviolate and the teacher’s autonomy is no longer sacrosanct” (Moore-Johnson et al., 2008, p. 1090). Increasing focus on accountability at the federal level, the patchwork of state policies in response, and the political and social reactions at the local level have resulted in teachers' frustration and pushback on reform. Analyses of the effects of school turnaround on women teachers are scarce. There has been limited discussion of the role gender dynamics play in administrative decisions or takeover efforts.

The gender profile of the typical teacher has mostly remained the same for decades because recruitment and hiring practices have not changed. Most teachers are still female,
White, and middle class (Ingersoll et al., 2014; National Center for Education Information, 2011; NCES, 2017). A lack of diverse hiring of teachers and school leaders may have undermined reform efforts because the same types of people were making the same types of decisions (Hargreaves, 1997). Historically, teachers have not had the leverage or agency to challenge those with empirical knowledge with what they know happens in classrooms (Blase & Blase, 2003; Lortie, 1975; Sarason, 1996) and this has prevented necessary operational reforms from taking place. The culture of classrooms and their connection to communities should be considered and not viewed too narrowly. As Sarason (1996) argued, assuming that all reforms will be implemented uniformly across classrooms threatens the initiative.

Over twenty years after Sarason’s (1996) depiction of school culture, the detrimental aspects he studied are undermining turnaround efforts. The culture of teaching has shifted to one in which teachers feel high-stakes, high-threat pressure from their leadership. Teachers do not feel they can challenge principals with impunity (Blase & Blase, 2003). They have grown frustrated as they believe the system disregards their schools and professional contributions. With the exception of the “Red for Ed” uprising of public school teachers in a handful of states in the spring of 2018, US educators remain reluctant to speak out against reforms that are designed to target scores, rather than student needs (Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, & Wishard-Guerra, 2011). Teachers fear retribution and retaliation for questioning their principals and school leaders (Blase & Blase, 2003). Thus, educators in struggling and state-controlled schools experience weak collaboration and high mistrust (Mintrop, 2004; Stoll & Fink, 1996). To retain teachers, Johnson and colleagues (2012) have
argued that schools have to support teachers through "school culture, the principal’s leadership, and the relationships with their colleagues" (p. 27).

**High-Threat Environments**

Inauthentic collaborations which foster distrust between and amongst teachers characterize schools taken over by the state. This distrust can result in a high-threat environment of already stressful work conditions for US teachers (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Johnson et al., 2008; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Sims, 2009; Wahlstrom, & Louis, 2008). From the 'hurried' decisions in the Chicago Public Schools in the US where impoverished, diverse students exhibit challenging needs (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999) to English schools under consideration for restructuring due to the academic struggles of their students (Harris & Chapman, 2002), teachers in schools under state control, or on probation due to low academic performance, may perceive reform as a threat. In his study of teachers who worked in some of the lowest performing schools in California in the earliest days of NCLB, Alan Daly (2009) found that educators who felt restricted by a rigid system of sanctions did not take the time to reflect or develop innovative methods to address student achievement gaps. According to the results of the statistical analysis of three survey instruments designed to capture the perceptions and emotions of the participants, they felt threatened as professionals.

Teachers in state-controlled schools can be removed from their teaching positions at-will by their principals because their unions and professional organizations can no longer shield them (State Department of Education regulation 603; Schueler et al., 2017). The fear of reprisal for low scores by students on standardized tests or lack of fidelity to a scripted, mandated curriculum deters teachers from exercising agency or professional judgment.
Studies such as that conducted by Daly (2009) have adequately captured the intersection of policy and practice in high-threat environments. However, even such studies do not entirely capture teachers’ identities since they do not consider gender.

Historically, those in authority positions are often men and those expected to carry out turnaround efforts successfully are frequently women. Klassen & Chiu (2010) noted this gap in the literature when considering teachers’ professional lives: “Although researchers have begun to examine teacher motivation by studying self-efficacy, job stress, and job satisfaction, few have proposed explanatory models that take into account teacher characteristics such as years of experience, teaching level, and gender” (p. 743). Even fewer studies have considered the role of gender during turnaround efforts, and the impact women teachers may have on a district's future. One study that did acknowledge gender differences is that of Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth (2001). In Grossman and colleagues’ (2001) longitudinal examination of a community of humanities educators, some trends related to gender and professional experiences emerged: high school teachers who were men responded to items differently than their colleagues who were women. The women participants tended to report that they were trying to support personal growth in their students as a professional goal, while the men participants tended to mention many goals, but did not have a unifying theme (Grossman et al., 2001). Grossman and colleagues also found that the men tended to dominate the group conversations. Recognizing gender in their study meant that they were trying to understand their participants as complete individuals. Studies of turnaround schools have not included a focus on many aspects of participants’ identities. The experience of teachers has been examined in other contexts (Gu & Day, 2013; Troman & Woods, 2000), but not in takeover schools.
Culture of Individualism

Turnaround efforts often encourage the individualism that has historically characterized the teaching culture. Many aspects of US teaching enable and encourage individualist practices. Traditionally, the teacher writes her lesson plans on her own, used in a classroom where she is the only adult in the room. Other than during her annual or biannual evaluation, no colleagues will observe her lesson to give her feedback. She teaches in a self-contained classroom with the door closed to the hall and the rest of the school. In struggling schools or those already in state control, teachers seem to become even more self-reliant and focused on their practices, as they know they are at risk of removal or reassignment. In response to these individualistic tendencies, a shift is underway in research and policy to promote teacher collaboration. This state has included collaboration as part of its turnaround procedures, written into its guiding documents and advice to schools on probation as well. However, the context in which collaboration is to take place is not included. Those brought in to evaluate teachers in such schools or districts may not consider the contextual factors. The social contexts of schools has been given limited consideration by research and reformers, a fact Johnson and colleagues (2012, p. 30) called “misguided” in their findings when studying turnaround schools. The protective, insular professional culture of high-threat schools perpetuates individualism.

The description of the isolated US classroom teacher is rooted in the classic study of the culture of teachers by Dan Lortie (1975). In his analysis of 94 interviews in the Boston metropolitan area and a subsequent related survey of Dade County, in the Florida school system, Lortie identified three main themes: individualism, conservatism, and presentism. In
“presentism,” or short-term thinking, the organization of career rewards in teaching fosters a present-oriented rather future-oriented point of view; those who intend to stay in the classroom have limited need to delay gratification in the hope of future gain. Few beginning teachers intend to stay very long, and the majority of teachers are women who have little interest in leaving the classroom for other work. (p. 101)

Presentism was found to be detrimental to teachers’ professional growth, yet it was prevalent among many of those studied. The teachers were not comfortable collaborating as they were used to working on their own. "Individualism supports presentism by inhibiting work with others in a search for common solutions" (Lortie, 1975, p. 212). Turnaround efforts and reform-minded practices have resulted in adaptive presentism. As Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) put it, "In the past 10–15 years,” they argue, “presentism among educators has changed from being a chronic and endemically “natural” condition of teaching, to an acute and unwanted one that demands a range of reluctant, short-term, and often cynical adaptations to imposed reforms" (p. 2509). Contemporary reform efforts are designed to be utilized quickly to show gains soon after implementation. These efforts can also be exchanged with other reform interventions so frequently that teachers do not invest themselves in them; they have little faith in their longevity.

In order to achieve short-term gains rather than institute long-term change, turnaround policies focus on changing the practices of individual teachers. Rather than addressing many of the external factors that impact student achievement (such as poverty or family stress), Kronley & Ucelli-Kashyap (2010) have found in their research on collective practices for sustained improvement in schools, reform efforts focused on teacher quality for "test-based student accountability are paralleled by new pressures for individual teacher accountability,"
This increased focus on individual teacher accountability has further perpetuated presentism and individualism among teachers.

While research shows that teachers can influence students’ learning, economists contend that the quality of the teacher is highly measurable (Hanushek, 2011). However, it is detrimental to the students to attribute academic success to the skills of individual teachers, rather than considering the whole schooling system (Lortie, 1975; Moore-Johnson, 2010).

[The] strategy for improving public education by relying on carefully chosen individuals is consistent with what is often referred to as “the egg-crated” model of schooling. The egg-crate model does nothing to ensure that a student’s experience over time will be consistent, coherent, or successful. (Moore-Johnson, 2010, pp. 2-3)

Policies that focus on individual teachers’ abilities to assist students in meeting academic goals, rather than seeing the schools as systems, are ineffective. These types of reforms are designed for short-term academic gains, rather than long-term student development. One teacher cannot adequately counter the potentially complex contexts and communities where their students live. Hargreaves & Fullan (2012), in their book on professional capital, demonstrated that students succeed academically “because they have a series of very good teachers” (p. 16). Such policies fail to recognize that more time is needed to achieve academic success.

Ironically, contemporary turnaround and reform efforts focus on individual teachers but do not recognize those teachers as the individuals they are. One study found that such workplaces caused stress (Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). In their study of teachers’ experiences and stress, participants told Schlichte and associates that they felt “loneliness” in school, heard only “silence” from administration when requests for support were made, and felt “disempowered” and “immobile” without being able to enact change (p. 37). The pressure to perform while disregarding one’s circumstances and that of the students results in
large numbers of women teachers practicing in isolation. Faced with the scrutiny of state-appointed leaders who are not familiar with their schools, distrust of their colleagues, and pressure to ensure impoverished students perform well on state tests, teachers feel stressed (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; McCarthy et al., 2009; Moore-Johnson et al., 2008; Sims, 2009; Wahlstrom, & Louis, 2008). The political dimensions of turnaround school scenarios only add to these negative feelings.

**Four Sociological Constructs Summary**

The four constructs together provide a description of the two districts’ work environments for teachers in 2017. In the decades of research looking at the cultures of schools and teachers, and the high-threat environments in which they work, few have considered the teachers as women. Research has rarely included implications for gender as it relates to teachers’ professional and personal lives. By overlooking this aspect of who the teachers are, the field has missed the impact of the micropolitics of gender (construct 1) on teachers’ lives and decisions.

The culture of the school (construct 2) exposes the contrary realities of US teachers. Women have made up the majority of the teaching force for decades but only recently have started reaching equitable levels of leadership positions (NCES 2017). Data-driven measures of academic progress remain, along with the male-dominant ethos among leaders. It is discouraged and frowned upon for teachers to question or challenge building or district authority (Sarason, 1996), so the teaching community, mostly women, do not typically question the reforms they are to implement.

Such teacher reticence about questioning reform strategies allows for the emergence of high-threat environments in turnaround schools (construct 3). In many places in the US,
the state departments of education have been granted broad powers by their legislatures to hire- and fire-at-will as they initiate accelerated improvement plans designed to turn schools and districts around quickly. Teachers focus on their work as they find themselves under great scrutiny to perform in order to retain their employment. The culture of individualism (construct 4) and Lortie’s (1975) ‘presentism’ have historically perpetuated an insular, protective perspective on instruction that discourages teachers from sharing their professional progress, resulting in stunted pedagogical growth. The teachers do not develop and innovate in the same ways they would if they collaborated or observed each other’s lessons.

**Research Question**

This exploratory study recognizes and includes all four constructs of the teaching environment when researching the experience of women teachers in schools taken over by state authorities. The context of the two public school districts in which the participants taught informed the research question. This US state has performed well on national and international comparisons of academic gains, as measured on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and international tests, like PISA, TIMMS, and PIRLS (Ravitch, 2013). In contrast, these two districts have not kept up with the rest of the state. Due to documented management problems by central office leaders, and academic failure, the districts were taken over by the state Department of Education. This study examined the experience of women teachers in these districts.

The study considered the experience of women teachers in turnaround schools by asking: *How do women teachers in state-controlled districts experience leadership during a school turnaround?* A two-part assumption about women teachers informs the question by arguing that (a) women teachers enact reform in turnaround schools differently from their
colleagues or superiors who are men while (b) having to navigate the complex context of a state-controlled district as women. Women teachers, in general, manage the emotional labor involved in dealing with the culture of schools and the culture of individualism. However, women teachers in state-controlled districts are experiencing the four constructs in masculine power structures.

Knowing how teachers recognize and respond to leadership is helpful for school improvement by examining how women teachers understand educational leadership as a key parameter for measuring success. In their study of school leadership, Jantzi & Leithwood (1996) found that “conceptualizing leadership in terms of the perceptions of those who experience it is the starting point for many approaches to measuring leadership” (p. 3).

**Considering the Impact of School Context on Teachers**

The workplace context is formative for teachers (Blackmore, 1996; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Kraft et al., 2015). The spaces in which teachers work impacts their perspective on their instruction and their willingness to stay in teaching (Baker & Foote, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Johnson et al., 2010; Louis & Marks, 1998; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Troen & Boles, 1992). How teachers experience leadership in these spaces relates to how effectively they can carry out the turnaround policies, or how motivated they are to do so (Mintrop, 2004).

Part of the teachers’ experience of leadership in these districts includes the need to manage frequent change. Leaders in both districts in this study (principals, assistant principals, department heads, central office officials, superintendents) have left their positions with high frequency (Appendices A & B), causing instability and confusion. Such leadership churn results in the loss of institutional knowledge, making it difficult to move
forward effectively. As Mintrop (2004) notes, the “notion of a school on probation that assumes responsibility for past performance deficiencies and strives to improve over a period of several years becomes obsolete because there is little continuity on which the school improvement processes can be built” (p. 71).

Teachers also leave with some frequency, and those teachers who stay with the district are left to try to manage this chaos. Teacher turnover has been a phenomenon since Becker’s (1952) study of Chicago teachers moving from the ‘slums’ to ‘better’ neighborhoods in the 1950s. Few have empirically examined what this turnover may mean for teacher development in turnaround schools, let alone for women teachers.

The two communities in state control that are the focus of this study struggle socially and economically, as well as academically. More nuanced understandings of the communities are needed to understand what success could be for these particular students (Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004). The state typically defines progress as obtaining significant improvement on the state-wide test, or in terms of higher graduation rates. In a review of research on high-stakes testing, Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) found teachers spend a majority of instructional time on the test and adjusted in-class assignments to mirror the high-stakes test. Additionally, in states with mandated high-stakes testing, 41% felt pressure from parents, principals, and superintendents to have students perform better on the tests.

Teachers, feeling such pressure, view success differently. As the Civil Rights Project found in their 2004 study of teachers in Fresno and Richmond, Virginia, teachers believe in reforming schools, though they may take a different approach than the punitive measures instituted under the NCLB Act. “Teachers recognize the impact that sanctions can have, but
also tend to believe that rewards and positive recognition for improvements in outcomes are more powerful” (Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, & Orfield, 2004, p. 8). Many of these teachers were not planning on staying in their schools another five years, and while they were willing to implement reforms, they were not motivated by them.

**Objectives and Significance of the Study**

As with all research, the findings are intended to improve the field’s understanding of its subject, in this case, the experience of women teachers in turnaround schools. The study is designed to contribute to the research on women teachers in two ways. First, the study aims to further the research field’s understanding of gender differences of teachers as women. Second, the study contributes to the understanding of women teachers’ perceptions of leadership and reform in high-threat educational contexts.

The first objective is to shed light on the experiences of women teachers as women in turnaround schools. Their gender identities as women define their professional lives, as the findings show. Despite the role their gender plays in their own practices, women teachers’ perspectives as women are not explicitly included in policy recommendations or turnaround reforms. The study seeks to raise awareness among practitioners and policymakers of the benefits of understanding women teachers’ experiences. The study strives to connect administrative and state-level decisions to the practitioner-level by promoting the voices of women teachers in state-controlled schools (Ben-Peretz, 1996).

By listening to women teachers within these state-controlled schools, the study contributes to what is known about women teachers’ perspectives when districts are labeled failures. When states categorize schools as “failing,” the blame for this label often falls on the teachers themselves. In his 2003 presidential address to the American Educational
Research Association, Robert Linn argued that decisionmakers should receive more focus because “the reality is that most accountability systems now place the focus so heavily on educators and/or students that others are largely ignored. Greater emphasis needs to be given to responsible parties” (Linn, 2003, p. 3). Teachers continue to be held responsible for school failure, and the ‘quality’ of their instructional skill is discussed by many as a potential contributing factor to the schools’ poor performance (Duke, 2016). Yet reforms do not consider the workplace climate and policies, particularly those that impact women teachers’ lives, such as maternity leave. School improvement policies fail to acknowledge the gender dynamic in school reform or turnaround efforts (Blackmore, 2000). Gender and equity were not included in the restructuring of Australia’s schools (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007), and have not been considered in US turnaround school reform either.

By not including gender as an analytical lens, empirical research on teachers and educational policies overlooks the crucial constituency of women teachers and therefore risks developing theories or practices that fall short of helping schools succeed. This research contributes to the literature on women teachers’ perceptions of leadership (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Lambert & Gardner, 2009; Young & McLeod, 2001), specifically in the context of state takeover and control. Understanding how women teachers perceive leadership could lead to better communication and partnership between state-appointed superintendents and the teaching staff.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study examines how women teachers are experiencing leadership in state-controlled schools. There are many ways to define leadership in education, from instructional (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1996) to distributed (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond,
The gender dynamics of leadership for women teachers should also be considered. The reality is that the micropolitics of gender impacts leadership, either overtly or covertly. The four sociological constructs of turnaround schools together form a more comprehensive understanding of what women teachers are experiencing and what gender dynamics they may face.

The four constructs capture what many policies and theories leave out: the micropolitics of women teachers in masculinist systems, the culture of schools, the high-threat environments of state control, and the culture of individualism in the teaching profession. The four constructs serve as the conceptual framework for the study. Whereas the field has examined each of these constructs on their own, considering them together allows for a better understanding of the professional lives of women teachers in turnaround districts.

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

In the course of this study, there are terms that require explanation and definition; there are several in the research question that warrant further discussion. As Dillard writes (2000),

> [The] underlying understanding of the nature of reality and the forms of discourse one employs to construct realities in research on leadership (or is encouraged or permitted to employ) significantly impacts not only what can be said and how it is said, but where it is said. (p. 661)

**Leadership**

The term “leadership” serves many purposes in the context of state control in this locality. It is an operational term that is measurable and action-oriented for the state department of education authorities. For practical and political reasons, the state’s legislative mandate calls on the state department of education to consider leaders as those in charge of school buildings and the district central office. Thus, leadership, as defined by the state in
this study, is based on Elmore (2000), because it most closely aligns with the department of education’s practices: “Leadership is the guidance and direction of instructional improvement. This is a deliberately deromanticized, focused, and instrumental definition” (p. 13). A masculinist perspective of leadership (Blackmore, 2000; Elmore, 2000) tends to come from those in positions of authority, such as principals or state department officials.

By contrast, “leadership” in the context of reform initiatives defines more of a general capacity for the greater good (Harris, 2003):

Everyone has the potential and right to work as a leader. Leading is skilled and complicated work that every member of the school community can learn. Democracy clearly defines the rights of individuals to actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives. (p. 9)

Harris’ egalitarian and democratic definition sees potential in all educators and exists alongside Elmore’s instructional, functional definition, for both interpretations are present in the findings.

**Woman Versus Female**

Power, control, and positionality are recurring issues in this study. The language to describe individuals is sensitive to the fact that such descriptions must accurately portray their situation, for “language use can constitute aspects of culture and identity” (Wortham, 2001, p. 255). Thus, the terms ‘woman’ or ‘women’ are not used interchangeably with ‘female.’

Recognizing the clinical, biological connotations of ‘female,’ this study instead uses ‘woman’ or ‘women’ to note the political and social aspects of the participants. Robin Lakoff (2000) writes in her text, *The Language War* that the “markings [of language] can shift” over time (p. 45), in response to political or social changes. She offers the example of ‘woman doctor’ from her youth when doctors who were women were so rare that the adjective was
used to recognize this unique individual. This study uses the phrase ‘woman teacher’ to highlight the numerical dominance of women in the profession, in response to literature that tends to refer to such practitioners as ‘teachers’ in a monolithic way.

Local context: Oakwood and Milltown as Communities

This study considered two communities that have similar social and educational histories. Each of these communities will be described using the US Census Bureau and state-collected data, to give a sense of the neighborhoods and their schools. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of the participants and towns.

The Milltown Public Schools and the Oakwood Public Schools have struggled to meet the needs of their students, as evidenced by low graduation rates, poor scores on state tests, and below average scores on national tests. Both districts were in control by the state government, though at two different stages at the time of data collection (2017): beginning (Milltown) and first years (Oakwood). These districts also have higher rates of English language learners than the rest of the state, are socially and geographically isolated and face economic struggles, as they work to reinvent themselves in the shadows of their former mills.

Milltown

The community of Milltown, in the south-central part of the state, has experienced both significance and obscurity in its 200-year history. It is located 60 miles from the state capital, and about 50 miles each from two other regional capitals, with a population of nearly 17,000. This former mill and factory town was home to a major glass company, as well as woollen mills and other factories. Throughout several decades, culturally and linguistically diverse workers from Poland, Quebec, and Puerto Rico moved to Milltown, where the glass manufacturer and related industries employed thousands of workers. The glass company
remains in business, as do a few factories, but in much decreased size. Today, the largest employer is the regional hospital, though it is currently facing restructuring and downsizing.

Milltown continues to be a diverse community as compared to the region, with 50.5% of the enrolled students identified as Hispanic in 2015, higher than the state average for the same year (18.6%). The percent of students whose first language was not English (21.4) and English Language Learners (14.1) was also higher than the state average. More recent disaggregated data on the town population is not available, as the latest Census data has not been released, but 26.6% of the residents identified as Hispanic in 2010, with 18.8% identifying as non-White.

While health care providers and the service sector have become the drivers of the local economy in Milltown, the long shadow of empty mills remains. Unemployment in June 2017 was 6.0%, which was lower than a year prior, but higher than the state’s rate of 4.3%. Poverty remains a challenge in Milltown, where 61.4% of the students are considered to be “economically disadvantaged,” as compared to the state average of 27.4%. Milltown had one of the lowest median incomes in the state in 2009 at $50,602, which dropped to $42,376 in 2014.

The Milltown Public Schools includes a high school, middle school, and three elementary schools. The complexities of the community exacerbated stressors within in the schools themselves, where frequent changes in leadership, (at both the central office and within individual schools), also contributed to the school district's low performance. The takeover of the Milltown schools occurred gradually, after state reviews and interventions. The first state-appointed superintendent of the district was appointed in March 2016 by the state department of education and assumed her duties in May 2016. She was placed on paid
administrative leave in May 2017 and officially resigned July 2017. An official from the department was appointed interim state-appointed superintendent in May 2017, and a search began for a full-time superintendent. The state appointed the second full-time superintendent in January 2018.

**Oakwood**

The farthest west of any of the controlled districts in this state, Oakwood is located on the banks of a major river and close to the third largest city. The river has been central to the city’s existence from the beginning of its founding by European settlers in the 1630s, as it provided opportunities for agriculture, transportation, shipping, and industry. Once home to many of the nation’s most important paper mills, Oakwood’s town leaders have aimed to attract new employers to the city from the tech industry and higher education, employers looking for a well-educated workforce.

With a population over 40,000, Oakwood is a mid-sized city with a larger urban center within reach, as well as college towns and agricultural communities in its environs. The city developed in relation to the mills: when the canals were built to bring river water to the mills, the workers arrived to run them, coming from Ireland and Quebec. Later waves of immigration brought Puerto Ricans and other Latino communities. The enrolled student body at the time of interviews was 79.3% Hispanic, higher than the state average of 18.6%. The percentages of students whose first language was not English (46.3) and English Language Learners (24.6) was also higher than the state average. Data on the town population are not available, as the latest Census data have not been released, but 48.4% of the residents identified as Hispanic in 2010, with 34% identifying as non-White.
Paper manufacturing remains a significant industry in Oakwood, though not at the rate it once was in the 1800s. Unemployment in June 2017 was 6.9%, which was higher than the year prior and higher than the state’s rate of 4.3%. Thus, poverty continues to challenge Oakwood, where 67.6% of the students are considered to be “economically disadvantaged,” as compared to the state average of 27.4%. Just as in Milltown, incomes have not risen in recent decades, and Oakwood has one of the lowest median incomes in the state at $43,578, a 12.6% decrease over the course of thirty years.

Oakwood has tried to adjust for this income and opportunity gap by providing many schooling options for its 5,366 students. Students have a variety of schools to choose from, varying from traditional schools to community schools to vocational-technical high schools. The current state-appointed superintendent of the district was announced in June 2015 by the state board of education and began in 2016, where he continues to serve as superintendent.

**Organization of the study**

The structure of the study is designed to provide a foundation for future research on women teachers’ experiences of leadership in turnaround districts. After presenting literature that informs the research and explains key concepts of women teacher’s leadership, the methodology for analyzing the three sources of data (state-generated documents, TELL survey, and teacher interviews) is described. The findings for the two districts are presented together, organized by the shared themes found across both districts. Finally, conclusions are drawn from across the cases, and implications for policy and practice are offered, along with recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies from many different research fields were included in this literature review to explore the sociological, educational, and governmental factors that influence the turnaround school leadership experience for women teachers. The literature came from educational leadership, women teachers in education, turnaround leadership, and teacher experiences of reform. There is a large field of research on leadership and women teachers in education. The current literature on women teachers and their experiences of leadership is limited and even more limited when one focuses on women teachers working in a school in turnaround. Riehl & Lee (1996), in their discussion of education research, contend that studies on ‘teachers’ often do not take gender into account because although “gender is ubiquitous, it is not always recognized as important” (p. 873). Riehl and Lee explain that researching gender in education can show differences in representation for those in leadership positions and provide new perspectives on the educator’s experience. This research highlights unexamined aspects of teaching or leadership: the experience of women teachers in turnaround schools. Including gender as an analytical lens can bring to the surface otherwise hidden disparities. This review will not discuss women leaders in general. For this study, the review focuses on literature that relates to women teachers’ experiences of turnaround reform.

The databases Google Scholar, Education Research Complete (ERC), and the Educational Resource Information Center database (ERIC) were used to gather studies. Keywords used to locate articles varied by strand, but included: ‘educational leadership,’ ‘women teacher leadership,’ ‘teacher leadership,’ ‘district takeover,’ ‘teacher networks,’ and ‘district reform.’ These peer-reviewed studies were from scholars in the US, and included books, chapters, studies and articles from the English-speaking diaspora of Australia,
Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand. Most studies were from 2002-2015, which coincided with the US federal law entitled *No Child Left Behind*; this era also overlapped with the takeover of the Oakwood and Milltown schools (see Appendices A & B).

**Theory of Unsuccessful Change**

The theoretical framework informing the literature review and study itself is focused on a recognition that educational policies to improve schools are often based on aspirational and idealistic models. These ‘best practices’ are supported by measurable outcomes that are presumably replicable and adaptable to many schools. However, when a state takes over a school or whole district, the problems facing the leaders and teachers therein are complex and require solutions customized to their needs and community. Fullan (2006) connected the societal and educational conditions through his reflection that “sick educational systems mirror sick societies” and that turnaround and reform efforts are truly designed to address improving societies (p.1). As Duke (2015) noted, it is difficult to gain access during such a transition, and thus the ‘pathology’ of failure in schools or districts is lacking in the literature. Schools taken over by state authorities are often turbulent environments that suffer the effects of frequent turnover, not “optimal environments” (Harris & Muijs, 2005, p. 56). Therefore, this study lays the foundation for a theory of unsuccessful change, to recognize the complexity of school failure.

**Literature Review Organization**

The literature review considers the experience of turnaround reform from the macro-level of state authorities, from the meso-level of school and district leaders enacting reforms, and from the micro-level of teachers who apply reforms. The review was organized around these three levels, as shown in Table 2. This review of the literature provides needed insights
from research, as studies which consider women teachers’ experiences in a state takeover of a school are absent from the literature.

The first context is the macro-level, which considers studies conducted at the state and district levels. These studies consider the rationale of the state, how achievement is measured, and how policies develop in the context of turnaround leadership. Next, studies were considered that examined the experience of school-level turnaround reform, as building-level leaders interpret and carry out reforms while managing schools. Studies of teachers and their classrooms are the last domain and the one which is central to this study because teachers’ interpretation, application, and reaction to turnaround reforms inform the research question.

Table 2

*Literature Review Organization*

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<th>Context of Turnaround Leadership</th>
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**Context of Turnaround Leadership**

**Defining Failure and Leadership in Turnaround Districts and Schools**

A legally significant and socially critical aspect of state intervention is the designation of school ‘failure’ in that particular jurisdiction. Mintrop (2004), Fullan (2006), Childs (2017), and others describe the wide variation in the terms used in educational circles and state legislation. The state department of education uses descriptors such as ‘failing,’
‘struggling,’ or ‘showing poor performance’ when a school or district does not meet certain benchmarks. Turning the school around implies that before state intervention, the district was backward or out of step with the norm. In his report on educational leadership, Elmore (2000) called for more streamlined, ‘deromanticized’ and purposeful language. Such a definition aligns with this state’s department of education’s philosophy. During the process of intervening and turning a district around, the state defines leadership as a skill to be developed, shared, and enabled across the organization, “creating a common culture, or set of values, symbols, and rituals” (Elmore, 2000, p. 15).

