

THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF PAST MENTORING EXPERIENCES ON THE
MENTORING PRACTICES OF SELECTED FEMALE SCHOOL EXECUTIVES

A Dissertation

by

BETTY DIANE ASHLEY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2006

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Virginia Collier Elizabeth Foster
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ABSTRACT

The Perceived Influence of Past Mentoring Experiences on the Mentoring Practices of Selected Female School Executives. (December 2006)

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Although research on mentoring dates back to the early 1980's, there is little research available which examines the influence of past mentoring experiences on relationships in which female school executives, in turn, serve as the mentors. This interpretive qualitative case study, based on data collected from conversational interviews with three selected female school executives, was designed to explore and investigate the past and present mentoring relationships of these female school executives to understand more clearly the influence of their past mentoring experiences.

Four distinct strands of mentoring interactions emerged from the key findings of this study. The four strands include: Strand I: Career Development and Psychosocial Functions, Strand II: Attributes of Successful Mentoring Relationships, Strand III: Values of Successful Mentoring Relationships, and Strand IV: Mutual Attraction, Reciprocity, and Interpersonal Comfort. After studying the various data that were collected, it became evident that the degree of influence of past mentoring experiences is interdependent and mutually connected to the mentoring interactions of Strand IV: Mutual Attraction, Reciprocity, and Interpersonal Comfort. In these specified

relationships, there appeared to be a greater degree of emotional connectivity and intimacy which served as an avenue to support the influence of past mentoring experiences in relationships where these females, in turn, mentored others.

Studies, such as this, add to the literature base regarding the importance of mentoring for females and thus affect mentoring practices, policies, and guidelines and serve to address the gap which sometimes exists between theory and practice. Since research has shown females remain historically underrepresented in educational leadership positions and mentoring is critical to the success of females who do occupy these positions, it is females who should gain the most benefit from studies of this nature.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my precious granddaughter, Ashley, and to all other females born in the 21st century who have the greatest potential to benefit from research which seeks to understand and rectify the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions. May mentoring become one of the avenues employed to ensure that you are afforded opportunities to serve in positions in which you can return to society those values and attributes we seek to instill in you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The conclusion of this study closes a chapter in my life; a chapter that has been filled with all of the emotions life could bring to a female struggling to balance her family, career, and a project of this magnitude. During this lengthy process, the love and support of my family has been invaluable. I am so appreciative of the tender encouragement each of you has given me along the way and acknowledge the personal sacrifices you have made in order for me to realize my dream of completing the requirements for a Ph.D. You insisted I hold onto my dream and let me know how much you believed in me. To my husband, Lemire, my friend and confidant, without your love and the strength which you provided throughout this process, I know I could not have accomplished this feat and realized this dream.

This study could not have come to fruition without the help of the three female school executives who so willingly shared their stories with me. Thank you for the time you committed to this research, for the stories you allowed me to collect, and for the legacies you are leaving for all females as you continue to mentor others in the field of educational administration.

Each member of my committee had a profound impact on this research and influenced each chapter as it unfolded. At Texas A&M University I was fortunate to have four females on my committee who themselves serve as an inspiration for all females in educational administration as they continue to exhibit those practices worthy of emulation. Thank you, Virginia Collier, one of the co-chairs of my committee, for accepting the responsibility for molding and shaping this work from the beginning. I so appreciate your gentle reminders and suggestions. The times you served as my own

Jiminy Cricket kept me grounded and on track. Elizabeth Foster, the other co-chair of my committee and the resident “mentoring expert”, all of your guidance and advice served to expand my views on mentoring. I am proud to have been a part of your work at the university level. Dianne Goldsby, thank you for the time you donated to this work and for the assistance and guidance which was always accompanied with a warm smile and words of support. Luana Zellner, who has led mentoring initiatives at Texas A&M, I appreciate you lending your expertise to this study. Thank you to all four of these female professors who studied my work with a critical lens and graciously offered their wisdom.

And last, I must acknowledge those females who continue to excel in educational leadership positions in our country, albeit in isolation. Perhaps one day the cycle will be broken and all truly will be well.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Nature of the Study	2
Statement of Problem	15
Purpose of Study	16
Methodology	17
Significance of the Study	21
Limitations	23
Operational Definitions	23
Summary of the Study.....	24
II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	26
Introduction	26
Examining the Past.....	29
What Is Mentoring?.....	38
Gender's Influence on Mentoring	49
Quality Mentoring Relationships for Females	55
History of Females in Educational Leadership	64
Summary of Review of the Literature.....	69
III METHODOLOGY	71
Introduction	71
Epistemological Frame.....	72
Sample Selection	75
Data Collection.....	84
Data Analysis	87
Research Issues	87
Summary of Research Procedures.....	90

CHAPTER	Page
IV FINDINGS	91
Introduction	91
Overarching Questions	91
Strand I: Career Development and Psychosocial Functions	94
Strand II: Attributes of Successful Mentoring Relationships.....	122
Strand III: Values of Successful Mentoring Relationships	131
Strand IV: Mutual Attraction, Reciprocity, and Interpersonal Comfort	142
Summary of Findings	149
V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	151
Introduction	151
Conclusions	152
Recommendations for Future Research	157
Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations.....	162
REFERENCES.....	163
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	181
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM.....	184
VITA.....	186

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sisyphus, the famous mythological character, has often been portrayed in Greek literature as the most logical and sensible of all mortals. According to Homer, this legendary creature was condemned to a lifetime of being forced to struggle to roll a massive boulder up a mountaintop, and after reaching the summit, being forced to watch the rock tumble back to the base of the mountain. Numerous Greek vases have been produced which depict Sisyphus's whole body straining to lift up the huge stone, roll it over, and then gradually push it up the sloped mountain. Many have seen the face contorted, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder braced against the mass, and have only imagined the tremendous strength, energies, and tenacity that Sisyphus must have possessed in order to roll that huge boulder over once, much less continue to methodically progress moving the rock up the mountainside. Of course, the tragedy of this myth lies in the fact that once Sisyphus finally does succeed in rolling the boulder to the top of the mountain, it tumbles of its own accord back to the base of the mountain (Lindemans, 1997).

The fate of females in educational leadership positions, particularly those school executives who have reached the summit, can conceivably be compared to this character Sisyphus, who worked and toiled in isolation and whose accomplishments ultimately proved to be futile. While it is certainly important for the expertise and talents of successful educational leaders to be transferred to all newly appointed executives, it is even more essential for female school executives to receive the wisdom and guidance

This thesis follows the style of the *American Educational Research Journal*.

from those who have accomplished the feat of scaling the mountain and have unequivocally enjoyed success in the field of educational administration. For the purpose of this study, three female school executives were carefully selected in order to examine the influence of their prior informal mentoring relationships on their personal and professional relationships when they mentored others. By assuming the role of mentor, these females have had a unique opportunity to influence others and provide transformational learning as they continue to support and promote novice executives in their chosen field of educational administration.

Nature of the Study

Mentoring has been identified as one of the most critical components for success by both business organizations and educators as well (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Kamler, 2006; Kram, 1988). By the late 1990's, in a conscious effort to increase job performance and create human capital in the work place, at least one-third of the larger corporations in the United States had implemented formal mentoring programs for their employees (Porter, 2001). Given that mentoring is such a powerful process, its popularity has grown exponentially and continues to expand and flourish in the business world. A recent issue of the renowned corporate magazine, *Fortune*, reported that of the top 100 companies in the United States, 60 have implemented specific mentoring programs for their employees (Whiting & de Janasz, 2004). Within such organizations, the benefits to both the males and females who have participated in mentoring relationships are widely published in the literature. Those individuals who have had a mentor might expect to accrue unique benefits such as: more

promotions and career advancement (Scandura, 1992), an increase in compensation (Dreher & Cox, 1996), and experience greater career satisfaction (Fagenson, 1989).

Educators, in an endeavor to provide this valuable support to novice teachers, have made mentoring readily available to approximately one-fifth of all novice teachers in the United States (Jennings, 2005). In addition, there is a body of research which touts the benefits of mentoring relationships for educational administrators (Brown & Phair, 2001, as cited in VanDerLinden, 2005; Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 1995; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Gilmour, S., Kinsella, M., Moore, S., Faber, K., & Silvernail, S., 2005; Kamler, 2006). Multiple states in our country, capitalizing on this body of research, have implemented an array of various mentoring programs for school administrators (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). These programs typically fall along a continuum and may be as simple as a match of an experienced principal with a novice principal, such as the Albuquerque Public Schools' Extra Support to Principals which was implemented in 1994. Or they may be more complex programs such as The School Leadership Program and Richardson Mentor Program, both initiatives were implemented at the Texas A&M Principals Center for assistant principals and experienced principals respectively (Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002).

While a canvassing of the literature certainly documents the value of mentoring for school executives, as well as multiple segments of an organization, the influence of past mentoring experiences on an individual's mentoring practices when they serve as the mentor has not been systematically explored. Thus, the focus of this work will be to

examine and describe the role past informal mentoring experiences have played in shaping the way these selected females have chosen to mentor others.

Examining the Past

The history of mentoring has been traced by historians to Homer's *Odyssey*, a Greek mythological epic which was written in the 8th or 9th century B.C. The seafaring King Odysseus, having left his homeland, asked the Goddess of Wisdom, Athene, to act as his son's counselor, advisor, and teacher. Before assuming this role, Athene, took on the male form and assumed the name of Mentor. Since that time, the term mentor, in a traditional sense, has come to be defined as someone "who achieves a one-to-one developmental relationship with a learner, and one whom the learner identifies as having enabled personal growth to take place" (Bennetts, 1994, p. 4).

Although history is replete with instances where mentoring was utilized as a vehicle to dispense knowledge and secure leadership for the future, mentoring did not begin to emerge in the literature as a way for organizations to increase both professional and personal development of employees until the later part of the 20th century. Kanter, Levinson, and Kram are three of the most notable early researchers who studied the complexities of mentoring relationships and explored this concept from the perspective of career development. Kanter (1977) established the benefits of mentoring in the business world and was one of the first researchers to document the difficulties certain marginalized groups, including females, may have had in obtaining a mentor in an organizational setting. Further research was completed by Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978). Their work, which was based on personal interviews with 40 men, described a mentor as a teacher, sponsor, counselor, and a developer of skills.

At this time, these authors realized the value of mentoring relationships and cautioned employees in the business sector regarding the career handicap, which could come as a result of being without a mentor. They also gave those who were fortunate to have a mentor the following warning, “Poor mentoring is the equivalent of poor parenting in childhood” (Levinson et al., 1978, p. 338).

Kram (1988) identified two major mentoring functions and thus laid the foundation for much of the subsequent research on mentoring in business. Career functions, which include sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments, simply help to prepare the mentee for advancement opportunities within the organizational setting. Whereas, psychosocial functions, which include role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship, are those aspects of a mentoring relationship which help to enhance a sense of competence and self-efficacy in a managerial role (Kram, 1988). In addition to these two defined functions, Kram’s work with 18 managers of a large public utility company provided a conceptual development model which depicts the four predictable phases of any mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1988). Even today, the works of both Kram and Levinson et al. continue to frame modern studies of mentoring.

During the 1980’s and 1990’s the majority of the body of research on mentoring expanded from the foundational base which Kram laid in her work. Embedded within this literature are research data which explicitly address the benefits of mentoring for educators. Gehrke and Kay (1984), Huling-Austin, Barnes, and Smith (1985), as well as Daresh and Playko (1992), are a sampling of the notable researchers whose works have

been largely credited with describing the importance of mentoring for novice classroom teachers during these two decades. Most educators now seem to realize the significance of mentoring and appear to understand the instrumental role mentoring plays in the development of the professional competence of classroom teachers. At the beginning of this century, more than 30 states, having realized the value of mentoring for teachers, had implemented formal mentoring programs for novice teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels (Evertson & Smithey, 2000). In addition, other countries have also recognized the value of mentoring and have incorporated this strategy into their novice teacher induction programs. Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Singapore are a few sites where mentoring comprises a large component of the teacher induction programs (Stephens & Moskowitz, 2005).

The literature also supports the value of a mentoring relationship for school executives in educational leadership positions (Brown & Phair, 2001, as cited in Van DerLinden, 2005; Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 1995; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Ehrich et al., 2004; Gilmour et al., 2005; Kamler, 2006). In a study of a statewide mentoring program for principals in Ohio, which was conducted in 2002, researchers Howley, Chadwick, and Howley reportedly found approximately three-fourths of the principals who participated in their study ranked having a mentor as the most critical component of their induction program. These same principals also reported they felt their mentors were instrumental in their subsequent administrative success (Holloway, 2004).

The Texas legislature, obviously recognizing the value of mentoring for school executives, has afforded superintendents in this state a unique opportunity to profit from

the learning alliance of a mentoring relationship. In 1999, The Texas Association of School Administrators [TASA] implemented a formal mentoring program in response to a legislative mandate which stated all newly appointed school district superintendents would be assigned a mentor (Rue, 2002). This state program established specific criteria and standards for both the mentor and mentee participants.

What Is Mentoring?

Although earlier research has addressed mentoring relationships and the benefits inherent to both parties, as well as the endorsing organizations, a search of the literature revealed the term mentor is ambiguous and suffers from a lack of true definition. The current research base, written as an endeavor to examine issues associated with the structure and the implementation of mentoring programs, often fails to specify and define what mentoring actually is. Simply finding a concise definition of the term can prove to be a challenging task in and of itself. The following definitions of this complex human relationship are only a sampling of the multitude of definitions which are available in the research.

1. “[A] mentor is a facilitative partner in an evolving learning relationship focused on meeting mentee learning goals and objectives” (Zachary, 2000, p. xx).
2. “Mentoring has been described as a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced member and a less experienced member of an organization or profession” (Mullen, 1998, p. 319).
3. “...mentors are guides. They lead us along the journey of our lives.....They embody our hopes, cast light on our way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way” (Daloz, 1999, p. 18).

4. “Mentoring is characterized as an active, engaged, and intentional relationship between two individuals based upon mutual understanding to serve primarily the professional needs of the protégé” (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000, p. 52).

For the purpose of this current study on the influence of previous mentoring relationships, the following research is aligned with the latter definition of mentoring as defined by Gardiner et al. in their book *Coloring Outside the Lines*.

While there appears to be a lack of conceptual clarity regarding the ambiguous term mentor, researchers do agree there are two types of mentoring relationships: formal and informal. Although these types differ at multiple levels, there is one profound distinct difference between the two types of relationships. Informal relationships develop spontaneously between key individuals. In contrast, the pairing assignments for formal mentoring relationships are typically made by a third party. Researchers also report the initiations of the relationship, the predetermined goals set forth by both parties, and the programmatic structure of the intended relationship all have a intense effect on the functions and outcomes and thus the qualified success of any mentoring relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

The phases of mentoring relationships, as defined by Kram’s (1988) research have proven to be a basic foundation for much of the later research on this topic (Scandura, 1998). In a study of 18 informal mentoring relationships, Kram identified four predictable, but not entirely distinct, phases. The first phase, an initiation phase, can be expected to last from 6 to 12 months and is essentially the time early on in the relationship when strong positive expectations from both parties tend to emerge. During the second phase, cultivation, the range of career development and psychosocial

functions peak as positive expectations are continuously tested against reality by both parties. The third phase, separation, can occur either structurally within the organization or psychologically within one or both individuals. Either instance, however, will lead to a period of adjustment, and consequently to the realization the relationship can no longer continue in its present state. Redefinition, the fourth phase, is a period of time at the end of the mentoring cycle when the relationship either morphs into a new form that significantly differs from the original mentoring relationship, or it ends entirely (Kram, 1988).

As Kram concluded her most renowned research, she cautioned the next step for researchers must be “to delineate further the characteristics of individuals who seek out and benefit from relationships with mentors” (Kram, 1983, p. 623). One such characteristic, gender, has since been explored by a host of researchers who have determined mentoring relationships, while important to males, are extremely critical to the success of females in organizations (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005).

Gender's Influence on Mentoring

Females often do not experience the same reality as their male counterparts in multiple realms. In mentoring specifically, one gender difference which emerged from gender stratified research is mentoring relationships often are not readily accessible for females (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gibelman, 1998; Hale, 1995; Kamler, 2006; Ragins & Cotton, 1991, 1996). This may, in part, be due to the fact there are simply fewer females in educational administrative positions (Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997; Young & McLeod, 2001). Moreover, some females may feel mentoring virtually implies

promotion for reasons other than merit and therefore, elect not to serve in a mentoring capacity (Rothstein & Davey, 1995). Other literature can also be found which reveals that men, unfortunately, often make an unconscious choice to sponsor those with similar characteristics (Johnsrud, 1991a; Moore, 1982; Wolcott, 1994).

Moreover, females may also choose to decline an opportunity to participate in a cross-gender mentoring relationship if they perceive the threat of both destructive gossip and discrediting sexual innuendoes (Ragins & Cotton, 1996). Even though the documented percentage of admitted sexual encounters between cross-gender mentoring relationships is relatively small, many females find the mere suggestion of an inappropriate relationship serves as a deterrent to the mentoring process and consequently, they elect not to participate in any available mentoring relationships (Ragins & Cotton, 1996).

Quality Mentoring Relationships for Females

Since research documents the importance of mentoring relationships for successful females (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997), ideally, mentoring programs which facilitate these relationships should be examined and evaluated from a critical feminist perspective. Gardiner et al. (2000) have provided a blueprint which consists of four major essential program attributes they feel must unequivocally be present in all successful mentoring relationships in order to meet the unique needs of female participants.

Communication. Open communication and personal connection are vital and necessary for all successful mentoring relationships (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000). Components of the communication process and their subsequent impact on

the interactions of individuals can be found in multiple readings in the literature (Blount, 1995; Brunner, 2000; Davies, 1994; Skrla, 2000a; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). In addition, Blount cautioned in her research the one who controls the discourse also limits the views expressed by others; an idea which is not only a concern, but also may have critical implications for anyone studying the mentoring process.

Reflective practice. Successful mentors promote deep reflective practices which should enhance leadership cognitive structures and measures. This construct implies conclusions to events should always remain open to a reevaluation (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998). Moreover, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) provided an academic base for the importance of reflection in all mentoring relationships and maintained without deliberately planned and implemented reflection, mentees will suffer and stagnate at stages below their developmental potential. These authors underscored the importance of reflection with the following powerful quote, “Unexamined experience forfeits the potential for growth” (p. 266).

Opportunities for leadership. Mentors who provide quality experiences do so by purposefully creating critical opportunities for leadership and consciously enhancing the visibility of their mentees. Without a mentor to open organizational doors, it often proves to be difficult for a mentee to obtain significant exposure within the system, which in turn tends to limit the number of opportunities for personal and professional growth (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Professional support and encouragement. While good mentors routinely encourage mentees to take risks, they also should be readily available to buffer them from any criticisms encountered in the work place. In addition, successful mentors never

allow their mentees to reach a status quo position, but rather these mentors are always refining and reevaluating the high expectations they have for their mentees (Gardiner et al., 2000). In doing so, quality mentors adopt a developmental mentoring perspective and consequently, design tasks and environments which support-and-challenge their mentees' problem solving schemas (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). In contrast, hands-on mentors are also keenly aware of the inherent personal risks they assume should their mentee perform poorly within the organizational setting and readily assume these risks to be a component of the mentoring process (Ragins & Scandura, 1994).

In addition to these four program attributes, multiple values such as trust, respect, and honesty are woven throughout the literature on successful mentoring relationships. Gardiner et al. (2000) recognized these values in their work and warned, "Good mentors build trust; ... trust is critical" (p. 55). Furthermore Kram (1988) also acknowledged personal values in mentoring relationships. The majority of the personal values which she identified can be found in the readings on the psychosocial function of developmental mentoring.

Successful mentoring relationships should provide the avenue for all mentees, but especially more so for females, to move upward within the ranks of an organization as they develop interpersonal skills through a developmental process. Quality mentoring relationships are composed of both career advancement and psychosocial aspects of mentoring. Such mentoring for females in educational leadership positions thus enables them to lead with their own philosophies and convictions, which according to available literature, often times may differ considerably from that of the present status quo regime (Grogan & Smith, 1998).

History of Females in Educational Leadership

It is well documented that schools are gender bound institutions which consist predominantly of females at the instructional level (Skrla, 1997). In 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] reported that as of Spring, 2000, 79% of all teachers in public schools were female. This appears to be a significant increase from a previous statistic reported by NCES in 1991. At that time, this agency reported only 68.7% of teachers in our country were females (NCES, 2003a).

Although females unarguably abound in school settings, they are noticeably absent in positions of educational leadership. A study in 1998 by the researchers Glass, Björk, and Brunner revealed nearly 13% of the executives in schools were females (as cited in Young & McLeod, 2001). A few years later, Brunner, whose renowned work typically involves female school superintendents and power, reported as she was asked her thoughts on the first female superintendent in Minneapolis, “About 14% of superintendents are now women...and people tend to feel we’ve made great strides. But that’s a mistake” (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001, p. 7). In the context of this interview Brunner continued to caution educators. She explained although there has been a slight increase in the number of reported female school superintendents during the past 70 years, if a representative line of this data was graphed, it would be an essentially flat, uniform line (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001).

The mindset of men running the schools, while it is the task of the females to simply nurture the students, appears to be a constant, persistent theme throughout the educational realm in our country even today. After studying the literature, it is disturbing to realize the following questions which the researcher, Charol Shakeshaft, posed almost

two decades ago remain unanswered today. Shakeshaft (1987) in her book, *Women in Educational Administration*, asked,

“ ... why, if gender is not the overriding explanation of a profession structured according to sex, are men managers and women teachers? How is it that women, more than men, are in positions low in power and opportunity? Why is it that teaching is a high opportunity profession for a man but not for a woman? (p. 93)

According to data, superintendent leadership positions are typically filled by candidates who are male, Caucasian, Protestant, married with children, and Republicans (Schmuck, 1999). This is a grave concern since within the past three decades documentation supports there seems to have been an increase in the number of females enrolled in educational administration programs in our country. Although Shakeshaft (1989) was one of the first to observe this trend, government agencies have reported this trend continues even in our current decade. According to NCES, for the 2002-2003 school year, 8,609 of 14,087 master's degrees conferred in the field of educational leadership and administration, or 61%, were bestowed to females. This same year, doctorates in this field were earned by 2,169 students, of which 1,357, or 63%, were females (NCES, 2003b).

Even though females have attained the masters and doctoral levels in educational administration at rates surpassing males, multiple, external barriers such as recruitment and selection procedures, working in tandem with norms and expectations, serve to ensure they are less likely than males to occupy those top leadership positions in this field (Shepard, 1999, as cited in Young & McLeod, 2001). In addition, when compared to males, females who are successful receive significantly smaller rewards for their professional achievements (Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000). Furthermore, such

factors as lack of mentoring and feelings of isolation reportedly cause those females who do reach the height of educational leadership positions to forfeit their titles and status at much higher rates than males in similar positions (Blackmore & Kenway, 1997, as cited in Young & McLeod, 2001).

Statement of Problem

Educational researchers, cognizant of the historical underrepresentation of females in educational administration, are also keenly aware their numbers make up the vast majority of educators in school systems (Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997; Young & McLeod, 2001). Most appear to fully realize mentoring is a critical component in the careers of those females who do achieve success in educational administration (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005). Even though research on mentoring began in the early 1980's, little research exists which can determine the influence of past mentoring experiences on the informal mentoring relationships of female school executives when they serve as the mentors. Exactly which subset of knowledge female school executives choose to transfer to novice administrators, as well as the avenues chosen to influence their mentees, remains largely unexplored. As such, this present study may contribute to a deep and comprehensive understanding of informal mentoring relationships, as well as expose how this concept interfaces with the success of female school executives.

This research is guided by the two following overarching questions: (a) How do you perceive your past mentoring experiences have influenced your current mentoring practices? and (b) What impact, if any, has gender had on your past and current mentoring relationships? Each of the three selected female school executives, who

participated in this study, was asked more specific, probing questions as appropriate. These questions can be found in Appendix A.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the past informal mentoring relationships of female school executives in an effort to discover the influence of such relationships on their mentoring practices once the roles are reversed. Although substantial research supports the significant role mentoring plays in career outcomes for all employees, other researchers have further delineated this construct and maintain mentoring relationships are unequivocally critical for females (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005). Whether these relationships originate as informal pairings, or are intentionally developed through formal programs, their influence on the mentee, the mentor, and the organization cannot be denied. Therefore, if careful consideration can be given to how effective, successful informal mentoring relationships evolve and flourish, it may be possible to design even more successful mentoring programs which in turn promote and support novice female school executives. If the exploration of these complex human relationships is continued by educational researchers, then perhaps exactly how the expertise and talents of successful school executives are transferred from mentor to mentee will be more clearly understood and therefore easily replicated.

Ideally, the results of this study will challenge all educators to critically analyze the mentoring relationships of school leaders through a different lens. Doing so may help to ensure all diverse groups will have equal access to quality mentoring relationships, which will in turn lead to optimum personal and professional development opportunities

for all educational leaders. In order to make certain the most competent, caring leaders are in positions of leadership in our schools, educators have a responsibility to identify those mentoring practices and beliefs which have proven successful and, in turn, ensure their implementation in the field of education.

Methodology

The following areas define the research methodology utilized in this study: Epistemological Frame, Participant Selection, Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Trustworthiness. Merriam (1998, 2002) is the qualitative researcher whose works were used as a model to design this current case study.

Epistemological Frame

When designing and implementing a basic interpretive qualitative study, the researcher “is interested in how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon; this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). The researcher “implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’” (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 7). Since the primary purpose of this study was to uncover and interpret how the participants made meaning of the experiences they encountered during both their past and current mentoring relationships, three female school executives were selected to be interviewed. Although this study was framed from an interpretive, developmental perspective, it was also necessary to consider the sociological and cultural context of these female school executives.

Sample Selection

During the initial stage of this study, while it still remained untitled, Dr. Virginia Collier, one of the committee co-chairs and also someone who has past experience as

one of the early female superintendents in our state, mentioned two of her former colleagues may have experiences salient to this study and suggested they be contacted and asked to share their stories. Both of these colleagues were among the first female superintendents in Texas and consequently had been mentored throughout their careers exclusively by males. Dr. Collier graciously agreed to make the initial contact with her acquaintances. This organizational contact was used to purposefully select two female school executives who had achieved high profile recognitions at the state level. These selected females, therefore, could be said to comprise a homogeneous sampling (Patton, 2002).

During the first interview session with one of the initial female school executives, she suggested one of her former mentees also be contacted and her story captured as well. She felt this particular mentee's story of mentoring someone who now is deceased would not only be interesting, but also would add another dimension to this study. This thread of one participant leading to another has been termed as a snowball sampling strategy, which also was utilized in the data collection phase of this study. Both purposeful sampling and snowball sampling strategies, as opposed to random sampling which is often utilized in quantitative studies, ensured that all participants were representative of a breadth of experiences, as well as possessed those experiences relevant to this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Data Collection

In order to enhance the validity of this study, the following multiple qualitative data collection methods were utilized: semi-structured taped interviews, observations in the field, and document review (Merriam, 2002). The primary method of collecting data,

the conversational interviews, occurred with each of the selected female school executives. The interview process was divided into two distinct sessions of approximately 90 minutes each. The focus of the first interview session was on mentoring relationships; whereas, the second interview session delved into the impact of gender on both past and current mentoring practices. These taped interviews provided a method of capturing a rich, thick description, which “means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Each interview was framed by a standard set of questions which had subsequently evolved after a comprehensive review of the literature had been completed. These semi-structured questions, designed to be open-ended, allowed the flexibility of inserting probing questions whenever these were deemed appropriate. All questions were deliberately constructed to solicit information pertinent to the content of this study only. At the end of each interview session, a member check was performed as the tapes were transcribed and sent to the female school executives for them to review. Their task was to validate the information which had been gathered and ensure it was indeed correct and error free.

Field notes of personal observations of the female school executives, as they interacted with their environments, were also recorded throughout the interviews. These written observations served as an avenue to capture data, such as body language, gestures, and a general description of the school executives’ immediate surroundings which could not otherwise be encapsulated via a tape recorder. Since there are multiple happenings in interviews, notes taken after the interviews were complete also served as an additional source of data.

Data Analysis

“[Data] collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research. In fact, the timing of analysis and the integration of analysis with other tasks distinguish a qualitative design from traditional, positivistic research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 155). Throughout the study, data was collected and simultaneously analyzed using the constant comparative method which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Comparisons of interviews, field notes, and documents led to tentative categories, or units, and subsequently, emergent strands arose within the data (Merriam, 1998). The separate strands amalgamated to form a holistic understanding of the female school executives’ perceptions of the influence of their past mentoring relationships on mentoring relationships where they then served as a mentor to others.

Trustworthiness

Merriam (1998) contended there are six avenues available for qualitative researchers to utilize in order to guarantee the trustworthiness of their studies. Three of these were employed for the purpose of ensuring the internal validity of this study. First, triangulation of data, defined as using “multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204), was accomplished through conducting multiple interviews, using three data sources, and employing multiple methods to authenticate the findings.

Member checks were done continuously throughout the study. As interview tapes were transcribed, they were sent back to the female school executives via electronic mail for them to review and validate the material which had been collected. In addition, tentative interpretations were also verified by the participants.

Prolonged engagement, or gathering data over a period of time, also served to validate the qualitative research. This study continued over the course of two months, and each school executive participated in two interview sessions. Interview questions were sent electronically to the female school executives in advance of each of the sessions. Thus, the female executives had sufficient time to ponder the influence of their past mentoring relationships on their informal mentoring practices and also to contemplate the role gender has played throughout their careers when they have served as both a mentor and a mentee.

Significance of the Study

Educators are keenly aware of their heightened responsibility to ensure the unique and varied needs of every child are met and to make certain each student achieves academic success throughout their entire school career. These changing demands on educators, coupled with high expectations and complex problems, have left many school leaders feeling isolated and insecure. Such issues could be one explanation for the current reported school leadership crisis which our country is experiencing (Anthony, Roe, & Young, 2000; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Houston, 1998; Kamler, 2006; Sherman, 2005, Tallerico, 2000). This present study, which highlights successful mentoring practices for female school executives, may provide possible insights to help develop the confidence and competence of practicing school executives, thus offering them the personal and professional support needed in order to succeed in such high profile, demanding positions. Since research unequivocally correlates effective schools and school leadership (Marzano, Water, & McNulty, 2005), ultimately, the students should be the benefactors of an advanced knowledge base of mentoring practices.

Although the generic benefits of mentoring are well documented throughout the available literature (Scandura, 1998), mentoring relationships have proven to be critical for the success of females in organizational structures (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005). Since research indicates females remain underrepresented in educational administration (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997; Young & McLeod, 2001), this study may contain maps of various ways mentoring relationships can assist females in overcoming many of the barriers which they possibly will encounter in leadership positions in educational bureaucracy.

Furthermore, the results of this study may contribute to the on-going body of knowledge currently available on mentoring relationships. Optimistically, the additional insight into the development of adult individuals, particularly those females in the organizational setting, will benefit theorists. This advanced research on mentoring in the areas of leadership and gender may be utilized to help design improved training programs, which should include both traditional and non-traditional mentoring models. Thus, all diverse groups will have equal access to the support and guidance which mentoring brings to their professional and personal development.

And last, as a practitioner and a researcher, this study has provided me personally with an increased understanding and knowledge of the development of individuals, particularly those in mentoring relationships. In the future, this advanced research will prove to be a vehicle for my personal individual empowerment.