**Rationale of State Intervention**

This common culture, put in place by the state-appointed leaders, is intended to change the daily instructional practices which have been deemed ineffective. The mission of state authorities when taking over a school or district is to transform the practices of teachers and leaders to achieve better academic results. As Duke (2016) describes in his book on the subject of state takeovers of schools, state intervention is a legal ‘process,’ not an event and many actions are taken once state intervention begins. The state defines what academic improvement means and what measures indicate that the school has ‘turned around’ and ‘reformed.’ Scott, Dunn, and McCauley (2017) explained how the idea of ‘turnaround’ came into everyday use in 2011. Hayes, Fulcher, Hogg, Ramsey, & Proscia (2017) argued that the concept of turnaround has been adopted from the corporate sector of the 1980s, part of an evolving idea in education policy to achieve systemic transformation regardless of the context, for so doing rebuilds the capacity of the system. State departments of education that intervene are defining educational success by the presence of particular metrics of achievement, such as test scores and graduation rates. The rationale of this state is that
turning a school or district around can be accomplished by replacing the district leadership with individuals the state authorities trust and can direct. Scott et al. (2017) question the capacity of states to successfully implement the principles of school turnaround while other studies indicate that state intervention does lead to improvement (Schueler, 2016; Schueler et al., 2017).

**Measures of Student Achievement**

In the states that do have the legal authority to intervene with schools or districts deemed failing or struggling, state legislators set the measures of academic progress (Duke, 2016; Mintrop, 2004). Duke (2008) has argued that there are eleven early indicators of school decline that should be considered when it is decided whether to intervene or what the best course of action should be for struggling schools. From ineffective staff development to an overreliance on untrained helpers, Duke found these eleven indicators are symptoms of more substantial management and instructional problems that result in poor student achievement, and ultimately school failure. The nature of the particular social structures that characterize school turnaround and reform efforts are part of the problem, and also a potential solution (Blackmore, 1996, 2000; Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015).

In this state, intervention remains a relatively new approach to transforming low-performing schools. None of the three districts in state control have been deemed successful enough to operate independently again as of February 2018. This determination is due in part to the use of state tests to measure progress and improvement. Fullan (2006) found test scores to be problematic, “another sign that [teachers] are watched too closely, not trusted, and about to be punished” (p. 63). Hewitt and Reitzug (2017) noted how many states use similar measures to determine academic achievement by students in their states but they call this
approach a Faustian bargain: “The metric used to determine turnaround success holds great power in determining which—and how many—turnaround schools achieve the rarified air of being labeled successful” (p. 285). Berliner and Biddle (1995) warned against ascribing too much meaning to shifts in test scores and overall academic achievement. Duke, Tucker, and Salmonowicz (2014) offer additional measures of progress, growth, and sustainability in their school turnaround model, though test scores and graduation rates remain the main metrics of success.

**Measures of Policy**

The steps and actions for turning schools and districts around, to meet these measures of success, are offered by both research findings and government policies. Some studies argue school “failure” is an organizational issue, so organizational structures need to be put in place to address it (Blackmore, 1996; Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dworkin & Tobe, 2014; Finnigan, Daly, & Liou, 2016; Fullan, 2006; Kraft et al., 2015). Cucchiara et al. (2015) found that the “quality of working conditions has implications for the task of turning around low-performing schools. Indeed, the extent to which teachers believe turnaround schools provide supportive and positive working environments may be crucial to the success of this reform strategy” (p. 261). This line of research takes a more comprehensive view of the school or district, taking into consideration sociological factors such as student poverty (Fullan, 2006; Kraft et al., 2015) or staff turnover (Dworkin & Tobe, 2014; Finnigan et al., 2016). In their investigation of organizational response to poverty and uncertainty, Kraft et al. (2015) interviewed 95 teachers across six schools from one district. They concluded that “as educators in high-poverty, high-minority, urban schools, teachers often fail in their work unless their colleagues and administrators enact organizational approaches that support them
in managing the uncertainty introduced by their school’s environment, especially its students” (p. 779). Such research and advocacy call for broader policies to support long-term, sustainable change through things like tailored professional development for teachers and leaders.

While several studies have found that turnaround schools need to address their community context as well as academics, the current reform policies call for more short-term actions that result in quicker results (Mann, Herman, & Hansen, 2017). Federal legislation, such as the NCLB Act or the Race to the Top Initiative, equated failure to low academic achievement. The legislation and guidance from the federal department of education called for the removal of at least 50% of the teaching staff (Childs, 2017; Futernick, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Hayes et al., 2017; Mann, Herman, & Hansen, 2017). The policies and practices of state educational agencies, including (at times) this state, hold the teachers accountable for the history of low-performance and operate on the assumption that an “infusion of new talent” (Mann et al., 2017, p. 253) is more effective at achieving improvement.

In this particular state, the established powers for the appointed superintendent and operating procedures are enacted once the state has taken over the district (Schueler et al., 2017). The documentation, including board meeting minutes, listed for Oakwood and Milltown in Appendices C & D, provide a sense of the state’s oversight of the districts.

**Summary**

While the idea of state intervention and turnaround has grown more common, as over 30 states have adopted it as a way to improve public education, there is not a consensus on its effectiveness and appropriateness as a policy. The research on the roles of the state and district in the context of turnaround varies from a formula for success (Duke, 2008 & 2006;
Duke et al., 2014; Schueler et al., 2017) to serious concern about the long-term implications (Childs, 2017; Futernick, 2010; Hayes et al., 2017; Hewitt & Reitzug, 2017; Mann et al., 2017). The fact remains that turnaround reforms implemented by state authorities are a method in use by many states, both high-performing, like this state, and those with less successful track records (Mintrop, 2004). Some research found there may be better ways to achieve results that could be sustainable and long-lasting, such as providing more direct support to teachers (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dworkin & Tobe, 2014; Finnigan et al., 2016; Fullan, 2006; Kraft et al., 2015).

**School-Level Context of Turnaround Leadership**

**Interpretation of Reform**

In the US, many schools taken over by the state authorities are in urban areas, or in non-urban areas that have urban characteristics. Students in such environments face high poverty and instability in their homes and neighborhoods. The teachers are often dedicated to the students, but feel their complex needs (food insecurity, neighborhood violence, lack of tangible and intangible resources) require much time and effort.

Kraft et al. (2015) found principals have a significant role to play in mitigating these stressors by providing support and resources to teachers. However, in high-stakes schools where trust does not always develop between teachers and administrators, support is less frequent. This distrust leads to more burnout. In their ten year longitudinal study of thousands of Texas teachers, Dworkin & Tobe (2014) found “high-stakes accountability, in which job security is threatened, conjoined with changes in school safety, and budgetary pressures, not only exacerbate burnout, but they diminish the capacity of peers and supervisors to provide social support” (p. 121). Despite their dedication to the students, many teachers consider
leaving such schools for they are unable to meet students’ needs and lack necessary collegial support. It is important to consider this finding in conjunction with studies that found mass firings of teachers cause more harm than good for those teachers and students who remain (Childs, 2017; Futernick, 2010; Hayes et al., 2017; Mann et al., 2017). Dworkin & Tobe (2014) found of those who were not fired, the remaining 50% felt unable to meet their students’ needs and considered leaving. In practical terms, this resulted in a large exodus of teachers by force and by choice.

Additionally, Hayes and colleagues (2017) noted that the “disruptive tension” caused by mass firings and teacher turnover can disrupt schools and districts organizationally. Indeed, Fullan (2006) discussed the emotional toll that working in turnaround schools takes on teachers. In such schools, teachers consider their options, for “it is depressing to work in a failing school that has little chance of becoming good” (Fullan, 2006, p. 52).

However, when teachers in turnaround schools can work together, they have a better chance of supporting each other in meeting the mandated goals. Fullan (2006) argued “all successful turnarounds develop collaboration where there was none before” because “all successful strategies are socially based” (p. 54). In their study of five schools undergoing district-wide reform, Daly, Moolenaar, Bolivar, & Burke (2010) found collaboration, networking, and professional development are essential for reform to have a positive impact. Daly et al. found that participants in strongly connected teacher groups focused on teaching and learning as they aimed to meet academic goals and implement reforms.

While teacher collaboration has been found to improve student achievement, other research cautions against imposing such professional learning on teachers. In their 2014 study of 1,300 stakeholders and 1,600 teacher leaders for the Gates Foundation, the Boston
Consulting Group found that few teachers felt professional development improved their instructional practices. Rather, the study participants wanted relevant, interactive, and sustained professional development offered by trainers who understood their experience as classroom teachers (Gates, 2014, p. 4). When discussing collaborative learning, the study participants explained that such professional development sessions felt like compliance activities (pp. 10-11) which were neither engaging nor efficient (p. 7). These participants reflected what Hargreaves (1991, p. 48) called “contrived collegiality”: professional learning groups assembled and controlled by administrators that do not address the school’s needs and often do not meet the goals for which they were created.

Datnow (2011) revisited contrived collegiality in her study of fifty educators who worked in two US school districts, part of a larger qualitative study of urban districts. Both districts provided their teachers with set collaborative time to review data and discuss instructional techniques. Datnow and her colleagues found that while the collaborative meetings were “administratively regulated” and “scaffolded” with questions and discussion topics set by building leaders, these collaborations were not contrived (p. 156). Instead, the strong and stable leadership in both districts had established school cultures to allow data-informed improvements to be developed by the teachers and implemented at their pace. The collegiality that formed between the teachers was authentic and unforced. The principals did admit there were pockets of resistance among some teachers, but not enough to derail their efforts. Datnow notes that these two districts were chosen specifically because of their high-capacity and their success in using data collaboratively. Although they may be unique, these two districts are examples of how district leaders, building principals, and teachers can work together to implement lasting reforms. Similar research in Canada found that striking a
balance between teachers’ autonomy and principals’ initiatives can result in improved student academic outcomes (Campbell, Osmond-Johnson, Faubert, Zeichner, & Hobbs-Johnson, 2016).

When considering schools as organizations that interpret reforms — whether it be mass firings of teachers or the decision to promote collaboration — it is useful to recognize who constitutes these organizations to understand the impact of these reforms. Women in classrooms make up the majority of the teaching labor force in the US, while men still occupy most district leadership positions (NCES, 2017). There are more women achieving leadership as building principals, but these women cannot create or dictate policies, as those come from the district leaders and state. In this state, for several administrations, men have held the roles of governor, education commissioner, secretary of education, the state board of education chair, and other leadership roles. Men have held leadership positions on the school boards in both Oakwood and Milltown. Most superintendents of the past decade (with a brief exception) have been men in both towns (Appendices A & B). People in positions to make educational policies and procedures in these districts are men, as is the case in many parts of the US. In their analysis of the educational leadership research, Weiner and Burton (2017) argued that there is a myth within the field that anyone with the appropriate skills can become leaders, despite the occupation being heavily gendered in its history and its structure.

Management of Reform Policies

The reform policies developed at the state level are ushered into schools and districts by the state-appointed leaders. Mintrop (2004) found that changing curriculums, pushing for additional tutoring or academic support, or offering more supports to address truancy or classroom behaviors may show initial academic gains. Yet, Fullan (2006) argued that such
gains are “too little, too late, work on only a small part of the problem, and unwittingly establish conditions that actually guarantee unsustainability” (p. 20).

Sustainable changes to work cultures to build collaborative partnerships, such as those suggested by Mintrop (2004) and Fullan (2006), are broad in their reach and take time to be effective. Their recommendations contrast starkly with the typical state intervention timeline of two to three years. Instead, the culture of the school or district may change because of teachers are leaving the system, either by choice or decree (Futernick, 2010), resulting in a disrupted professional community (Johnson, 2012). Futernick (2010) pushed back against “draconian” measures of firing all teachers in his policy analysis by identifying three reasons why removing “bad teachers” does not solve the underlying problems in such schools. First, firing and rehiring teachers fails to recognize correctable problems, like teacher attrition. Second, it falsely assumes there is a ready supply of competent teachers to replace them. And third, it ignores the fact that struggling teachers often lack the support and resources they need to be successful.

Building upon Futernick’s (2010) three arguments against en masse firings of teachers are findings from studies that consider who these teachers are in the first place. Statistically, the teachers are women who lack the power and status to advocate for themselves besides reapplying for their classroom teaching positions. Those who are hired back and those who remain with state-controlled districts witness the complex reach of state government into local school systems. They have been part of reforms and turnaround measures designed to reverse years of academic struggle in a set period — usually three years. Therefore, the insights of these teachers, mostly women, are key to understanding turnaround leadership. As Hubbard & Datnow (2000) argue, women teachers have not been
“mere pawns” but instead they “are connected in important ways to the structure of the school itself” (pp. 116-117).

The structure of the schools in which reforms are to be implemented matters both to the idea of failing schools and to turnaround policies. The turnaround reforms introduced by the state authority are not necessarily designed to address inefficiencies in operational procedures or negative work cultures. These reforms focus on the metrics of academic improvement that can be measured and tracked. However, the ethos of schools and districts has an impact on school effectiveness in the physical and psychological experience of teachers. That which impedes teachers from succeeding is referred to as a barrier, or in Acker’s (1989) words, “structures of opportunity outside their control” (p. 9). In their book on teacher leadership and agency, Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann (2009) define barriers as “practical or ethical constraints that diminish the work of the school” (p. 17) and that “stand in the way of successful teacher[s]” (p. 103). They argued these barriers can be external to the teachers, such as through policies or procedures, or internal to the person in their feelings about their work. York-Barr & Duke (2004) contend that these barriers need to be broken down to facilitate a better working environment for teachers. Their analysis suggested teachers could confront “barriers in the school's culture and structure” to “nurture a culture of success” (p. 265).

A 2018 curated research report by The Center for Women and Business at Bentley University found many of the same barriers and biases as this study in its examination of women’s experiences in professions such as banking, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing (Foster, 2018). While it did not consider women’s experiences in education, similar findings indicate a pattern may be occurring for contemporary professional women. This review of
studies on women’s experiences in professional situations found such women face structural and operational obstacles that prevent their promotion and success. In this meta-analysis of studies on women professionals, Foster found women were negatively impacted by a number of barriers, including: workplace cultures that promoted an ‘old boys club’ atmosphere; difficulty forming relationships with influential colleagues who could help their careers; lack of transparency regarding pay and promotions; and project expectations that made work-home life balance difficult. The Center's report was conducted to address a ‘leaky pipeline’ of talented women managers and executives leaving business in the US. Well-trained teachers are walking away from education in a similar fashion, but research is needed to know both how many potential teachers are not completing their training, and how many leave because of their negative perceptions of their workplaces.

The barriers operate within the context of the school and are sometimes used by leaders to manage the daily operations. Traditionally, leaders have been men who, Acker (2012) argued, were trained to establish an organizational culture “of particular, often time and place specific, images, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and values” (p.216). What leaders may view as parameters, teachers may experience as barriers, for all men and women educators come to school as gendered human beings, socialized by their upbringing and society to approach their peers in certain ways (Hubbard & Datnow, 2000). Management in business and education has tended to ignore gender while also perpetuating a gendered hierarchy and organizational structure that promotes a masculinist approach to leadership (Collinson & Heard, 1996). Collinson & Hearn called the response to this gendered reality “a strange silence, which we believe reflects an embedded and taken-for-granted association, even conflation, of men with organizational power, authority and prestige” (p. 2).
The Relationship of Turnaround Reform Decisions to Teachers

The silence has continued, as have gendered institutional structures in turnaround schools. Women educators are personally molded by the societal and cultural forces that constrict their decisions and ability to influence policy, calling into question their standing as professionals. The concept of professionalization in teaching is defined by Talbert and McLaughlin (1994) as

specialized knowledge based on shared standards of practice, a strong service ethic, or commitment to meeting clients’ needs, strong personal identity with, and commitment to the occupation, and collegial versus bureaucratic control over entry, performance evaluations, and retention in the profession. (p. 126)

Although Talbert and McLaughlin put forth this definition, they also make the argument that the school contexts in which teachers work need to be considered as well, as there is great variation from location to location.

The tension between establishing common standards of professionalism while adjusting for the contextual variations continues, as the debate of professionalization of teachers has a long history. Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) make a case for the connection between the professionalization of teaching and the standardized curriculum movement by examining the values and politics of either side of the debate. Politics and values have driven the idea of professionalization in ways that have benefited some and penalized others. Popkewitz (1994) argued that the earliest efforts to professionalize the field resulted in occupational mobility for men and social regulation for women. As the movement to professionalize teaching has evolved and efforts have been made to regulate education, there is evidence that some policies have de-professionalized teaching. Keeping in mind the Talbert and McLaughlin (1994) definition — professionalization of teaching includes specialized knowledge and shared standards by those who promote the collegial practice, and
a commitment to the field — Milner (2013) found some policies de-professionalize teaching. In his analysis of policy reforms for the National Education Policy Center, Milner found three policies can move teaching towards professionalization, or can de-professionalize the field if applied in a top-down manner. He found policies that evaluate teachers based on students’ standardized test score gains, policies that fast-track teacher preparation and licensure, and policies that use a scripted, narrowed curriculum can support the professionalization of teaching, or undermine teachers’ judgement. Milner found them to be “far more de-professionalizing than professionalizing” (p. 19) and recommended teacher training programs be more aware of the potential problems these three policies can have on teaching.

Milner’s (2013) analysis described the impact on teaching in a general way, as he did not include the roles that race, age, gender, or class can have for teachers encountering these policies. While Popkewitz (1994) saw a clear connection between professionalization, school improvement, and an occupational hierarchy that benefited men, policy development does not often include gender as a consideration. Turnaround reforms can allow teachers to have more chances to shape policies and make recommendations. As teachers are removed, or elect to leave, opportunities become available for some teachers to participate in the turnaround efforts. However, some research has found that while new opportunities may become available through reforms, these positions still exist within the paradigm of male-dominance. In a 2007 study of school-based organizational reforms in Australia, Blackmore and Sachs found these opportunities were not the career-building chances available to men. They found school restructuring put women in “marginal, part-time, acting or lower level positions” to “tidy up” the reforms (p. 57). These positions undermined the training and
professionalization of teachers. Interviews with Australian women educators demonstrated that they understood this scheme quite well. The damage to morale among the teaching corps was significant. They could see the system was not being changed to support teachers and students, but rather to entrench the gendered power dynamics already in place.

The systems that reinforce gendered power dynamics are woven into the fabric of the workplace. In her article updating the literature on gender in the workplace since the original theorizing in the 1970s, Acker (2012) explained these structures can be hidden, implicit, or assumed as a result of gendered practices. She offers examples of workplaces in which the higher paid manager had historically been a man, while the lower paid support staff (such as a secretary) was a woman. The structure of that type of workplace — the job descriptions, performance evaluations, pay scales — were developed with the gendered dynamic of men in managerial roles and women in secretarial roles. The organizational logic that created this system has evolved, as have the workers, as more women are in positions of influence and decision-making. Acker argued:

The gendered substructure is created in the organizing processes in which inequalities are built into job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the workplace, and rules, both explicit and implicit, for behavior at work. (p. 215)

In all of these studies, the women participants felt inhibited and restricted by the professional and social structures holding them back as women from fully meeting the needs of students. The culture of schools taken over by state authorities may promote a silo-mentality among classroom instructors, as they must focus more on their students’ performance and growth on standardized tests (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Kronley & Ucelli-Kashyap, 2010).

Lee, Smith, & Cioci (1993) directly addressed gender differences between the faculty and administrators in their secondary analysis of two national data sets to examine teachers’
perceptions of gender and leadership. Among the findings was a statistically significant trend among men and women teachers’ perceptions of women principals. Men tended to find them less competent, and women found them to be average to above in their competence. “This is especially noteworthy considering that by and large, these male and female teachers are probably working for the same principals” (p. 162).

**Summary**

At the school-level, research on turnaround reforms finds that the policies dictated by the state have consequences. Even if the federal recommendation to remove at least 50% of the teaching staff upon the state taking over the district is followed, it will not necessarily improve academic outcomes, nor workplace morale. If anything, it may cause further disruptions to an already depressing and complex workplace (Fullan, 2006; Johnson, 2012; Kraft et al., 2015). Teachers in turnaround schools, and for this study, women teachers, have to find a way to balance complex stressors. As Kraft et al. (2015) explained, “the inevitable uncertainty of teaching is compounded by the economic and social realities of urban students’ lives as well as accountability policies that track and report their performance” (p. 755).

**Teachers and Classrooms in the Context of Turnaround Leadership**

Three themes emerge in studies at the classroom level of analysis, as teachers encounter reform policies. The first is concerned with teachers’ interpretation of turnaround leadership. The second is focused on the daily experience of teachers and their application of reforms to their instruction. And the third is the reaction to these reforms by teachers after they have interpreted and applied them to their teaching practices. For while authorities and educational leaders at the federal, state, and district levels develop policies designed to
address academic needs, these policies rely on the understanding, support, and use of them by teachers in their classrooms.

The complete turnaround and reform process hinges on teachers themselves. In his remarks to the American Educational Research Association, Linn (2003) explained that students and teachers could only successfully carry out reforms when given the tools to do so.

Students and teachers have a responsibility to put forth a reasonable level of effort, while administrators and policymakers have a responsibility to provide the means — both instructional resources and professional development — for teachers and students to meet the expectations of the accountability system. (p. 3)

It is unreasonable, Linn argued, for administrators to set such expectations for new reforms without understanding how the teachers can accomplish them. In their book on improving schools, Stoll and Fink (1996) argued that teachers need to be involved with school reforms if they are to succeed: “These [reform] attempts have failed in the past and will fail again in the future because teachers have not been involved in the changes and find little personal meaning in them” (p. 6). This last section of the literature review considers whether teachers have been given these opportunities.

**Interpretation of Leadership Decisions**

In the state where the study presented here occurs, the department of education or the appointed superintendent and the central office develop reform measures (Schueler, 2016; Schueler et al., 2017). These reforms, which are intended to improve academic outcomes, are then outlined by the building principals to the teachers. In faculty meetings and professional development in-service days, teachers learn about new instructional methods or required classroom practices. The teachers then have to interpret how to apply these reform measures.
to their classes. Sometimes they have room to adapt a technique or curriculum, while at other times they must follow the process to the letter.

This state’s approach may seem direct and clear. However, as Hoban (2002) argued in his study of educational reform, sustainable and meaningful change is “a non-linear process that occurs over a long period of time and so needs to be supported by a combination of personal, social, and contextual conditions for teacher learning that interrelate as a system” (p. 67). In his 2006 book on turnaround leadership, Fullan critiqued such state-mandated reforms “not to question intent, but to point out that the strategies are perversely flawed, in a way that can be specifically uncovered — silver bullets that wound” (p. 24). In a book written for leaders embarking on school turnaround, Duke (2015) noted how nineteen principals and 320 teachers enrolled in the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program viewed the conditions to be targeted for reform quite differently. When the principals and teachers took a survey of selected issues and problems; they expressed quite different opinions on what changes were needed. “The point is not that one group has a more accurate perception of what needs to be changed than another group,” Duke noted (p. 11). However, in most public school turnarounds, the opinions of teachers are not given the same weight as those of principals and central office leaders. Moreover, the research on teachers shows that they are working in gendered environments where their identities impact how they teach.

Several studies that have examined teachers’ interpretations of reform have found recognizing the identity of the teachers can be productive in improving academic outcomes. In her conceptual reflection on teacher preparation, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) saw a moral imperative in meeting the academic, emotional, and social needs of students by elevating a womanist perspective, particularly the teacher-mother role that African-American women
educators can embody in majority-minority classrooms. She argued that such pedagogy is more effective in educating students, especially those from impoverished neighborhoods. Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s conclusions follow the “endarkened feminist epistemology” (p. 662) of Dillard (2000), whose case study of three African-American women educators provided a space to explore the role gendered, racial, economic, and social identities of educators can have on how they educate. In his statistical analysis of teacher and student perceptions, Dee (2005) found although race, ethnicity, and gender impact both teachers and students, turnaround measures do not include them.

Few studies consider the gender of teachers, even while analyzing their professional experiences. In their study of school turnaround in an impoverished community, Baker & Foote (2006) identified a long trajectory of reforms and the impact they have on teachers’ professional practices, but they did not consider the gender of the teachers. They noted the roles that race and poverty had in the lives of students and neighborhoods but did not describe the race or gender of the teachers. Many studies take note of the strain that turnaround measures have on teachers, but do not consider gender as a factor of their analysis (Duke, 2016, 2015, 2008, 2006; Fullan, 2006; Kraft et al., 2015; Salmonowicz, 2009; Schueler, 2016; Schueler et al., 2017). However, teachers are impacted by their identities as much as their students are.

Women who work as teachers are on the receiving end of reforms while trying to balance their personal and professional lives within gender and power differentials. As Tamboukou (2000) argued in her study of women teachers, “The paradoxical status of women in education has not emerged in a void. It is poised on a critical dichotomy that has left women oscillating between two worlds: the private and the public” (p. 466). Tamboukou
argued that women teachers do not stop being who they are once they enter their classrooms (partners, mothers, aunts, friends, daughters, sisters), any more than their students have, yet women teachers have not been able to acknowledge their full selves in professional settings in ways that could have a significant impact on their students. The research of Grumet (1988), Apple (1994), Griffen (1997), Datnow (1998), and Hubbard & Datnow (2000) supports Tamboukou’s (2000) assertion.

**Application of Leadership Decisions**

All teachers receive turnaround reform policies and procedures in schools in state-control. While they may interpret them to a certain degree, providing teachers with the power to dictate pedagogy is a fleeting ideal in many of these studies (Harris, 2003; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). For most teachers in such schools, they are both held accountable for the low-academic performance and are responsible for applying the reforms to improve academic outcomes. Fullan (2006) argued “external accountability does not work unless it is accompanied by development of internal accountability” (p. 63). How teachers are motivated to change matters.

If teachers are held responsible for struggling schools and the implementation of turnaround reforms, then it is imperative to understand the social and political forces that prohibit teachers from meeting these expectations. In her study of educational change in a California high school, Datnow (1998) identified that the main problem plaguing the school was gender politics. Most of the teachers in Datnow’s research were women, and the school communities viewed reform efforts through a gendered lens. The state recognized the school’s inability to function effectively and California attributed its problems to instruction and pedagogy. In so doing, the state overlooked how “gender is one of the most powerful
social organizing features of the lives of teachers [and] plays a significant role in school change” (Datnow, 1998, pp. 130-131).

Datnow (1998) demonstrated how perspectives of gender influenced how these initiatives were perceived by three groups: the idea team, the middle team, and the good ol’ boys. These three factions of teachers emerged from Datnow’s data collection and represented three types of responses to the state-mandated reforms. The idea team was comprised of mostly women teachers who opposed the school’s structures and policies. The middle team was a group of women and men who disliked the political influences in school reform. And the good ol’ boys was a “faction of entrenched male teachers who defended the status quo in the school” and took a particularly gendered view of reforms (p. 6). Datnow also drew on comparison case studies of nearby middle schools to consider the role of gender in educational change. She found similar responses to reform initiatives among those participants. Men in these schools resisted reform measures designed to meet the social and emotional needs of students. They interpreted such nurturing beyond basic instruction as being “women’s work” and an extension of mothering (p. 131).

The field has continued to find that teachers are called on to carry out reform initiatives. In reality this means women are the reformers of schools, a conclusion Datnow (1998) came to in her Central High School study. There are numerically more women teachers, so more women than men are instituting turnaround reforms, and thus more women are “school reformers” (Datnow, 1998). Datnow also argued that reform research conducted in the isolation of classrooms, and not in the context of the whole school, is too narrow to depict a more complete understanding of the social structures women teachers experience in
schools. A broader scope of research would bring women teachers’ experiences to light and the impact of teacher and leader churn.

In addition to becoming the de facto reformers of struggling or turnaround schools, women teachers may become leaders by default. Schools slated for turnaround or state-control often lose their leaders through a revolving door, and teachers may find themselves in positions of influence due to forced retirements or restructuring. These teachers may lack the skill set to succeed due to inexperience (Donaldson et al., 2008). In their study of 20 teachers (in years 3-20 of teaching), Donaldson and colleagues found that teachers placed by administrators or state authorities in reform roles were relatively young and had insufficient experience working in classrooms. They encountered resistance from their colleagues when trying to carry out turnaround reforms. As newly minted teacher-leaders, they were viewed by their peers with suspicion, doubt, or resentment. Other teachers perceived them as overturning the values of autonomy, egalitarianism, and seniority that remain important to many classroom teachers. It may be an effective reform strategy in the short term for the state and administrators to promote young educators, but maintaining them in these positions in such schools proves difficult.