Limitations

The idea small qualitative studies can be statistically generalized is in direct contrast to the general purpose of such studies. Small, purposefully selected samples are chosen in order to give the researcher a deep understanding of a particular concept, not so that the results can be generalized to a greater population (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, it must be concluded the results of this study are applicable to these three selected female school executives and their unique situations and cannot be assumed to be representative of a larger population. It will be the reader's responsibility to ask, "...what is it in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply?" (Walker, 1980, p. 34, as cited in Merriam, 2002).

Since the results are based on the perceptions and thoughts of selected female school executives, the basis of the study must rely solely upon the truthfulness of their recollections and their willingness to fully disclose information regarding their prior and/or previous mentoring relationships. There remains a possibility that some distortion in this self-reported data could result from faulty recall by the participants. In addition, the researcher must assume that all answers are honest, forthcoming, and portray genuine actions by the executives.

Operational Definitions

Mentee - A participant in a learning relationship in which both parties stand to gain a greater understanding of the workplace and the world (Zachary, 2000). This term, relatively new to the literature, is often used as a synonym for protégé.

Mentor - Someone in a relationship who understands the significance of developmental growth and seeks to increase their colleague's effectiveness as a professional problem-solver and decision-maker (Lipton & Wellman, 2001).

Mentoring Relationships - Active, engaged, and intentional relationships between two individuals based on a mutual understanding in order to serve primarily the needs of the mentee (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Protégé - Frequently a young professional with high career aspirations (Hunt & Michael, 1983); often used as a synonym for mentee.

Psychosocial Functions - Functions, including role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship, which seek to develop a sense of competence, confidence, and effectiveness in the mentee through interpersonal relationships (Kram, 1983).

School Executive - A professional who has chosen to serve as a manager and instructional leader in a bounded academic system. This professional accepts the responsibility for the social, emotional, and academic growth for all students within the system.

Summary of the Study

This basic interpretive qualitative case study is comprised of five separate and distinct chapters. Chapter 1 provides the reader with an overview for this study, which essentially explores the influence of past mentoring relationships on the informal mentoring practices of three female school executives. The statement of the problem, the significance of the study, as well as some of the limitations to this type of study, are briefly discussed in this chapter. In preparation for this case study, a detailed review of

the literature was conducted, and these findings are discussed in Chapter II, which lays the foundation for this research, as well as identifies the gaps in the literature for this particular subject. Chapter III provides a rationale for the type of qualitative methodology used to explore the subject of mentoring relationships, as well as details the research procedures which were utilized in order to collect and analyze this data. It is in Chapter III that the participants are actually introduced to the reader. Chapter IV yields the “What” of the study. As the interviews, the observations, and document collections were analyzed and categorized, emergent, identifiable strands surfaced. This qualitative approach is designed to promote understanding and give meaning to human phenomenon. The conclusions from the study, as well as implications and recommendations for further research, can be found in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Although certainly many have seen the graphic of Sisyphus as he struggles to push the boulder up a mountain, most are not familiar with the circumstances which preceded Sisyphus' punishment to a lifetime of futile labor. At first glance, it appears the gods of the underworld have wronged Sisyphus and unjustly condemned him by sentencing him to perform an eternal, purposeless task. However, an in-depth study of this antediluvian myth reveals Sisyphus was not entirely without fault. In many instances throughout Greek mythology Sisyphus was the root of various thievish operations and routinely made fools of the gods, for which he was aptly nicknamed "the crafty one" (Macrone, 1992).

Just as in the tale of Sisyphus, the plight of females in educational leadership positions has various dimensions which may help to explain why this arena remains androcentric. Many researchers have tried for multiple decades to determine why the top leadership positions in the field of education are almost always explicitly reserved for males and have been seemingly unsuccessful to date in identifying the cause of this dilemma. The intent of this current study is to contribute to the available literature on this social injustice by studying the past mentoring practices of successful female school executives and discerning the influence of these practices on relationships where they in turn have assumed the role of mentor.

Although I have always been generally in tuned to social injustices in our society, a colleague's remark a few years ago first led me to begin reading and studying

about the perceived unequal representation of females in school executive positions. We were on our way to class one evening and lamenting about several members of our doctoral cohort who had dropped out of the program. Even though we had originally begun the cohort program with some 30 students, the number at that time had dwindled to only 15. Thirteen of these students who remained in the cohort group were females, and two were males. My friend and colleague made the following pivotal remark to me that evening, “It’s a shame about the others who dropped out. But it is so important for David and Steve to finish the program. They are the ones who will truly be able to reap the benefits of having a doctorate.”

This remark lingered in my inner consciousness and began to frame many of my thoughts regarding administrative assignments. I wondered if simply being male truly gave David and Steve an unfair advantage for acquiring future school executive positions, and if so, why? Make no mistake. David and Steve were certainly astute scholars, well deserving of any career advancements. My colleague’s seemingly innocuous remark simply planted the seed for me that evening and helped me come to the realization that possibly only two of our group may come to enjoy the full benefits of obtaining a terminal degree. Since the social reality of male dominance of leadership positions continued to cause me some discomfort and continued to gnaw at my sense of justice, I elected to design a case study which essentially focused on the mentoring relationships of female school executives. The intent was to analyze these complex human relationships and discern the influence of past mentoring experiences on mentoring relationships when female school executives serve as the mentor to novice school executives.

A case study has been defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). In an effort to understand the issue of underrepresentation of females in school executive positions and how this dilemma interfaces with mentoring practices, I purposefully selected two female school executives to interview. Later one other female was included in the study as a result of snowball sampling. These three executives composed the bounded system for this case study and provided the base for collecting data. An in-depth review of the literature available on female executives and their mentoring practices was conducted prior to the initial data gathering sessions.

The research provided ample evidence to support the initial observation of the underrepresentation of females in school executive positions of leadership. Even though females admittedly have made small gains in the numbers who have “arrived” and who currently enjoy a position in the arena of school leadership, available research indicated there remains a persistent, irrefutable underrepresentation of females who do achieve such high profile ranks in education (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001; Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997; Young & McLeod, 2001).

Unfortunately, many of these females, after reaching this pinnacle of their career, choose to abandon such a challenging position. In contrast, others, who have been deemed successful by the educational community, have weathered the conflicts and controversies inherent with this duty. The focus of this study is the latter group; particularly females whose mentors have provided explicit assistance which has proven helpful as they navigate through those challenging, political waters of our educational

bureaucracy. An analysis was made to ascertain how these females in such high profile positions transferred their knowledge and expertise to their selected mentees. How these females facilitate this learning and help to ensure these new and promising school executives acquire and integrate this knowledge into their current practices was thoroughly investigated. In addition, the influence of past mentoring relationships on current mentoring practices was also explored in-depth.

Although certainly a multiplicity of factors contributes to the success of any female in an administrative position, the academic literature credits a successful mentoring relationship as being one determinant factor for these high-achieving females (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005). While various disciplines address the subject of mentoring, the following select topics have proven applicable to serve as a base of knowledge when exploring the role mentors have played in the success of female school executives and the influence of these identified relationships on the mentoring practices of these females: *Examining the Past, What Is Mentoring?, Gender Issues Related to Mentoring, Quality Mentoring Relationships for Females, and Females in Educational Leadership.*

Examining the Past

Mentoring dates back to the 8th or 9th century B.C. to Homer's *Odyssey*. According to this Greek mythological epic, King Odysseus persuaded the Goddess of Wisdom, Athene, to take on the male form of Mentor in order to act in the quasi-parental role as his son's teacher, advisor, and counselor while Odysseus went about the business of completing his life's work. Mentor guided young Telemachus into adulthood, helped

him to confirm his identity in an adult world, and provided the young man with guidance, understanding, and good advice when needed (Potts, 1998). To most in our world today, this literary figure, Mentor, continues to exemplify one who provides instruction and guidance to those less experienced.

The age-old practice of mentoring relationships surfaced again in history during the medieval times with the apprenticeship model of the craft guilds. In this era, since the mentor's primary role was to provide a model for imitation, it was the norm for young men to be assigned to observe master craftsmen in order to learn their trade and emulate their practices. These young men would generally live with a designated master and advance to the status of journeyman under the guidance and direction of the master craftsman, who could be seen as fulfilling the role of a mentor for them. In time, these same young men also would be deemed masters of their crafts, having gained technical expertise, as well as social and political skills from their various masters.

Other mentoring relationships which have been chronicled in history include the passing of the throne to a successor in pre-Revolutionary China, favored pages and squires receiving knighthood in the English feudal system, and the supporting of select talented artists by some wealthy families during the Renaissance period (Darwin, 2000). Mentoring in these hierarchical situations was utilized as a vehicle for dispensing knowledge, maintaining a specified culture, and securing future leadership.

As time progressed, mentoring practices changed somewhat during the Industrial Age. Throughout this specified timeframe, these actions tended to focus more on the mentee's career advancement within the bureaucratic hierarchies (Haney, 1997). However, mentorship in our current Information Age has additional expectations.

Mentors in the 21st century are expected to assist their mentees in developing a wide range of cognitive, interpersonal, and technical skills. Some will argue the context of mentoring today is often examined through a critical developmental framework and the expectations of mentors necessitate they seek to develop mentees according to cognitive stage theory (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). In addition, other researchers maintain mentees cannot expect one individual to deliver such a wide range of developmental functions, and therefore, should seek out multiple mentoring relationships throughout their career (Chandler & Kram, 2005).

Early Mentoring Research

Kanter (1977), one of the first authors to tout the benefits of mentoring as it exists in the business world in the 20th century, noted in his book, *The Men and Women of the Corporation*, the benefits of participating in a mentoring relationship for the personal and professional development of an individual. As early as the 1970's Kanter recognized the difficulties certain marginalized groups, such as women and minorities, have in obtaining mentors and thus the problems they face as they seek to advance and achieve success within an organization. Following Kanter's work, *The Season's of a Man's Life*, written by Levinson et al. (1978), was published a short time later. This work, based on interviews with 40 men, focused on perspectives of adult development and described mentoring as "...one of the most complex and developmentally important that a man can have in early adulthood" (p. 97). Although this work did not explicitly discuss the changes in a mentoring relationship over time, it did allude to certain changes and in fact compared a mentoring relationship to that of a love relationship, complete with all of the emotions therein (Kram, 1983).

During this same relative time frame, another notable author, Kram (1980, 1983, 1988), also explored the nature and benefits of traditional forms of informal mentoring and qualified functions of the mentoring relationship which can significantly enhance the career advancement of the mentee. In her work, career advancement is synonymic with sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. Kram also investigated the mentor's influence on the psychosocial development of a mentee. Role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship are terms used in Kram's work to describe the psychosocial development of the mentee (Friday, Friday, & Green, 2004). Kram's influential research has been viewed as one of the most comprehensive and thorough treatments of the mentoring concept to date and is the foundation for much of the recent research on this topic (Scandura, 1998).

Through her examination of mentoring, which was based on the study of 18 developmental mentoring relationships within the business realm, Kram also identified four relationship phases: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Both of Kram's findings appear to have equally impacted the mentoring literature and continue to surface in the readings even many years later.

Mentoring research steadily increased in the 1980's and 1990's as other researchers examined mentoring relationships in various organizational settings and subsequently documented their findings. For example, the importance of mentoring as a career training and development tool was the focus of work done by Hunt and Michael (1983). Additional samplings of the numerous facets of the mentoring process which were examined and explored include: developing formal mentoring programs (Burke & McKeen, 1989); potential benefits of mentoring (Fagenson, 1989); potential drawbacks

of mentoring (Ragins & Scandura, 1994); and mentoring for administrators (Daresh, 1987; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Pence, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Mentoring in the Business Sector

Although not all successful employees, both male and female, in business organizations had a mentor during this period, many did reap the benefits of being a part of a successful mentoring relationship. In 1979 the *Harvard Business Review* published a study conducted by an international management firm which revealed only one-third of the executives whom they had interviewed reported they had not had a mentor at the beginning of their careers. This firm also found those executives, when paired with mentors, reportedly earned more money at a younger age, were more pleased with their personal career growth, and, in turn, were more likely to sponsor a mentee themselves (Roche, 1979). In a separate edition, the *Harvard Business Review* also published an interview with entrepreneur Donald Perkins, who reported he had given a directive to his employees in which he insisted every manager in his firm serve as a sponsor to a younger more inexperienced member of his organization. Although in this interview Perkins referred to this assistance as sponsor instead of mentoring, he did offer clarification for his directive and explained he felt being a mentor was an important part of his own personal responsibility to society.

I don't know that anyone has ever succeeded in any business without having some unselfish sponsorship or mentorship, whatever it might be called. Everyone who succeeds has had a mentor or mentors. We've all been helped. For some, the help comes with more warmth than for others, and with some it's done with more forethought, but most people who succeed in a business will remember fondly the individuals who helped them in the early days. (Collins & Scott, 1978, p. 100)

Moreover, additional research pertinent to this study was conducted by Dreher and Cox (1996). These authors concluded career success for females in business administration simply rests in their ability to form mentoring relationships with White males. They also reported the income of women and minority MBA's who had been assigned a mentor was significantly higher than those who had not had the benefit of a mentor during their career. Specifically, they reported, "Graduates who had been able to establish mentoring relationships with White men displayed an average compensation advantage of \$16,840 over those with mentors displaying other demographic profiles" (Dreher & Cox, 1996, p. 297).

Mentoring for Educators

Mentoring for teachers. Embedded in the mentoring literature is an expanded research base which addresses the potential value of mentoring for educators. The selection of mentors, how mentors and mentees are assigned, formal vs. informal mentoring, rewards for mentors, and how to find the time to mentor are enduring key issues relevant for educational personnel which can all be found in the literature (Little, 1990). Works by Gehrke and Kay (1984) and Daresh and Playko (1992) were only a few of the publications instrumental in describing the benefits of mentoring for new classroom teachers during the 1980's and early 1990's. As a result of such an vast accumulation of literature, the importance of mentoring for first year teachers appears to have been widely accepted, and mentoring has become a vital component of many teacher induction programs in a number of states. In our country, mentoring is offered to slightly less than one-fifth of all classroom teachers as a component of their induction program at both the elementary and secondary levels (Jennings, 2005).

In Texas, House Bill 1, passed by the legislature in 2006, includes Texas Education Code §21.458, which states each school district in the state shall be responsible for assigning a mentor teacher to each classroom teacher who has less than two years of certified teaching experience. This state code mandates the following criteria for this program: (a) the mentor must teach in the same school as the mentee, (b) ideally, the mentor should teach the same subject or, at a minimum, teach on the same grade level as the mentee, and (c) the mentoring program must meet any additional qualifications which will be determined by the commissioner at a later date (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2006). In addition to providing a mentor after a teaching position has been assigned, there are some states which require all novice teachers to intern with a mentor prior to actually receiving their teacher certification (Cunningham, 1999).

Mentoring for school executives. There appears to also be a corresponding awareness in the educational community regarding the implications of mentoring relationships for school executives. Most seem to understand mentoring is critical to the success of school executives (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Brown & Phair, 2001, as cited in VanDerLinden, 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daloz & Edelson, 1992; Daresh, 1987; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Ehrich et al., 2004; Gilmour et al., 2005; Kamler, 2006; Pence, 1995). Once the value of mentoring programs became so widely recognized by school leaders, multiple states in the 1990's mandated formal mentoring programs for beginning administrators (Daresh, 1995), and there continues to be a wide array of mentoring programs available for school executives (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). One group of researchers, Howley, Chadwick, and Howley, studied a mentoring

program for school leaders in Ohio in 2002 and concluded three-fourths of the participants actually ranked their mentoring relationship as the single, most critical, and valuable component of the school district's induction program for school administrators (Holloway, 2004).

In the state of Texas there is one group of school leaders who should benefit from the research that touts the value of mentoring relationships for school leaders. In 1999 TASA implemented a formal mentoring program in an effort to proactively address a predicted educational leadership crisis in Texas. Their formal mentoring program, *Learning for Leadership: A Mentoring Program for Texas Superintendents*, was designed to support new superintendents as they transitioned into this admittedly difficult position and thus to help ensure their success (Rue, 2002). This formalized, structured program was developed in response to the requirement of 19 Texas Administrative Code [TAC] §242.25, an unfunded mandate passed by the legislature which specified all first time Texas superintendents, including experienced superintendents serving for the first time in the state of Texas, must participate in a one year mentorship (State Board of Educator Certification [SBEC], 1999). Specific criteria were established for those who would serve in the role of mentor and provide guidance to these novice superintendents. Those chosen to mentor must hold a Texas superintendent's certification, be nominated by their peers, have completed at least five years as a successful superintendent, and also agree to complete six hours of mentoring training before accepting this task. In addition, mentors also had to agree to the requirement of making at least 12 contacts with their mentees, with six of these being face-to-face, as well as agree to provide documentation of the mentoring experience and

accept responsibility for verifying the new superintendent fulfilled the state requirements (Rue, 2002).

This TAC also detailed explicit written expectations for the mentee superintendent as well. These mentees are also expected to willingly share their needs and goals with their mentor and meet with their assigned mentor on a monthly basis at the agreed upon times. One other added requirement for these superintendent mentees is they also must complete 36 hours of professional development in areas which relate to the standards for state superintendent certification and then present this documentation to their mentor at the conclusion of their formal mentorship (SBEC, 1999).

In a survey mailed to the Texas superintendents who had been assigned a mentor in 2002, the majority of the respondents reported a perceived personal dissatisfaction with the scheduled meetings component of this program. Negative comments such as the following were included for the researcher, “My mentor superintendent did call me, once! He scheduled a meeting with me but called later and canceled. That was the last time I ever heard from him” (Rue, 2002, p. 132). Superintendents who served as mentors for this group also indicated meeting with their mentees face-to-face six times throughout the year proved to be problematic. However, overall, both the mentors and mentees who responded to the survey agreed the mentoring program met the purpose for which it was designed and developed (Rue, 2002).

To date, superintendents are the only central office school executive positions required by the legislature to participate in a structured, formal mentoring program in Texas. Although there is a documented shortage of school leadership in a variety of

arenas, other executive positions in central administration in Texas do not have a mandated mentoring component.

While this current research work is mindful of the mentoring issues in a world of education which is undergoing profound fundamental changes, a review of the literature failed to produce studies informed by theory which addressed the rationale, context, and consequences of a school executive's mentoring practices. Though there appears to be a common belief in the need to provide some type of mentoring procedures for school leaders, this research will challenge educators to look at mentoring performed by school executives through a different lens in our postmodern age.

What Is Mentoring?

A precise definition of the concept of mentoring has proven to be challenging for researchers. Since the late 1970's, when the value of mentoring relationships was first brought to the forefront of organizations by writers such as Levinson et al. and Kanter, multiple authors have attempted to define and capture this complex human relations concept. Although often described as role modeling, counseling, and providing guidance, the descriptors magical and mythical have also been used in the literature to describe mentoring (Daloz, 1999). A comprehensive review of the works which examine the mentoring construct found numerous efforts replete with definitions of mentors who provide career guidance and emotional support to mentees in the workplace setting.

Mullen (1998) provided one of the more simplistic definitions of mentoring in her work as she explored both the vocational and psychosocial functions of mentoring,

“Mentoring has been described as a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced member and a less experienced member of an organization or profession” (p. 319).

Today, the term mentor generally has come to refer to someone who establishes a personal relationship with a mentee, understands they must provide professional instruction to this person, and attempts to guide the mentee through some sort of developmental process. As cited in Daloz (1999):

The mentor is concerned with transmission of wisdom. How, then, do mentors transmit wisdom? Most often, it seems they take us on a journey. In this aspect of their work, mentors are guides. They lead us along the journey of our lives. We entrust them because they have been there before. They embody our hopes, cast light on our way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way. There is certain luminosity about them, and they often pose as magicians in tales of transformation, for magic is a word given to what we cannot see. As teachers of adults, we have much to learn from the mythology of the mentor. (p.18)

Other definitions of a mentor, which are relevant to this study and can be confirmed in the literature, include the following: Barnett (1995) acknowledged the most effective mentors as “those who consciously move their mentees from dependent, novice problem solvers to autonomous, expert problem solvers” (p. 46). Lipton and Wellman (2001) in their work described a mentor as “someone who embraces a growth orientation, understanding that the work is to increase their colleague’s effectiveness as professional problem-solvers and decision-makers” (p. 1).

When considering the term mentoring as it applies to educational administrators, Gardiner et al. (2000) defined mentoring as “an active, engaged, and intentional relationship between two individuals based upon mutual understanding to serve primarily the professional needs of the protégé” (p. 52). These authors found participating in a mentoring relationship resulted in a positive impact upon the

instructional, participatory, and caregiving leadership styles of the mentees. The aforementioned definition by Gardiner et al. provides the basic definition of mentoring used in this study.

Types of Mentoring

As previously noted, throughout the literature mentors are often described as guides, sponsors, advisors, teachers, role models, and friends. Although this lack of conceptual clarity has proven to be challenging for some researchers, most writers do generally agree there are two types of mentoring relationships: formal and informal. Distinct differences between these two types of mentoring have a profound impact upon the mentor/mentee pairing. The way the relationship is initiated and formed, as well as the structure or purpose of the relationship, has a direct effect on the relationship's functions and outcomes (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Informal mentoring relationships. These informal mentoring relationships, which tend to arise spontaneously, are usually based on mutual identification and career needs. Both participating parties generally agree the mentee will trust the mentor to provide counseling and guidance (Hegstad, 1999; Noe, 1988a). Since an informal relationship is most often driven by developmental needs (Kram, 1988), the mentee typically tends to choose a mentor whom they perceive to be a role model; whereas, the mentor, in turn, likely can be expected to select a mentee who could serve as a younger model of the mentor. Such relationships help the mentee to develop a sense of professional identity and help the mentor to feel a sense of worthiness by contributing to future generations (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Mentors also tend to informally select mentees based on interpersonal comfort and understood proficiency within the organization (Allen, Burroughs, & Poteet, 1997). Studies show mentors are likely to choose someone for a mentee who is not only a like figure, but also someone who is considered to be adept and shows great promise of succeeding within the organization. Mentees often choose mentors who possess expert talents and skills which they perceive as beneficial to them. Members of informal mentoring relationships take pleasure in working with one another and testify to enjoying a mutual attraction within the relationship (Kram, 1988). Both parties find having shared interests allows them to move beyond career-related issues and form meaningful personal bonds (Friday et al., 2004).

According to Kram (1988), informal mentoring relationships generally can be expected to last anywhere from three to six years. During this time, goals evolve and are adjusted and modified as needed. Kram also reported since the mentors are typically concerned with long term career goals, it often takes some time before the actual career benefits can be expected to materialize.

Formal mentoring relationships. Once they were made aware of the benefits of informal mentoring relationships, many organizations began to develop and implement formal mentoring programs in which mentors and mentees were typically assigned to each other by an unknown third party. By replicating the informal mentoring programs as such, their hope was their members would enjoy the same benefits which had been evidenced in informal mentoring relationships in the past. Most often these formal assignments in organizations tend to be made by a third party and are often based solely on application forms submitted by the mentor and mentee (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Since it is probable the two participants were unacquainted before the pairing, there is an excellent chance these formal relationships will not be based on mutual perceptions of competency and respect, as informal mentoring relationships tend to be. In addition, some mentors may view their mentees in formal relationships as weak or in need of remediation simply because they have chosen to participate in the program (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Moreover, although some formal mentors may receive recognition and rewards within the organization, there remains a possibility many enter the relationship simply to fulfill a superior's expectations. If this is the case, typically these mentors will be less likely to invest in their mentee's personal development and then may consequently fail to provide some of the identified critical functions of mentoring relationships such as friendship and counseling (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

Formal mentoring relationships tend to last from six months to a year and usually have identified goals at the beginning of the relationship. According to the researchers, Ragins and Cotton (1999), this relatively short time has proven to be problematic in the area of career advancement for some mentees. In addition, some researchers believe when mentees think their formal mentors are spending time with them out of a sense of organizational commitment, it may be difficult for them to cultivate a sense of trust and respect. Such feelings may make the relationship awkward at best (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Kram (1988) argued some formal mentoring relationships may not be as beneficial as informal, spontaneous pairings due to personality conflicts and the lack of a true personal commitment from either of the parties (Noe, 1988a). Nonetheless, in order to unequivocally ensure employees reap the benefits of the mentoring process, business

and educational organizations alike routinely include a formalized mentoring program as a component of training and professional development (Noe, 1988a). Multiple states in our country, capitalizing on this body of research, have implemented an array of various mentoring programs for school administrators (Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). However, researchers warn these formal mentoring programs will only be as good as the skilled mentors who are recruited and then trained to perform in an organizational environment which supports the development of rewarding mentoring relationships (Ragins et al., 2000).

Even though there is a multitude of research which corroborates the benefits of both types of mentoring programs, Daresh (1995) cautioned against simply matching pairs of individuals and labeling one person as a mentor. Such an arrangement will not ensure a true developmental and supportive relationship. The concept of a mentoring relationship is much more complex than originally thought. Throughout the decades, researchers have come to realize mentoring does not encompass a simple, all-or-none issue, but rather falls along a lengthy continuum of effectiveness (Ragins et al., 2000).

Functions of Mentoring

According to Kram's (1988) research, during this complex human relationship, mentors provide varying degrees of two broad, expansive mentoring functions to their mentees: career development and psychosocial functions. Mentoring relationships are generally tailored to help advance the career development of the mentee by helping them become familiar with the inner workings of the organization and thus providing career advancement. Ragins and Cotton (1999), in their research, continued to build on Kram's influential work and further delineated the five specific career development functions

mentors offer in the relationship: "...sponsoring promotions and lateral moves, coaching the mentee, protecting the mentee from adverse forces, providing challenging assignments, and increasing the mentee's exposure and visibility" (p. 530). They also warned the scope and success of the mentee's career development likely depends on the mentor's power and position within the organization.

Notable researchers, Kram (1988) and Levinson et al. (1978), provided the developmental base for the psychosocial function of mentoring. Kram conducted biographical interviews with public utility managers and hence detailed the psychosocial function of mentoring. She found this mentoring function depended on the quality of the interpersonal relationship and the emotional bond which typically forms between the two parties. In her study the psychosocial function which the mentors provided to their mentees included: role modeling, counseling, friendship, and providing acceptance-and-confirmation (Fagenson, 1989). Levinson and his coauthors also have provided studies which confirm mentoring is the most important component of the psychosocial development of men (Hunt & Michael, 1983). Throughout the literature this function may also be described as enhancing the mentee's sense of competence and creating self-efficacy, as well as contributing to a mentee's personal and professional development (Fagenson, 1989; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

According to Kram (1988), "Relationships that provide both kinds of functions are characterized by greater intimacy and strength of interpersonal bonds and are viewed as more indispensable, more critical to development, and more unique than other relationships" (p. 24). In her work, she did add the caveat that if only the career

development function is evident in a relationship, the mentee can expect to experience less intimacy and feel less connected to the mentor.

Although Kram (1988) identified nine sub-functions within the career development and psychosocial functions, she cautioned this list of sub-functions will not typically be all inclusive in each individual mentoring relationship. She gave the following warning with regards to each sub-function being evidenced in each specific mentoring relationship.

There are several factors that influence which functions are provided in a relationship. First, the developmental task of each individual shapes what needs are brought to the relationship; individuals' important needs will affect what functions are sought out and offered in the relationship. Second, the interpersonal skills brought to the relationship influence how the relationship gets started, how it unfolds over time, and the range of possible functions. (p. 40)

Table 1 delineates the two mentoring functions, career development and psychosocial, and provides behavioral examples for each sub-function. Although these components of mentoring relationships were identified by Kram's (1988) qualitative work, these functions continue to surface in more current quantitative studies.

Phases of Mentoring

Kram's (1980, 1983, 1988) work, which also identified the four phases of a mentoring relationship, has continued to be instrumental to the mentoring research. Her findings inform much of the current mentoring literature and are often quoted throughout studies on mentoring. Initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition are the four phases of a relationship which she identified in her writing. This research has provided a base for advanced research many continue to build upon and expand.

Table 1
The Functions of Mentoring

Mentoring functions	Definitions
Career development functions	
Sponsorship	Actively supporting an employee for lateral moves or promotions
Exposure-and-visibility	Giving employee assignments that provide contact with key figures
Coaching	Sharing advice, information, and ideas that help an employee attain objectives
Protection	Shielding an employee from damaging contact with key figures
Challenging assignments	Helping an employee prepare for greater responsibility by providing challenging work
Psychosocial functions	
Role modeling	Serving as a model for the mentee to emulate
Acceptance-and-confirmation	Conveying positive regard
Counseling	Using active listening to enable the mentee to explore personal concerns
Friendship	Sharing informal social experiences

(Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003, p. 42)

Initiation. According to Kram (1983), the first phase, initiation, can be expected to occur during the first 6 to 12 months of an informal mentoring pairing. It is during this stage strong positive expectations of the mentor typically emerge. The mentor, who is generally admired and respected by the mentee for proven organizational competence, as well as the ability to provide support and guidance, will behave accordingly and thus lend credence to the mentee's initial expectations. The mentee should begin to sense a feeling of caring, as well as respect, and thus a semblance of trust can be expected to be established during this first phase. In return, the mentee is generally viewed by the mentor as someone who can benefit substantially from the mentor's attention and counsel. The first year serves as a base and provides a foundation for the remainder of the relationship. It is during the first year that initial expectations are transformed into concrete positive expectations. According to Kram (1983), the following is an example of this transformation during the initiation phase.

An opportunity to work on a high visibility project is interpreted by the young manager as proof of the senior manager's caring, interest, and respect. Alternatively, a request for assistance or a volunteered criticism of the department is interpreted by the senior manager as proof of the young manager's assertiveness and competence. (p. 616)

Cultivation. During the second phase, cultivation, which can be expected to last from two to five years, the positive expectations formed during the initial phase are continually tested and pitted against reality. As the relationship proceeds to develop, both the mentor and mentee should begin to realize the value of relating to each other. Kram (1983) has reported the majority of the lessons from mentoring are most likely learned in this second phase. Career development, as well as interpersonal bonds, is apt to peak during this time. Although each individual undergoes both obvious and subtle

unique changes during a mentoring relationship, the mentee generally will become more self-confident and optimistic regarding a promising future within the organization. As the inherent ability to influence others is realized, the mentor should begin to feel a sense of empowerment and personal satisfaction. Although boundaries between the two parties are most definite and clarified, Kram reminds us, for some, there can be disappointment should developmental needs fail to be met. However, for many, as their relationships prove to exceed expectations, personal, meaningful bonds are formed between the two parties (Kram, 1983).

Separation. The third phase, separation, is a period of time generally characterized by turmoil, anxiety, and feelings of loss by both individuals. A physical, structural separation which allows the mentee to function at a different level will give the mentee an opportunity to perform without supervision and guidance. Although structural separation can certainly prove to be extremely difficult for both parties, psychological, or emotional separation, which results from the withdrawal of support and guidance from the mentor, can wrack the most havoc on the relationship. Kram (1983) found evidence of some mentors who actually blocked mentees promotions in order to resist such emotional loss. Even though separation can be painful, this phase is critical to the development of both the mentor and mentee.