Organizational culture extends to how the teachers relate to each other as well. In their article on the impact of state policies on teacher induction, Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglman (2004) explained they inadvertently realized the mentoring and socialization policies utilized at the time had created two tracks of teachers that reinforced social inequities. They considered two districts, A and B, and the teachers who worked in each district. Achinstein and associates studied the ways the twenty participants taught, their beliefs about instruction, and how their interactions with students reflected their thoughts
about education. The two districts “differed in the amounts of physical, human, social, and cultural capital they possessed. District A had lesser amounts of all types of capital than did District B, impacting their hiring practices, workplaces, and responses to state policies” (p. 575). District B could afford to hire the best-trained, most experienced, highly-recommended teachers; with fewer resources, District A could only hire those with less training and less experience who would accept lower salaries. Thus, District B attracted the best teaching candidates, including those who had moved from schools in places like District A.

Achinstein and colleagues found teachers in both districts were inducted into the profession, but District A teachers socialized with teachers who also had poor preparation, while District B teachers (who were already well-trained) were brought into the profession by better paid, more well-resourced teachers. These dual teacher tracks create a “Matthew effect” of teaching: the poor get poorer, while the rich get richer (Stanovich, 1986).

Sanchez & Thornton (2010) found similar trends in their literature review of gender and educational leadership, noting that stereotypes, limited professional networks, and social barriers (family obligations falling to mothers, low salaries for highly demanding jobs, and role conflicts for those moving from classrooms to leadership positions) inhibit women educators from assuming leadership roles. Sanchez & Thornton contend that these barriers influence how teachers perceive leadership and call for a “reconceptualization of effective leadership” (p. 10) to encourage more women to participate.

Even new programs, developed to encourage women teachers to participate in decision-making more thoroughly, do not provide enough support for the women to be successful. In her 2005 study, Sherman examined the experiences of 15 women teachers transitioning into leadership roles through one district-based program. She discussed how
masculinist systems in educational settings protect the status quo while claiming to want to become more diverse. Sherman noted that educational leadership has “traditionally been informed by androcentric perspectives” (p. 707). Sherman questioned the effectiveness of these district-based leadership development programs for women, because they prevented women participants from informing or shaping policy. The women interviewed consistently shared that they thought the networking opportunity of the program was a key benefit of participating.

However, Sherman (2005) argued that few of the women recognized the significant impact a professional network could provide them as leaders and administrators. She concluded they did not understand networking in the traditional sense, nor its professional value as they became leaders because they were not provided with instruction demonstrating the social and political capital provided by such networks. Women educators are no less interested than men in leadership roles or more responsibility. However, they were held back from progressing or from considering leadership because of the traditional gatekeepers within districts and the masculine power structures that can accompany professional development in education. Sherman explained that the networks, collaborations, and support systems within the district were designed around the men who served as leaders, and not adapted for the women who were joining their ranks. While these women had been given the training and paths for assuming leadership roles, they had not been offered ongoing support and advice once they were in their new positions.

By empowering teachers to lead by providing more pathways to leadership or removing structures that inhibit them from participating, reform efforts are more likely to take hold (Lambert, 2003; Little, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teachers would then have
time and space to integrate necessary changes, so students would be more likely to succeed. In communities like Oakwood and Milltown, the challenge is not merely to provide teachers with more training but to provide enough time to practice using that training within the social context of their towns.

Related to the need for pathways and guidance for women teachers is the recognition of the social structure of the school during reforms. Social power and social position of educators within schools were factors in students’ academic outcomes in several of the studies included in this strand of the literature. As the work of Johnson (2012), Futernick (2010), and Donaldson et al. (2008) has shown, reform strategies may increase the power differential between genders, putting women teachers in a weaker position socially. At the same time, as Datnow (1998) contended, women teachers are both held responsible for school failures while also expected to implement solutions to fix schools. Research studies and policy analysis of school turnaround have not included the gender dynamics Datnow identified and that Lee et al. (1993) and Wahlstrom & Louis (2008) also found.

**Reaction to Turnaround Reform**

Women teachers are negatively impacted by the social, political, and educational pressures put on them. In their study of US teachers, Kraft and colleagues (2015) found that these teachers were feeling the emotional strains of teaching: “It became clear in our study that individual teachers could not singlehandedly manage the day-to-day challenges they faced in working with their students who lived in high-poverty communities” (p. 765). The organizational problems of many US schools with high-poverty, high-needs student populations require organizational solutions from leadership to avoid burning out teachers who may leave to teach elsewhere.
Teaching is recognized as a stressful occupation (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; McCarthy et al., 2009; Moore Johnson et al., 2008; Sims, 2009; Wahlstrom, & Louis, 2008), but the particular stressors of teaching in a state-controlled school need empirical consideration. Fullan (2006) speculated on the harmful effect teaching in turnaround schools may have on teachers’ mental health and integrity. By contrast, in their 2010 study, Daly et al. found that the stressful experience of school reform brought teachers together. They developed sincere trust in each other, allowing themselves to be open about their frustrations, and insecurities.

Some teachers were motivated by their stress to resolve to stay through the reforms. Mintrop (2004) found that some of the African-American teachers in the Maryland cohort of his study felt a commitment to their African-American students, and so stayed through the stressful reform implementation period for them. Teachers Mintrop interviewed in Kentucky described feeling a calling to serve their communities which enabled them to withstand the stressful aspects of their challenging work. However, the Kentucky teachers felt few “parents, the wider public, and the distant state authorities appreciated their toil” or understood the limited “external rewards” of teaching in state-controlled schools (p. 45).

Teaching is often difficult work but arguably even more so when students’ needs are great. In her reflection on motherhood and education in Bitter Milk, Madeleine Grumet (1988) remarked on the work of teaching that falls outside the prescribed schedule or job description: “The incredibly time-consuming work of consulting with students and of responding sensitively and helpfully to their work is too often ignored” in the teaching schedule, class assignments, or salary negotiations (p. 86). In their research on English teachers working with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Day and Honig (2016) describe the stress of the work, “teaching in circumstances that required the effective
management of constant emotional, intellectual, personal and professional challenges in order to succeed in engaging students in learning and achievement” (p. 116). Like their counterparts in Mintrop’s (2004) study from Maryland and Kentucky, these teachers dealt with this emotional labor because of their internal motivation to help the students.

Teachers in studies by Mintrop (2004) and Day and Honig (2016) chose to stay in their classrooms and schools despite the stress and frustration due to what they believed to be a moral imperative to provide stability for their students. They were managing their feelings in order to do their jobs to the best of their abilities, enacting ‘emotional labor.’ First described by Arlie Russell Hochschild in her 1983 book, The Managed Heart, emotional labor is defined as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (p.7). In the emotional labor of flight attendants and caring professions, who deal with the public’s needs, emotional labor is “sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” (p. 7). Hochschild reiterated this definition in a 2018 Atlantic Magazine interview, in which she explained:

Emotional labor, as I introduced the term in The Managed Heart, is the work, for which you’re paid, which centrally involves trying to feel the right feeling for the job. This involves evoking and suppressing feelings. Some jobs require a lot of it, some a little of it … Teachers, nursing-home attendants, and child-care workers are examples. The point is that while you may also be doing physical labor and mental labor, you are crucially being hired and monitored for your capacity to manage and produce a feeling. (Julie Beck, 2018)

In her innovative work, Hochschild (1983) argued the more effective a woman is at playing a woman (being friendly, deferential, supportive), the more praised she will be. Women must innately understand the role emotional displays can have on how they are treated at work and in public, for women risk being regarded as irrational or not taken seriously. Thus, women must balance being seen as the “protomother” (p. 176), while also
not showing too much anger or sadness about their own experiences. Although she considered the training and professional schools that produced such emotional laborers, Hochschild did not consider teachers explicitly, nor in the 2012 revised edition, but did mention them briefly in the 2018 Atlantic interview as an example of an occupation that may include emotional labor (Beck, 2018).

Women who lack power and agency feel they must defer emotionally to others in the workplace, in social situations, or the home (as Hochschild describes), but not all women experience emotional labor in the same ways. Blackmore and Sachs (2012) found well-connected women from the more socially acceptable paths had more access, while others without social connections were less able to navigate the complex institutional structures. As a result, there was a dearth of women in management positions generally because of “the limited opportunities created by the systemically gendered cultural, social, and structural arrangements that inform women educators' choices and possibilities relative to their male colleagues” (pp. 12-13).

Jill Blackmore (1996) expanded the concept of emotional labor to include women educational leaders. She used emotional labor to explain how women educators worked in these gendered environments. Participants in her study described the pressure they felt from government agencies and market forces to be seen as “performing” (p. 343). They felt unable to freely share their concerns or doubts with their colleagues because they would be breaking from their role of effective, efficient workers. The women educators in Blackmore’s study of emotional labor felt compelled to show deference, support, and uniformity with those in positions of influence, mostly men.
Adding to the emotional labor of teachers in state-controlled turnaround schools is the
aforementioned high-frequency of colleagues leaving the district or profession. Teachers in
state-controlled districts are at high-risk of becoming part of a teacher churn. They may feel
unprepared, unsupported, or unable to bear the pressure of the high-stakes, high-threat
environment and may choose to leave (Fullan, 2006; Kraft et al., 2015; Mintrop, 2004;
Salmonowicz, 2009). These educators take with them “knowledge, social support, and
organizational memory” (Finnigan et al., 2016, p.184) which could otherwise have been
leveraged to shore up the school.

Some research has found that leaving the school could be better for one’s mental
wellbeing. McLean and Connor (2015) studied the emotional health of twenty-seven third
grade teachers and the correlation between those teachers’ rate of depression and their
classroom learning environments. They found that teachers who stay in stressful schools may
suffer from depression, which can impact their students’ academic performance. As Day and
Honig (2016) noted, little research has been conducted to examine the many factors that
contribute to teachers’ experiences and their emotional well-being in stressful, high-need
communities. There are no known studies of women teachers’ emotions in state-controlled
schools and few that consider teachers’ experiences in the earliest stages of school
turnaround. A study by Cucchiara and associates (2015) interviewed 86 teachers (their
gender not identified) in thirteen schools chosen for turnaround measures due to low
academic performance. They found the teachers were viewed as objects, rather than agents,
in the process of school turnaround in the schools. They also found the working conditions
(long hours, the requirement to raise test scores, and implementing new programs) impacted
the capacity of the reforms to succeed and that these problematic conditions took an emotional toll on teachers.

These stressful environments in turnaround schools are not new, nor are they limited to turnaround environments. Harris and Muijs (2005) recognized the impact of these stressors and advocated for more investment in teachers. Their research found that professional development and opportunities for teacher leadership are essential to the improvement and stability of effective schools. By involving more teachers in the decisions of instruction and school management, Harris and Muijs argued, both students and schools would improve. They called for more opportunities for teacher leadership development, given the research evidence showing that teachers can positively impact student achievement. Not all teachers work in ideal schools, and some are in dysfunctional circumstances. Some teachers may be inhibited from collaborating to improve their practices by the barriers of time, competing tasks, and physical geography. In the environments of turnaround schools, teachers have few trustworthy colleagues to lean on and must do more on their own to solve problems.

While the Kentucky teachers in Mintrop’s 2004 study perceived that those outside their schools did not understand their struggles, a study by Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) indicates they were also developing perceptions of their school leaders. This national study was designed to understand better what factors shape teachers’ perceptions of leadership decisions and classroom instruction. Wahlstrom and Louis considered four individual variables (gender, race, years teaching, and type of school) to see what impact those had on teacher perceptions. Statistically significant differences in teachers’ perceptions of leadership and instruction were in part explained by gender. They found a teacher’s gender and the gender of the principal influenced how much trust the teacher felt in relation to that principal.
While Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) did not directly measure social standing and influence, they acknowledged that the responses to the survey instrument questions reflected the power that certain genders and positions have over others when decision-making is not shared or diffused in a school: “What these results also suggest is that when the power differential between principals and teachers is lessened, instruction is positively affected” (p. 483). Improved instruction can start to take place by removing differentials and turning the focus away from individual characteristics of the principal and teachers.

**Summary**

The studies included in this section of the review demonstrate the significant influence teachers can have on the turnaround process. The highest ranking public educators and officials mandate that struggling schools must improve academic outcomes, but that can only be achieved with teacher participation. The interpretation, application, and response of teachers to these reforms matters a great deal, for they can make the turnaround successful. However, many of these studies show teachers do not feel like equal partners in this process. They do not have the time, space, or trust to adapt these reforms for their classes. Reviewed in connection with studies on the state and district positions, the studies in this third section of the review, which focus on teachers, show how tumultuous and complicated the turnaround process can be within classrooms. The studies demonstrated how many schools had negative workplace morale where teachers encountered gendered decisions of leaders and were unable to strike a balance between their identity as women and the expected identity of dutiful instructors.
Literature Review Summary and Implications

The experience of women teachers working in schools taken over by the state authorities due to poor academic performance has not been a single line of research. Instead, school turnaround, teacher experience, leadership development, academic improvement, and other related topics were included. However, as this collection of studies has shown, the experience of women teachers and their particular impact on education needs more examination.

Gender is a defining characteristic for teachers. Disregarding it imperils a profession which employs far more women than men. There is a long history of keeping women from succeeding by obstructing them through institutional practices (Datnow, 1998; Futernick, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Lee et al., 1993). The hegemony of traditional schooling procedures has become so embedded in the US mindset it is almost rebellious to argue that the majority of school employees should have more of a say in their profession. The audacity of questioning the status quo is resented, even as these same disenfranchised teachers take the blame when achievement targets are not reached (Datnow, 1998; Donaldson et al., 2008; Futernick, 2010; Linn, 2003).

Women teachers need to be included more often when examining school leadership and reform (Blackmore, 2000; Cucchiara et al., 2015; Datnow, 1998; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hubbard & Datnow, 2000). As the literature has shown, the experiences of women teachers have been overlooked and ignored within research and policy (Blackmore, 1996, 2000; Lee et al., 1993; Walhstrom & Louis, 2008; Wang, 2004;). There is a lack of empirical research on teaching and gender despite the demographic disparities within the profession (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2014). The research included in this review
indicates that there is a potential for improved efficiency and innovation if more women are placed in positions of influence (Kramer et al., 2007; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The literature review has shown that the role women teachers can and do play in turnaround efforts is not well understood or studied. How do women teachers in state-controlled districts perceive leadership? How are women teachers understanding, utilizing, and implementing turnaround reforms? How do women teachers respond when the issues holding the school back may be structural and organizational, and not just academic or pedagogical? This study is intended to address these gaps in the literature, to contribute to the knowledge about women teachers in the context of school turnaround and reform. The following research question guided the study:

How do women teachers in state-controlled districts experience leadership during a school turnaround?

This study drew on data collected and used by state authorities to legally take over the district. The study also provides new data in the form of teachers’ voices and opinions regarding turnaround leadership through interviews.

**Research Design**

This study fills three empirical gaps in educational research: by accessing a district during a takeover; by researching women teachers as a group in general; and by considering teachers in state-controlled turnaround districts. This study triangulates topics not often considered together: districts in takeover; women teachers; and teachers’ perspectives. Metrics such as graduation rates or test scores are often analyzed to determine the health of a school. Teachers’ voices on reform should be included to contextualize those numbers. Likewise, the state documents that determine policy should be scrutinized empirically for state authorities decide how to proceed based on these reports.
First, while there are studies on districts as they are failing or beginning their takeover by the state (Schueler, 2016; Schueler et al., 2017; Tek, 2014), few consider the teachers themselves (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Studies abound on turning districts around (e.g., Fullan, 2005 or Marsh et al., 2013), but few focus on the process of a district takeover or the people involved, particularly women teachers.

Second, women continue to be under-represented in the literature on leadership or decision-making in academic settings (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lagemann, 2002). Studies of teachers have come to represent both genders, though there are indications the professional experience differs depending on gender, race, age, or other characteristics (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). There are also virtually no studies on the experience of women teachers in state-controlled districts, a culmination of both these gaps. Although women teachers are arguably held most accountable for the students’ academic achievement and the future of the district on the whole (Linn, 2003), the research literature has not often included their experiences, challenges, and struggles. The focus of research has been on the characteristics of the students, the metrics used for gauging success or failure, or the outcomes of reform efforts (Mintrop, 2004).

This study was designed to contribute to filling these inter-related gaps by bringing together the state-generated data with the voices of the teachers themselves. It builds upon aspects of previous literature and research to create a portrait of what is happening in Oakwood and Milltown during state takeover. The study is the beginning step towards a better understanding of women teachers, high-stakes turnaround efforts, state-control of schools, and perceptions of leadership.
Data Sources

There are three sources of data for this study to address the research question: participant interviews, state department of education documents, and state teacher survey results.

Interview Data

The interviews took place with 12 teachers, all women, from the two district sites: Milltown and Oakwood. The decision to limit the participant sample to 12 interviews builds upon the findings of Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006). Their analysis of qualitative research determined that studies relying on interview data can reach saturation with as few as 12 interviews. The National Center for Research Methods in the United Kingdom came to similar conclusions about sample sizes in its discussion of qualitative research methodology (Baker & Edwards, 2012). The NCRM found 12 interviews can be sufficient for purposes of saturation, depending on the study. Moreover, since the two samples of Oakwood and Milltown teachers’ experiences are not being contrasted to draw comparisons in academic or personnel outcomes, the interview data can be viewed as one group. As such, “[i]f the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogeneous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient, as it was in our study” (Guest et al., 2006, p. 76).

The teachers were recruited directly, with support from the superintendents and the building principals. Gift card incentives were offered through a random draw and information about this was included in the participant consent forms before interviews began. Interviews took place in the spring and summer of 2017 after recruitment and advertising the study in the spring of 2017.
Additionally, all but three of the interviewees were employed as elementary and middle school teachers; the remaining three were teachers in local secondary schools. This was for three reasons. First, as the districts strive to meet academic and administrative achievement goals, elementary and middle schools can be sources of significant progress. Students at such schools are especially well-suited for additional assistance, resources, and innovative methods, since there is still time to reach them before they consider dropping out or not returning to formal education. Thus, women teachers in these schools are in the best positions for impacting their campuses and districts. Second, although both districts are following state standards, there is more opportunity for variation between the districts in older grades, therefore making it more challenging to consider shared themes in the data analysis. While variation exists at the elementary and middle school levels as well, the procedures, curriculum, and pedagogies are more likely to be similar.

Third, I am drawing on my own strengths as an educator, as my own professional teaching experience has largely been in elementary schools, making me more familiar with the experiences of these teachers. As Grossman et al. (2001) noted, “researchers often implicitly treat professional community as generic, but teacher community differs — just as teaching does — by grade level, subject matter, and student population. A model of community developed for one population of teachers may not work for others” (p. 29). The specific expectations, pedagogies, materials, and challenges are relatable for me, as I taught most recently in an elementary school that had three principals in three years and faced significant financial obstacles. The elementary community happens to be my own, and provided the largest group of interested teachers for this research, as only a small number of secondary teachers agreed to participate.
State Department of Education Reports

The state reports are publicly available documents generated by the state department of education on each of the districts as they moved closer to state takeover. These documents are listed by district in Appendices C and D. As dictated by the laws of this state, the department of education generated reports which were presented to the state board of education and the commissioner of education regularly. These included site visit reports, historical reports, and accountability plans for each district. The minutes of the state board of education meetings discussing these reports and their subsequent decisions are also included in this study. Occasionally, officials from Oakwood and Milltown would make presentations to the board and these minutes were also included as state reports.

The Accelerated Improvement Plans (AIPs) and District Turnaround Plans (DTPs) are the plans of action for state-appointed district leadership that provide the immediate and near-future steps to turn the district around academically and administratively. The state authorities and leadership select legal and educational actions after reviewing inspection reports, third-party evaluations, and educational metrics (e.g., graduation rates, test scores, student demographics). District stakeholders and the general public (from local media to parent groups), use these AIPs and DTPs to understand the district’s decisions, such as those related to curriculum and staffing. Altogether, the 53 state generated documents included in this study drew from the earliest documentation made publicly available on each district up to the spring and summer of 2017.

This study is one of the few to examine state reports on districts alongside state-commissioned survey research on teachers’ perceptions of their working environment, while
also including interview data from teachers themselves. Johnson et al. (2012) advocated for the use of state documents in educational research:

Future work would particularly benefit from additional measures of the social conditions of work … We need to combine such sources with closer analyses of school-level practices — including observations and interviews — in order to examine why some working conditions are especially important, how they interact day to day, and what can be done to ensure that all schools serving low-income, high-minority students become places where teachers do their best work. (pp. 34-35)

**State-Commissioned Teacher Climate Survey Results**

The state department of education commissioned teacher workplace climate surveys which were administered in 2012 and 2014. The survey results are organized by campus, as well as by district and state as a whole. The results of these surveys were made publicly available when the participation percentage thresholds were met, though the entirety of the surveys (question items, responses) had to be requested directly from the survey administrator. The surveys were mentioned a few times in the state reports but were not significantly included in the turnaround plans for Milltown or Oakwood. There have been high rates of teacher turnover in each district, meaning that different cohorts of Milltown and Oakwood teachers participated in the surveys in 2012 and 2014. The teachers employed by the districts in 2017 were different once more from those other two cohorts. The churn of teachers in these districts means that different groups of teachers are represented in the 2012 survey, the 2014 survey, and those participating in this study. However, the consistency of responses on the 2012 and 2014 surveys, despite coming from different groups of teachers, meant that the issues were significant. Therefore, the issues raised in the survey responses were included in the interview questions because they were concerns about the schools across groups of teachers.
Value of Specific Qualitative Methodology

Teachers’ voices were heard throughout the data: through interviews, survey responses, and, to a lesser degree, state-generated reports. Since the research questions focused on the experiences of women teachers, it was imperative their voices be heard as often as possible (Ben-Peretz, 1996). The case study methodology selected for this research provided the opportunity to analyze these voices empirically. The exploratory comparative case study provided the structure by considering the two districts as two parts of the same case, and the foundation for future research in this field (Streb, 2010). The exploratory case study of these women examined if they were able to find agency, “to cope” (Yin, 2015, p. 3).

Thus, an exploratory comparative case study design (Yin, 1994) was employed for the study, similar to that used by Coburn and Russell (2008) and Zhong (2009). This study is exploratory in that no definitive conclusions are to be drawn, nor are theories to be fully established. Exploratory studies investigate:

distinct phenomena characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research … exploring a relatively new field … in which the research questions have either not been clearly identified and formulated or the data required for a hypothetical formulation have not yet been obtained. (Streb, 2010, p. 373)

In other words, this study traveled into uncharted territory, much like an explorer might (Yin, 1993), and thus the conclusions and comparisons drawn through the study are but the first blazes on the trail that others may follow in new ways with new tools.

Study Setting

The districts participating in this research serve communities that are former industrial bases for the region and country. Today, those sources of previous economic growth are either diminished or out of business, although new business sectors and employers are emerging in their place. The Oakwood and Milltown public school districts
both experienced long periods of decline before being taken over by the state commissioner of education (Appendices A & B). While the question of how long a district should struggle is valid and applicable, the data analysis did not include the question. Instead, the study focused on the current paradigm of state control and oversight and the experience of women teachers in such districts.

The findings emerged from the contexts of these communities. The academic, systematic, and societal obstacles facing both Oakwood and Milltown did not occur suddenly but had been building for years (Appendices A & B). Several of the study participants built their careers in and around these districts. They were aware of the official and local descriptions of the decline.

The Oakwood Public Schools entered their second year of receivership in 2016-2017, and the superintendent had been in that position for just under a year when interviews began. The district has eight community schools, most of which educate pre-school through eighth-grade students. The district also has two high schools: one traditional secondary school and one technical school. In accordance with a request by the superintendent, interviews took place at the campuses he deemed most willing to participate (personal communication, June 2016), though he encouraged all campuses to do so (personal communication, September 2016). Participants came from one community school, which serves pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students, and from the traditional secondary school.

The Milltown Public Schools started their first full year of receivership in the 2016-2017 academic year. The district has two schools that teach students in grades one through five, and one that teaches preschool through grade two; the district also has a joint middle-high school campus. The then-superintendent encouraged both buildings that serve grades
one through five to participate, as well as the joint middle-high school (personal communication, September 2016). Participants came from all but one campus.

As will be described in subsequent sections of this study, Milltown had three superintendents between May 2017 and January 2018. The first state-appointed superintendent was placed on administrative leave in May 2017 and removed in July 2017. An interim state-appointed superintendent was appointed in July 2017, and a full-time state-appointed superintendent was announced in January 2018. The two most recent superintendents, both men, were not included in this study, as the data collection was completed by July 2017.

**Overall and Sample Populations**

The population of possible participants was limited in scope by the very nature of the research questions. The focus of the questions, and therefore data sets, is that of school teachers who are women. The majority of all teachers in the US are women (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), a traditional trend that is becoming even more prevalent (Ingersoll et al., 2014). While the teaching force is also becoming more diverse, the ethnic and racial backgrounds of participants were not deciding factors in the data collection. The study focuses on only one characteristic of the teachers — gender — and not one or more of the many other defining characteristics that may be significant to their identities, such as age, race, ethnicity, or the languages that are spoken. These other aspects of their identities are important, but as this is an exploratory case study, the participants’ many additional defining characteristics were pared down for streamlined analysis. The participants all self-identified as women and considered their experiences as those of women teachers in state-controlled districts.
Description of Teachers in the Districts

As there is little data on state-controlled districts in the US, it is difficult to discern from the outside how typical state-controlled districts staff their schools. This state does report the staffing data for each district, organized by grade level, but a comparison of this state to others was not made. All descriptions included here are intended to give a snapshot of the districts as a whole at the time interviews took place.

The Milltown Schools employed 175.5 teachers for the 2016-2017 academic year. Across the district, the largest age group was 49-56 years old, 92.3% of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees were White, and 78.8% of the FTE employees were female. The average salary in 2016 was $68,572, about 9% lower than the state average. The state has no published data on teacher retention for Milltown.

The Oakwood Schools employed 407.6 teachers for the 2016-2017 academic year. Across the district, the largest age group was 41-48 years old, 70.8% of the full-time equivalent (FTE) employees were White, and 79.8% of the FTE employees were female. The average salary in 2016 was $67,517, about 9% lower than the state average. The state has no published data on teacher retention for Oakwood.

The 12 study participants all self-identified as women and were employed full-time as teachers in one of the two districts included in the study. They contacted me directly to participate either because the emailed flyer looked interesting or because a friend who had already interviewed with me suggested that they participate as well. This version of the snowball method suited the culture of the two districts (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The teachers did not always trust their leadership or peers, but instead relied on specific colleagues or outside resources.
Access to School Sites

A careful and deliberative process of engaging the districts began in the spring of 2016. Each then-superintendent was contacted via email, with a brief introduction from me as the researcher and an explanation of the proposed project. At that time, the Oakwood superintendent had been employed by the district for just a few months, and the then-Milltown superintendent was newly appointed. Their relationships with their districts had just started, causing a tenuousness that had to be respected by me as an outside researcher. Both superintendents inherited complex situations and circumstances with their respective districts. Oakwood and Milltown both faced deep financial losses and rising costs, high turnover of teachers and building leaders, and distrust from community members. Despite their relative newness, both superintendents agreed to learn more about the proposed research.

Through a series of emails, phone calls, and messages, the superintendents agreed to participate. Each worked with their staff members to submit a site letter agreeing to the project—both of which were included in the Internal Review Board application. It should be noted that the Milltown superintendent was put on paid administrative leave in late May 2017 and officially resigned in late July 2017, as data collection was being completed. The interim superintendent had only been in his role for about six weeks at the time of completion and was not involved in the process, nor was the newly hired full-time superintendent who joined the district in January 2018.

Instrumentation

As outlined earlier in this chapter, there were three sources of data (state reports, state-commissioned teacher surveys, and interview data). Of these three, only two can be
considered instruments (the climate survey and the teacher interview protocol) and only one is specifically designed for this study (the teacher interview protocol). The semi-structured interview protocol is available in the Appendix E.

**Teacher Survey**

The Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) survey is a climate survey of teachers employed by public school districts in the state in 2012 and 2014. The survey was commissioned by the state from the New Teacher Center. Support for the survey was offered by a number of organizations, including the State Teachers Association, state Association of Vocational Administrators, state-branch of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the state Association of Bilingual Educators.