During this separation phase, the mentee is typically given an opportunity to demonstrate newly acquired talents and skills. At the same time, the mentor can take pride in the success of the mentee and be proud of the vital role they have played in the mentee's learning and advancement. When both parties realize the relationship in its previous form is no longer servicing the needs of either individual, the end of this phase

has occurred. This realization ultimately leads to a redefinition of the relationship (Kram, 1983).

Redefinition. Redefinition, the fourth phase of a mentoring relationship, as identified by Kram (1983), is characterized by significant changes in both individuals. The mentee can be expected to exhibit an ability to communicate with the mentor as a peer and be grateful for the contributions which have enhanced both personal and professional development, as well as appreciate the newfound ability to function effectively and independently in new settings. The mentor also can be expected to engage in a peer-to-peer relationship with the mentee and look fondly upon the former mentee's success with pride and satisfaction, fully aware of the personal contributions made to ensure the mentee's success. At this stage, both parties should come to the difficult realization the former relationship is neither no longer needed nor desired (Kram, 1983).

Gender's Influence on Mentoring

According to the researchers Hart (1995) and Isaacson (1998), mentors play many critical roles in the development of leaders. Several researchers report this is especially true for females (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005). The researcher Collins, after performing an in-depth examination of the careers of 24 females, declared the importance of mentoring for the advancement of female leaders. She stated, "An ambitious woman's need for the assistance of a mentor is even greater than that of her male counterparts. All women in the study reaffirmed their beliefs in the positive aspects of the mentor relationship" (Collins, 1983, as cited in Ragins, 1989, p. x). Intriguingly,

the majority of the participants of this study had no previous knowledge of mentoring and had heretofore believed they would advance on the merits of their hard work and proven competence. Nor did they seemingly recognize the value of a mentoring relationship.

In an additional study, Moore (1982) examined only females who aspired to administrative positions in higher education and reached the following conclusion. In spite of females having appropriate and impressive credentials, she reported, “No one rises to leadership without being vouched for by powerful individuals, usually other leaders” (p. 4). Her deduction was supported by yet another study of male and female college faculty and administrators in Pennsylvania (Queralt, 1982). This independent research supported subsequent data. In addition to these researchers, others also report the necessity of females to have a mentor in order to succeed in the field of educational administration (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005). A review of the literature documents the critical nature of mentoring for females and provides supportive data which suggests mentoring is an important and necessary component of the career development of females who aspire to become educational leaders. Many of these authors advocate mentoring is actually the key to a female’s success in educational leadership positions.

Females’ Inaccessibility to Mentors

Although mentoring has proven critical for those educational administrators who have the desire, motivation, and competence to advance and succeed in their careers (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Brown & Phair, 2001, as cited in VanDerLinden, 2005;

Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daloz & Edelson, 1992; Daresh, 1987; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Ehrich et al., 2004; Gilmour et al., 2005; Kamler, 2006; Pence, 1995), the literature on mentoring reveals that for females, mentoring relationships are not always readily accessible (Gibelman, 1998; Hale, 1995; Kalbfleisch, 2002; Kamler, 2006; Ragins & Cotton, 1991, 1996). There appear to be a number of reasons which could possibly explain the female's lack of accessibility to mentoring relationships. The aforementioned researchers have focused on gender differences in mentoring and found females are often excluded from informal contacts within the organization simply due to gender alone. In addition, since fewer females are in administrative positions (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001; Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997; Young & McLeod, 2001), fewer simply are available to mentor.

Females often experience a paradox in the realm of mentoring relationships. Although there is a proven need for mentors, they are likely to have only limited access to individuals who have the expertise and capability to mentor them into administrative positions. This problem could be compounded by the fact many females who do reach the executive level often must focus on their own performance and career, thus leaving precious little time to devote to developing a mentoring relationship with a subordinate. Moreover, some females feel simply participating in a mentoring program implies promotion for reasons other than merit (Rothstein & Davey, 1995). Researchers Ragins and Cotton (1996) found in a survey of 510 managers of both sexes the females were the group most likely to report others were unwilling to mentor them. Unfortunately, sometimes for those females who actually do receive a specified mentor, the experience can be described as "debilitating rather than empowering" (Johnsrud, 1991b, p. 7).

However, fortunately for females, the formal or structured mentoring programs which are becoming more available throughout organizations are less exclusive and include female mentors in greater numbers than the informal self-selected process of mentoring (Kamler, 2006).

Gender Networks

Even though it has been well documented both sexes benefit from effective mentoring relationships, research studies reveal gender differences do have a profound effect on successful mentoring relationships. Multiple researchers refer to one basic problem within the mentoring concept as the “good ole boy syndrome” (Gardiner et al., 2000, p. 187). Although to some this concept may be more commonly recognized as networking, this arrangement in educational circles generally consists of prominent White males who are renowned for promoting from within their own ranks in order to perpetuate the status quo (Kamler, 2006). This syndrome is typically used to describe circumstances where mentors prefer to nurture relationships with people who are similar to themselves.

Wolcott (1994) referred to this phenomenon as variety-reducing behavior. In his study of a Principal Selection Committee, he found male principals manipulated the selection process in order to reinforce the existing system. Even though this committee, composed of male principals, had an opportunity to permit the introduction of variation, i.e. female candidates, they chose instead to recommend candidates so similar they appeared to be interchangeable. Wolcott reported these male principals appeared to have no conscious concern or awareness of their “...variation-reducing behaviors. Their attention was directed toward keeping things ‘manageable’ by drawing upon and

reinforcing the existing system” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 143). Additional review of the literature supports the problematic position of men who tend to sponsor others with similar characteristics and exclude those who do not possess like characteristics, such as gender or race (Johnsrud, 1991a; Moore, 1982; Queralt, 1982; Short, Twale, & Walden, 1989).

Sexual Tensions

In addition, the comparatively small number of females who occupy educational administrative positions could partially help to explain why some females have had difficulty gaining access to mentoring relationships. Often, in the absence of a formalized process, males may be reluctant to serve as mentors to younger females for a variety of reasons, which only serves to exacerbate the dilemma. Sexual innuendoes, which are sometimes associated with such relationships, could be one paramount reason some feel uncomfortable in cross-gender mentoring relationships.

There is research available which legitimizes these concerns. In a survey of 381 professional females, 26% responded they had sexual encounters with their male mentors (Collins, 1983, as cited in Ragins, 1989). An additional study by Fitt and Newton (1981) also supported the role sexual tension plays in mentoring relationships. A number of managers in this study reported their mentoring relationships had developed into romances. Statistics such as these help one to understand why prospective female participants may decide the perception that a relationship is romantic outweighs the potential benefits of a mentoring relationship and therefore decline to participate in a formal program (Kelly, 2001). Whether this perception is actual reality or not is irrelevant. The perception serves as the determining factor and often is sufficient to

prevent females from entering into a cross-gender relationship. They frequently choose to avoid destructive gossip and discrediting innuendoes and thus forego participating in mentoring relationships (Ragins & Cotton, 1996).

An additional researcher, Missirian (1982), also chronicled sexual tension as one of the complications of a male and female mentoring pairing in her work.

When one works closely, as these women did, with men who are as brilliant, dynamic and often physically attractive as these mentors were perceived to be by their mentees, it would be extraordinary if sexual tension did not exist between the two. All of the women who acknowledged having had a mentor felt that sexual intimacy with the mentor would have threatened the existing relationship, and they were not prepared to take that risk. (p. 84)

Although a formalized, structured mentoring program within an organization may assuage some of the sexual tensions, it will not eradicate the sex role stereotyping existing in society. Most current research indicates even though society's attitude towards females may be changing, stereotypical behaviors still exist.

In many instances males and females behave in the same way, but their actions are interpreted entirely differently (Amedy, 1999). If a female chooses to exhibit task-orientated behaviors, she may be perceived as masculine, and females who use power in a masculine way often have a negative connotation. Nurturing behaviors, on the other hand, are sometimes perceived as weak and unsuitable for leadership positions. The obvious contradiction in female leadership is by gaining power, the female must lose her feminine identity (McBroom, 1986). Unfortunately, the paradox in educational leadership remains; mentors are frequently males who presumably model male behaviors for their mentees. "Mentoring needs to be explored within a conceptual framework that

moves beyond male-oriented models of adult development and encompasses values of affiliation, caring, and interdependence” (Johnsrud, 1991b, p. 10).

Quality Mentoring Relationships for Females

As noted earlier, not all mentoring relationships prove to be beneficial, neither to the mentee nor the mentor. Lack of communication and/or commitment is often indicative of a flaw in the mentoring relationship. Although the mentee may feel an intense loyalty and allegiance to the mentor, if the feelings are not reciprocated, the mentor may fail to respond to the mentee’s needs and ambitions.

Gardiner et al. (2000) have provided in their book, *Coloring Outside the Lines: Mentoring Women into School Leadership*, four attributes of a quality mentoring program for females, which in effect presents a concise blueprint to ensure success for females. Quality mentoring programs can be identified by the expectations and parameters in place to help promote the professional and personal growth of the mentees. The following attributes, valued by both the mentee and the mentor, should be easily discernable in successful mentoring relationships.

Open Communication

Open communication and personal connection are necessary for quality, superior mentoring relationships (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000). Successful mentors can easily be identified as those who connect on both a professional and personal level with their mentees. These are the mentors most likely to invite their mentees to work alongside them and get to know them on a personal level. As a result, they often are described as caring and giving mentors who are truly committed to the

enhancement of the lives of their mentees. This spark or emotional connection is always evident in quality mentoring relationships (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Good communication between the mentor and mentee is critical to the relationship, and when in place, both parties should feel comfortable expressing their opinions and views. Contemporary researchers have completed multiple studies which compare the talk of male and female school executives. A review of the literature of the discourse of leaders reveals in-depth examinations of language and discourse and their subsequent impact upon the everyday interactions of individuals (Brunner, 2000, 2002; Davies, 1994; Grogan, 1996; Skrla, 2000b; Skrla et al., 2000; Weedon, 1987). The following is not an all inclusive list but certainly is representative of the themes which have been analyzed within the framework of this concept: unnatural silence, silence, and proactive listening. Of particular interest is the work of Weedon (as cited by Grogan, 1996) who examined discourse from a feminist perspective and focused on the conscious, organized, and controlling aspects of discourse.

Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the “nature” of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases. (p. 108)

In addition, Brunner (2000) studied the importance of silence in the act of listening. According to her work, females often are thought to be silenced when in effect they are only listening. In contrast, one must be ever cognizant, as warned by Blount (1995), and aware the one controlling the discourse can easily limit the views which others can legitimately express. This particular concept could possibly be of paramount

importance to anyone attempting to analyze the communication and discourse of mentoring relationships.

Reflective Practice

Successful mentors promote deep reflective practices in an effort to enhance leadership cognitive structures and measures (Gardiner et al., 2000). Such mentors generously offer their thoughts and feelings on administrative plans and events, as well as encourage their mentees to engage in extensive, complex reflection. In the process, the mentees usually derive personal theory from their experiences and relate such to more formal theories, which they may have acquired through their readings and studies. Reflective thinking is a critical construct which implies individuals understand conclusions must be grounded in relevant data, as well as realize they should remain open to a continuous reevaluation of events (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998).

The benefits of the construct of reflection are supported by the authors Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) in their work. They advocated, “significant new ‘helping’ experiences with appropriate reflection can promote more complex cognitive structures” (p. 42). These researchers also maintain in the absence of reflective experiences, which must be deliberately planned and implemented by the mentor, adult learners typically stagnate at stages below their developmental potential.

As cited in Reiman & Peace (2003), additional research done by King and Kitchener (1994) also confirmed the critical role of reflection in the mentoring process. These authors, who conducted a study which involved more than 1,700 adolescents and adults, chronicled the importance of reflection in developmental mentoring.

[Their work is] one of the most comprehensive explanations of the gradual evolution of critical thinking, intellectual development, and critical reflective judgment in adults. Although their research shows evidence of seven stages, they are grouped in three clusters of epistemological reasoning: pre-reflective thinking, quasi-reflective thinking, and reflective thinking. (Reiman & Peace, 2003, n.p.)

Although reflection itself has been described as an “inner dialogue with oneself whereby a person calls for his or her own experiences, beliefs, and perceptions about an idea” (CampbellJones & CampbellJones, 2002, p. 134), “informing and transforming functions of knowledge” (Risko, Roskos, & Vukelich, 2002, p. 149), and “a conscious and systematic mode of thought” (Valli, 1997, p. 67), there is little research available which actually provides detailed, linear instructions on how to actually encourage individual reflection, a deep complex, personal process. However, using a support-and-challenge responding process, or mismatched responses, is recommended to enhance the reflection process and promote deeper introspection (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). These authors, in their writings, also encouraged the mentor to act as a sounding board for the mentee and cautioned the mentor to respond with honest answers to any questions and concerns which the mentee may present. As a caveat to the mentor, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall also warned that the reflection process must be balanced with action and that too much of either will stifle developmental growth in the mentoring relationship.

In the mentoring process, reflection enables us to slow down, rest, and observe our journey and the process of self-knowledge that is so important along the way. (Huang & Lynch, 1995, p. 57)

As the mentoring relationship progresses, both parties should benefit from participating in the observation process Huang and Lynch (1995) recommended.

Zachary (2000) in her work, *The Mentor's Guide*, suggested a three step process for the mentor. First, the mentor must regularly practice self-reflection and seek to become cognizant of any major events which may have impacted their own life. Second, the mentor should attempt to understand the mentee's journey by studying the mentee's prior experiences. And third, the mentor should endeavor to gain perspective and separate the two adult paths which have become intertwined. Although it is human nature to project our own perception of reality to others, the mentor should ideally be constantly guarded against making assumptions regarding the mentee's understanding of experiences (Zachary, 2000).

The following quote from a mentee, whose mentor understood the value of reflective practice, as cited in the study of Gardiner et al. (2000), exemplifies how this construct may promote critical thinking, intellectual growth, and professional independence.

Joan, my mentor, required that we watch her...when she had a dilemma as an administrator, she walked it through with us as to what was going on in her head...She required that we have daily logs...it was very laborious and I hated doing it...but we were new, we had to prove ourselves to these other people out there. (p. 57)

When engaging in reflective practice with mentees, there are two caveats for the mentors. First, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) offered this powerful warning to mentors, "Unexamined experience forfeits the potential for growth" (p. 266). And second, as the mentees become more expert at self analyzing and judging their accomplishments, mentors should be aware of a possible conflict between the mentee's individual set of high standards and expectations and their personal critique of their own

performances. Some mentees can be considered fragile at times, and thus criticisms may be painful and difficult to internalize.

Opportunities for Leadership

Mentors who provide quality experiences purposefully create critical opportunities for leadership as one way to enhance the visibility of their mentees (Gardiner et al., 2000). These efforts, whether very direct and forceful, or indirect and inconspicuous, should be deliberately designed to promote the mentee within the organization.

Since there are few objective tests of competence at this level in educational administration, one's status often is a determinant of competence and capability (Scanlon, 1997). Mentees should be encouraged to be cognizant of opportunities to increase their visibility with those in power, and effective mentors should have the foresight to plan occasions where the mentees will be given multiple opportunities to spotlight their talents and skills. These successful mentors go beyond the boundaries of pragmatic day-to-day routines in order to purposefully ensure the visibility of their mentees. Effective mentors tend to become both a cheerleader and a coach for the mentees taking advantage of every opportunity to market the skills and talents of their mentees to others within the organization (Gardiner et al., 2000).

In this marketing process, it is helpful for the mentor to be astutely aware of how marginality shapes the expressions of gender consciousness. The researchers, Schmuck and Schubert (1995), conducted a study of females in principal positions and noted the majority of the participants focused on defeminization. In an additional study, Bell (1995) chose to study other successful female superintendents, and learned they, too, felt

the need to disaffiliate themselves from other females in order to negate the negative stereotype of female administrators. This self-imposed isolation, in this instance, led to the inability to form relationships and solidarity with other females. Her findings manifest the importance of a mentor providing a mentee with networking opportunities and opening doors for mentees to socialize with others in prestigious positions.