Several states joined in commissioning this survey following the experience of North Carolina. For several years, that state issued a survey to all its teachers to get a sense of their working conditions. The survey was called the Governor's Teacher Working Conditions Initiative (2002–2009) (TELL Survey, 2014). Other states began to issue their versions of the North Carolina survey, and it was absorbed by the New Teacher Center of Santa Cruz, California in 2009. The following year, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided additional funding, and the climate survey became part of the Swanlund research (2011).

This state’s version of the TELL Survey was first issued in 2012, after involving many state-level groups in its development. It was reissued in 2014, and 38,217 (or about 48%) educators participated in answering the questions online through the TELL website. The archived results for those districts where participation rates hit the threshold marks are available through the survey website. The 182-item survey covers a variety of topics, including demographics, time, classroom management, and administrative support. Direct
access to the data was granted by the New Teacher Center, per the signing of a data sharing agreement, which was filed with the Boston College IRB office.

**Teacher Interviews**

The interview instrument was developed specifically for the study. It was designed to be moderate in length to capture more in-depth answers. The semi-structured interview protocol is comprised of 15 main questions and 17 follow-up questions, which provided further information based on the answers given in the main questions. After asking a few demographic questions, the questions then moved to the participant’s experience as a woman teacher in a state-controlled district. The questions were informed by the TELL survey, such as what the school was like prior to state takeover.

The interviews became the primary source of the data for the study, and the teachers’ experiences with barriers to success were triangulated with survey and government report data. The teachers contacted me when they wanted to be interviewed after reading the electronic flyer; others contacted me after receiving my contact information from their fellow teachers. This semi-snowball method of participant gathering reflected the level of caution the teachers felt towards those outside their immediate social circles. Building trust and rapport with the teachers was a challenge, not unlike the experience of Howard Becker (1952) in Chicago in the 1950s. Just as the Chicago teachers were concerned about the “consequences of being interviewed,” the Oakwood and Milltown teachers were also hesitant to participate at first but felt drawn to the research topic (p. 471).

The participants’ anecdotes were shaped and influenced by the act of sharing them. The women reflected and reminisced, and in so doing, started to make connections between their lived experiences and the larger issues surrounding their schools. As Seidman (2013)
remarked in the introduction to his book on qualitative research in education, the “concrete experience of people” provides access to the complicated and abstract issues in society and education, making them relatable and meaningful (p. 7). Milltown participants MA, RAL, JLH, and Oakwood participants LC and MB noted that until they read the flyer about the study, they had not considered the role of gender in their work lives.

At times during interviewing, these women relived the pain and anger of their experiences. Tears were shed, frustrations were expressed, and some joy was discovered. The students in these districts face some of the toughest economic, sociocultural, linguistic, and geographic circumstances in this state. These women were well aware of what the students are up against and were willing to stand by them as long as they could. As described by MacDonald and Shirley (2009) in their study of teachers’ emotions, I too wanted to “befriend the complex and the intractable,” in order to better understand the experience of teachers in turnaround schools (p. 29). The 12 women represented in Table 3 shared their stories of teaching in state-controlled schools. The analysis did not use ethnicity and race, so no demographic information on these criteria was collected.
Table 3

Teacher Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Level Taught</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Domestic obligations shared during interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAC</td>
<td>Milltown</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Married, no children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Milltown</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Family needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JLH</td>
<td>Milltown</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Married, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EK</td>
<td>Milltown</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Married, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAL</td>
<td>Milltown</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Married, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM</td>
<td>Milltown</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Planning for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Married, no children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KD</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Married, four children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>K-8 Specialist</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Raising her niece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMA</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Married, child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRH</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Married, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>Oakwood</td>
<td>Special Ed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Married, planning for children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity for both of these instruments (the TELL Survey and the interview protocol) are considered separately. Reliability and validity are necessary components for any empirical study, and in qualitative research, they are used to ensure the quality of the data (Golafshani, 2003), given that the survey and interview responses are shared by participants in particular places and times. By design, qualitative studies are shaped by the contexts in which they are situated, and the methodology uses a “naturalistic
approach that seeks to understand phenomena in [these] context-specific settings” (p. 600). Since qualitative studies are not necessarily meant to be generalizable, and replication is difficult, multiple methods of data collection are used. In this study, I used the results of a state-commissioned survey instrument, analysis of state-issued government documents, and an interview protocol.

The reliability and validity of the TELL survey are provided by the New Teacher Center and the state department of education. Tests of the validity and reliability of the instrument were conducted by the New Teacher Center as well as outside researchers. It was determined that the instrument was reliable (Swanlund, 2011), as the survey was found to be “capable of producing consistent results across participant groups” (TELL, 2014, p 4). Additionally, the determination of the instrument’s external validity was conducted, and adjustments were made to strengthen particular items.

The interview protocol’s validity follows the idea that while this concept is less defined in qualitative research, aspects of trustworthiness, quality, and rigor are essential (Golafshani, 2003). The protocol has a high measure of validity in that it is grounded in the principles of interviewing as outlined by Creswell & Poth (2018): developing an interview protocol, refining the protocol, obtaining consent from participants, and managing interview logistics, including managing the time and space as much as is feasible. The Creswell & Poth validation of qualitative research was used to guide data collection: the “process involves a combination of qualitative research strategies—for example, extensive field time, thick descriptions, and closeness of researcher to participants” (p. 255). The questions in the semi-structured interview protocol were informed by the literature review, the TELL Survey, and the state-generated documents, particularly concerning the timeline of state intervention.
Data Collection Procedures

For the study, data collection took place through the recording and transcription of the 12 interviews. The state-generated documents for the 2012 and 2014 cohorts (reports leading up to the state takeover of each district) are publicly available through the state department of education website. The original data set of the TELL Survey was received after a formal request.

Meetings and correspondence with the districts began taking place in September 2016. During these communications, decisions were made regarding the best ways to contact the teachers, in conjunction with the superintendents. Again, given the relative newness of those superintendents, all efforts were made to respect the relationships they were building with the district principals and faculty members. For both, this was their first full year of leading these districts, so developing trust and rapport with the teachers was essential for their success. Understanding this, I agreed to allow them to send out the flyer directly.

The IRB granted approval in November 2016 and again in May 2017, when the interview instrument was updated. It was decided that the superintendents themselves would contact the teachers. They offered to share an IRB-approved flyer about the study with the teachers by email. The emails were sent out by early May 2017. The state-appointed superintendents were given a significant role in selecting campuses for sharing the study information flyer electronically, though the teachers elected to participate on their own. Both superintendents agreed to share the flyer with the principals of all district buildings. The superintendents were not informed about which teachers participated, nor about the content of the conversations.
Semi-structured interviews took place in May, June, and July of 2017, during the teachers’ planning periods, after school, and on the weekends. I traveled to Oakwood and Milltown to conduct the interviews, which were recorded on an audio recording device. The conversations took place in study rooms in public libraries, classrooms, teachers’ offices, and a coffee shop. Teachers signed participant consent forms and were assigned participant numbers, which were logged into a spreadsheet to organize all demographic data. Only I knew the participant number in order to protect the privacy of the participants. I explained to the teachers that they could speak freely about their teaching experience and that any information shared could not be traced back to them directly.

All interviews were saved electronically once conducted. The audio file was transcribed by a transcription service, with all identifying information removed. These were saved both electronically and in hard copy. No identifying marks were included on the transcript, again to protect the participants’ privacy.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Analysis of the data was conducted for each source of data, with respect to the type of data and its purpose in addressing the research questions. These three sources of data were triangulated in order to provide a clearer understanding of the women’s experiences in the state-controlled districts. The software program, NVivo, was used for analysis as themes were identified and the coding system was developed.

**State-generated documents**

To take over a school or district in this state, the commissioner of education and the department of education have to document years of decline and failure to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), per legislation. The office of the commissioner of education directly
manages the oversight of the takeover process. Any actions toward the takeover of a school or district are implemented by the commissioner and state board (who advises the commissioner). These officials and board members (who are appointed to by the governor) rely on reports written for them by certain divisions within the department of education bureaucracy.

In addition to the metrics included in the state database of school records (graduation rates, test scores), information is provided to the department from two satellite offices. The District and School Assistance Centers (DSAC), for medium-sized and Level 3 districts, and the Office of District and School Turnaround (ODST) both provide information about the context of the districts in their decline and the problems facing the districts from the state’s perspective. In addition to providing advice on how to improve, the offices also provide plans for getting the districts back to adequate and improved standing.

All reports about the Oakwood and Milltown districts from these and related offices were collected and analyzed using document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Saldaña, 2015). In the process of analyzing the documents, information that is pertinent for interviews with teachers was noted. It was important to be able to identify that which is significant, and that which is not relevant for the study (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Since the documents are entirely about the districts, it was critical to be able to focus on just those aspects that are useful for addressing the research question.

An iterative process was employed to focus on these topics. The documents were reviewed three times: the first was to become familiar with them; the second time was to make note of significant passages; and the third time was to code the significant passages (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, there were two levels of coding: the first level was for the
initial codes, noting themes and the second level was to categorize codes, to note patterns (Saldaña, 2015; Yin, 2015). This process began with the earliest relevant document for Oakwood, upon entering Level 3 as a district, to establish the codes for the district. It was repeated for the earliest document for Milltown, upon entering Level 3 as a district, to establish the codes for that district. The codes and themes were compared to identify themes for these particular types of districts and their women employees.

Once the code books for each district were established, the codes were applied to the survey data for the respective districts and the campuses where the participants taught. Again, the survey data for both 2012 and 2014 were collected by district and campus to be reviewed three times, similar to the state-generated document analysis. The first time was to become familiar with the items in the survey and the responses to them. The second time was to make note of significant responses, and the third time to code these significant responses. The category codes for the districts were applied and themes analyzed, particularly as they related to the state documents. The survey data at both the district level and campus level for each district were compared to identify common themes.

The analysis of the interview data followed the same coding process as that of the state documents and survey data. The transcripts of the six interviews from each campus were reviewed individually in the iterative pattern, noting significant passages twice, and then coding took place on the third pass. The codes for that district were applied, and then the coded passages were reviewed together, as if from one document. This compiled set of coded data was analyzed for themes, which was compared to the state document and survey data, as they related to the research question.
Validity of Interpretation, Limitations, and Ethical Considerations

The process by which the analysis takes place (the iterative process, the repeated procedures, the consistency across data type) is intended to ensure the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn from the data. The reliable comparison of the districts’ data — while not intended to be individual cases, but rather two parts of a whole — allows for generalizations to be offered and provides a foundation for future research.

The findings and conclusions are possible because of the applicability of the research question. Women teachers continue to be the majority of educators, but their experiences have not been considered empirically on a large scale. Interviewing women teachers about their experiences during turnaround reforms is useful, but their insights are made more powerful in light of the decisions made on their behalf through the state. This triangulation of data, along with the repeated and consistent analysis procedures, strengthened any conclusions drawn.

While the potential for impact is present, the study is not without its limitations. There are three main limitations of this study due to context, limited sample size, and lack of generalizability to other state-controlled districts. First, the findings and conclusions are context-bound. The documents, survey data, and interviews are all specific to these districts and campuses. Conclusions are thus limited in their scope which is often the case for qualitative research (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Second, while all three of the districts taken over by this state were contacted, only two agreed to participate in this study. No explanation was given for the third district’s decision, though one was requested. The third district would have provided a very different perspective, as the first district taken over by the department of education in the state and one which is currently participating in several initiatives.
(Johnson et al., 2012; Schueler, 2016). By not participating, the study is inherently limited to the two participating and more newly controlled districts. The state-appointed superintendent of the third district was appointed state commissioner in January 2018, after the death of the previous commissioner in 2017. And third, as this is not a national study of all state-controlled districts in the US, any conclusions drawn should not be interpreted as generalizations for all state-controlled districts. Indeed, the circumstances and processes of takeover are unique to this state.

While the study has clear limitations, it also has three de-limitations which strengthen its future findings. First, women teachers in state-controlled districts are not often directly included in empirical research, so any contribution that can be made will be significant for the field going forward. Second, women teachers are not often studied as being women. No fundamental differences based on gender are being drawn in terms of their teaching abilities or leadership qualities. However, it is worthwhile to study women as women, to allow this meaningful aspect of their identities to be included as a central aspect of empirical research. And third, this study is meant to be a first step in studying both women teachers and state-controlled districts, and not the final word.

In the process of conducting this study, I kept my identity, perspective, and personal investment in the communities at a respectful distance. As a former classroom teacher, as well as someone who has worked in a school with revolving leaders, I approached the research with a particular perspective. Both districts have struggled under transitional leaders at the building and district levels, causing problems of various kinds, some of which I experienced in my teaching career. However, it would not have been appropriate for me to
project my background on the districts, particularly during the interview stage of data collection. I kept such experiences to myself.

I am interested in the role of gender in education, and my perspective as a woman who has worked as a teacher and educational professional may have impacted my analysis. Just as there is no way for me to mask my race or ethnicity, I could not hide my gender, particularly during interviews. It is arguable that a woman asking another woman about her experience as a woman was an advantage; a certain level of familiarity did build rapport. However, I strove to be cognizant of these biases and perspectives throughout the study.

It is also important to note that I live in a community not far from Milltown, which is within the region of Oakwood. My church is in Milltown, and the Milltown Public Schools employ some church members. I did not interview my friends and acquaintances and did not include their opinions and perspectives in the analysis. Although these geographic and social connections did afford me a helpful background knowledge that informed the interviews with the teachers, I tried to keep the connections from influencing the data analysis.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The focus of this research was to examine how women teachers experience turnaround leadership in districts taken over by the state department of education. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the study participants taught within schools that operated within the sociological constructs of masculinist management that caused a high-threat environment, leading teachers to turn inward or to a few trusted colleagues. The data analysis found that the turnaround leadership decisions and policies within these districts created two types of barriers — structural and cultural — that negatively impacted the participants’ opportunities to be professionally successful including in their contribution to educational reform.

The definition of barriers is adapted from Crowther et al. (2009): external or internal barriers are “practical or ethical constraints that diminish the work of the school” (p. 17) and “stand in the way of successful teacher[s]” (p. 103). The structural and cultural barriers prevented the study participants from succeeding personally and professionally in state-controlled schools. The findings suggest that the turnaround leadership decisions created barriers that inhibited the teachers from fully participating in the reforms. Their skills as experienced educators were under-utilized and their perspectives as women were not acknowledged. Structurally, the internal organization of the districts asked a great deal of the teachers as they dealt with personnel churn, inaccurate compensation, and diminished professional autonomy. Culturally, their gender identities as women placed them at a disadvantage with school and district leadership. The structural and cultural barriers occur alongside the four constructs of turnaround schools, which are outlined in the Table 4.
Table 4: *Constructs and Findings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Barrier Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-threat Environment</strong></td>
<td>Structural Barriers</td>
<td>Personnel Churn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of Individualism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inaccurate Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diminished Teacher Autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture of Turnaround Schools</strong></td>
<td>Cultural Barriers</td>
<td>Sexual and Gendered Harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-threat Environments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Intimidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Micropolitics of Masculinist Systems</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Micropolitics of Turnaround Schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overview of Barriers**

The three types of data included in this study (survey data, state-issued documentation, and interviews with teachers) provided different perspectives on the same set of problems for several years (Appendices C & D). The districts moved into their troubled status for multiple reasons. The decline and closure of major employers were detrimental to the town’s tax base, particularly in Oakwood. Frequent changes in central office leadership and building leadership also caused instability, confusion, and uncertainty, especially in Milltown. In both towns, blame and scapegoating of the non-English speaking populations (in both cases, mostly Puerto Rican communities) detracted from the growing unmet need of language instruction and support. State authorities attributed academic reasons for school failure, while the study participants cited institutional factors that prevented students from succeeding on tests or in class.

Analysis of the participants’ interviews, the survey data, and the state documents indicated that these women experience two barriers as a result of turnaround leadership
decisions. First, structural workplace barriers negatively impacted women teachers in the Oakwood and Milltown schools. The district and state authorities have not recognized these barriers as factors contributing to the decline of the schools. The structure of the school day disproportionately impacts women teachers in ways that Oakwood and Milltown administrators have not acknowledged. These structural barriers in the workplace preceded and continued into the period of takeover of the districts by the state.

Second, these barriers exacerbate an already high-stress workplace culture of employee turnover, collegial distrust, and inconsistent decisions. The participants in this study experienced resentment, disdain, and disregard from their colleagues, particularly the male colleagues. The stressful, and sometimes toxic, workplace contributed to the high rates of teacher turnover.

Third, these structural and cultural barriers are enabled by, and perpetuated, the micropolitics in the communities and the schools that undermine women and teachers. The turnaround process used by the state did not alleviate the negative influence of local politics on the Oakwood or Milltown schools. Issues of poor teacher compensation and weak social capital disrupted the implementation of reform measures. With so many demands on their time and attention, the teachers did not believe they were fairly treated. Many of these gendered dynamics continued despite state intervention.

Together, these barriers constituted the experience of women teachers under turnaround leadership, characterized by high rates of teacher churn, frustration, and dysfunction within the districts. The structural and cultural barriers (Table 4) are described at length in the following sections.
Table 5

*Structural Barriers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Barrier Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-threat Environment</td>
<td>Structural Barriers</td>
<td>Personnel Churn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Individualism</td>
<td>Inaccurate Compensation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diminished Teacher Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Structural Barriers Facing Women Teachers in Turnaround Schools**

This study asked how women teachers in state-controlled districts experience leadership during a school turnaround. The findings connected to the structural barriers show these women teachers were undermined as professionals. The turnaround leadership decisions resulted in the churn of teachers in and out of the district, the demands on teacher time and expertise without additional compensation nor accurate compensation, and the lack of teacher control over lessons, schedules, or classes taught. Three aspects of the structural barriers were shared by participants in both districts when discussing the management of daily operations: personnel churn, inaccurate compensation, and diminished teacher autonomy.

The theme of structural barriers refers to the structures and operations of the schools, the daily procedures that compose the parameters of the workday. The structures include the teachers’ schedules, compensation, and daily work expectations. The barriers they experienced refer to the policies put in place by the school leadership that kept the teachers, in participants’ view, from being successful. The workplace structures in these districts appear to be neutral but they have specific implications for women teachers. The data pointed
to three primary structural barriers that inhibited the participants: personnel churn, inaccurate compensation, and diminished teacher autonomy.

Academic struggles and leadership failures had festered for years before the Oakwood and Milltown schools placed structures in response. The challenges of teaching in high-needs schools, including those under state control, are significant and the study participants felt the blame for the failure fell on them. Participants felt the state was “really placing more accountability on the teachers than they are on the students or the families” (TAM, Oakwood). The state recognized the need for more financial investment — “a huge infusion of money” (KD, Oakwood) — but did not address the underlying structural problems facing classroom teachers daily.

The restrictive and reactionary workplace structures in Oakwood and Milltown and organizational decisions affected the teachers’ collective ability to enact reforms. There is a gendered aspect to the school workplaces in the expectations for teachers assumed to be neutral agents through their work schedules, pay rates, and unwritten expectations for teaching outside of the traditional school day. This study finds that this state’s educational leaders did not explicitly recognize gender as a factor to consider in the improvement of teacher workplaces, reform measures, or in how leadership decisions were experienced.

**Personnel Churn**

The first structural barrier is personnel churn as teachers and leaders left these districts frequently. The districts were struggling as organizations in ways that impacted teachers directly through internal structures causing them to leave. Analysis of state documents indicates the department of education recognized that the lack of critical thinking and rigorous instruction were not the only problems in Milltown and Oakwood. Milltown
floundered, in part, due to a constant leadership churn and to central office conflicts with the school committee: “The district has had low retention of leaders at all levels of administration, with 35 transitions involving 43 individuals, in recent years.” Personnel issues also occurred in Oakwood, where a $4-5 million budget deficit caused the district to replace teachers with paraprofessionals. These challenges caused turbulent and confusing work environments for participants from both districts.

The history of mismanagement, leadership changes, and state involvement in these districts is extensive: 12 years in Milltown and 14 years in Oakwood (Appendices C & D).

As the then-Milltown state-appointed superintendent reported to the state board, the district:

has experienced a lot of trauma and turmoil, and 43 administrators have come and gone over the past seven years. She said the system has been suffering from neglect as well as racial, ethnic, and socio-economic divisions, and she is working to repair relationships.

The “chronic” and “constant” administrative turnover resulted in frequent teacher turnover, or churn, and was noted by the residents in both communities and the state department of education.

The state reports and plans capture the turmoil but not the emotional toll experienced by the employees, most of whom are women:

The principal that hired me was female. And she was brutalized. She really went through a lot. From the district, from central office. I think she was under [a lot of pressure]. Because of the instability of the upper leadership, she didn’t get the support she needed. The first female principal at the new high school, she didn’t even last six months because she was not being supported. (RAL, Milltown)

RAL implied that as the first women in such a position, her former principal needed mentoring and guidance from her colleagues. Since the majority of those individuals were men, and men who had been in positions of influence in Milltown for years, her needs as a woman professional were not realized nor understood (see Appendix A). Indeed, an early
state department of education district review of Milltown noted how “the most recent
[superintendent] search committee was stacked with ‘good old boys’” and expressed doubt
that future searches would be thorough and open. Even for experienced teachers like JR in
Oakwood, the frequent churn of leaders and teachers caused disruption and aggravation:

No, Mr S is the principal now. He will be leaving. But he's been here. He was a VP. And he took over interim and decided to take it. So he has been here. But a lot of the other people they've brought in like there's vice principals, other people for other--
not teacher positions, these administrative positions or these positions that they create. But they don't have money for teachers. But they have a lot of people telling teachers what to do.

Moreover, as is the case in some state takeovers, all but one (JR) of the participants from Oakwood were hired after the majority of the teachers had been let go. Several of the Milltown teachers taught in the district previously and returned recently (see Table 4). All of the participants mentioned teacher turnover.

[W]hen I started teaching in [Milltown] … the thing that I noticed [to be] most glaring, like [a] wound, was that there's so much turnaround, so much turnover. Literally, I was hired with a massive group of new teachers and a bunch specifically [from] my building were fired right after 90 days. And it was chaotic for my students. (LM, Milltown)

Oakwood teacher KD felt that although many of her colleagues were dedicated, “we have people coming and going. There's high turnover.”

Milltown teacher MA worked there twice; this is her second time in the district. During her first tenure, she served as the teacher department head for both the middle and high school: “It was insane. It was the stress of that and then other things that made me quit.”

LC in Oakwood attributed the teacher churn to the structures of the school day and the demands placed on teachers:

So when you talk so much about purposing and crafting these great lessons, and then they make something and they go copy it and there's no paper, or they don't have time to copy it in this long school day that doesn't include any time for copying, you have
to do that on either end. I think that's just what's causing people to leave. It's just such a long day.

In Milltown, frequent changes in central office and building leadership meant there was little vision behind decisions:

Every day is a different day. I walk in and every day is something new. There’s not a lot of consistency and clear guidelines in what’s expected of us as professionals and what’s expected of students. And there’s not clear communication. (LM, Milltown)

Participant BAC shared the frustration she and her colleagues felt towards turnaround leadership: “[A]ll the initiatives that we had have been scrapped, and now there’s these new initiatives, and everyone’s still [saying] ‘What about the last three?’”

A third of the participants (one in Oakwood and three in Milltown) were moved around by building administrators to fill in for teachers who left or were fired during the 2016-2017 academic year. They were not assigned classrooms or classes of students at the beginning of the year but were more like long-term substitutes. One teacher (JHL, Milltown) was the third 3rd grade teacher in that school year in one particular classroom. Another, Milltown’s RAL, trained as a special education teacher, described her 2016-2017 teaching assignments this way:

My third co-teacher was put on administrative leave just before Christmas. Came back right after the Christmas holiday and was put back out like a week after that. So, I ended up taking the lead, teaching all of that class. I was given a sub too — because the sub needed to cover the other classes [I was supposed to be teaching]. And so they got their third teacher of record for the year just at the beginning of the fourth quarter.

Moving teachers around during the school year is not unheard of, though certainly not ideal for any school setting, but doing so in a turnaround school can exacerbate organizational problems that have already been present. This practice worsens the high-threat environment of turnaround schools, where teachers are concerned about being fired.
Fifty percent of the participants—three from Milltown (LM, RAL, and MA) and three from Oakwood (JR, MB, and TAM)—expressed concerns for their professional futures. Some were worried they might not receive renewed contracts for the following academic year, felt they were being scrutinized more than before the takeover, or had already started looking for new positions after much stress and frustration. They expressed feelings of burn out and depression. MB described how she struggled to get out of bed in the morning, saying to herself, “Oh, my God. I hate going here. I'm getting burnt out. I've only been teaching three years.”

Moving teachers takes place at the same time as other teachers are fired or leave voluntarily. The threat of removal was discussed by the Milltown participants more than Oakwood because the Oakwood teachers had been hired to replace those who had been fired. KD explained what her school had experienced before she was hired:

And so [the state] came in and disbanded everyone in the school and rehired [all positions]. I think the only people that came back were one of the secretaries, I think one of the middle school math teachers, and the middle school social studies teacher. I think there were only those three people. I came in with the wave of new employees.

Experienced teachers described how they gave guidance to younger teachers through nurturing support: “I've taken my little sped teacher under my wing, and I have a substitute teacher on the other side of me that I've taken under my wing” (TAM, Oakwood). The less-experienced teachers appreciated this protective assistance from their colleagues: “I look to Amy for guidance, if anything. I mean, I have Liz as my mentor teacher, but Amy’s my life teacher at this point” (MB, Oakwood, pseudonyms used). The relationships with these trusted colleagues were precious to the participants, as the more experienced teachers were able to help their younger peers deal with the uncertainty of Milltown and Oakwood.
I have a mentor right now who has been teaching in this particular school I think for six years and she's been teaching for a few years longer than that. She is a fantastic mentor that I really enjoy working with and I'm lucky to be paired with her. (LM, Milltown)

After describing several ways that she learned from her experienced colleague, Milltown’s EK concluded: “I just have so much respect for her as an educator.” This kind of care and consideration for one’s peers is arguably more necessary in a work environment that is high-stress, turbulent, and awash with barriers and bias. The informal, supportive relationships these participants discussed in the interviews were forged in response to their work cultures, but such relationships had also been attempted prior to the takeover.

Building professional relationships and promoting collaborations was recommended by this state in a report about school turnaround, having found that these practices had been successful in low performing districts not yet in state control. The professional friendships and informal mentoring the participants described had enabled the women to find ways to manage working in these districts. Milltown and Oakwood teachers worked together before the state intervened as well. There were attempts to collaborate before the takeover in Oakwood and Milltown. As teacher JHL explains, the teachers had the desire to succeed, but it was not enough:

We knew we weren't meeting all the students' needs, and we knew there was a way to meet them. I mean, they have a civil right to an education, so we have to help them learn, and we tried things that the state's mandating now. Collecting data, okay, and then having the meetings with the other teachers on the team in the same grade. How did your students do on theirs? How did they do on that? Oh, my students did well on this one, but not on that. What did you do? How do we reteach them? What do we redo? We tried, I mean, we were just really hopeful, and then there was rumor that we would be taken over, and then they took us over. It was devastating. Not devastating like somebody dying, but it was devastating.

The turnaround reforms were designed to target areas of achievable academic gains by focusing on the practices of the teachers themselves.
The state and local officials responded to the low academic performance of students by creating a high-stakes environment that demanded improvement but drove teachers to turn inward instead of collaborating. The study participants dealt with workplace practices and policies that impeded them from fully applying reform measures. From inconsistent policies from building and district leaders regarding pay or scheduling to frequent changes in curriculum or no curriculum at all, these manifestations of structural barriers kept the women from being professionals. None of the teachers who planned on returning to these districts could say with any certainty what they would be teaching or how many students they would have to teach, a striking reality given the interviews took place in the spring and summer. For example, Milltown special education teacher EK explained how much she enjoyed working with her caseload of 19 students, but she expected she would have to take on more students across more grades. “I don’t know if they’re going to hire a first grade special ed teacher or if we will have to do both grades. [Many of us] do more than one grade.” EK did not think she would be paid more if she took on more students, nor did she expect to have more say in her schedule. She knew that she either had to agree, or a teacher who would teach more than 19 special education elementary school students would replace her.

The organizational structures established by the turnaround leaders in both Oakwood and Milltown schools were detrimental to the professional growth and success of the study participants. The teachers’ extended day schedules, their compensation, and the outsider control of the districts are examples of the manifestation of these structures. In practice, as teachers are removed, reassigned, or resign without warning, the remaining teachers and their students feel shaken and distrustful of the administration. Milltown’s MA’s students who have special needs were very concerned she would leave them: "You're coming back, right,
Also in Milltown, teacher LM returned from Thanksgiving break to find her students upset because they thought she had been fired because a teacher with a similar last name had been let go over the break:

And my students came up to me and they were like, "Miss, we were so scared that they fired you." And they were devastated because they need people to stick around for them. And that's not happening. [T]here's been so many changes, there's been so many things turning over for the kids before, they don't know what to expect anymore.

The threat of reassignment or removal in these two districts was present and impacted the teachers as they took on more students or took over classes.

JHL’s dedication to providing student-centered education is not unique to her. Indeed, teachers in Oakwood and Milltown in 2012 and 2014 expressed their desire to have more time and resources in order to focus on their students in the climate surveys. The teacher climate surveys that the state commissioned were intended to determine how teachers felt about their schools, including class assignments and management. These state-issued teacher climate surveys, given in 2012 and 2014, were meant to address many of the issues that can result in teacher turnover. Statements calling for a Likert scale response included: “Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students,” and “Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.” These attempted to get to the core of what many teachers saw as being the problems that prevented academic success. In 2012, the response rates in both Oakwood and Milltown were relatively high: 88.6% and 64% respectively. However, the districts continued to decline despite, or perhaps because of, leadership changes and state oversight. By the 2014 survey, response rates had fallen to 62.61% in Oakwood and 34.71% in
Milltown. These participation percentages meant that no official report could be offered, as the response rate was below the required threshold for reliability.

Teachers who did reply were clear about their agreement and disagreement. The questions follow the structure of the surveys, in both 2012 and 2014: A four-point Likert-scale enables teachers to indicate whether they strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with each statement. A key factor to keep in mind in reviewing survey items is that the majority of the respondents are women, as they comprise the largest group of teachers in Oakwood and Milltown.

Many of the survey respondents — mostly women teachers — gave responses that indicated time was a factor for them. They responded to items that asked, “Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the use of time in your school.” The Oakwood teachers responded to this question at a high enough rate for the district to make answers available for public access. The teachers did not feel they had enough time to meet the needs of their students or to complete their work during non-instructional periods. Fifty-eight percent did not think the class sizes gave them sufficient time to meet the needs all the students; 56% felt they did not have time to collaborate with their colleagues; and 60% often felt they were interrupted by requests from building leadership or colleagues. Only 21% felt that efforts were made to minimize routine paperwork required of teachers.

Teachers have little time if they are required to complete paperwork or other tasks during the day or attend mandatory meetings during their planning periods. Teachers in all types of schools may feel that they need more time in the day to complete all that they need to do. However, what is significant here is that these districts were already struggling when
they issued the survey to the teachers in 2012, and struggling further in 2014, but the districts did not attend to the teachers’ concerns about items like having enough time. Just as a budget reflects an organization’s values, a schedule reflects what is considered essential and necessary by how the time is spent in it. Teachers, including this study’s participants, received their schedules; they did not create them. They spent their time on things they did not value as much as they did on instructional and planning time.

The need to address fundamental structural problems of time and authority before applying reform pertains to Oakwood and Milltown as well. There is a long history of noting problems within schools and teachers’ concerns about structures (Appendices A, B, C, & D). The state surveys were issued several years before state takeover was considered; in 2012 and 2014 the teachers in Oakwood and Milltown expressed frustration with class sizes, lesson planning time, and the need for more time to collaborate. Rather than address the consistent concerns of the teachers through changes to the daily schedule or teachers’ responsibilities for children, the state intervened with reforms to change academic outcomes through tests.

The Milltown teachers had similar responses. Seventy-nine percent felt the class sizes were not reasonable. The same proportion felt they were interrupted too often, and 82% felt they had too much routine paperwork to complete. The expressed dissatisfaction in 2014 was with a school system that already experienced two superintendents and multiple building leadership changes that academic year. The responses show that 55% of Milltown teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they had available time to collaborate. This contradicts the state’s report that indicated that Milltown elementary teachers had
multiple opportunities to collaborate, from weekly grade level meetings with instructional resource specialists, to 45-minute common prep times and grade-level team meetings.

Three years later, in 2017, concerns raised in both the survey and the interviews included: class sizes are too large (MB, KD, Oakwood), lesson plans are scripted and restrictive (BAC, EK, & MA, Milltown; JR, KD, Oakwood), and there is not enough time to prepare for teaching or reflect on effectiveness (LC, KD, Oakwood; JLH, RAL, Milltown). The reform efforts did not seem to address the consistent concerns of teachers. “[It’s almost like] the plans for [takeover] look good on paper, but not in practice” (LM, Milltown).

In practice, Oakwood and Milltown participants felt the state and district authorities intended to implement the turnaround plans without teacher input. Under the pressure of probation and subsequent takeover, the districts seem to have utilized masculinist approaches to get the result they needed to get out of the state’s scrutiny. The survey data indicates the teachers who participated felt that they had to work longer hours, were monitored more through required paperwork, and were expected to do more with fewer resources. The TELL survey respondents’ and the study participants’ responses suggest a “gendered substructure” within their schools that supported and promoted a gendered management system through masculinist, top-down approaches (Acker, 2012). Rather than address the teachers’ request for more time to prepare, plan, and reflect on their lessons for classes they thought were too large, the leadership instituted new instructional methods and curriculum designed to turnaround the test scores. These methods were masculinist in that they focus on the bottom line of improved test scores and exert power to control the teachers’ professional work.

An Oakwood faculty meeting in the spring of 2017 demonstrated this gendered logic and the problems of the organization itself. As the school year ended, the state-appointed
superintendent and building leaders presented a new directive to the teachers, to be implemented in the remaining days that semester. Following the guidelines of the Oakwood District Report, the teachers were told to use “purposing statements” when presenting lessons. As MB explained,

So when [superintendent] comes in, he's like, "Oh, we want you to do these purposing statements. We want you to spend a lot of time working on how to purpose a lesson. A lot of professional development on that. Bring it into your classroom. Blah, blah, blah."

The leadership was given this directive from the central office, which may have been trying to pull up some test scores and academic metrics. However, the leadership seemed to be unaware of the low morale of the teaching staff:

This is what their directive is, not hey, we want more teachers to be hired so we can have smaller class sizes to improve that end of it, but it's more like, hey, here's a bunch of tedious stuff we're going to have you do because we think this is going to help. And so, from the teacher's standpoint, we're like, "Oh, God. More of this. More of this minutia," when we know the minutia's not really what needs to be put in place to change anything (MB, Oakwood).

Many of the participants expressed a nagging fear and suspicion of their building and district leaders who caused frustration. Feelings of disgruntlement and resentment were working their way into the Milltown and Oakwood faculties. The interviews were conducted from late May to mid-July of 2017 during which time the participants shared increasingly frustrated feelings about their leadership. They felt the leaders asked too much of teachers while contributing little to the turnaround itself. The teachers were directly responsible for the improved test scores and graduation rates, while the leadership had many responsibilities. However, the gendered dynamic of schooling in this state focuses on test scores to gauge learning. The perceptions of teachers’ responsibilities in the turnaround process varied, reflecting the participants’ views on their school leaders, their own agency, and
professionalism. Some participants thought there was too much complaining by fellow teachers about the responsibilities and scrutiny from building leaders: “So at a certain point, when people whine, you just have to say, ‘Go get another job. I mean, this isn't for you. This isn't for you.’ Yes. It's hard. Yes. They expect a lot. But we all chose to be here” (KD, Oakwood). Other participants felt they lacked the agency to question the leaders without impunity. Oakwood’s MB was concerned about retaliatory measures:

We can't speak our minds…Because we know that if we say the wrong thing, it's going to get back to administration, who then will somehow punish us for something we said … maybe, on your evaluation you'll get ‘needs improvement’ in an area because you didn't do X, Y, and Z to please them,” (MB, Oakwood).

MB was not the only Oakwood teacher concerned about evaluations. During her interview, Oakwood high school business teacher JR shared her observation that the state-appointed leaders and consultants seemed young and inexperienced. JR felt these people had been hired because the state could control them, while someone with her years of experience was “expensive.” She suspected teacher evaluations could be manipulated by these younger school leaders to remove “expensive” teachers such as herself:

You can make a bad review for anybody, I think, just like you can manipulate data to look any way you want. You don’t have security anymore. They can get rid of you, no matter how many years you’ve taught. They can always find a reason” (Oakwood).

As she reflected further on the motivations and machinations of the state department of education, JR concluded those who had decided to take over the Oakwood schools felt compelled to justify their decision to intervene, rather than leverage those with experience:

The state has to show something, right? They came in and now they need to show that graduation rates are up. I’ve heard electives and non-elective teachers [being pressured] to do something about a grade because the students need to graduate or pass. They’re really pushing summer school.
JR’s opinions of Oakwood’s turnaround efforts are representative of the systemic approach some participants observed: show progress quickly through improved graduation rates, even if that means removing or replacing teachers.

In order to be effective, the turnaround reforms needed commitment and investment from the teachers. In Oakwood, participants began to question the accountability procedures, and also started to doubt their colleagues: “Sometimes you don’t even trust the people that you have known, because you don’t know. Everybody wants to keep their job, so you’re careful, guarded” (JR, Oakwood). Peer distrust emerged in interviews in Milltown as well, as several of the teachers worried about how to know whom to trust, who was reliable, and who provided useful information. One teacher felt “betrayed” and “stabbed in the back” by her colleagues who abandoned their support of her when she challenged the principal (RAL, Milltown). Another worried her license was on the line since she challenged her team chair on a decision regarding a special education student because she felt she must advocate for her students (MA, Milltown).

Personnel churn in Milltown and Oakwood caused the teachers to express feelings of concern, suspicion, and lack of trust during their interviews. While the poor academic performance is well-documented by the state, the department of education did not capture the experiences of teachers in the course of the takeover. This study’s findings indicate the operations of the schools contributed to the high-threat environment for teachers. The lack of consistent reforms and poorly communicated decisions caused the participants frustration. They feared removal or reassignment, so their concerns were not often shared to avoid retribution. Their frustration with and fear of this ineffective work environment made it difficult for them to address students’ needs.
Inaccurate Compensation

The second structural barrier is inaccurate compensation. Despite these stressful work conditions, the participants needed to keep teaching for their pay and benefits. Both Oakwood and Milltown have few viable employers besides the public school systems. The participants’ feelings of insecurity and distrust were due in part to the compensation practices of their districts. Compensation was an issue for teachers in both districts, and neither administrations seemed to appreciate the need for fair and accurate pay rates. Due to the power granted to the appointed leaders through legislation, teachers in state-controlled districts do not have the same protections from their unions as other districts (State Department of Education regulation 603; Schueler et al., 2017). Additionally, to remove or fire teachers more easily, the legislation also allows the state-appointed leaders to extend the school day. However, it was unclear to the participants if teachers would be paid for staying longer, teaching larger classes, or taking on more duties.

Whether the concern was in regard to being paid for time worked (BAC, Milltown), being paid correctly (LM, Milltown), or for not requesting a substitute teacher (TAM, Oakwood), the participants were aggrieved. They felt the economic pinch of inaccurate pay affected them most because of their family needs. A vicious cycle formed: working at evening events or conducting home visits required more childcare. More childcare to cover the longer hours is only paid for with better pay, and incorrect pay meant teachers could not do their jobs well without worrying about the cost of childcare. This study asked how women teachers in state-controlled school districts experienced leadership during a school turnaround. The examples participants shared about why they distrusted the leadership, and at times, each other on this issue are directly related to turnaround leadership decisions.
Oakwood teacher TAM admitted she had not seen as much “humanity” or transparency from the building leadership as she had at the beginning of the school year, particularly when she stumbled upon a pay compensation issue. The faculty at TAM’s school had been instructed to request as little time off as possible. There was no funding in the tight budget to pay for substitute teachers. Many teachers tried to honor this mandate by covering each other’s classes instead of requesting a substitute instructor, to assist the school financially. However, when TAM did have to request some time off and later checked her pay stub, she realized she had been docked for far more time than she had used. She called the central office to rectify the mistake:

And [the clerk in the Central Office] said what was on my check meant that it was only a deduction of 15 minutes. And now, I'm a math teacher, and it said 0.25, which is a quarter of a day. I know it's not 15 minutes, I know it's two hours, I know it's a quarter of a day. So then I send off an email to central office, and just point blank asked. And yeah, the policy is they don't take it by minutes, they take it minimum two hours, four hours, six hours, eight hours. So all of us who've been trying to make sure we're there for the school and support the school, and sneak out an hour here, or three hours there, or 15 minutes here, and still show up and not take a full day off so we're present [are not getting paid as much as promised]. (TAM, Oakwood)

The payroll office practices contradicted what the principal at TAM’s school assured the teachers would happen if they would avoid taking full days off. The principal implied if teachers would not request time-off, which would require hiring a substitute, then she would only dock them for the time they used. The teachers were persuaded to forgo their contractual benefit in order to save money for the school. When TAM went to her principal about this policy discrepancy, she was pressured by the principal not to take the issue further. The principal learned of TAM’s call to the central office and requested that she come to meet with her. The teachers’ union representative joined the meeting, and both reprimanded TAM for questioning the policy.
It did not matter that the principal and the union representative were both women, for they utilized masculinist management techniques. The message to TAM was she lacked the status and authority to obtain this information. The fact she was mathematically correct about the policy did not matter because it was not supposed to be her legitimate concern. From the perspective of the building leaders, as a classroom teacher, TAM did not have enough formal status to question a school policy.

Similar discrepancies in pay policies occurred in Milltown as well. In 2016, the teachers were invited to an evening event with hors d'oeuvres and short presentations about compensation. The teachers were looking forward to the evening, at first, according to Milltown teacher BAC, but they soon noticed that it was an elaborate attempt to gain their support for significant changes to their work. During the event, the teachers learned about their new work schedules and an increase in their salaries, but again they noticed a mathematical discrepancy: “You want us to work 18% more for 5 or 6% more money? Well, 5 or 6%, yeah, that’s a lot of money, but not if I have to work 18% more.” (BAC, Milltown).

The teachers were expected to give a great deal without expecting more in compensation or benefits because the district needed them to commit to this higher cause. The structural barrier of inaccurate and unclear compensation policies were not resolved to the satisfaction of the Milltown teaching staff. Professional mediation teams were therefore called in by the state authorities to affect a compromise. By the spring of 2017, with no agreement reached, a rally was organized in Milltown to support the negotiators working on behalf of the teachers, and meetings were held to discuss adjusting teacher pay. Several of the Milltown teachers in this study mentioned this rally, though none of them participated in it. The teachers understood the rally to be a way to assert themselves in the face of ‘outside’
leadership (BAC, EK, LM, Milltown). The demand to increase workloads without additional compensation implies an undervaluing of teachers’ work generally, and by extension, an undervaluing of women.

The state department of education hired lawyers and contract negotiators who were brought in from the capital city. “Most of the people who were there at the rally were women, but again, many of them have children, so they are fighting much more aggressively, to see to it that they can be home for their children,” (BAC, Milltown). Compensation remained problematic going into the summer of 2017 when the state-appointed superintendent was put on paid leave, and an interim state-appointed superintendent replaced her. A fulltime superintendent was not appointed again until the winter of 2018 and the compensation issue was still not resolved as of the spring of that year.

The participants’ concerns about the accuracy of their pay and how they were being compensated for their work are symptomatic of the structural problems caused by the turnaround leadership decisions. The participants did not feel their professional expertise was recognized in their salaries, as BAC explained when describing the Milltown salary changes. The participants’ efforts to support cost saving measures, such as by not requesting substitutes, were not honored and they were not paid properly, as TAM discovered in Oakwood. The structural barriers faced by teachers in both districts because of these compensation problems led them to rally and negotiate with state mediators. They were fighting to be treated as professionals.

**Diminished Teacher Autonomy**

The third and last barrier is the diminished teacher autonomy that the participants faced in their districts. The lack of professional respect and the de-professionalization of the
Oakwood and Milltown teachers extend from inappropriate pay and unreasonable teaching loads to the inflexible structure of schooling for state-controlled schools. Concerns about compensation resulted from uncertain policies regarding teacher schedules and time worked. The participants provided evidence that they experienced leadership decisions directly in these turnaround districts through the decreased control they had over their professional work (the use of mandated scripted curriculum, teaching re-assignments, and required assessments). These decisions limited the influence the teachers had in their classes, undermining them as professionals, while the role of the state increased.

The publicly-available state board of education meeting minutes include brief reports on progress towards these goals, but not on the opposition to them. For instance, early in the Oakwood takeover, the state-appointed superintendent made a presentation to the state board of education which was summarized in the minutes:

Commissioner said he has been in the district and noted that community members previously opposed to the takeover have been very complimentary of [the superintendent] and the work that is underway. [The chair of the state board] extended the Board’s appreciation to Superintendent.

The state and district leadership failed to recognize the ways these structural barriers prevented teachers from thriving professionally because they did not see how it impacted them personally.

The May 2017 state board meeting minutes include an example of this discrepancy. At that meeting, the then-Milltown state-appointed superintendent provided a status report on how things were progressing in her district. After sharing specifics on new technology and curriculum, the minutes indicate that “She presented other priorities and activities including: developing effective teaching and leadership through professional development; applying evidence-informed decision making; cultivating family and community partnerships; and
reallocating resources to ensure high quality management, accountability, system-wide coherence, and sustainability.” The superintendent’s actions to strengthen the climate in Milltown are important, but the actions she described took place on Saturdays, afterschool, and during planning time. According to the participants themselves, they were not compensated for these efforts. By not seeing their teachers as women, those setting policies did not see how these initiatives disrupted their lives. In order to fulfill their new requirements, the participants had to rearrange their personal lives, because in US society, such adjustments fall primarily on women (Grumet, 1988; Tamboukou, 2000; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Schulte, 2015). By not acknowledging that their workforces are mostly women, the state and district leaders did not recognize how the initiatives disrupted their teachers’ professionalism. The participants’ autonomy was diminished in three ways: the scarcity of their time; unreasonable work expectations; and policies that undermined them as professionals.

First, the participants found their autonomy to be diminished because their time for instructional activities continuously decreased. Participants in both districts expressed their frustration with how little time they had to fulfill their duties as teachers in these schools. Longer school days, more tutoring support for students, and additional activities are offered in this state’s turnaround schools, as part of the reform efforts to provide more academic and enrichment time for the students. The longer-than-typical school day caused one teacher to question its feasibility: “And although I don't have children, the length of the school day is very difficult because it is so long. So just thinking about child care for other women, I don't know how they do it,” (LC, Oakwood). Eight out of the twelve participants were raising their children or nieces and nephews. All were impacted by extended school days, after-school
meetings, home visits, and events held at the schools on the weekends for students who needed extra support and direction. Teachers are expected to participate fully in these initiatives, hence Milltown’s 18% longer school day. The proposal was not well received by experienced teachers, who felt they were expected to “work longer for less money” (EK, Milltown). As one Milltown teacher described, the announcement of the longer day was not transparent:

If next year I'm going to be working 10 hour days because it's going to be an 8 hour day, and then the afterschool meeting. So now you're expecting us to work 10 hours, but you don't ever put that in writing. You put, 'Well, this is how long the day's going to be,' but you don't add on the meeting so we all know we have to go to meetings. Don't act like we aren't aware of that. (BAC, Milltown).

Changes were not put in writing consistently, and the announcement of changes felt abrupt and frequent. Milltown teacher LM viewed the scheduling changes as part of a pattern of reforms that left her frustrated:

It felt very devaluing. Like it felt like sort of the way that we're starting to see, especially with changes to compensation, with changes to the schedule … Basically, it started to feel to a lot of us teachers that they're looking for new people, for bodies to occupy classrooms. (LM, Milltown)

Such schedule changes occurred in Oakwood too, which were accompanied by new curricula or instructional techniques. Oakwood teacher JR shared that she found the uncertainty to be “stressful, because you don't really know what they are going to do.” Part of the uncertainty may be due to the complexity of the district itself. Oakwood teacher KD did not have a set assignment when interviewed:

Six, seven, and eight, ESL is my official title, but in schools in state control, it's all hands on deck. We lose staff in the middle of the year, sometimes. Things change dramatically, in flux, in and out students. At any given time, I could be an ELA teacher. I could be the social studies teacher, but my main purpose is ESL teacher. I have certifications in those. They don't put you outside of your certification.
As the survey data stated, for years these teachers were already taking home extra work through grading papers for larger-than-average classes, lesson planning, and reports since they were provided such little time during the school day. Now, in 2017, they were being asked to allocate more time to the students between the end of the school day and when they had to go home to grade papers and design lesson plans. The participants were not altruistic, neutral agents, able to dedicate their evenings to additional time with their students without extra pay.

Since the week was scheduled with teaching and afterschool activities, teachers were assigned to work on Saturdays as well. In Milltown, teacher MA thought the then state-appointed superintendent was “motivated” to improve the schools and was “working her butt off” to succeed. Similarly, RAL noted that the then state-appointed superintendent was:

very visible. She's very vocal. Yes, she's asking us to enroll in courses and do extra PD [personal development] but then she's there. She shows up on a Saturday and spends half the day with us. That, to me, is very telling. To be that vocal and that visible.

However, their Milltown colleague BAC shared how the personal development sessions, especially the Saturday sessions, could be frustrating. BAC participated in several personal development sessions, both in-service days and Saturdays. At first, the sessions seemed promising as they learned about a new language arts curriculum the then state-appointed superintendent personally endorsed. BAC and her colleagues were given some training on it and then told they would have time to work together on planning some lessons:

Then the trainer’s like, ‘Okay, you can work on your units.’ I'm like, ‘It's 9:00. We're going to have to 2:00 to work on these?’ Worked on them for an hour, got a ton of stuff done. It was awesome. ‘We’re going to bring you back for this.’ From 10:00 to 12:00, she talked at us, and I did say, ‘at.’ Then we had lunch, and then from 12:00 to 1:30, she talked at us some more, and had us talk amongst ourselves, and then we got the last 15 minutes or so, to do it again. I'm like, ‘seriously?’
What aggravated BAC and her colleagues further, besides giving up precious time to prepare their lessons, was the uncertainty that any of their lessons would ever be used. They had been through the experience before where they put hours in preparing new curriculum, only to be told it was going to be replaced with something else. The sentiment among the teachers BAC knows is “How much time do I want to put into something that's going to then be scrapped next year? Even though they say, ‘We guarantee you're going to use it,’ there is no guarantee.”

Teachers in any school value their instructional and planning periods, as evidenced by the TELL survey; time was reported as important for all respondents. In these turnaround districts, time became even more scarce as pressure from the districts leaders to quickly improve academics increased. The frequency of changes to their schedules, the lack of communication about these changes, and the doubts that arose about the commitment to new curriculum all undermined the participants’ professionalism and autonomy as educators.

Second, the lengthy schedules plagued the participants as they contributed to unreasonable work expectations. In addition extended instructional time and professional development sessions, Oakwood teachers are expected to attend a certain number of afterschool events (sporting events or dances), and it is highly encouraged they attend the others as well. They are also expected to complete multiple home visits throughout the year, which are held before and after the school day to accommodate families’ work requirements. In practice, the visits take place well into the evening or weekend and some teachers questioned how well they were being conducted: “We have a home visit program here. It's one thing to just go into the home. It's another thing to understand the family. It's two totally different things” (CS, Oakwood). Oakwood teacher TAM discussed the tension with these
requirements. She saw the academic and social benefit to home visits: “They're on to something with home visits if we're doing them as successful as they want it to be, there is something to be said for them.” And TAM also recognized the structural problems contractually obligating teachers to do such extra work:

So this year, I was expected to do 3 outside-school events on top of the 12 home visits. It's a lot because our day is already 7:30 to 4:00, because it's already an extended day, and we're talking don't get preps because of IEP meetings, and PLCs, and everything else, so it's already a lot to ask.

Such after-hours meetings can inconvenience any faculty member, but there are also hidden gender inequalities in these educational reform ideas. Whether intended or not, the extended school day and afterschool requirements were burdensome to these women teachers in particular who struggled to find ways to meet the districts’ expectations. While these aspects of the turnaround plans were intended to provide Milltown and Oakwood students with more time in school, in hopes of raising test scores and graduation rates, these requirements also impinged on the lives of the participants.

The requirements extend into their activities and time, particularly for those with children or family members who depended on them. Several participants (BAC and RAL in Milltown; LC, TAM, and KD in Oakwood) lamented how difficult it was to meet these expectations, particularly if they were not explicitly included in their teaching contracts (Milltown) or not supported by additional pay (Oakwood). RAL noted how “younger teachers who are maybe raising families are in the prime of their career or trying to build their careers” were impacted more by the proposed changes. The schedule could change daily, and as KD explained, teachers had to learn to roll with the changes because in such schools “you have to have a great tolerance for discord and chaos” (Oakwood). LC tries to help her fellow teachers think through their problems, if she can, as there are few solutions:
“Okay, well, let's be creative about this. Is it a time thing? Are you running out of time? Is it a resource thing? Maybe we could get other teachers to help us” (Oakwood). Running out of time in Oakwood was a concern in 2017, for as TAM explained, “we have professional development every single morning and on Wednesdays, there's two periods of professional development for teachers. And we are expected to do home visits, which was very new to me and very unexpected.”

BAC described the experience of her colleague that was typical for many teachers:

She lives an hour-and-a-half away, and that was a big concern. She said, "I'm going to get home. If we are here until 3:30, then we have meetings until 4:30, now I'm getting home at 6:00. It's hard enough, getting home at 4:30 when the kids are off the bus at 3:00, and there's a babysitter for that hour-and-a-half. I don't want a babysitter for the three hours. Can I even find someone willing to take the kids for three hours every day?"

The districts’ expectations for teachers to work longer and adapt to frequent changes did not overtly acknowledge the complexity of the school communities themselves, which made teaching difficult for the participants. Schools in crisis are typically found in communities in crisis (Duke, 2015; Fullan, 2006; Mintrop, 2004) and Milltown and Oakwood were struggling. “Everything’s on fire,” KD said when comparing her current class to her previous class in a wealthy, suburban district south of Oakwood. “The kids themselves are not throwing chairs at you. They’re not trying to light books on fire in the back. They don’t come to school high.” Fellow Oakwood teacher CS also experienced unruliness with her students: “They were just running, and throwing things, and swearing, and cussing, and punching each other, and bouncing off the walls. It was a madhouse. I've never seen anything like that in my life.” When a rumor spread about racist comments a Milltown teacher supposedly said about some students (later determined to be unfounded), BAC and colleagues had to control the students’ emotions: “The 8th graders swarmed on their floor
afterwards, ‘We're going to find this teacher.’ The 6th graders were berserk.” Oakwood and Milltown are communities fighting back the crisis of poverty, but the benchmarks of success are tied to academic metrics of test scores and graduation rates. These are necessary measures, and the extended days and weekend professional development sessions were intended to improve performance, but the participants faced many challenges in trying to reach these goals.

An example of such unreasonable expectations comes from the Oakwood turnaround plan. The district review commended the additional efforts made to track the impact of interventions at the elementary level. It praised support systems designed to keep older students from dropping out. According to the district review, Oakwood teachers spent time after school in three ways: they attended professional development training to prevent student dropout; they met with their teaching team colleagues; or they visited with students in their family homes. These efforts seemed promising at the time of the report, and the state recommended that these support systems continue. If these things were happening as described, then the teachers were working together to improve not only academic outcomes, but to also strengthen the community relationship. However, the report does not calculate how much time each teacher spent in this work after the school day ended, nor does it mention if the teachers were compensated for this extra time and additional duties.

Therefore, the participants’ experience of the turnaround leadership includes these additional demands and unreasonable work expectations. It is not clear how effective the teaching teams were in improving academic outcomes. The state expected teachers to give more of their time and talent but did not seem to recognize the strain and pressure this placed on teachers personally and professionally. Even an additional hour or two at school results in
additional costs for childcare for those with young children, as BAC noted, as well as longer commutes in rush hour traffic as they are staying later at school and have less time at home to prepare for lessons since they often do not have sufficient planning periods. The participants’ lacked the autonomy to challenge the expectations placed on them as their work days extended to be filled with meetings, events, and professional trainings.