Quality mentors, who believe strongly in the leadership abilities of females and are committed to equity and social justice in this arena, most likely will empathize with females and realize conscious intervention is often necessary in order for social change to occur. This support should prove to be invaluable to female leaders and allow them to believe in their personal leadership abilities (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Professional Support and Encouragement

Good mentors routinely encourage mentees to take risks and attempt to buffer them from organizational criticism (Gardiner et al., 2000). While effective mentors understand a significant amount of risk accompanies growth, they also realize the connection will be compromised if a relationship is not defined by trust and honesty (Daloz & Edelson, 1992). Rather than allowing their mentees' careers to merely evolve, astute mentors encourage them to accept responsibilities which may initially feel uncomfortable and awkward to them. They should always be cognizant of their activities and never allow them to reach a status quo plateau, but rather continuously provide effective professional support and encouragement in an effort to sustain and support their mentees (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Ill structured administrative problems often are open to multiple points of view. Successful mentors should design tasks for their mentees which support them in their

problem-solving process, but yet also challenge them to consider multiple viewpoints when solving problems. As they adopt such a support-and-challenge developmental mentoring perspective and design learning activities accordingly, mentors promote the cognitive growth and development of their mentees (Reiman & Thies-Sprinthall, 1998). These authors also warn such opportunities for growth must occur over time in order for true developmental growth to occur and caution mentors to be aware of the cognitive developmental stages of mentees, carefully matching their support in order to allow for maximum potential growth.

Moreover, the mentor should always be prepared for the possibility of failure on the part of their mentees and willingly accept this risk as a viable possibility. Skilled mentors, as advocates, back their mentees' actions and unconditionally choose to buffer and protect them in public. Disagreements at all times should be discussed in private if at all possible. Kanter (1997) described mentors as “godfathers” or “rabbis” who protect their mentees in times of controversy. In contrast though, mentors should also be aware a poorly performing mentee will cast a negative shadow on their personal accomplishments and recognize this risk as inherent within the mentoring process (Gardiner et al., 2000; Ragins & Scandura, 1994).

Personal Values

Personal values are embedded within the literature on successful mentoring relationships. As authors analyze, delineate, and define components of these relationships, a wide array of personal values ultimately seems to surface. Kram's (1988) work on the psychosocial function of mentoring emphasized the importance of these values in relationships and recognized their magnitude, specifically in the sub-function

of acceptance-and-confirmation. She explained in her writing, “Both individuals derive a sense of self from the positive regard conveyed by the other....mutual respect helps both individuals” (p. 35).

Moreover, personal values are evident throughout the work of Gardiner et al. (2000) in their book *Coloring Outside the Lines*. When writing about the attribute of open communication, they stated, “Good mentors build trust with their protégés, and encourage them to have faith in their abilities and to ‘trust the process’; trust is critical” (p. 55). Relationships which tend to encourage and nurture personal values help to establish an environment that perpetuates the maximum benefit from the mentoring process.

Mutual Attraction and Interpersonal Comfort

Social interaction and identification, as well as mutual attraction, appear to enhance the interpersonal comfort of mentoring relationships. Although social identification is a complex theory, Tajfel and Turner (1985) attempted to explain this process which has become known as the social identification theory. These authors maintained identities which intersect augment the interpersonal comfort of mentoring relationships and also reported interpersonal comfort is greatest in relationships where both members of the relationship are of the same sex.

Allen et al. (2005) designed a quantitative study to examine the role of interpersonal comfort in successful mentoring relationships. They found evidence supporting the original findings of Tajfel and Turner (1985). At the conclusion of their study, they reported, “Gender similarity influences mentoring behaviors indirectly through the ease with which protégés are able to relate to their mentors” (Allen et al.,

2005, p. 165). Interestingly, they also reported the type of mentoring relationship, informal or formal, did not have a significant relationship to interpersonal comfort.

History of Females in Educational Leadership

In the near future, we shall have more women than men in charge of the vast educational system. It is a woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the large part of the work and yet be denied the leadership. (Ella Flag Young, as cited in Isaacson, 1998, p. 1)

According to multiple researchers, Ella Young's prediction did not come to fruition, and females in the 21st century generally continue to struggle for success in the androcentric, male arena of public education. Females have, in actuality, made very little true progress since Ella Flagg Young was appointed superintendent of Chicago Public Schools in 1909. At that time the following editorial appeared in a local newspaper.

The election of a woman to be the superintendent of schools in the second largest city in the United States is a violation of precedent. If any man among the candidates had possessed all her qualities, her sex might have been against her. (McManis, as cited in Schmuck, 1995, p. 204)

Although it is well documented that the world of education consists predominantly of females, especially at the instructional level (NCES, 2003a; Skrla, 1997), there is evidence in the literature which suggests discrimination has continued to exist for many years. One possible cause for this glaring inequity could be females are primarily viewed by some as incapable of performing satisfactorily in administrative educational leadership positions.

Females as Teachers

Ginn (1989) reminded professionals in her keynote address at the Conference on Women in Educational Administration females have in fact dominated the teaching profession from colonial times until the present. During the earliest history of our

country, females were looked upon as the cheap labor force and viewed as a prudent way to staff public schools and thus enable education to advance the goals of society (Curcio, Morsink, & Bridges, 1989). Not only did females provide an inexpensive workforce, but they also were thought of as an extension of the mother and, consequently, were expected to extend the nurturing, caring, and support received in the home. In addition, females were universally accepted as teachers because they were thought to work well with children (Ginn, 1989). Although females were initially hired to teach only the younger children, historically, they soon comprised the bulk of all teaching professionals. History records reveal low salaries, longer contracts, and higher certification standards provided the men good reasons to leave the profession. This trend reflects the numbers of females employed in public schools even today. Recently NCES (2003a) reported 79% of the teachers in all public schools are females; in 2000 this same governmental agency reported 75% of the educational staff were females.

From the time females first entered education, the perception has been maintained they will foster the emotional and educational growth of the learners; whereas the men remained free to engage in the actual business of managing the schools. The following quote has been cited in a number of academic studies as a concise example of what could be termed a prevalent discriminatory mindset; “Women nurture the learners; men run the schools. It’s been that way for the past 100 years, and the prospect for change looks bleak” (Pigford & Tonnesen, 1993, p.4). Authors Young and McLeod (2001) attributed partial blame for this problem on a society that has negative stereotypes attached to females in leadership. Often they are not perceived as credible leaders and denied roles beyond the instructional level.

Females as School Executives

Even though education admittedly has a predominance of females in the teaching field, females are noticeably absent in executive positions in educational administration in our country (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001; Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997; Young & McLeod, 2001). Brunner, who was cited in an article by Radar (2001), has extensively studied females and superintendents as related to a power framework. She reported females had made great strides in the area of educational leadership in the 1930's when 13% of superintendencies were reportedly occupied by females. This has even been referred to by some as the golden age for females in administration. However, these gains were not maintained, and this number fell drastically to 3% in the 1970's, and then rose again to 14% in 2001. While this research unequivocally represents a recent rise in the number of female executives in educational administration, the advancement is minimal at best. If a line graph were constructed to display the number of percentages of females in this position each year for the past 70 years, the graphed line would be, in comparison, a uniform flat line (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001).

Additional recent research provides data which indicate the Caucasian, male dominance of educational administration is currently still prevalent in the majority of school districts in our country (Björk, 1999, as cited in Skrla, 2000b; Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997). In fact, Skrla, in additional work, has reported the odds are 1 in 40 any male teacher will become a superintendent, whereas the odds for female educators are significantly lower. Any given female teacher in a school district has an approximate 1 in 900 chance of reaching the top executive position of superintendent.

According to such computation, male teachers are approximately 20 times more likely to become superintendents than their female counterparts (Skrla, 1999).

The literature also has disclosed superintendents typically are males who have the following attributes: Caucasian, Protestant, married with children, and Republicans. Women who are chosen for these high profile positions, on the other hand, tend to be people of color, Catholic or Jewish, never married, divorced, and Democrats (Schmuck, 1999, p. ix). Young and McLeod (2001) reported females who do enter the field of educational administration can be expected, when compared to men, to have an average of 10 years or more of teaching experience, are older at the time of entrance to the field, and are more likely to have had experience teaching at the elementary level. In contrast, most men who obtain promotions to the level of superintendent come from the secondary level. In addition, females are more likely to have held previous staff positions in the central office as opposed to line positions for men (Blackmore & Kenway, 1997, as cited in Young & McLeod, 2001; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1989). Although females in educational administration tend to have more advanced levels of preparation, further unsettling research indicates they are often paid less than males who enjoy comparable positions (Pounder, 1988; Spencer & Kochan, 2000).

While there has been an increase in the number of females enrolled in administrator preparation programs throughout our country, it is equally concerning to note females in school executive positions remain a minority (Brunner, 2001, as cited in Radar, 2001; Grogan, 1996; Kamler, 2006; Skrla, 1997; Young & McLeod, 2001). Shakeshaft (1989) found by the mid 1980's, females majoring in educational administration composed more than 50% of the candidates enrolled in doctoral programs.

In the 21st century, the number of females enrolled in like doctoral programs has increased even further. For the 2002-2003 academic school year, NCES (2003b) reported 2,169 doctoral degrees conferred in the field of educational leadership and administration. Of these doctoral degrees, 1,357 degrees, or 63%, were awarded to females. This data gives cause to wonder just how many females who are licensed to be superintendents are considered unqualified for reasons other than certification issues (Young & McLeod, 2001).

School Leadership Crisis

Ironically, at a time when there continues to be a persistent underutilization of females in educational administration, many researchers are reporting a growing shortage of school leaders as a whole (Anthony et al., 2000; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Houston, 1998; Kamler, 2006; Sherman, 2005, Tallerico, 2000). Additionally, based on surveys and studies, such as those directed by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (Houston, 1998) and the Educational Placement Consortium (Anthony et al., 2000), administrator organizations and legislators across the nation have determined our country is in the midst of a school leadership crisis. The researchers, Fink and Brayman (2004) explicitly warned of this crisis in their writing, “A demographic time bomb is ticking in many school jurisdictions. Up to 70% of present leaders in the private and public sectors will retire within the next 5 to 10 years” (p. 431).

An additional component to this leadership crisis is historically, superintendents tend to serve in those powerful positions for a relatively short time; the average tenure of any superintendent is reported to be approximately seven years (Cooper, Fusarelli, &

Carella, 2000). Many urban superintendents choose to remain an even shorter time in their positions (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Although this alarming statistic is not gender specific, females are more likely to become dissatisfied and leave their positions due to a lack of mentoring, feelings of isolation, and a difference of opinions with institutional decisions (Young & McLeod, 2001). In Texas between 1979 and 1995, a total of 69 female superintendents chose to leave their superintendent's post (Allen, 1996). Many educators feel the most prestigious and powerful position in public schools is just not as attractive as it once was. Sternberg (2001) quoted Gmelch's research when she accounted for this phenomenon and reported superintendents experience "physical and psychological effects, burnout, flat-out emotional exhaustion...and... depersonalization" (p. 6).

The subject of females in educational administration can be further explored by studying the contemporary works of several modern researchers. Ginn, Glass, Björk, Brunner, Grogan, Shakeshaft, and Skrla are only a few of the renowned, respected authors in the educational field who have published relevant studies on this critical issue. These authors' contributions to the field indicate the positions of power and prestige in the educational leadership arena remain firmly rooted in the hands of males, as well as reveal additional concepts and constructs regarding females in educational leadership. Their studies contribute to the literature as they seek to discern how inequities are developed when female leaders interact and negotiate with male leaders in this field.

Summary of Review of the Literature

We are left wondering why, if gender is not the overriding explanation of a profession structured according to sex, are men managers and women teachers? How is it that women, more than men, are in positions low in power and

opportunity? Why is it that teaching is a high opportunity profession for a man but not for a woman? (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 93)

Although progress in educational administration has been within the reach of a relatively small number of women, these questions that Carol Shakeshaft asked in 1987 remain virtually unanswered in 21st century school districts around our country. Since there has been such an abysmal lack of progress in this area, it is imperative those educators who have achieved positions of power receive the support and encouragement needed to ensure success.

A canvassing of the literature documents the value of mentoring to all segments of an organization and uncovers the profound failure of Ella Young's 1909 prediction females will soon be in charge of the educational system. The focus of this work is to examine and explore the role mentoring plays in sustaining female school executives, as well as the avenues females choose to utilize as they share their past experiences with novice school executives.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Different authors and philosophers who studied Greek literature have disclosed multiple themes which emerge from the various accounts of the character of Sisyphus in Greek mythology. Although admittedly most famous for his punishment of being banned by the gods to an eternity of fruitless labor in the myth which has become the basis for the term “Sisyphean Task”, there are many additional faces of Sisyphus not routinely introduced in this story. According to other accounts, Sisyphus was also known as the man with the keenest eye for profit and was associated with two heroes of similar nature; brothers who “surpassed other men in thieving and the oath” (Pinsent, 1969, p. 57). In addition, he was sometimes labeled the crafty one and the trickster for his antics that included cheating death.

Just as this ancient character of Sisyphus has multiple dimensions, females today are likewise complicated and are comprised of various dimensions of experiences, emotions, and attributes which determine the depth of interactions in mentoring relationships. In an effort to examine modern complex mentoring relationships, specifically those of three female school executives, a qualitative case study was designed with the intent to delve into past relationships where these females had served as the mentee. More current relationships where they had assumed the role of a mentor to other novice educational leaders were also analyzed. An in-depth examination of the methodology used to design and implement this qualitative case study is provided in this chapter.

Epistemological Frame

“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted” (Albert Einstein, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 12). This seemingly innocuous quote by Albert Einstein provides a basic rationale for all qualitative research, a research design that differs dramatically from familiar positivist or quantitative research where “reality” is considered observable and measurable (Merriam, 1998). In contrast, qualitative research is built upon the concept that “meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). In her work, Merriam informs it has only been within the past 20 to 30 years qualitative research has achieved an acceptable status within the scientific research community.

A researcher, who conducts a qualitative study, has multiple overarching theoretical orientations from which to choose, depending upon the specific research design. Since the purpose of this study was to understand how female school executives made meaning from their mentoring relationships, a basic interpretive qualitative approach was utilized. Such an inductive strategy provided an avenue to discern meaning from the selected females’ past mentoring experiences.

As the researcher of this study, I assumed the role of the primary instrument for data collection (Merriam, 1998, 2002). The charge then became to employ a “commitment to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence” (Patton, 2002, p. 51). In order to observe the female school executives’ behavior in a natural setting, two of the participants were interviewed in their executive offices and the third participant in the living area of her home. While the

conversational interviews were recorded via an audio tape recorder, external observations, which could not be captured in this manner, were recorded as field notes. These notes provided a rich description of the surroundings of the selected female school executives and provided an avenue to collect during the interview any extraneous information which may be pertinent to this study. For example, the home décor of one of the participants was colorful, and her house was eclectically decorated. Even though this first interview session took place in May, field notes reflected a fully decorated Christmas tree stood proudly in one corner of the living area. During the course of this interview, just by observing the way she dressed and the way she decorated her home, it was evident and noted her persona appeared to be exuberant and lively.

“In this type of research it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework... (Merriman, 1998, p. 203). As the researcher, my physical presence in this participant’s home environment afforded an opportunity to record data which only proved to enhance the understanding of her self description and her perception of reality in the work setting, which truly gave credence to her stories as she later shared them. Notes taken immediately after leaving the interview site also proved to be beneficial for data collection.