Third, the participants experienced diminished teacher autonomy as their professionalism was undermined by turnaround leadership decisions. The academic struggles in Oakwood and Milltown were well-known and discussed within these communities and the department of education; the department did not feel the teachers met professional standards. A review of Oakwood found that “the quality of instruction was inconsistent and did not demonstrate mastery implementation of the district’s instructional practices.” The state authorities intervened in an attempt to “professionalize” these districts by putting in their leaders and processes (new curricula, new faculty meetings, new outreach to parents), but in so doing, the teachers were undermined as “professionals” by not giving those teachers who remained a way to actively participate in the reforms. In Oakwood and Milltown the bureaucrats had taken the active role. As the state department of education authorities and the appointed district leaders announced and implemented reforms to improve academic outcomes within the allotted three years, they did not outwardly acknowledge the implications for teachers. When Oakwood hired paraprofessionals instead of licensed teachers or when Milltown announced teachers would be working longer hours, such decisions were made with the measurable outcomes in mind: increased academic performances achieved in a fiscally conservative manner.
Another example comes from Oakwood’s KD, whose personal and professional experience is representative of both the district’s narrow understanding of its employees and society’s anachronistic expectations. She previously taught in several different states and several types of schools. She is an experienced instructor with a full toolkit of classroom management techniques and strategies to help her students stay focused. KD is also the mother of four children and a spouse of a higher education professional. KD’s life outside Oakwood public schools is important to her and teaching in a state-controlled school is difficult for her personally:

As a woman, it's very hard. As a mother, it's very hard. So [the principals] ask, and then you do it, and then they ask something else, and you do that, and pretty soon you look back and you're like, ‘Wow, this isn't even what I signed up for.’ But somehow you just do it. [B]ut also if something happens and you have to — a kid threatens you and you have to press charges on the kid, and you've got to wait for the police to come, you can pick up the phone and call, and say, ‘I'm going to be an hour late today. Shut the crock pot off. You're going to have to fend for yourself for dinner, the meat isn't thawed,’ whatever.

KD found that she had to adjust both to Oakwood’s increasing expectations of her time and expertise, while also continuing to be the primary parent for her four children, as her husband’s work kept him away from home after school. KD struggled logistically and emotionally to balance her work and professional lives.

In this state, the department of education has been legislatively granted extensive power to make personnel and policy decisions for districts in its control. When a school or district comes under the oversight of the commissioner of education, the commissioner can appoint many levels of managers to make rapid changes in the district. Instructional coaches, educational advisors, and management teams came to Milltown and Oakwood to implement changes stipulated in the AIPs. Study participants could not name the nonprofit organizations
that were brought in, nor could they recall the names of the individuals who were supposed to be leading their schools:

Well, we had a gentleman here who was — I can't remember who — I think he was the head of everything. I'm pretty sure he was the head of everything. Because there was him and another gentleman who used to come down from Canada. And the one that was here all the time…” (CS, Oakwood).

The participants’ lack of emotional and professional investment in the external management suggested they placed a protective distance between themselves and these leaders.

For some participants, their frustration was also due to their lack of agency in these decisions about their professional and personal lives. MB of Oakwood sat through faculty meetings and professional development sessions with great annoyance. As state and district leaders spoke, MB felt their initiatives which they launched with little teacher input were “more work for the teachers when we know this isn't really going to help.” Instead of purchasing the necessary curriculum for her academically delayed students, Milltown’s EK was told to develop materials on her own, in addition to all her other class preparations: “I’m like, ‘Oh, my God.’ We create the wheel every single day for every single student.”

Participant LM was willing to put in the work and time as she cared about her Milltown students greatly, but wanted to have more of a role in the changes taking place: “For me, it’s not even about the compensation so much as it’s about if they change our contract, we should have a say in the changes that they make.”

Some Oakwood and Milltown teachers were willing to consider the proposed ideas in the turnover plans, but like teacher JR, they were cautious: “It depends how much time and effort they put into it and stay here and do things and how they treat the employees” (Oakwood). They did not think reformers outside their communities would stick around and in fact, most external teams left after a semester or even one academic year. One of the
participants referred to the reformers coming to the district as “carpetbaggers” (BAC, Milltown). The participants did not trust these outsiders because they thought they were disconnected from the local community.

In addition to their feelings of distrust as they observed external teams come and go from their districts, the participants questioned the reform initiatives. The participants viewed the new instructional plans, curriculums, and protocols as ways for the turnaround leaders to control and limit them as professional educators. The teachers were compelled to follow state policies more strictly than their peers in districts not in state-control because the state’s focus was on improving measurable academic gains. The participants were limited because they could not innovate or adjust lesson plans. “[The district and state authorities are] trying to get out of that hole they’re in. Everything, everything, everything was focus[ed] on [the state test]. ‘Teach the test,’ ‘Make sure everyone’s making gains.’ (MB, Oakwood).

An example from Milltown demonstrates this control regardless of the teachers’ training or expertise. English teacher BAC has taught for over two decades and has two advanced degrees, including a doctorate. When instructed to use a particular set of literacy lessons selected by the new principal and the then state-appointed superintendent on the recommendation of an external literacy consultant, BAC complied despite feeling frustrated:

So I’ve had to do the lessons. I’ve had to model the lessons. I’ve had to work on Saturday and talk about how the lessons have worked and then give input. First, we were told, ‘Absolutely don’t change them at all,’ but the lessons are boring, and teachers who were teaching the lessons as directed got horrible, horrible evaluations because they were doing these boring lessons. (BAC, Milltown)

Districts like Milltown or Oakwood encourage instruction that follows scripts since the districts have a weak record of academic success. Although narrowing the curriculum can ensure the content is covered, it also undermines teachers as professionals by disregarding
their expertise. Control extended to the lesson design directly, as the teacher teams turned in their lesson plans to the principals weekly in Oakwood and Milltown. Hours of training and review were spent to develop and effectively enact such policies, such as the Saturday professional development sessions.

Teachers in state-controlled schools do not engage equally with scripted lessons and some in these districts resisted by changing them when not observed by evaluators. “We varied the text to make them more relatable to our students, like a story about a kid who grew up in the barrio” (BAC, Milltown). KD of Oakwood was troubled her students would be limited to a curriculum focused on the basics, as called for by the state reforms. “My kids [students], from Canal Street, one of those Puerto Rican kids, they have just as much right to know Shakespeare as my [own] child.”

Another Milltown teacher, JLH, encouraged one of her students, who is on the autism spectrum, to sing for her classmates instead of performing a poem because the student responded so well to music and was engaged in this way. Reading and writing were challenging for her emotionally. JLH also allowed the student to sing her math answers to her instead of writing them down because the student could do that accurately. Evaluating students who vocalize their answers rather than writing them down does not fit into the scripted model requested by the state, but JLH focused on the student’s needs.

The academic outcomes of students like those in JLH’s classroom were the objective of the state’s turnaround efforts. The measures of academic achievement and graduation rates in Oakwood and Milltown were among the lowest in the state. However, the state’s approach assumed that instruction had been inadequate while the district reviews repeatedly pointed to weak leadership. By controlling the curriculum and limiting teachers’ pedagogical choices,
state authorities were demonstrating misgivings about women teachers’ abilities to plan and instruct. They doubted the teachers as professionals.

Together, these three aspects of the participants’ experience in turnaround districts—scarcity of time; unreasonable work expectations; and undermining of professionalism—diminished their autonomy as teachers. They were controlled carefully by the state through their allotted instructional time, the scripted curriculum, professional training, and compensation. They had very little opportunity to contribute to these decisions, let alone to challenge them. The participants’ experiences of diminished autonomy resulting from these control measures contributed to the structural barriers that kept them from succeeding professionally.

**Summarizing Structural Barriers**

The participants of this study experienced the turnaround leadership of the state-controlled districts through structural barriers, which undermined their professionalism. The churn of fellow teachers and other personnel, their inaccurate pay, and the diminishing of their autonomy as teachers were the outcomes of turnaround leaders’ decisions. The inability to exercise control or influence over the basics of teaching, such as designing appropriate lesson plans or determining the best instructional techniques for their students, elicited much resentment from the participants. Neither their pay nor their responsibilities reflected their worth as professionals. Their districts hired them with the expectation that they would comply with the workplace norms, within a system that rewards those who are assumed to be unencumbered, without emotional or social obligations. These districts, which hired mostly women, failed to recognize these teachers shouldered the burden of family and unpaid work including home visits to students’ families and nighttime school activities.
Cultural Barriers Facing Women Teachers in Turnaround Schools

The data also pointed to three ways cultural barriers impeded the participants’ work as educators through sexual and gendered harassment; teacher intimidation; and the cultural politics of turnaround schools. Gender dynamics and inequity, as well as sexism in the workplace, infused many of the experiences the participants shared in their interviews. The turnaround did not cause the workplace cultures in Oakwood and Milltown which the participants found frustrating and problematic, but it further interfered with the participants’ ability to succeed professionally. Gender bias (being a woman, interacting with men in ways that felt uncomfortable, or inequitable policies), surfaced in the interviews as a significant factor in the lives of the participants. However, cultural barriers (Table 6) were not recognized as obstacles to reform or professional success by the state in their district reviews or turnaround policies.

Table 6

Cultural Barriers

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<td>Sexual and Gendered Harassment</td>
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<td>High-threat Environments</td>
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Three cultural barriers affected the work of the participants, keeping them from fulfilling their potential as professionals. First, sexism against women was evident in the harassment described by participants from both Oakwood and Milltown. Second, the participants shared examples of intimidation that was gendered in nature, coming as it did
from men. And third, the cultural politics of these districts allowed women in positions of influence to be treated differently than men who served in similar roles. Neither the climate surveys nor the state reports and documents include such examples. The participants had not been able to share their experiences because they were not asked for them. No question regarding harassment or sexism was included on the survey, nor in the evidence gathered by the state for its reports. The culture of the schools supported and enabled women employees to be treated differently than men, and to be harassed, negatively impacting their ability to teach and lead effectively.

**Sexual and Gendered Harassment**

The first cultural barrier is the sexual and gendered harassment the participants faced in their schools. In Oakwood and Milltown, the workplace culture of sexual harassment felt harmful to the study participants. From the ways their colleagues described them, based on physical appearances or their anatomy, to the ways they were treated when raising a concern or questioning a decision, the participants felt that a sexist set of beliefs about women kept them from succeeding. This substructure of power relationships based on gender was present during the turnaround. The mission of both districts, as outlined by the state authorities, was to improve the academic outcomes of the students. Structures were put in place to do so, but in so doing, the participating teachers were hampered by leaders’ beliefs about them as women. During the interviews, over 40% of the participants (MA, EK in Milltown; MB, KD, CS in Oakwood) described how they or their colleagues had considered leaving the districts altogether because of these sexist interactions, which were, therefore, contributing to the high rates of turnover.
Gender and leadership factors also influenced personal interactions the participants had with their male peers. The participants explained how some male colleagues voiced sexist opinions, and several of the participants stated that their male colleagues made them uncomfortable (MA, RAL, EK in Milltown; CS and KD, Oakwood). In what they described as a lack of institutional support, the participants reported that these men faced no consequences for their behavior in the workplace. The sexism varied from male teachers calling a woman teacher they disagreed with a “loud-mouthed female” (CS, Oakwood) to male principals labeling women colleagues arrogant (EK, Milltown), to demeaning their physical appearance, as EK experienced.

The gendered cultural politics of Oakwood and Milltown are found in how the participants felt they and their fellow women teachers were being treated. “When I started teaching here in Milltown, women were treated horribly, even though we were the majority of the [teachers]. Often I would think, is this 1932?” (EK, Milltown). EK recounted one experience of cultural politics that occurred during her first three days as a teacher in Milltown:

I was getting my area ready, and this man-teacher who is renowned here in this town — he’s been a teacher for like 900 years — he came in and he started screaming at the top of his lungs at the teacher I was sharing the room with about some union meeting they had gone to. And he said, ‘I am sick of women like you coming to these meetings and supporting your breasts.’ Now I didn’t want to hear anything like that on my first week, so I dived into the library, thinking he would stop. He repeated it three times. She said, ‘You’re going to have to leave.’ She told him to leave three times. There were other teachers who came in when they heard him raise his voice. Nothing came of it. He only retired two or three years ago.

Several types of political and social dysfunction exist in this example from Milltown. First, the brazen attitude of the male teacher to speak to his colleague in such a tone, and to use such language demonstrates his confidence in his standing in the school; he did not worry
about who would hear him. Second, EK’s instinct was to remove herself from the situation, as a new employee, but several other teachers hid in the library with her. They did not feel that they could stand up to him, nor come to the aid of their colleague, who was being berated across the hall. The man’s fury at the woman for apparently speaking about something related to being a woman at a union meeting came from his political and social opposition to that statement. He was offended and wanted to make sure she knew that. The political and social mindset of this particular man was not limited to just him.

The participants ran into the barriers of cultural politics in their interactions with students and their families. Their titles, training, and assignments did not shield the participants from being negatively impacted by the cultural politics of their districts. Alongside the sexist and sexualized comments KD received, LC found some of the parents to be “patriarchal” (Oakwood). As a member of the instructional leadership team, LC sometimes meets with parents. She explained the classroom teachers’ decisions about students’ progress or services that were available through the school. While a vice principal might manage such meetings in other schools, in Oakwood, faculty members take on additional roles due to funding restrictions. In this position, LC has run into gendered perceptions of leadership in which power is equated with men.

So sometimes I've been in meetings with a parent where they don't necessarily want to talk to their wife or me — they want to talk to somebody else. They want somebody in power. That's happened a few times with a man who's just taken over the whole conversation and wants to talk to the principal or whoever is in power.

Despite her nearly two decades of professional experience and a doctorate in education, LC was not taken seriously by some parents, as, for example, when a father did not want to hear what she had to say about his child during a parent meeting.
In addition to blatant sexual harassment, the participants also described sexist interactions they had with male administrators—another way in which the women teachers experienced leadership during school turnaround. An example comes from an elementary campus in Oakwood. At that time, an independent organization was contracted to turn the school around, as it was testing at the lowest levels in both the district and state. The then-building leader was an employee of an organization which had come from outside Oakwood to institute change. His approach in communicating with his new colleagues made some uncomfortable. The majority of these teachers were young women, very few were men, and the then-leader and his team were patronizing and blatant in their gendered harassment:

There were a lot of things that they did that were just kind of sexist. The way they talked down to women. If you were young and a female, the way he talked to you was like he was grandpa, and you were the young ladies, and you were getting chastised. The way he would talk to you if you were older was just sort of like passing fancy. But he was really friendly with the guys. (CS, Oakwood)

Both districts had evidence of patronizing attitudes towards teachers. Petite and strong-willed (as she described herself), RAL, was teased by her students for being a ‘strict old lady’ which she attributed to ‘ageism’ among the students. But even her administrators also expressed similar observations in the sense of being regarded as “‘one tough cookie’ — which was a little sexist coming from him,” (RAL, Milltown). While neither example is particularly heinous, these moments and comments stayed with CS and RAL because the harassment by the turnaround leaders undermined them as professionals.

These examples of sexism were offered to demonstrate how these negative interactions made them feel as women and as educators. The sexist interactions contributed to the strain and stress of these particular workplaces. The participants saw the aggressive gendered language, restrictions on the curriculum, and constraints on their teaching spaces as
part of the sexism in the workplace culture, a barrier that hampered their ability to teach successfully. Oakwood teacher CS recounted a debate she had with one of her only male colleagues as an example of this type of sexism. As a woman of color from an economically disadvantaged background, CS thought it was important for students to see themselves in the curriculum, including girls. The debate began because the man “got into it with one of our other teachers because she said women’s rights were not represented in the teaching.” The man did not think it was necessary to include women’s history for the girls to feel connected to the lessons. CS felt that his arguments reflected the administration’s attitude towards women. She told him:

If that’s what you think, we have some serious work to do with you. Some serious work. You’re molding the minds of children. I don’t want anybody teaching my child who says women have just as equal rights in this country as men do. Just because there are female teachers around you doesn’t mean that it’s equal for them. (CS, Oakwood)

The patronizing attitudes from male colleagues and the lack of support from building administration that the participants encountered was part of their experience in the state’s control of school turnaround.

The evidence the participants shared indicates the workplace culture not only perpetuated sexism among the adult men, but also allowed it to fester among the students towards women teachers. Oakwood teacher, MB, received gendered, sexist harassment from her older elementary school students who were attempting to disrupt class and rattle her nerves. These students struggled with classwork due to their cognitive conditions and responded by acting out. One boy asked personal health questions of his teacher. MB was asked on several occasions by this student if she was on her menstrual cycle: “And I’m like, really? Just because I’m a woman and I’m cranky you think that?” (MB, Oakwood). He was
able to make such remarks multiple times without punishment because MB did not see the point in taking it up with the principal. Her decision to not seek out her principal was directly due to the takeover and turnaround of the school. The school was not staffed adequately to discipline students for infractions the administration team considered small. MB’s requests for assistance with a disciplinary matter had been dismissed before, and she assumed she would receive no assistance with this sexual comment. As a result, MB did not trust the principal or those she perceived to be close to the principal: “It’s a clique. There's like four of them. I call them the rat pack because they're kind of like rats.”

By the time of the interview, MB had long since lost any respect or feelings of trust for her principal. She knew that even though the comments were uncomfortable and offensive, and it contributed to her feelings of burnout, the principal did not regard such sexism as significant enough for intervention. Fellow Oakwood teacher KD also learned to disregard the sexual commentary she received from these elementary-level students. When a male student would invite her to do something sexual to his anatomy, she would not respond to it: “[They] threaten you in sexual ways or whatever. I let it go, but I think that other teachers have a hard time with that” (KD, Oakwood). The teachers were not viewed primarily as women by their building and district leaders, but as neutral agents, so the administration did not recognize that these remarks would offend.

The teachers’ sense of safety as women was not considered either. When MB called the main office on the classroom phone for help in breaking up a fight between students, she was told to “stop yelling” and to deal with it. “And we, who are women, who are smaller, or who are maybe not trained to fight people, we don’t have that instinct to defend ourselves when students are fighting or if there is an intruder” (MB, Oakwood). The student
disrespected her as a professional, and her peers disrespected her sense of safety that she felt she was entitled to as a licensed teacher. The participants’ evidence suggests the limited staffing due to the high rate of turnover, perennial funding challenges, and culture of sexism prevents those in charge of the turnaround school workplace to consider how these social factors impact the majority of teachers, who are women.

Teachers from both districts shared similar reflections. Five out of the six Milltown teachers and four out of the six Oakwood teachers experienced some gender-oriented negative exchange with males while employed by these schools. The participants shared examples of verbal abuse, intimidation, and being patronized. Such behavior is undesirable from leadership of any kind, let alone in an industry dominated by women in staff roles and men in authority positions. Being in the numerical majority does not insulate women from gendered harassment while teaching: “I think the same sexism that is prevalent in our society is alive in a lot of our schools” (KD, Oakwood).

This sexism extends into assumptions based on stereotypes of gender. One Milltown participant was asked to accompany a 12 year-old boy with special emotional needs to the bathroom. “What questions does that bring up and why isn't a clinical paraprofessional doing this? There are male teachers here. Why isn't a male teacher doing this? He [the principal] goes, ‘Absolutely not. You're going to do it’” (EK, Milltown). Concerned that this was inappropriate given the age of the boy and the compromising position she would be placed in, along with her co-teacher, who was also a woman, the teacher refused to participate. She took the student to the nurse’s office to use the facilities. Taking this child to the bathroom would also have been difficult work as he was emotionally more like a toddler but had the physical growth of a pre-teen. The principal balked at this alternative plan to use the nurse’s
office instead: “And he goes, ‘Oh, you people just — you're so arrogant. Everybody else does what I tell them to do.’” (EK, Milltown). EK and her colleagues held their ground, worked with the nurse to assist the boy in a more appropriate fashion and felt relieved when this principal left the school soon afterward.

EK was pushing back at the notion that she, as a woman, was naturally better equipped to help this student than a man would be, due to her perceived maternal and nurturing nature. It would also be potentially unpleasant given the boy’s delayed emotional growth and his inability to care for himself. The principal saw this all as ‘women’s work.’ Indeed, the principal perpetuated a work culture that defined by designations of women and men’s work based on beliefs about gender.

Three-quarters of those interviewed experienced some form of harassment of either a sexual or gendered nature while working in their Milltown or Oakwood schools. The remarks about their anatomy, dismissal of their professional opinions because they are women, and assignments of work or tasks based on biased assumptions about women were provided during the interviews. Such sexual and gendered harassment contributed to a workplace culture that cause the participants to express feelings of discomfort, anger, and fear. The harassment the participants experienced was part of the cultural barriers that arose because of the turnaround leadership within these workplaces.

**Teacher Intimidation**

The second cultural barrier is teacher intimidation. The study participants experienced their districts’ turnaround leadership through the tension arising from micropolitics of masculinist management practices in the high-threat environment of the culture of turnaround schools. The patronizing and sexist attitudes the participants described took place within the
context of uneven power relationships: teacher leaders to classroom teachers (RAL, MA, TAM) or principals to teachers (EK, CS, MB). The participants were at the receiving end of comments or attitudes, unable to respond to them because they did not have influence or authority. The bullying of women educators, the promotion of male colleagues who lacked appropriate professional experience, and a focus on moving the students through the system, rather than meeting their needs, resulted in a negative work culture. The gendered intimidation between the teachers and their colleagues took place within the districts’ particular social context and power dynamics. The gender bias within teaching and education in US schools contributes to this workplace culture.

An example comes from Milltown teacher MA. She challenged a colleague who made a disparaging remark to a special-needs student in front of a group of students. Not only did the remark seem unprofessional to MA, but she also knew the student felt “humiliated” by the interaction. MA spoke to this fellow teacher about how upset the student was about this exchange. Soon after, the colleague’s romantic partner, one of the few male teachers at the school, verbally threatened MA. The male colleague was also upset by his girlfriend’s embarrassment, according to MA. He came to MA's classroom during a class and demanded she come out in the hall. She refused to leave, saying she had no problem with him. “You will if you don’t come out here,” he replied, which prompted a few boys in the class to stand up next to MA in a protective fashion. He eventually returned to his classroom. She said she felt “terrible” after that interaction. “I didn’t want to be here. I was nervous I’d run into this guy. I didn’t feel safe. But yet, I didn’t want to leave and kind of let him win,” (MA, Milltown). MA took her concerns to the administration and the male teacher repeated the threat in front of two male administrators. Despite telling her supervisors, no action was
taken, leaving her to feel unsettled and uncertain as a professional. These levels of gendered intimidation may be more common than is often realized, but their occurrence during turnaround reform has not been considered empirically.

In another example of how Milltown women teachers experienced intimidating leadership, RAL confronted her superiors about a team chair who spent time alone, behind closed doors, with a mother of a troubled student, after dismissing the rest of the team. RAL thought the family was emotionally vulnerable because the mother was having trouble with her son at school and was desperate for assistance. Meeting alone with this mother after the official meeting had ended went against protocol and showed poor professional judgement on the part of the team chair, according to RAL.

RAL went to her department head and principal with her concerns: “What you need to know is you have a male administrator behind closed doors with a female parent and I don't feel good about it” (RAL, Milltown). RAL continued to press the issue.

And so that's the kind of thing I will do and I will not [worry], "Oh, I wonder if I get fired" You know? I'm not going to do that because I think part of the issue that I see with women is that people with power, not always men, will try to intimidate where they would not do that with a man. And I've seen it over, and over, and over again.

RAL and the department head (also a woman), felt the male principal was not addressing their concerns. They contacted the state-appointed superintendent, who quickly set up a meeting. While her swift response was interpreted positively, RAL felt she was subsequently reprimanded on a separate issue soon after for speaking up:

I don't know if they somehow felt threatened. So when this was presented to me by a different administrator what was actually said to me was, ‘I have heard from students, teachers, and families with concerns regarding your approach to children.’ I could have picked my mouth up off the floor. I was stunned. Stunned. And then I was told, ‘Nope, no names. No, you'll never get to meet them. No, there is no restorative justice here. In fact, you can never speak about this.’ So that was the first time. And within the next three weeks, I was sanctioned three times not to talk about what had been
discussed in the meeting. Administrator, power over me, two men. So [the state-appointed superintendent] never said that to me, ‘You can't talk about this meeting.’ [The superintendent] never said that to me. But they both did. They both did.

With no due process and few powerful allies to advocate for her, RAL became more cautious about making similar comments in the future. Fear of reprisal and sanction, coupled with surveillance through classroom visits and paperwork, kept teachers cautious and concerned. Indeed, Oakwood’s JR called the district’s official who visited classrooms the “grim reaper.”

MB in Oakwood felt that she could not speak out against reforms because the one person she admired who challenged the district had recently been fired. BAC in Milltown did not openly push back against curriculum changes she knew to be futile but rather undermined them by not following the scripted lessons while teaching. She thought the lessons were “boring” so she “skip[ped] little things and tried to punch it up a little bit and it ended up going okay.” RAL in Milltown felt she took professional risks by standing up to the principals and district leaders: “I still, in my old age, have such an issue with justice. I think I'm perceived as being confident enough to speak.”

Another Milltown teacher experienced similar attempts to dismiss her concerns as a professional. In addition to experiencing harassment by a male colleague, MA challenged her male team chair. MA is an experienced special education resource room teacher for students with particularly low IQs who need alternatives to the general curriculum. In 2017, she was assigned to work with an administrative team chair (a man), who was promoted to this position by the then-new building principal (a man). The administrative team chair lacked special education qualifications and had not worked in that department before. She raised concerns at a regularly scheduled team meeting, during which students’ special education placements were discussed — a practice that was previously considered the norm. Soon after
this incident, however, she received a notice to meet with her union representative, the
administrative team chair, the principal, and an investigator.

It was ridiculous! In 25 years I’ve never had a meeting with a union rep. Ya know, union reps come for two reasons: either someone’s under investigation and I’m not, or someone’s going to be fired. I think all of us are a little bit on edge. Because I wasn’t the only one. There are several people that got those messages to have the meeting.

All of the educators under investigation at the request of the team chair were women; at the time of the interview, this issue had yet to be resolved.

While she was not sanctioned, it appeared to MA that the meeting was an attempt to prevent her from challenging the team chair’s decisions going forward. MA argued if the decisions were what was best for the students, she would be supportive.

But when it’s ‘Geez, autism is a qualifier for an IEP?’ or ‘A 688? What’s a 688?’ and having meetings without the right people there, we would raise concerns. It was not received well. (MA, Milltown)

This study’s findings indicate that in state-controlled schools, leaders who are motivated by the state-authorized metrics of success further entrench gendered biases that undermine women teachers’ academic and professional growth. In these masculinist systems, women teachers experience negative, discriminatory, or intimidating actions because of the perpetrators’ beliefs about women. Education is not alone in having such gender dynamics, of course. But acknowledging their presence in a field dominated by women is also necessary.

The workplace culture created an environment where the participants felt the need to make a choice: to be mentally strong and resist the institutionalized sexism or to leave. The state-appointed superintendent told MA and her colleagues to “bring forward anything we felt that was retaliation. And we did. And we don’t talk about it. We just kind of do our
best,” (Milltown). In turnaround schools, the workplace culture is often one of frequent changes in a high-threat environment. In such cases, the pressure and stress of measurably improving academics at a relatively rapid pace exacerbate the workplace culture already present. The biases and assumptions about women persist because the state’s focus is on measurable outcomes, not on so-called personnel matters.

Gender bias should not imply a dichotomous relationship of only men harassing women, or men exerting their authority over women teachers. Instead, gender bias refers to the idea that a person is held back or inhibited by cultural barriers based on assumptions and beliefs about his or her gender identity; women can also be biased against other women. A prime example of this comes from Oakwood, where several of the participants served under the same principal and her leadership team. The school struggled for a few years before the state intervened. The school had been taken over by the state before the rest of the district. State officials had been observing the school, from 2008. In this particular school, women held central office roles as principals and received praise from some of the participants: “And this school, it's all female leaders and they are very strong and very passionate. So in a way it's been nice to see the female leadership” (LC, Oakwood).

The participants’ perceptions of these female leaders were not always aligned in the interviews. The leadership style that LC describes as “strong” and “passionate” were perceived differently by others, as her colleague KD explained: “When you work for a woman who is competent and demanding, that ruffles a lot of feathers. I think that they're held in a completely different light than a male principal.” Oakwood teacher LC worked alongside KD, an experienced educator who worked in both suburban, affluent districts and poor urban districts before coming to Oakwood. KD did not view the difference between her
previous suburban school and Oakwood classrooms as merely a result of the urban/suburban
divide. She understood the leadership decisions were influenced by the fundamental
distinction in the urgency and complexity of the Oakwood context and the calm of suburbia.
In her previous school, there was time to reflect on the best responses to behavioral issues,
but in Oakwood, decisions had to be made quickly. The principal held everyone to a high
standard, with little time or room for equivocation, utilizing masculinist approaches to turn
the school around. Colleague MB was not sure what to make of the principal’s approaches.