Another important characteristic for all qualitative studies is the recognition of the inductive process (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Often this type of research evolves from a lack of theory to explain or clarify certain phenomenon or questions which remain unanswered by researchers. Since there are no hypotheses to guide qualitative researchers, they must build continually toward theory and often report their findings in

the form of categories, units, or themes (Merriam, 1998, 2002). An analysis of the data collected from these participants revealed the following four, distinct strands of mentoring relationships: Strand I: Career Development and Psychosocial Functions, Strand II: Attributes of Successful Mentoring Relationships, Strand III: Values of Successful Mentoring Relationships, and Strand IV: Mutual Attraction, Reciprocity, and Interpersonal Comfort.

Rich, thick description, the final common characteristic of all qualitative designs, provides the foundation for qualitative studies and is paramount to the success of any researcher's work (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Since words, pictures, and representations provide the avenue for the researcher to convey what has been learned about a particular phenomenon, quotes often are included in the study to support the findings. Denzin further defines thick description for researchers in his work on qualitative studies.

A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (Denzin, 1989, p. 83)

While this study was in the design stage, requests for mentoring stories from each of the participants were purposefully inserted as probing questions in order to help ensure such rich thick description was received from each executive, as well as to ensure each participant's story was heard. Such study design provided an avenue for these executives to fully express their feelings and voices when sharing their mentoring experiences. As the responses to all requests for information were analyzed and critically examined in relation to prior research, specific strands common to these relationships

began to emerge from the collected data. Specific quotes which support these findings are presented in Chapter IV.

Sample Selection

Since the purpose of this case study was to derive meaning from the past and present mentoring experiences of female school executives in a bounded system, it was obviously necessary to select participants who could be considered information rich and who possessed a breadth of experiences salient to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In an effort to obtain in-depth information from a small subgroup of female school executives, the following criteria were developed which narrowed the system and reduced the possible number of participants for this study. Each of the females, whose stories were collected, must have satisfied this all inclusive list of criteria before they could be considered and ultimately invited to participate in this study.

1. Participants must be female and have occupied a school executive leadership position in a school district for at minimum of five years.
2. Participants must have served in districts of more than 7,000 students.
3. Participants must be available to participate in two face-to-face interviews.
4. Participants must be willing and agreeable to share their mentoring experiences.
5. Participants must be willing to identify those who served as their mentor, as well as those they have mentored.

As this study was evolving and developing, Dr. Virginia Collier, during one of many academic discussions regarding the mentoring experiences of female school executives, shared the names of two of her female colleagues who were among the first female superintendents in Texas and are renown statewide for their accomplishments.

Once the criteria were identified and available, she offered to make the initial contact with these two females. Since she, herself, had experience as one of the early superintendents in the state, she knew of the reputations of excellence each of these females enjoyed and felt their experiences would be salient to this study. Given that both of these females were among the early female superintendents in Texas, there were virtually no other females to mentor them into positions of leadership at that time. Although they most likely had been mentored exclusively by males, they since have had opportunities to serve as mentors to both males and females. Such a purposeful selection of information-rich participants helped to increase an in-depth understanding of the question of the influence of past mentoring experiences (Patton, 2002).

After choosing this small homogeneous sample (Patton, 2002), these two female school executives were contacted via electronic mail and asked if they would be interested in participating in this study. Since both of them expressed an interest in mentoring research and quickly replied they would gladly and willingly share their experiences, an initial interview was arranged with each female school executive at a mutual time and site.

During the course of the first interview session with one of these participants, she suggested one of her former mentees be contacted and her mentoring story possibly be included in this research. She felt this female school executive's story would, not only be interesting, but would also contribute to the data which was being collected. Even though, when compared to the other participants, this new addition to the study had been a superintendent in a different era, her mentoring experiences were unique and added another dimension to the study. Such a thread of referrals, called a snowball sampling

strategy by those who are expert in qualitative design, is the most common type of purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998).

This first school executive readily provided contact information for this additional possible participant, who currently is the superintendent of a neighboring school district. When she was emailed an initial contact request to gauge her interest in sharing her personal mentoring stories, this superintendent responded, "I will be happy to participate. Just schedule a time with my assistant!" And so an interview time for this third participant was subsequently arranged, and she became the third female school executive who shared her mentoring experiences.

The addition of this new participating female executive brought the total number of selected female school executives to three. Although two of the participants retired from a superintendent's position in Texas, they both are still active in the field. One of these executives presently serves as a consultant to practicing superintendents; whereas, the other is the Director of a Region Service Center in a highly populated area of Texas. The third participant, referred to me during my first interview, currently is the superintendent in a district of approximately 7,500 students, although she did share with me that she is contemplating retirement in the near future as well.

In an effort to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of each of these female school executives, pseudonyms were assigned to each of them. These names do not represent anyone involved in this study and were simply chosen at random in an effort to protect the privacy of these females, as well as help the reader easily distinguish between the three executives. The following section describes each of these three female school

executives who met the criteria established for this study and subsequently agreed to share their mentoring stories for this research.

Participants

Jennifer. The morning of the first interview with Jennifer, I arrived a bit early and a little nervous, wondering if this Director of the Region Service Center would truly be willing to spare 90 minutes out of an incredibly busy day to share her personal thoughts and mentoring experiences. Such concern proved to be needless. Jennifer opened her office door with a warm welcome to her large executive office. She took her place at the head of her mahogany conference table and motioned for me to sit on her right, a seating arrangement that appeared to be quite comfortable for her. Jennifer was conservatively dressed in a blue pants suit and seemed unfazed by the necessary tape recorder in the center of the table. In a soft spoken, unhurried voice she unassumingly began to share her personal history. She disclosed she was unmarried, but, however, does have a nephew who came to live with her when he was a preschooler.

Jennifer considers herself a hometown girl, having grown up in a city which today has a population of approximately 220,000 residents. She graduated from the local high school, went to college a short distance away, and after completing her degree, returned to her hometown to teach history at the secondary level. She remained in the classroom for 13 years before she was promoted to assistant principal at the same high school where she was previously a teacher. At this time, Jennifer revealed the following account of the educational atmosphere present when she was appointed to her first administrative assignment.

There was much skepticism about a female in a high school. There were a few female elementary principals then. Now and then there would be a middle school one. But they were virtually unheard of in high school...high schools weren't staffed like they are now. When I was an assistant principal, we had 2,650 kids, and there were two of us. That same high school today has 2,100 kids and five assistant principals.

After three and one half years as a secondary assistant principal, Jennifer was promoted to a central office position, Director of Communications. However, she soon was named Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, a position which she held for three years before being appointed Interim Superintendent upon the resignation of the current superintendent. Jennifer served in this interim capacity for only four months before she was named by the board as the official superintendent of the same district where she had begun her career teaching at the secondary level. She served in the superintendent's position for 14 years before retiring and beginning a consultation service available on a part time basis. In this role, she did some work providing staff development for superintendents at the Region Service Center and subsequently was named as the director of that facility, a position she presently holds.

Denise. After Jennifer's interview, I realized the depth and breadth of her mentoring experiences and thus, some days later, approached Denise's superintendent's office with more confidence and assurance she would have an equally relevant and interesting story to tell. Since Jennifer had suggested Denise's experiences would add a vibrant dimension to this study, I was anxious for this new participant to share her story.

Although I was the first appointment of the day, it was evident Denise had been in her office long before I arrived. As she came out of her inner office to personally greet me, she handed paperwork to her secretary with a long “to do” list attached before she escorted me to a small round table which sat to the left of her executive desk. I noticed, although her office was smaller than Jennifer’s, it also was tastefully decorated with multiple replicas of the district high school mascot visible throughout her office.

Denise, dressed in her bright yellow suit, immediately made me feel comfortable with her warm smile and assurance we had as much time as necessary to capture her story. Since I had allotted 90 minutes for each of my interviews, I had purchased 90 minute tapes to use during the sessions themselves and was very surprised when we heard the tape click off. This was the only interview session where it proved necessary to change tapes in order to record all of the data. Denise was so approachable and engaging neither of us realized the time limit had expired, and she graciously gave extra time to gather a last bit of data by answering the one remaining question.

Denise began this interview by giving an account of her personal history. She started her career in education in 1972 when she accepted a position to teach English III at the secondary level and feels blessed to have been able to work in this same district for 29 years. When she was in the classroom, she actually had the good fortune to work alongside Jennifer on many occasions. Denise was a classroom teacher for nine years before she was promoted to an assistant principal’s position at a rival high school. She actually was promoted to this administrative position before she even had completed her certification requirements.

I never thought that I wanted to be an administrator because at that point they whipped butts, and that didn't look good to me....But long story short, the district moved to an instructional administrator model, and I became an assistant principal without any certification because I had a master's in English. I loved English. All of my hours were English hours. So then I had to start backtracking and that's when I began the doctoral program.

Denise was an assistant principal for only one year before she was promoted to the central office. Although she was thrilled to be working in the central administration office, she did share one of the greatest disappointments of her career is her career path swerved, and she was never able to serve as a high school principal. Since Denise and Jennifer were in the same district at this time, and Jennifer recognized Denise's talents and skills, she elevated her from an assistant principal to the Director of Communications at the central office. After serving in this capacity for three years, Denise was then tapped to be the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, a position she occupied in this district for seven years.

Once Denise decided she would like to be a superintendent, she began applying for various openings in the area and was ultimately chosen to be the superintendent of her current district. Denise received her five year pin for service in this district this past June. She described it this way, "So this is where I am, and I love it."

Katherine. Interviewing the third female in this study proved to be a bit of a challenge. It took several telephone calls and multiple emails before we were able to agree upon a time which would work for both of our schedules. Since it was so difficult to reconcile our schedules, we reached a compromise and agreed to do two interview

sessions in one lengthy visit, as opposed to two 90 minute sessions as had been previously planned for this study. It was necessary to make this one small adjustment in the interviewing schedule in order to include Katherine as a participant in this study. Since several of her peers had shared she was one of the first female school executives in the state of Texas and was a most unique and interesting individual, this small concession was made into order to ensure her participation in this study.

When I arrived at Katherine's home for the interview, I noticed her house was truly a retreat in the middle of a large metropolitan area. Her home, at the end of a cul-de-sac, had a completely natural landscape; quite a contrast to the neatly manicured lawns of her neighbors. Katherine came to the door and offered a warm welcome to her home. When I mentioned the peacefulness of her home and surroundings, she shared she had actually designed the home some 33 years ago. Of course, there have been periods of time during her career when she lived in other areas of the state and country, and she then leased her home to others. But now after retiring from public education and enjoying a thriving consulting business, she is finally getting to enjoy the serene retreat she created so many years ago.

Although her reputation preceded her, Katherine confirmed she had dedicated approximately 39 years to providing an education for students in multiple states. Moreover, her career span included a variety of positions. She began her teaching career as an elementary teacher in Texas and served in that capacity for four years before becoming a special education supervisor in a district near her current home. After four years in this position, one of the deputy superintendents of her district selected her for a secondary principalship. At that time there were only a minuscule number of females in

secondary positions. Katherine stated she considers this deputy superintendent more of a quasi-mentor and certainly not a mentor in the traditional sense. She does not recall getting the kinds of support from him that would be expected of a mentor today.

He was a very heavy fisted, pounding on the table kind of deputy superintendent, and he decided that he wanted me to be the first female in secondary. So he said, "I'm putting you out there, and you either sink or swim." You didn't ask for help because, certainly as the first woman in secondary principalships, I was setting the tone, not only for my district for the future, but also for other school districts because there were no women in secondary school principalships. I certainly did not want to appear weak and ask for help.

Katherine's career path led from this secondary principalship to a stint working at the state level for the Texas Education Agency. Even though she held this position some 20 years ago, some of the changes she made while serving in that capacity are still in effect today. The following quote not only gives insight into the impact Katherine had on education in our state, but also is a testament to her strength and tenacious personality.

The campus improvement plan in this state is what I implemented when I was Director of School Accreditation, and everybody just went berserk all around the state. Who does she think she is, causing us to write up a plan at every single campus? Well, we are still doing it, which is what we should have been doing all along. And now we are doing district wide plans.

After serving at the state level for approximately three years, Katherine accepted a superintendent's position in a district near her hometown and successfully led that

district for seven years. It was while serving in this district the Texas Association of School Boards named her as one of the *Top Five Superintendents in Texas* (“Eyes Excellence”, 2002). Her reputation for success was recognized nationwide, and she was subsequently selected to be the superintendent of a large district in another state.

Katherine enjoyed her tenure as superintendent in this state for nine years before Texas welcomed her home to lead a demographically challenging district of approximately 33,000 students. She served in the capacity of superintendent for approximately two and one half years before retiring to her retreat and beginning a consulting business.

Although each of these female school executives, Jennifer, Denise, and Katherine, had a unique and different educational career, each demonstrated an unusual commitment to the education process. All of them proved to have a breadth of experiences which they willingly shared and thus provided the opportunity to collect the rich data necessary for this study.

Data Collection

Data are generally thought to be words, representations, photographs, graphics, and other artifacts that are “constructions offered by or in the sources” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 332). Although qualitative researchers may collect their data from a variety of sites, they typically draw from the following sources for data pertinent to their study: interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2002).

The three selected female school executives participated in two in-depth interviews, each approximately 90 minutes in length. “In-depth interviewing is conversation with a specific purpose--a conversation between researcher and informant focusing on the informant’s perception ... It is the means by which the researcher gains

access to...the private interpretations of social reality that individuals hold” (Minichiello, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990, p. 87). In the role of primary researcher, I traveled to two participants’ executive offices at times that were most convenient for them. Due to calendar constraints and prior commitments, one of the school executives, Katherine, suggested her interviews be held in her home. Since she is currently doing consulting work, the hours she was available to be interviewed were somewhat more flexible than those of the other participants. However, since Katherine has such a busy schedule with her consulting business, she asked if we could do two sessions in one visit. Although there were two distinct interview sessions in one lengthy visit, this small modification was made in order to accommodate her schedule and ensure her participation in this study.

All of the audio taped interviews, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, were framed by a set of questions which had evolved after a thorough canvassing of the literature. These open-ended questions, flexible by design, provided the opportunity to ask probing questions where appropriate. An extended list of all questions which were asked can be found in Appendix A.

Mentoring experiences were the focus of the first set of interviews which were framed around the following question, “How do you perceive your past mentoring experiences have influenced your current mentoring practices?” Although the participants were asked six specific questions pertaining to their mentors and six specific questions pertaining to their mentees, they were also encouraged to engage in a less structured conversation. The intent of this less structured approach was to permit any hidden assumptions and constructions to emerge in the conversational interviews.

The second round of interview sessions focused on the participants' perception of gender's impact on their mentoring relationships. Specifically, each interview was framed by the following question, "What impact, if any, has gender had on your past and current mentoring relationships?" Although I asked each participant eight pertinent questions relating to the impact of gender on their mentoring practices, each participant did expand and provided insight into their thoughts and feelings on this subject.

"A story...carries the shared culture, beliefs, and history of a group. Moreover, it is a means of experiencing our lives" (Durrance, 1995, p. 26, as cited in Merriam, 2002). Since stories are such powerful tools for understanding, each participant was asked to share stories which they felt exemplified their experiences in mentoring relationships at each interview session. Often the depth of relationships can be captured in a story, whereas a simple one sentence answer to a question fails to expose the complexities of the relationship. Denise shared an interesting story which revealed an unusual level of support from her mentor.

When I started dating again, which I never thought I would, but I did, [my mentor] said, "OK now. I've got to tell you about the 100 mile rule." I said, "OK, what's the 100 mile rule?" She said, "You can't have anybody overnight within 100 miles of the school district." It's like, well, thanks. It was a personal, but professional tip, and we always joked about it. But still it is a great thing for somebody who is single to realize that it does matter whose car is in front of your house at night. And how long it stays there and all that. ...and that was just the kind of relationship we had.