I mean, she is really into doing what she's doing, being the principal and making sure
the school runs and the kids are well cared for and whatever, but at the same time,
I've kind of seen this other side of her which is very off-putting. She shuts you down
really fast. (MB, Oakwood)

With her more extensive professional experience, KD offered a different explanation for the
principal’s approach, explaining,

Sometimes you just have to be efficient. When a woman says, ‘Do this. Do this now.
Don’t talk back to me. This has to be done,’ there are people that don’t like that. And
I think if a man did it, it would be better received.

Similar gender bias emerged in the Milltown interviews. While there had been a few women
principals and assistant or interim superintendents, most Milltown superintendents and
principals had been men; the majority of the school committee were also male. Teacher MA
reflected that as she came to know the state-appointed superintendent, a woman, her thoughts
evolved on biases toward women leaders: “I think we tend to see women who are passionate
about things in a different way than a man. [The state-appointed superintendent] would be a
bitch and [previous superintendents] would be enthusiastic” (Milltown).

When the state-appointed superintendent selection was announced for Milltown, the
appointee was the only woman hired to such a position in this state, and the only woman
superintendent in several years in Milltown. However, her position did not remove the
barriers of gendered politics any more than it did in relation to her teachers. The state treated her as if she was a neutral agent by not acknowledging her gender or personal background in the announcement. When the state commissioner and secretary of education announced her appointment during the state board meeting in March 2016, her appointment was the first item, according to the minutes. More time was given in that brief introduction to her professional work than her background or the historical precedent she set as the first woman appointed by the state to turn a district around; an unrecognized milestone. Her appointment was statistically unusual, as the majority of all superintendents are men and she was one of only a handful of women administrators the district had had in over a decade. The absence of this acknowledgement in itself is a statement, indicates how the state department of education did not understand or value the significance gender plays in Milltown cultural politics.

The state-appointed superintendent was not stepping into a gender-neutral space. The state itself acknowledged the gender biases and gendered power struggles between the district and school committee in its own 2015 report. The ways in which teachers evaluated the superintendent in terms of her appearance along with doubts about her abilities, were not expressed by the Oakwood participants when describing their state-appointed superintendent, a man. Patriarchal attitudes emerged with the appointment of these two superintendents, which took place within weeks of each other. Although they had the same titles and training, the two superintendents were judged quite differently by their coworkers on the basis of their genders.

The workplace culture of Oakwood and Milltown is characterized by gendered harassment that is used to intimidate and control women teachers. From the participants’ examples, the perpetrators of harassment seemed to expect that certain work was within the
domain of women, or that they could use the women for their own entertainment. Again, the participants face an untenable duality: they are both treated by the districts as being unencumbered neutral employees, while also being harassed for their physical characteristics or stereotypical qualities as women.

Oakwood teacher TAM lived this duality herself at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year. Due with her first child, TAM went into labor early and unexpectedly during a math lesson. A teacher who taught nearby stepped in to help her, and the principal made sure she was able to get to the hospital with her medical insurance information in hand. The situation was handled with care and compassion, yet, “I haven't really seen that empathy since. [The school] comes first, and you're expected to have [the school] come first, and they don't necessarily give anything else to you” (TAM, Oakwood). With TAM’s medical crisis averted and her maternity leave over, her building leadership assumed she would return to her duties with the same level of dedication as before. However, her life was no longer the same with a premature infant at home:

There's really no one relatable right now to what I'm going through. It's either no children so you can focus your whole world on [the school], or you have the ability to focus enough because your kids can manage themselves, but no one's getting up at 3:00 in the morning to feed their kids.

TAM was viewed by the district as a genderless individual, as the job of the classroom teacher is designed around an unencumbered man. The principal’s approach to her employees exemplifies the complex space in which women teachers work in these districts. They are neutral agents whose needs as humans and as women are mainly unseen, despite adjustments to accommodate those needs under extenuating circumstances.
**Cultural Politics of Turnaround Schools**

The third cultural barrier is the cultural politics of turnaround schools. While structural barriers to the professionalism of women teachers function locally in the districts and schools themselves, and cultural barriers live within the hearts and minds of the individuals, cultural politics permeate the statewide educational system. From the legislative mandate to intervene in schools deemed failing, to the jockeying for power between local boards of education and central offices, the entire turnaround process is predicated upon the political power of those in charge (Apple, 2004). There is a distinct gendered aspect to the politics in these turnaround districts, which has contributed to the cultural barriers that have undermined women teachers. The cultural barriers are also inextricably political ones too, because schools function within the economic and social contexts of the larger communities they serve (Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Youdell, 2010).

There are two ways in which these cultural politics manifest themselves. First, the historic gendered dysfunction of Oakwood and Milltown leadership choices and decisions continues to the present-day, preventing women from playing a more active role in the improvement of the schools. This culture of gendered dysfunction converges with the turnaround school construct of high-threat structures and the cultural politics of these districts. Second, the cultural politics and the high-threat environment prohibited the participants from participating freely in discussions of school policies and instructional pedagogy as they fear retribution from their leaders. Without the insights and opinions of teachers, the reform and turnaround efforts risk becoming insufficient and unsustainable, because the professionals meant to carry out reforms and put the district on the right path are not included.
The gendered dysfunction and reticence of teachers arises from the culture of individualism, as teachers may feel it is wiser to focus inwardly, rather than risk unwanted attention or punitive measures. The state department of education focused on measurable academic outcomes and the building principals assigned teachers to small working groups to improve these measures. These forced collaborative groups were directed to use academic data to determine ways to improve student learning outcome measures, like state test scores. The teachers were collectively evaluated based on the progress of the students assigned to their small group. This contrived collegiality did not establish trust and rapport between the teachers (Datnow, 2011; Hargreaves, 1991) Instead, as Milltown teacher JHL articulated when reflecting on her assigned team, she felt the teachers were competing to not be fired:

I think there's still, especially when people are getting evaluated and getting on the list to go, I think there's still some competition. I think … if you don't all feel like you trust everyone on your team, … if you feel like you've got to hold something back as you want your scores to be better, that's not student centered.

The lack of trust, the instinct to turn inward, and the sense of competition that JHL describes in their forced collaboration groups contributed to the cultural politics of these schools. In these contrived collaborations, the teachers were competing for their jobs, focused on the academic metrics they could improve in a short period of time, rather than the well-being of the students. Similar to the barrier of teacher intimidation, the contrived collaborations were designed by the districts to direct and control the teachers. The politicization of the Milltown schools was a documented problem, as it was included in the state district review and local media by the time of the state-appointed superintendent announcement. Her efforts to improve academic performance and provide resources for students were undermined by the gendered politics set by the previous leadership.
I think she has a heck of a job to do. And being female, as well. I still see the old guard here in [this state] and in [the state department of education] is a very male-dominated structure. And so I see that any woman that takes on a task like this is going to be maybe micromanaged. (RAL, Milltown)

The superintendent was highly visible in the community through her attendance of Saturday training sessions (mentioned by RAL and BAC), and discussions of her work appeared regularly in local and regional newspapers.

The state-appointed superintendents are granted their authority by the department of education’s central board members, in a process similar to local boards of education hiring superintendents. The superintendents’ social and political influence in the community comes from their leadership positions, yet the gendered differences between the Oakwood and then Milltown superintendents are striking. Personality, experience, and leadership style may have played a role in how the two towns received the superintendents, but gender was also a factor based on the analysis of this study’s interviews.

While the 75% of the participants could offer evidence of how they had experienced gender bias and the cultural politics of their districts, they did not notice how they perpetuated it as well. Indeed, the ways in which the participants received the superintendents demonstrates how even they themselves may have unconsciously adopted the sexist attitudes of their administrators. In course of being interviewed, four of the six Oakwood teachers mentioned the state-appointed superintendent. They mentioned the job title (“the superintendent”) seven times. In contrast, all six of the Milltown teachers mentioned their state-appointed superintendent a total of 63 times. She was referred to by job title (“the superintendent”) 34 times, and four of the participants referred to her by her first name a total of 29 times. None of the Milltown teachers mentioned her doctorate or her last name. Arguably, the state-appointed superintendent in Oakwood was also just as visible, but
none of the participants mentioned his physical appearance or intellect. The Milltown teachers may have experienced the leadership by participating in the practice of scrutinizing a woman educator on the basis of gender. The community freely discussed her appearance and personal characteristics, not her professional acumen or ideas, according to study participants. As one Milltown teacher reflected:

I sometimes see that people end up criticizing the [superintendent] herself as a woman rather than like criticizing her actions. Like people will criticize the way that she dresses and criticize her intelligence. I think those are kind of low blows that I wonder so much if it would happen if the [superintendent] was a man. (LM, Milltown)

The cultural politics of gendered dysfunction undermined the state-appointed superintendent as a professional educator. In the school and community, her efforts became less about the reforms she was trying to implement and more about gender politics. The familiarity with which the Milltown teachers discussed their superintendent indicates while they may recognize the sexist attitudes towards teachers, they may not have realized that they adopted some of those mindsets.

Oakwood teachers may not have spoken much about their superintendent, but they did have to contend with their district’s struggles with political dynamics. The teachers were aware of the town’s political factions which cut across geographic, economic, and ethnic/racial lines. Several of the teachers mentioned particular neighborhoods in Oakwood and their social and political influence (CS, LC, TAM, and KD, Oakwood). The Highlands was the home of wealthier, more established, and typically Irish-American, families with long ties to the community. The Lowlands, close to the former mills and the canal, was home to the newest immigrants, many of whom were Puerto Rican and were the most impoverished families in Oakwood.
Political power came from being from the Highlands side of the city and from being connected to the “right” groups, a distinction explained by CS who found the neighborhood divides frustrating. She experienced these distinct “neighborhood divides” and argued that it is “very clear that that's what the history of this city has been.” Men dominated the political and social landscape of Oakwood, from the mayor to the state-appointed superintendent, the former superintendent (who was also male), and most of the district principals. Many members of the school board were men as well. Women teachers in Oakwood gained social and political capital if they were considered to be allied with these men. LC came to this conclusion during the interview:

Depending on the group you're part of at any one given time women may or not be afforded a similar level of respect. Sometimes it could be even just with who you're standing with. If you're standing with a man who happens to be in administration or whatever then they seem to be deferred to by whoever is in the conversation.

In Oakwood, women educators receive respect from the community and fellow educators because of those they are connected to, such as male administrators. In addition to CS and LC, the political aspect of leadership and neighborhood divides was also noted by TAM, KD, MA who described an impoverished but “tight-knit community” (MA) of “South Oakwood” (KD). Only JR, who raised her three children in Oakwood, did not mention the neighborhood divides of the Highlands and Lowlands in South Oakwood.

Oakwood participant TAM experienced these dynamics and the district's treatment of women teachers in the course of her compensation conflict with her principal. She soon discovered when challenged, Oakwood Public Schools would use connections to the Highlands neighborhood, men in power, and organizations with influence to intimidate and control teachers. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, TAM discovered the written pay policy was being improperly applied, resulting in teachers being underpaid. The principal, a woman,
disagreed but was not able to change TAM’s mind on the matter. The union representative was brought in by the principal to mediate a solution. This union rep, a woman teacher in the building, no longer had any negotiating leverage due to the state takeover but was still politically powerful and socially connected. “[The union representative] is not my kind of people but she’s well-known and she had had the mayor in her class. So, it was more of a political decision for the principal to go to her” (TAM, Oakwood).

By bringing in the union representative who had connections to some of the most influential Oakwood residents, the principal was signaling the power she had in the conflict. By associating herself with the union and the popular young mayor of Oakwood, the principal was trying to persuade TAM not to take the compensation issue further. Moreover, neither TAM nor the principal, both women, had as much sway, influence, or power as the union representative. Since the union rep once taught the current mayor — a man who grew up in Oakwood — she was automatically more significant and qualified to act as a mediator. Without union support, and with clear political barriers placed in her path, TAM did not have a way forward, and she lacked influence herself as only a classroom teacher. She was standing alone, so TAM decided to discontinue her challenge.

The patriarchal system enables and perpetuates this distribution of power when it disregards the knowledge, experience, and capabilities of women in their own right. The evidence shared by the study participants indicates they were restricted socially and professionally by the political influence of their leaders. The study participants could support their arguments with hard numbers about their pay or demonstrated professional training about instruction, but they were not as powerful as some men in the system, or those
connected to these men. The system acts as a social barrier preventing the participants from succeeding professionally in their classrooms and schools.

In Oakwood and Milltown, being connected to the right member of the school board or the mayor himself provided access to key individuals and resources. It provided TAM’s principal with protection against a public inquiry about compensation in Oakwood. There were certainly state-level and city-level political maneuverings that shaped the restructuring of the districts. However, the smaller cultural politics of daily work in the schools impacted the participants more.

**Summarizing Cultural Barriers**

The three forms of cultural barriers (sexual and gendered harassment, intimidation, and cultural politics of turnaround schools) negatively impacted the participants’ work lives. The participants were harassed for being women (“loudmouthed female” CS, Oakwood), threatened in sexual ways (KD, Oakwood), and expected to do work that was beyond their scope, simply because they were women (EK, Milltown). When they challenged the status quo or the decisions of the men in their schools, the participants were physically and professionally threatened (RAL and MA, Milltown) but their accusers were not reprimanded or disciplined. The students in Oakwood and Milltown districts were in a “crisis situation” as KD described it, and the adults tried to find solutions with insufficient tools and resources. The state department of education did not dismantle the patriarchal, competitive, and dysfunctional systems that brought the districts into state control. Even though the state partially acknowledged them, the gendered political barriers to making decisions remained in place for women teachers. The participants continued to be obstructed by the cultural barriers as they found their professional knowledge dismissed by community members and ignored
by leadership. From judging an educator by her appearance instead of her accomplishments to pressuring an educator to drop her compensation challenge, the cultural politics prevented women teachers from changing the operations.

The experiences shared by the participants demonstrate that women can receive harassment about their bodies or their minds, but they are not welcome, as agents, to advocate for women’s voices in policies or procedures. The cultural barriers these women experienced in the turnaround schools were established by the patriarchal attitudes present in those communities, but also to serve a political purpose of controlling the women teachers.

**Conclusion**

The two barriers — structural and cultural — together describe how the participating teachers in this study experience leadership in these turnaround districts. From curriculum and instructional restrictions, to being discredited by their principals, and having concerns about harassment dismissed, the participants were undermined professionally by turnaround leadership decisions. The troubles plaguing Oakwood and Milltown existed prior to, and during, the takeover by the department of education. The legal action this state took to directly control the districts allowed the state department of education to target its intervention in ways that the department could not do with other struggling districts. While the state focused on metrics of improvement (increased test scores, improved graduation rates), the problems that weakened the districts were left to fester, compromising the state’s efforts to improve. As indicated by this study’s participants, teachers left after feeling threatened, frustrated, and burned out, leading to turnover. The experiences of these teachers during state control speak to their specific positions as women, as teachers, and as professionals working in troubled districts.
The state’s investment of time, talent, and funding targeted academic outcomes. This is made clear in announcements of takeover where the low academic performance is cited as the reason for the state’s intervention. The structural and cultural barriers were enacted, enabled, and upheld by the school systems to control aspects of the districts in order to achieve improved academic measures on state tests and increase graduation rates. Structurally, the intent was to improve instruction in order to raise academic achievement, since Oakwood and Milltown had not been able to meet the state’s expectations for several years. Culturally, the state wished to maintain workplace stability in the schools among teachers, leaders, and staff.

However, the state did not recognize the problems of harassment, bias, or barriers, as those issues since these do not overtly impact student academic achievement. Yet, as the findings of this study indicate, how teachers experience leadership and feel in their classrooms matters toward their ability to help students meet their potential. A teacher who feels frustrated, unsafe, or suspicious of colleagues cannot effectively address the needs of students, particularly those coming from impoverished homes. A teacher who feels left out of the turnaround process, or worse yet feels like a cog in the reform machine, will begrudge requests to stay later, work harder, or attend more school events. A teacher who feels disregarded as a woman by her school and district leadership because they dismissed her concerns about harassment or physical safety or ignored her obligations as a parent or caregiver will not want to build a career in such a school.

And thus, the cycle of academic struggle is at risk of continuing despite the state’s intervention. Women teachers shared the same concerns about their workplaces for several years, but the state did not address the problems. Instead, these structural and cultural
problems continue in the district operations. The conclusions, research implications, and policy recommendations that follow address this cycle.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to determine how women teachers in state-controlled districts experience leadership during a school turnaround. The findings of this study suggest participants experienced this leadership through structural and cultural barriers that prevented them from being fully effective educators. These barriers existed because of implicit and explicit bias against women educators, but also because of a historically outdated mindset about teachers, which expected them to perform regardless of their perspectives as women or as professionals. They were presumed to be neutral workers implementing reforms that were similar to the types of routine factory work that used to exist in these towns.

In both Oakwood and Milltown, large four and five-story brick complexes that stretch along local rivers for the equivalent of many city blocks dominate the landscape. The clock-in, clock-out mentality of the industrial age where the factory whistles sounded for shift changes and breaks are echoed in Acker’s (2012) description of neutral work for neutral employees in educational environments today. Of course, these factory workers were not any more neutral than the women in this study, but the mindset and culture of this industrial model continues in the towns’ schools. It is just as prohibitive for ‘line workers’ (teachers) to question the powers that are perpetuating this culture as it was for the immigrant, impoverished mill workers when the factories were operating.

These modern factory workers, the study participants, found themselves in difficult positions professionally, socially, and politically. They were expected to contribute to the relatively rapid improvement of two of the most troubled school districts in their state, located in two of the poorest, least-resourced towns. Like line workers, they were expected to teach in the manner the district and state said they were to teach, which included a scripted
curriculum and preparation for the state test. The schools in which they taught retained sexist, gender-biased attitudes including among some men with positions of influence. Moreover, while they experienced incidents of overt sexism and intimidation, they were also treated as if they were gender neutral employees, able to withstand staying late after school and attending weekend functions. The dualities the study participants encountered have been considered by scholars interested in women teachers’ experiences (see Acker, 1989; Grumet, 1988; Tamboukou, 2000), but few have considered the experience of women teachers during reforms of schools (Hubbard & Datnow, 2000) or state takeover.

This study lays the groundwork for larger research endeavors on women in state-controlled schools, and sets out policy implications for the state control of public schools and school turnaround.

**Review of the Problem: Gender Issues in Turnaround Schools**

Empirical research on the state control and turnaround of struggling districts has been conducted from the perspective of school leaders and policymakers for over a decade (Duke, 2006, 2008, 2016; Mintrop, 2004; Salmonowicz, 2009). The perspective of teachers, especially women teachers, has rarely been included in that research (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Since gendered aspects of teaching were not considered relevant to state authorities, all of the participants in this study experienced complex circumstances that were not fully acknowledged in state documents nor captured in the state survey. State officials design turnaround reforms with unencumbered, neutral teachers in mind. The pressures of turning a school around exacerbated the structures and biases that women teachers were already facing, as described in the four constructs: the culture of turnaround schools, tendencies
towards inward individualism, a high-threat work environment, and demoralizing cultural politics.

The demographic statistics of US teachers show that it is women who are predominantly navigating these constructs, as they make up the majority of all teachers, including in Milltown and Oakwood. However, state documentation (reports, reviews, board minutes) did not explicitly include women teachers’ perspectives and experiences. The districts’ accelerated improvement plans (AIPs) from before state takeover, the districts’ reviews, and reports to the state board members do not acknowledge the gender of the teachers, nor their needs as individuals. The interviews provided an opportunity to capture their experiences.

Decisions related to teaching did not include teachers’ needs as women facing harassment, inaccurate pay, and extended work days, but drew upon false assumptions and stereotypes about teachers. The age-old dichotomy of selfless teaching martyrs versus the resentful, checked-out instructors has been repeatedly portrayed in contemporary and historical media (Dalhgren, 2017; Goldstein, 2014). In Oakwood and Milltown, the characterization of selfless martyrs shifted to a stereotype of teachers who are altruistic team players, wholly dedicated to their schools and students, regardless of the entrenched academic struggles, lack of resources, or demanding work culture. In this sense, teaching was being portrayed as a true vocation for these women instead of as a profession. Teaching was characterized as a calling, that if unheeded would disappoint the community (Bujis, 2005; Grumet, 1988). The experience of teachers in these two districts included the pressure to perform, an expectation that came from the leadership and the communities themselves.
Summary of the Structural and Cultural Barriers

This case study captures how women teachers in two districts taken over by state authorities experience leadership during turnaround reforms. The study findings describe workplaces in which women teachers were impacted directly by the decisions of their district and building leaders. The findings suggest that the structural and cultural barriers that resulted from turnaround leaders’ decisions undermined the professionalism of the women teachers. These two barriers and their subcomponents receive little or no discussion in the literature on women in education or women teachers' experience of reform and leadership. The findings are not included in the literature on state-controlled schools — pointing to an apparent gap that this study begins to fill.

The stress of long days, the struggle to find time to plan or reflect on teaching, the battle against inaccurate pay, and teachers’ limited control over their classrooms left many study participants frustrated and demoralized. They were also contending with a workplace that was gendered, biased against women, and intimidating. The culture of turnaround school reform and the cultural politics of masculinist systems exacerbated sexism, gendered intimidation, and gendered bias against women teachers. Comments about their anatomy, disparaging remarks about their gender, and retaliation by men in their schools when challenged created a negative culture that weighed heavily on the minds of the study participants. Oakwood teacher KD explained that she could handle sexually suggestive remarks from her middle school students, but fellow Oakwood teacher MB pushed back against them. MB also felt she had no support in the administration, who did not seem to understand how unsafe she felt as a physically small woman; no one came to help her break up fights when she called to the office.
In Milltown, the vindictive culture of punishing those who questioned district decisions began before the takeover and continued during it. This state’s education law requires a group of educators and citizens be appointed at the earliest stages of the takeover to provide feedback to the state, though their recommendations are nonbinding. The Milltown Local Stakeholder Group suggested the district “develop and strengthen an inclusive culture that allows all to raise concerns openly and honestly without fear of recrimination.” The experiences of teachers MA and RAL who were intimidated by their peers and supervisors after they raised questions are evidence that these recommendations went unheeded.

Turnaround school structures and cultural practices take place within a social and political context. In Milltown and Oakwood, the social and political contexts were tainted by gender dynamics that tended to empower men, those associated with the men, or those who adopted masculinist approaches. The implementation of reforms in these districts was influenced by these gendered power dynamics. Women teachers who felt undermined, unappreciated, or undervalued did not commit to reforms (ex BAC in Milltown secretly adjusting her scripted curriculum or CS and KD in Oakwood questioning the validity of lessons that do not value the students’ interests or abilities). They may have decided to leave the district (MB in Oakwood) or they doubted their abilities (JHL in Milltown). Turnaround reforms must involve more than changing components within the school district. Rather reforms must engage the beliefs and mindsets of those who are to enact them; the teachers who are mostly women. This conclusion pushes forward the contention of Hubbard & Datnow (2000) that “gender politics contribute to who supports some school reform efforts, who advocates for a reform, whether a reform is adopted, and ultimately, whether a reform is
successful” (p. 18). Teaching is a gendered profession (Ingersoll et al., 2014) so not acknowledging the gender dynamics of education is shortsighted. The gendered dysfunction of the Oakwood and Milltown districts continued through the takeover.

Gendered political tensions were prevalent in both towns. The findings of this study demonstrate that when the state appointed a new superintendent, she faced different scrutiny than her counterpart in Oakwood. Men were given leadership positions in Milltown at the department level for which they were not qualified. In Oakwood, the participants were still aggrieved about the condescending, gendered treatment they received by outside school reform consultants, such as when CS complained about being spoken to like she was a child or when KD felt the literacy curriculum was less rigorous and biased against the students because of their poverty and ethnic background.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The findings point to ways reforms and interventions could be improved to better meet the needs of teachers (mostly women) and subsequently their students. The concerns, experiences, and observations of this study’s participants call for a systemic understanding of their professional lives. To focus on one aspect of school reforms, such as academic testing, at the expense of others, including teachers’ experiences of turnaround reform and their work environment in general, is far too narrow an approach. To do so fails to resolve the social, economic, and political reasons why students are doing so poorly in the first place. A focus on one aspect of schooling reform also takes a simplistic view of teachers by not recognizing what they could be contributing to the improvement of the districts through better instruction, more support of student wellbeing, and more investment in their professional growth. With a comprehensive approach in mind, three changes to policy and practice are recommended for
school turnaround and reform, to view teachers’ needs with the same urgency as raising graduation rates or test scores. These policy and practice recommendations are:

(1) Changing workplace culture through collaboration, trust, and effectiveness;
(2) Developing strategies to keep teachers and their talents in turnaround districts;
(3) Providing for turnaround reforms that support women teachers.

Together, the three recommendations would create a more supportive workplace for teachers to ensure professional stability and academic success. First, developing a democratic, egalitarian, and trusting work culture would provide teachers with more autonomy and agency. Such a workplace culture would build on their professional knowledge and judgment to implement turnaround reforms more effectively. Second, in line with research by Kraft and associates (2015) and Fullan (2006) which both call for more supportive workplaces, this type of school would encourage skilled and promising teachers to stay, rather than leave to teach in other districts. And third, if teachers felt they could rely on each other, they would then feel more confident in establishing careers in the district because their needs as professionals and as women would be met.

**Changing Workplace Culture: Collaboration, Trust, and Effectiveness**

This study’s findings show that the turnaround districts were not simply failing academically, but also professionally. The barriers and biases impacted the participants negatively. Not one participant expressed feelings of professional contentment or security. Instead, every woman had been harassed in some fashion by their leaders to the point that they could not do their jobs effectively. The sexism, intimidation, and instructional control took hold because no leader was able to establish a culture of support and success. The frequency of leadership turnover did not result in improved academic achievements for the
students, nor better conditions for the teachers. Instead, participants described how they felt suspicion, distrust, and unease towards some of their fellow teachers and leaders as the chaos and confusion of leadership transition became the familiar milieu in their schools (JR, MB, TAM in Oakwood; LM, JHL, EK, MA in Milltown).

The legal and educational protocols of taking over a public school district in this state are elaborate and thorough, but these laws do not consider all the needs of the districts and their teachers. This state’s landmark legislation allows the commissioner of education to manage districts by appointing a superintendent and having access to daily operations. The commissioner is then able to monitor the reforms as they are implemented through frequent communications with the appointed superintendent and regular visits to the district. However, consolidated power and control of the districts may not be most effective in creating sustainable improvements because such top-down, masculinist approaches do not invest improvements of teacher workplaces, as evidenced by ongoing teacher churn in both districts.

The interview analysis and review of teacher responses on the two years of climate surveys offer positive moments and ways forward. A desire for more collegial partnerships and better communication was expressed by the TELL survey participants and this study’s participants. Districts that have been taken over by the state should leverage these opportunities and build their reform efforts around them.

Moments of collaboration occurred both naturally and organically among teachers, as has been recommended by this state itself. In the absence of support from their principals and central office staff, some participants explained how they leaned on trusted colleagues for support and feedback (MB, LC, TAM, CS in Oakwood; JHL, EK, RAL, BAC in Milltown).
These teachers forged relationships that enabled them to become more resilient and skilled. The leadership in both districts could have used these authentic partnerships and alliances to strengthen the faculty. The review of the state documents and reports recognizes these local connections and the potential to leverage growth from collaborative partnerships. Instead, the state launched new instructional teams of its own.

When the state-appointed leadership took over the operations of the schools, efforts were made to tackle the academic achievement gaps within the proposed takeover timeframe of three years. Collaborative groups were formed to improve data-driven instruction and to bring more teacher input into curriculum decisions. The instructional learning teams (ILT) in each district were staffed with some of the most experienced teachers, as were the building leadership teams. Three of the women from Milltown (EK, JLH, MA) and three of the women from Oakwood (CS, KD, LC) served on these instructional learning teams. However, since teachers bear the responsibility for school failure (Linn, 2003), they were not trusted to create or conduct lessons of their own design (BAC, Milltown) but had to list objectives on the board before every lesson using words given by the state department of education (JR, Oakwood). Only the appointed principals and superintendents were permitted to form the collaboration groups, even though they did not usually know all teachers, students, or communities well. While the decision to use collaborative groups to improve academic metrics is grounded in evidence of academic gains, the dogmatic, top-down implementation of the groups jeopardized their effectiveness. This approach to collaboration does not allow for authentic, teacher-led improvements. Instead, it is contrived collegiality, forced upon the teachers by their leaders (Hargreaves, 1994). Rather than building on the work that JHL and
other teachers had begun before the takeover, the state authorities started afresh with teachers who were either new to the district or to working together.

These types of administrator-directed professional learning communities were resented not only by the Milltown and Oakwood teachers, but also by teachers in studies of such collaboration (Gates Foundation, 2014). The teachers in the Gates Foundation study were open to collaborating, as long as teacher groups fulfilled the purpose of such PLCs. In their study of highly-effective teacher collaborations, Hargreaves & O’Connor (2018) found that two elements are necessary for successful groups. The teachers develop solidarity with each other as they experience sincere trust, supportive feedback, and informal opportunities to work together on shared goals for academic improvement. There is also a solidity to their practices, protocols, and expectations, so they are working with intention and purpose. In Milltown and Oakwood, participants questioned the effectiveness of their teacher-working groups which felt more contrived and forced, instead of authentic and mission-driven.

All of the study participants acknowledged that students were struggling on state tests at all grade levels, that many high school students were not graduating, and that many were not receiving adequate services for linguistic or cognitive needs. They understood these collaborative groups and ILTs were designed to specifically target academic and behavioral problems plaguing the schools, in the hopes of moving the scores up towards the state-set targets. However, the collaboration groups and teacher teams did not address fundamental problems in the schools concerning teacher pay, work climate, or socioemotional needs of the students, so they rarely achieved the goals set for them. Instead, the collaborative groups and teacher teams attended required meetings (KD; MB; TAM; CS, Oakwood; MA; LM;
RAL; EK: JHL: BAC, Milltown) and compared scripted lessons together (JHL, Milltown). The pairings and partnerships the teachers formed naturally would have been more effective.

The legislated takeover strategy used in Oakwood and Milltown disassembled and reassembled aspects of solidarity in the districts through weakening the unions and creating designated teacher groups. At the same time, the takeover design has a problematic solidarity in that substance of the takeover is focused on academic metrics and is reinforced with retaliatory methods of intimidation. A more successful reform design would target the effects of poverty on students, the instability of the leadership and faculty, and the inconsistent curriculum choices.

In Hargreaves & O’Connor’s (2018, p. 24) words, if “success with the solidity of the design depends on solidarity among teachers,” then the current takeover design is unlikely to succeed. Milltown and Oakwood operated without institutional missions, drifting in a sea of reform rather than sailing with purpose to port. The districts leaders did not establish a mission for the entire community to follow and therefore the participants did not feel a sense of solidarity with their leadership. Only a few felt such connection to other members of the faculty. Therefore, educational leaders, practitioners, and policymakers would be wise to follow the professional judgment of these embattled educators, by involving them in determining how their collaborative groups progress. A balance between teacher-directed and leader-imposed professional learning has been effective in other jurisdictions (Campbell, Osmond-Johnson, Faubert, Zeichner, & Hobbs-Johnson, 2016; Datnow, 2011). Demonstrating greater trust in teachers would also help school and district leaders to retain their faculty members — the second recommendation of this study.
Developing Strategies to Keep Teachers and Their Talents in Turnaround Districts

Oakwood and Milltown have abysmal records of retaining educators, particularly leaders (Appendices A & B). Frequent changes in building and district leadership, high-rates of departure and turnover of classroom teachers, and the difficulty the districts had in finding well-trained, qualified teachers exacerbated already trying circumstances. Studies of teacher churn have noted the role classroom and school contexts play in teachers’ decisions to stay or leave (Duke, 2008, 2016; Ingersoll, 2001, 2004; Swanlund, 2011; Tek, 2014). Other factors, such as class size, student behavioral problems, and principal support of teachers can also determine whether a teacher stays or goes elsewhere or why teachers need a number of supports to remain in high-needs schools (Johnson et al., 2012; Kraft et al., 2015). However, none of these studies acknowledge the predominance of women teachers numerically or address why women, in particular, might choose to leave a school during a turnaround.

Leaders and policymakers can improve the workplace culture in ways that will strengthen teacher recruitment, retention, and effectiveness by addressing the four constructs of turnaround schools: the culture of schools under state control, the high-threat environment created by state-control, the persistence of individualism and the particular nature of collaboration in the teaching profession, and the ways in which women teachers are undermined by masculinist systems of management. Through the use of collaborative professionalism and listening to the needs of the majority of their teachers (women), leaders can improve their districts. Women teachers should be given more agency and respect, both of which are forgotten or disregarded in the frenzy of takeover and reform (Datnow, 1998; Donaldson et al., 2008; Futernick, 2010; Johnson, 2012). Struggling schools need greater democratization of school management and should grant more power to women teachers.
The state makes significant financial and professional investments to quickly improve districts when taking over. If women teachers feel disrespected, threatened, unappreciated, underpaid, or insulted they will leave the school and take this investment with them. These teachers may bring their newly developed skills and knowledge to better-off districts, further perpetuating disparities between towns and districts. This transfer of professional development should be considered in school turnaround reform and policy, for these leaving teachers are essentially creating two groups of educators: those with new skills and better circumstances and those who are left behind.

Studies have considered how two groups or tracks of teachers proceed professionally, including Achinstein and colleagues (2004), which was mentioned in the literature review. By applying the findings of Achinstein and colleagues’ study to Oakwood and Milltown, it becomes evident the teachers in these districts were on the poorer track like District A. However, because of state intervention in their turnaround districts, the District A/Milltown or Oakwood teachers are now much better informed about certain professional practices. So just as Becker (1952) found in 1950s Chicago, teachers will move to find a better workplace if they can. “The teacher’s career consists of movement among these various schools in search of the most satisfactory position in which to work, that being the position in which these problems are least aggravated and most susceptible of solution,” (p. 471). Teachers in state-controlled districts such as Oakwood or Milltown leave for districts which are richer in many types of capital: social, emotional, and professional.

Hiring these teachers benefits stronger District Bs, further enriching already richer districts, therefore creating a whole new type of “Matthew Effect” (Merton, 1968; Stanovich, 1986). Merton (1968) found success attracts more success Rich districts get richer in
intangible resources and talent, while poor districts get poorer in resources and talent, just as their students face vocabulary deficits and reading challenges due to their own home socioeconomic circumstances (Stanovich, 1986).

Further research on the teacher churn could follow teachers to see where they are hired after leaving places like Oakwood and Milltown. The negative reputations of Oakwood and Milltown grew for years before the state intervened (Appendices A & B) and may now be attached to their teachers who have left to work in other school districts, all of which are ranked higher because their students perform better on state tests. It is also possible the array of professional development turnaround district teachers receive could be viewed positively by principals and central office staff in other districts who see the teachers’ new knowledge as an asset. If the teachers can find employment in more stable, higher-ranked districts, then the Matthew Effect of School Turnaround may be taking place (Merton, 1968; Stanovich, 1986).

Policymakers will not be able to prevent teachers from choosing where to teach, nor when to switch employers, but they can write policies with this problem in mind. It may be possible to incentivize teachers to join a struggling district, such as an Oakwood or Milltown, and to stay there for a significant period. The Oakwood district has already been working on creating a teacher pipeline with local universities. A monetary incentive would help to encourage them to stay once hired and perhaps force the districts to address the inaccurate compensation challenges the participants discussed. From a policy perspective, if research verifies the Matthew Effect of School Turnaround, then it must be addressed quickly (Merton, 1968; Stanovich, 1986). Otherwise, communities such as Oakwood and Milltown
will become further entrenched in their socioeconomic struggles that could stretch into further generations.

In addition to legislative responses to this Matthew Effect (Merton, 1968; Stanovich, 1986), policymakers and state authorities could also address the workplace culture that has inhibited this study’s participants from thriving professionally. Teacher retention is also bolstered by the work itself, when teachers are intrinsically motivated to stay in the profession because the work is meaningful and satisfying. Several of the participants were committed to these districts. LM wanted to stay in Milltown because she believed that these students needed her to be an example of an adult who stayed for them: “And when I realized that, I was like, "I want to make every effort to stay here."” JHL said she chose Milltown so she could make a difference for the town: “I was older and I was trying to squeeze my purpose for life into whatever years I would have left.” LC in Oakwood applied to work in the district after moving to the area because she was interested in being part of the solution. In her interview, she described her experience as being “fascinating” and “frustrating,” but she was motivated to continue. Taking down the structural and cultural barriers found in Oakwood and Milltown would go a long way in making the majority of teachers, as women, feel empowered and secure. Doing so would fundamentally change school operations, but in order for the change to be sustainable, leadership would need to change as well. The following recommendations discuss three ways these changes could occur.

**Recommendations for Turnaround Reforms That Support Women Teachers**

The context of schools in the midst of a turnaround and the particular pressures placed on teachers (who are mostly women) in such schools needs to be recognized when decisions about such schools are made. The theory of unsuccessful change was proposed in this study
to highlight the need to better understand academic failure and struggle. Schools that are not meeting measures of adequate yearly progress are not simply using ineffective instructional methods or insufficiently preparing students for standardized tests. Rather, more research is needed to best understand the social, economic, political, and educational contexts in which these schools operate. Research and analysis shows that schools in crisis are part of communities in crisis (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Duke, 2008, 2016; and Fullan, 2006).

Struggling schools are unlikely to be able to replicate the best practices of high performing schools but understanding the reasons why school leaders and teachers remain “stuck” is needed (Mintrop, 2004). Research on leading from the middle, with a focus on collaboration, transparency, and collective action towards a broad goal has been successful in Ontario and Hackney, England, where schools in one of the most impoverished areas of England were able to score higher than the national average on standardized tests in 2012 after contracting with the Learning Trust. By strengthening Hackney educators professional practices and stabilizing leadership, Hackney thrived (Hargreaves & Braun, 2012; Hargreaves et al., 2014).

In districts such as Oakwood and Milltown, the frequent leadership changes at all levels and the disruptions of teacher churn (not to mention the federal recommendations of 50% removal of teachers), mean that the middle does not yet exist. There is also no equivalent to the Hackney Learning Trust in Oakwood or Milltown. Empirical research on why such districts have trouble achieving stability, let alone success, is needed.

Such research on school instability would need to take socioeconomic contexts into consideration. In the same way, the teachers in such studies would need to be understood as their complete selves, including their gender identities. Future reforms will fail if women (as women) are not involved in the changes and do not find meaning in the reforms. They also
need to have the power to participate in reform and policy development. Providing women teachers with such influence and access should not be to benefit the titled leaders in the school, but rather to leverage their expertise and experience to better serve students and fellow teachers (Harris, 2002).

Oakwood and Milltown schools have missed many opportunities to improve by not recognizing the deep well of talent within their faculties. The 12 study participants alone had much to offer. Besides their collective decades of experience, the participants were multilingual (KD and CS of Oakwood), had owned their own businesses (JR of Oakwood and RAL of Milltown), and had doctoral degrees (BAC of Milltown, LC of Oakwood). They knew the communities well and had many connections with fellow teachers. The acquired knowledge and experience of women teachers is not included often enough when studying schools or designing reforms, with the notable exceptions of Markowitz (1993), Blackmore (1996), Hubbard & Datnow (2000), and Blackmore & Sachs (2007). Not including women teachers with such abilities and experience perpetuates their self-doubt about seeing themselves as leaders (Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

In addition to calling for more women teachers to be involved actively in school turnaround and reform, as a way of leveraging their knowledge while also building and strengthening the system, the following three concepts based on this study’s findings are recommended for consideration. Together these three thoughts on leadership offer ways to change the culture within the school, which Johnson, Marietta, Higgins, Mapp, and Grossman (2014) have called “a critical ingredient” (p. 117) for school turnaround. All three could be used simultaneously as they are complementary in their efforts to support women teachers in turnaround schools. The action steps suggested here would need to be studied in
the context of turnaround schools, but they seek to respond to some of the most often heard concerns in the data analysis. The following recommended action steps for reforms supporting women are influenced by the work of Harris (2003), Harris & Mujis (2005), Johnson et al. (2014), Johnson et al. (2012), and Kraft et al. (2015).

First, women teachers would participate in the hiring of a state-appointed superintendent by working closely with the state department of education. The shared leadership model would continue after the superintendent is in place to strengthen the involvement of all members of the district through teaching teams of principals, teachers, and community members. This recognizes the need for membership that represents the district accurately by race, gender, socio-economic status, and educational attainment.

Second, by forming committees to address social, emotional, and institutional barriers that have contributed to teacher churn in the district, women teachers could address them directly. They would discuss accusations of harassment and intimidation so negative behaviors can be removed during the tenure of state involvement. Topics to be addressed would include: teacher maternity leave and care for new mothers upon their return, compensation issues, and the ability to grow through supportive professional development.

And third, through mentorships with peers, women teachers would find support during their experience of high-stakes, high-pressure reform efforts. These peer teams would participate in professional development together and would serve together on in-school committees to contribute to improve students’ academic experiences.

Through these three aspects of leadership, women teachers might feel their concerns would finally be heard and acted upon. The women in this study wanted to be treated as
professionals in an equitable, fair, and respectful manner that acknowledges their expertise and abilities.

In implementing such women teacher-centered leadership when taking over a school, policymakers would be better able to address the underlying problems plaguing such districts. Further research is needed to discern if the harassment, intimidation, or compensation issues are common in other similar districts in the US. If such barriers are present, the elements of the proposed framework may be beneficial so the workplace culture can be improved. As Hubbard and Datnow (2000) and Blackmore (1996) have argued, reforms will not take hold if the gender dynamics and biases that women teachers face are not addressed and resolved. The current masculinist, high-threat, high-stakes, and punitive measures of school turnaround can only work if the teachers who must carry them out believe in them. Mintrop (2004) found this consistently in his review of two state takeovers. As this study has demonstrated, when women teachers feel disregarded, dismissed, or undermined as professionals, they will not be able to be effective and will not want to stay. Policymakers and researchers alike would strengthen the educational field by seeing teachers not as neutral agents, nor expecting school reform to be a checklist of improvements to increase test scores. Rather, turnaround reform is whole school change, and the teachers involved need to be understood as whole people as well.

**Implications for Future Research**

A holistic understanding of women teachers is needed in policy and in research. In order for the culture of schools to be more welcoming and supportive of women, more research on their experiences needs to be conducted. Such studies would help to ensure that experienced and talented women teachers will be less likely to leave for more stable schools,
and more likely to take up opportunities for leadership. When gender has been considered in educational research, studies have primarily focused on women principals or school leaders, not women teachers’ lived experiences as women (Blackmore, 1996; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Ben-Peretz, 1996; Datnow, 2000; Eagly, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Grumet, 1988; Hubbard & Tamboukou, 2000; Lambert & Gardner, 2009; Sadker & Sadker, 1991; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Sherman, 2005). Yet, the research field would be enriched by accepting the numerical reality of who teachers are (women), by empirically exploring their experiences as women in society and in the classroom, and by examining the institutional and cultural obstacles that prevent them from succeeding because of gendered biases.

Building upon the policy recommendations, this study’s findings indicate three areas for future research of women teachers and the state-controlled turnaround schools in which they teach. More empirical research in these three research strands would address gaps in the literature: the lives of women teachers in all types of schools; the experiences of women teachers in state-controlled, turnaround schools; and the structural and cultural barriers in school operations and management that negatively impact teachers, particularly women.

Research on the Lives of Women Teachers

Qualitative research on the lives of teachers has been conducted for many decades (such as Becker, 1952; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Lortie, 1975), but few have examined teachers through the lens of gender (Acker, S., 1989; Blackmore, 2000; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Dillard, 1995; Griffen, 1997; Grumet, 1988; Markowitz, 1993; Tamboukou, 2000). Demographic analysis has shown that US teachers are not representative of the general population, as they are predominantly middle-class women
(Ingersoll et al., 2014) and few are women of color (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), but education studies often consider teachers in a neutral way, devoid of gender, race, or class. Education would benefit from more study into the lives of women teachers by recognizing their individual identities in order to help schools recruit, support, and retain a wider and more diverse pool of professionals.

Additionally, research on the lives of women, who happen to be teachers, is needed, in conjunction with broad studies of teachers, or studies of teachers who happen to be women. This distinction matters, for as the findings in this study have shown, structural and cultural barriers are put in teachers' paths in the form of gender bias, intimidation, and sexism. These barriers were based on the participants' gender, not their occupation. EK in Milltown was told to take a special needs boy to the bathroom not because she was a teacher, but because she was a woman. KD, CS, and MB in Oakwood encountered sexist and gendered comments from males not because they were teachers, but because they were women. The pay discrepancies described by TAM in Oakwood and BAC in Milltown were problematic not because they were teachers, but because working for less pay caused them operational and logistical problems as women.

Studying the lives of women teachers pivots research initiatives from narrow understandings of teachers to comprehensive studies which will provide more insights about teacher attrition or collaboration. The tension between personal and professional lives is as prevalent currently as it was for Ben-Peretz (1996), Grumet (1988), and Tamboukou (2000). By building on the research of Markowitz (1993) or Becker (1952), studies of women who teach could provide significant insights on a critical time in US education. Teachers are working in an era of disruptive technologies, demographic shift, and globalization, as well as
more public and governmental scrutiny. Much can be learned from listening directly to women who teach, particularly those in state-controlled schools.

**Research on the Experiences of Women Teachers in State-controlled, Turnaround Schools**

This study was designed to capture the viewpoints of women teachers in the most troubled districts in this state because their voices had rarely been included in the literature. Independent research on districts in the midst of being turned around by the state is limited, for few studies take place during the takeover, and those reports that are available are commissioned by the state itself. What the education field understands of state government takeover of schools has often been conducted after the takeover has started, or towards the end of the takeover period (Duke, 2006, 2008; Mintrop 2004), with a few exceptions (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Schueler, 2016; Schueler et al., 2017).

As more states passed legislation to grant takeover power to their own departments of education, more women became teachers than in previous years (Ingersoll et al., 2014), but by 2018, teachers were leaving the profession at the highest rates on record (Hackman & Morath, 2018). At the same time, a review of the literature for this study found gender has been less often examined empirically in education research in the US since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (implemented 2002-2015) than in previous decades.

Masculinist policies of top-down control and centralized decision-making at the state and federal levels heightened the gender dynamics in schools during the era of *NCLB*, *Race to the Top*, and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (signed into law in December 2015, implemented in 2016 to present day). Yet few studies have considered what this has meant for women teachers. Connecting these trends without more research on how they intersect and overlap would be irresponsible; however, studying just one aspect of contemporary
education policy without recognizing these trends is short-sighted. If women comprise the majority of teachers, and teachers are under great pressure to implement reforms to improve schools, then women teachers are experiencing the leadership decisions of reform more than any other type of educator. Studies that expand on what this case found could contribute to this understanding by interviewing more women teachers from more state-controlled districts.

**Research on the Structural and Cultural Barriers in Schools**

Further study of women teachers in state-controlled schools should be accompanied by additional study on the workplace culture of schools for women. Recent research on the leaky pipelines of other professions found women are not reaching levels of leadership and influence in significant enough numbers because they are inhibited by structural and cultural barriers (Foster, 2018). The findings of this study question whether the structural and cultural barriers are only found in such stressful teaching environments, or if they would be found in the highest performing schools as well. KD of Oakwood explained she thought schools were not immune to the sexism of society, while another Oakwood teacher, MB, hoped she could find a calmer, more supportive school elsewhere. More study into the experience of women teachers in many types of schools is needed to determine how prevalent these barriers may be in education. Such research could draw on analysis of women professionals in other fields as well.

**Conclusion**

The “subjugated knowledges” of women teachers (Tamboukou, 2000, p. 464) has been historically overlooked by the field as a whole. Despite their presence as a majority of the educational workforce in the US, women teachers have not been considered specifically
as women. This is particularly the case for women working as teachers in state-controlled schools and districts, when the stressors and pressures to perform have exacerbated the structural and cultural barriers. This exploratory case study of two such state-controlled districts was designed to provide some groundwork for future study of women teachers in such schools.

Just as every child deserves a high-quality education regardless of the child’s race, ethnicity, gender, culture, or location, so too do all teachers deserve to be seen for all their characteristics, including gender. However, the state policies, work expectations, and district goals failed to recognize the teachers’ gender. The insidiously undermining atmosphere of these districts made it difficult for the reforms to take root. Poor academic performance in Oakwood and Milltown developed over the course of many years and will take many years to rectify. The way women professionals are treated in these districts is just as important to address as the low graduation rates or low achievement on state tests.

Education is predicated on the involvement of the whole community. As Horace Mann (1855) advocated nearly two centuries ago, the ideal of the US society depends on the education of its public. And the inclusion of women is paramount, for the vast amount of female talent, of generous, philanthropic purpose, [is] now unappropriated. It lies waste and dormant for want of some genial sphere of exercise; and its possessors are thereby half driven, from mere vacuity of mind, and the irritation of unemployed faculties [to great frustration]. (p. 7)

So too does the reform movement require the inclusion of women teachers fully and the treatment of women teachers fairly, for to ignore women teachers hurts only the reforms. These women will leave due to “vacuity of mind” and “irritation.”

The state takeover of schools and districts in this state remains a grand experiment, carried out by the state and its quasi-inspection service. No end of state involvement is in
sight for Oakwood and Milltown, and other municipalities are being considered for takeover.

If this is to become a more common strategy, then the state would be wise to spend time and resources investigating the experience of women teachers. The vast amount of talented women can be found in such schools, and in place of top-down reforms, a truly democratic society would seek the involvement of all members of the community, starting with those working most directly with the students: women teachers.
### Appendix A: Milltown School District Leadership and Accountability History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993-February 2005</td>
<td>Long-serving Superintendent steps down</td>
<td>State declares district ‘underperforming’ in September 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2005</td>
<td>Interim Superintendent appointed by school board</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2005-2010</td>
<td>Permanent Superintendent hired (male)</td>
<td>December 2005: state accepts proposed turnaround plan; State support team assigned 2007: State monitor appointed in place of team as district seems more stable 2010: Grandfathered in as a Level 4 district (Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2010-</td>
<td>Permanent Superintendent hired (male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2012</td>
<td>Town Business Manager appointed interim superintendent (male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>Permanent Superintendent hired (male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2013-July</td>
<td>Permanent Superintendent hired (male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2014</td>
<td>Director of Teaching and Learning hired as one-year superintendent (resigns by January 2015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
January-July 2015
Then-Director of Teaching and Learning hired as Acting Superintendent

May 2015: Town Council sends formal letter to School Board explaining their no confidence vote they took.

July 2015: several members of the School Board step down.

July 22-September 22, 2015
Interim Superintendent named Acting Superintendent returns as Director of Teaching and Learning.

September 22-October 6, 2015
Interim Superintendent becomes Permanent Superintendent on medical leave starting October 6. Steps down October 14.

October 15-
Director of Teaching and Learning returns to be the Acting Superintendent

November 3, 2015
New Interim Superintendent (male) was interviewed during an open session of School Board meeting on October 27.

January 26, 2016
State votes to name Milltown ‘chronically underperforming’ (Level 5) and receiver will be appointed.

May 2, 2016
Appointed receiver (superintendent) begins term (female) expected to be a three-year term.

May 31, 2017
Appointed Receiver placed on paid administrative leave; interim receiver appointed.
July 20, 2017  

Appointed Receiver resigns formally. Interim receiver becomes official receiver (male)
Appendix B: Oakwood School District Leadership and Accountability History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 2003</td>
<td>Office of Educational Quality and Accountability</td>
<td>Declares Oakwood underperforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td>State Board declares district underperforming</td>
<td>Receives assistance from state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2004</td>
<td>EAQ issues report</td>
<td>Provides further details for turnaround process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2004</td>
<td>Turnaround plan submitted to state</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2004</td>
<td>Turnaround place accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2007</td>
<td>Nonprofit organization (&quot;A&quot;) appointed by state to help district implement turnaround plan</td>
<td>State provides additional funding for more personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2007</td>
<td>Turnaround Benchmarking Report completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>Nonprofit organization (&quot;B&quot;) contracted by state to provide reports to state and guidance to Oakwood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>State conducts district review plan</td>
<td>Additional staff and qualified teachers needed, more PD needed in content areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>&quot;A&quot; still contracted by the state; consulting group (&quot;C&quot;) hired to provide PD in conjunction with university based in Boston-area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>Oakwood grandfathered in to system as a Level 4 district</td>
<td>Act Relative to the Achievement Gap, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>One elementary school and one high school declared Level 4 schools</td>
<td>First district in state to be designated as Level 4 because of two ineffective schools and ineffective district systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>Level 4 District review conducted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Level 4 elementary school given school redesign funding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011-2013</td>
<td>Level 4 high school receives new turnaround operator, nonprofit group (&quot;D&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday 2013</td>
<td>Partnership monitored by State actively from January-June 2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>Level 4 high school receives new turnaround operator, nonprofit group (&quot;E&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2013</td>
<td>Level 4 elementary school drops to Level 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2014</td>
<td>Nonprofit group E appointed to turnaround Level 5 elementary school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 9, 2014</td>
<td>Level 5 elementary school turnaround plan approved by State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2014</td>
<td>Level 4 high school receives an additional contracted partnership through state with nonprofit group (&quot;F&quot;) for teacher training, recruitment, PD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2014</td>
<td>State provides funding for Oakwood to contract nonprofit group (&quot;G&quot;) for district-wide staffing consulting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2015</td>
<td>District review conducted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2015</td>
<td>Many recommendations given for better management &amp; achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 28, 2015</td>
<td>State board voted in favor of Ed. Commissioner's recommendation to declare district Level 5 and take over management of district</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>State decides to end relationship with nonprofit groups that had been running the Level 4 elementary and high schools; current superintendent in place until June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2015</td>
<td>State appointed superintendent announced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C: Milltown Department of Education Document List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Document</th>
<th>Date Issued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Accelerated Improvement Plan</td>
<td>July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. District Review Report</td>
<td>October 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>December 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. History as an underperforming district</td>
<td>December 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Letter from DESE to Parents and Stakeholders</td>
<td>January 26, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. FAQ about Receivership</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Receivership Update</td>
<td>February 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Letter to DESE from Local Stakeholder Group</td>
<td>April 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>April 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. District Turnaround Plan</td>
<td>June 24, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Report to Legislature</td>
<td>March 1, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Oakwood Department of Education Document List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Document</th>
<th>Date Issued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. AIR Evaluation of Level 5 AIP School: Morgan Full-Service Community School</td>
<td>2014-2015 School year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>February 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Press Release</td>
<td>April 28, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>April 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. FAQ Document about Receivership</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>June 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. District Turnaround Plan</td>
<td>October 1, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Community School First Quarter Report</td>
<td>October 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>November 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>December 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>April 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. HPS Request to Modify Turnaround Plan</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Dept. Response to request to modify District Improvement Plan</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. State Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Semi-structured Interview Instrument for Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today, __________ (Date to be stated for audio recording). I appreciate your time and look forward to learning from you. As you know, my research study is exploring the experience of women teachers in schools that have been taken over by the state. Please note, your answers will remain anonymous and I will follow the strict procedures required for data gathering and management, as mandated by the Boston College Internal Review Board.

Have you had a chance to read and sign the consent form?
If not, then the consent form will be given to be signed. Thank you. Are you aware that by participating you are eligible to be included in a raffle for a $25 gift card?
Very good. Let’s begin.

1. Please state your initials.
   a. Where do you teach?
   b. What do you teach?
2. How long have you been a teacher?
   a. How long have you taught at this school?
3. What brought you to this school?
   a. How long ago?
4. How would you describe the school prior to receivership?
5. What has the experience of state receivership been like as a teacher?
   a. As a woman?
   b. What makes you say that?
6. How do you think women teachers are viewed in:
   a. Education generally?
   b. This district?
   c. This campus?
7. What does ‘school leadership’ mean to you?
8. How should school leadership work?
9. What are your opinions and perceptions about effective leadership?
   a. What do you think it looks like?
   b. Can you give a couple of examples and indicators of this kind of leadership?
10. What was leadership like at this school, district before receivership?
11. Where did you find leaders at that time?
   a. Who do you turn to for leadership now?
12. Do you see yourself as a leader?
   a. Would you call any of your coworkers leaders?
13. How has the receivership experience changed the way you teach?
   a. How has it changed how you connect with other teachers?
   b. How has it changed the way you lead?
14. What opportunities are there to make an impact towards improvement as a teacher currently?
15. When will you know positive changes are taking place?
   a. At the school level?
   b. At the district level?

Thank you for your time. Your name will be added to the raffle drawing.
References


experience differentiated roles in schools. *The Teachers College Record, 110*(5), 1088-1114.


Schueler, B. E. (2016). *Can states take over and turn around low-performing school districts? Evidence on policy effects and political dynamics from Lawrence, Massachusetts* (Doctoral dissertation). Harvard Graduate School of Education.


State Code of Regulations, Department of Education, Title 603. (2011; 2019)