Although all interviews were audio taped, additional data were also collected from the extensive field notes taken during and immediately following both sessions. This raw data helped to provide a complete picture of how the participants interacted within their specific organizations, as well as offered rich descriptions of their offices and home environments.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data. (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 112)

The analysis of data for this study began the day that I arrived at the first interviewing site with my clipboard and tape recorder in hand. As I asked probing questions and listened carefully to the participants' stories, I was consciously coding and searching for common strands in their stories. Since data collection and data analysis should occur simultaneously, as soon as one interview ended and certainly before a second one began, I transcribed all audio tapes and began the process of developing units. Each unit of information was written on an index card and then sorted into themes, categories, and ultimately strands. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to sort the collected data from the interview sessions and field notes into the strands which subsequently emerged.

Research Issues

Trustworthiness

A paramount concern for all researchers is the production of valid and reliable results at the conclusion of their work. Being able to trust results is especially important

to researchers in a chosen field of study. Steps for ensuring such trustworthiness must be included in the design phase of the study and continually developed as the work progresses. According to Merriam (1998), there are six basic strategies which researchers should consider building into the design of a study in an effort to enhance its trustworthiness. For the purpose of this case study, four of those basic strategies were utilized and incorporated into the research design.

The first of these strategies, triangulation of data, helps to augment the internal validity and ensure the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation is simply “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). By design, three separate, distinct sources of data were accessed on different occasions. In addition to these interview sessions, data were also collected from extensive field notes recorded both during and immediately following the interviews. As this information was analyzed, it was taken back to the participants.

“Member checks, taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204), were also utilized continuously throughout the study. The transcriptions of each audio tape were immediately electronically mailed to the participants for verification and confirmation of data. Also, as the data were analyzed and strands began to emerge, this information was shared with the participants in order to ensure it was reasonable and a holistic understanding of the process was emerging.

The third strategy used to ensure triangulation of the data was prolonged engagement, which is simply the process of gathering data over an extended period of

time. Approximately two months elapsed before the interview sessions were completed and all tapes had been transcribed and the information returned to the participants.

And last, in an effort to ensure the absolute trustworthiness and credibility of this study, any personal assumptions regarding mentoring experiences and females were bracketed and set apart from the research at the beginning of the study. In addition, throughout the study, I kept a personal journal of my thoughts and perceptions on mentoring relationships, which allowed an avenue to explore my own private thoughts and biases on this subject, as well as added a source for investigating the influence of these beliefs on the study. Identifying such biases allowed me to become aware of my personal thoughts and opinions which potentially could have become intertwined with the collected data. As an inexperienced researcher, it was necessary to bracket and identify those personal biases at the beginning of the study and continue to examine them periodically throughout the study.

Ethical Considerations

Stake (1994), as cited in Merriam (1998), warned “Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (p. 244). Ethical considerations framed each phase of this research study. Realizing these interviews were extremely personal, at the beginning of the interviewing process a document was provided to ensure both the confidentiality of the data and the anonymity of the school executives. Each executive was given two assurances: (1) all verbatim tapes would be safely secured for five years and (2) their true identities would be concealed as well. Throughout this study these three female school executives have been referred to by pseudonyms. The consent form which ensures the confidentiality of

the executives can be found in this document as Appendix B. Interestingly enough, although confidentiality is paramount for any qualitative study, all three female executives readily signed the consent form at the beginning of their interviews before reading it carefully and exhibited no qualms regarding this issue. None of the executives mentioned confidentiality again and did not need verbal reassurance their identities would remain confidential. It appeared to be a nonissue with them.

Summary of Research Procedures

This case study, utilizing basic interpretive qualitative research, was designed with the sole purpose of constructing meaning from both the past and present mentoring experiences of three selected female school executives. This meaning was mediated to others as data was collected, analyzed, and eventually morphed into a descriptive outcome. Purposeful sampling was the method chosen for selecting two of the individuals to serve as participants, whereas a snowball sampling strategy was employed to offer one additional participant. These three female school executives hence provided the data which became the focus of this study. Moreover, ethical considerations were given to all processes within the study, and steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the work, with the caveat that these findings may not be generalized and are only applicable to this particular study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Although most often the focus of Sisyphus, who has become known as the futile laborer of the underworld, is on the torment he must feel as he pushes the boulder to the top of the mountain, little consideration has been given to his thoughts as he travels back to the base of the mountain to begin his task again. Where would the torment be, if on this short journey down to the base of the mountain, Sisyphus was hopeful he would succeed in his task and was oblivious to the eternal fate which had been bestowed upon him by the gods? Since this tragic Greek myth does not capture Sisyphus' thoughts during his descent, it could be rewritten such that Sisyphus, unconscious of his predicament, negates the gods' sentence and claims victory by assuming all is well. As Sisyphus' plight is compared to that of female school executives, so often many claim victory in the educational arena by simply refusing to admit to discrepancies in educational leadership positions. However, multiple studies have been conducted that seemingly uncover a constant: females remain proportionately underrepresented in this arena.

Overarching Questions

The challenge of any qualitative case study is to take the abstract human interactions being studied, form a concrete schematic which accurately and effectively captures these interactions, and then present them as a comprehensive description for the reader. Accepting this challenge, data was collected during the process of interviewing three female school executives and then analyzed and systematically categorized. Each

of these interviews was defined by an overarching question. The executives' responses to the first question, "How do you perceive your past mentoring experiences have influenced your current mentoring practices?", were very similar in nature. Without fail, each of the executives gave explicit examples of instances where they had drawn from knowledge gained through a past mentoring experience in order to effectively serve as a mentor to others. Denise put it succinctly in the following quote before she further explained many of the individuals whom she has mentored have moved into a superintendent's position.

Oh, they have served and continue to serve as a model. How I was mentored directly affects how I mentor others today. And because I did have a very positive model of leadership, I try to emulate that with individuals within my work.

Jennifer gave a more specific example of how she incorporated her past mentoring experiences into relationships where she has served as the mentor. She stated, "Well, one thing that I did when I was superintendent, I included my assistant superintendents in everything as my superintendent had done."

In answering this overarching question, the tone of Katherine's interviews was a bit different in some respects. At the beginning of the interviews, she indicated she had not had any mentoring experiences at the beginning of her career and made the following remark. "Back then we didn't have mentors. The person who selected me to me to go into secondary school principalship is about as close as I can get to a mentor." However, as the interview progressed, she mentioned on multiple occasions how she modeled her leadership practices after specific individuals. Although Katherine did not

verbalize these feelings, perhaps on the basis of these interviews she can now reassess how she views these individuals, who unknowingly helped to positively shape her career, and consider them as mentors in every sense of the word.

“What impact, if any, do you feel gender has had on your past and current mentoring relationships?” was the question framing the second set of interviews with these three female school executives. Again the responses were similar in nature, as each of them reported the various ways they perceived gender has impacted both their professional and personal mentoring practices. Jennifer gave a specific example which demonstrated how she feels gender has impacted her professional development throughout her career, as well as the gender impact on the specific experiences she plans for her female mentees.

Well, in an indirect way I think that gender has impacted my professional development because for the most part, women in school administration have come through the curriculum and instruction ranks. Twenty-five years ago that kind of background wouldn't get you a superintendency. They were looking for people who had management backgrounds or finance experience....You don't see very many people get fired because of what they did or didn't know about instruction or for that matter even how their schools or school districts performed student achievement wise....There are all kinds of things that are lurking out there, and therefore I think it is smart if an aspiring woman starts broadening her horizons before she becomes a superintendent and doesn't know what to do.

Katherine, likewise, openly stated she feels the impact of gender on the professional and personal practices of females cannot be ignored. When asked if she thought a mentor was necessary for females, she answered,

Yes, I do because it is still a man's world. We still don't represent probably no more than about 10 to 12% if it's gone up; it had dropped back down to about 9% nationally of the superintendents in the country being female. And so it is still a man's world out there.

As the data continued to be compared and contrasted, it became apparent there were underlying conditions which must be present in relationships in order for these females to maximize past mentoring experiences and relate them to mentees in an effective manner. Studying these relationships through a critical interpretive lens revealed four distinct strands of mentoring relationships which emerged from the data collected during these specific interviews. The purpose of the remaining chapter is to present these findings in detail and to provide a supporting framework, in addition to psychological concepts, for each strand which was subsequently identified.

Strand I: Career Development and Psychosocial Functions

As the conversational interviews, which were had held with these three female school executives, were dissected and minute sets of data were categorized, it became evident distinct mentoring interaction strands were beginning to form. Kram's (1988) initial work on mentoring relationships was supported and authenticated by the first strand which surfaced in these interviews. Kram's research is reviewed in detail in Chapter II.

The intent at the onset of this present study was not to validate nor confirm the mentoring functions Kram (1988) had identified in her preliminary work. However, after two rounds of interviews, it became apparent the two mentoring functions, career development and psychosocial, were so embedded in each mentor/mentee relationship they simply could not be ignored. Kram gave explicit definitions of these two most basic mentoring functions in her book, *Mentoring at Work*. For researchers studying her work, the following caveat is worthy to note. There are some who have made the accusation that since Kram explored only informal, naturally occurring mentoring relationships, much of her initial work done in the 1980's is not applicable to organizational formal mentoring programs in the workplace setting today (Friday et al., 2004). However, since her work on mentoring continues to be viewed as one of the most comprehensive works available to date on this subject, there are other researchers who argue it is applicable to formal programs as well (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

As a result of her study, Kram (1988) provided the following definition of the two functions of mentoring relationships which she identified in her book and which continue to serve as a pivotal base for much of the current research on mentoring relationships.

Career functions are those aspects of the relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for the advancement in an organization. Psychosocial functions are those aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional role. (p. 22)

Career Development Function

As detailed in Chapter II of this study, the career development function of mentoring actually is comprised of five distinct, delineated sub-functions: sponsorship,

exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments. We know as a result of Kram's (1988) influential work these sub-functions, whose intent is to prepare the mentee for advancement in an organization, have three common characteristics.

First, the mentor's position and organizational influence must be well documented. In the case of this study, each of the three selected female school executives is considered to be successful in the field of educational leadership and is held in the highest regard by their peers. Judgments by others in their field were used to gauge the successfulness of these executives. Second, in each of these conditions, the mentor must agree to help the mentee learn the rules and procedures specific to the organization, as well as gain exposure and ultimately obtain promotions within the organization. And last, these relationships should help the mentor build their own level of support. As a result of the support given to others, the mentor becomes subsequently recognized as someone who develops younger talent within the organization (Kram, 1988).

All of the females in this study appeared to feel a sense of pride when they related the numbers of individuals who had actually come to them and requested their assistance in climbing the ladder to success. As the discussion of the findings of this study continues, each of these five sub-functions, which were identified by Kram in her career development mentoring model, will be presented and correlated to the mentoring relationships of the female school executives as applicable.

Sponsorship. This first sub-function, sponsorship, is actually the one most frequently observed in any mentoring relationship, and one Kram (1988) suggested is most critical for advancement in any organization. This function generally features a

mentor who actively promotes an individual for career advancement, albeit formal or informal or directly or indirectly.

Although there was evidence all of the participants in this study had various levels of sponsorship in their career relationships, none of them in their interviews actually labeled this assistance as sponsorship, but however, did readily assign credit for their promotions to their mentor(s). Most often these females made reference to the fact someone liked them or supported them. In one instance, there was an opening in central office, and one of the mentees was promoted from an assistant principal position at a high school to the Director of Communications for a large district. Denise realized there were probably many one-on-one informal conversations between her mentor and other central office personnel which took place prior to her promotion and shared this account.

And then when I came to the central office, there weren't that many women, first of all in central office, and I think because of her, there was a close bond between communications and her job because she had just come from that job. So she knew how much communications could help in the area of curriculum administration in getting the word out and all that. And probably because she knew me, I got to do some things that I wouldn't have gotten to do. That's what I'm guessing. I mean the superintendent asked me, but I'm guessing she [my mentor] advised him.

Interestingly, each time one of the participants mentioned their various promotions throughout their careers, they never attributed their achievements to their own merits or gave themselves credit for their successes. Neither did they say serendipity, nor being in the right place at the right time, had any bearing on their

subsequent career advancements. This lack of self-promotion supports the following prediction by Kram (1988), “Without sponsorship, an individual is likely to be overlooked for promotions regardless of his or her competence and performance” (p. 25). Denise continued with a further explanation for her promotion to central office.

And I applied for the Director of Communications, which was my mentor’s old job, and I got it, of course, because of my mentor. She talked to her former boss and told him about me and everything. So that helped pave the way for me moving into that position.

Jennifer also identified a previous principal as her sponsor, though she never labeled him as such, and gave him full credit for her first promotion from teacher to assistant principal at a high school. Since she realized her first promotion came at a time when it was highly unlikely for a female to even aspire to be an administrator at any level, much less be appointed to a secondary administrative position, she felt especially grateful to her previous principal for his support. Jennifer shared this account.

And so when the opening came for assistant principal, he told the superintendent that he wanted me....I spent three years as his assistant principal, and the same summer that I moved to central office as Director of Communications, he moved to central office in a different job. And so even though the time came when he really wasn’t mentoring me any more because I became a superintendent, he still was very, very influential in my career....and if he had not held out, I would not have gotten the job. I wouldn’t have because there was that much skepticism about a female in a high school.

Jennifer was fortunate she could identify three specific mentors who had great

influence on her career successes. Research supports having several persons who will actively defend and vouch for a mentee's competence only tends to strengthen the credibility of the mentee within the organization (Kram, 1988). The support of multiple mentors may alleviate the criticism of favoritism, as well as erase the doubts some may have about the mentee's performance in the absence of a particular seasoned mentor. In addition to the high school principal who was instrumental in Jennifer receiving her first promotion, Jennifer also counts the Dean of the College of Education where she received her educational certificates as one of her mentors, as well as the superintendent who preceded her in her first superintendency. When Jennifer spoke of the Dean of the College of Education in her interviews, she candidly attributed many of her career successes to his influences.

I think that probably his recommendation was very important as I moved up through the ranks. Again, it got to the point that I really didn't need him any more, but...uh, he was a Renaissance man. And he had a great, great influence on my career.

Kram's (1988) work also informs often it is not so much what a sponsor explicitly says about an individual which can be empowering, but simply the acknowledgement of an influential supporter will prove to be sufficient to open doors and deliver opportunities for many mentees. Katherine discussed how she employs this tactic and utilizes her name and reputation as a former successful school executive in one of her present mentoring relationships. Katherine is currently providing this assistance and serving as a mentor to a novice female superintendent in a nearby district. She shared with me how she strategically plans for opportunities to sponsor this mentee.

And so I think that you really do need to have a mentor because it helps to open doors to the community. That's one of the things that I'm doing for my mentee right now is taking her out to meet the movers and shakers of the community so that they will know who she is.

Although Kram (1988) cautioned a mentee's failure to function successfully within the organization could reflect negatively on the mentor and cause them to lose credibility and clout, none of the female school executives disclosed experiences in which they may have chosen to mentor someone in an educational leadership position who did not perform to expectations. However, Denise reported there was one person who approached her and asked for her help and assistance in attaining a superintendent's position. Denise recognized such a relationship would not be in the best interests of the employee, herself, or the organization and elected not to accept the challenge of forming a mentoring relationship with this person. However, she did not say she refused to mentor this female due to the inherent risk to her own personal reputation and credibility. She explained this uncomfortable situation.

And there was a girl when I got here who had just finished her doctorate, and I did an internship with her. And I could tell, I don't mean to be ugly, but she was not interested in doing any more work. She was always looking for the easy way out. And when she did her internship even, and so I was amazed. That might have been, but it never was because of what I saw in her... You encourage and support those that you see who have that drive and the motivation and also the ability to be successful.

Another factor to be considered when examining mentoring relationships is the impact of support through association only (Kram, 1988). Often times this phenomenon is difficult to measure and track at best. In the mentoring relationships of these three female school executives, the dimension of simple association with others on the career success of the mentees is impossible to determine, although certainly it is probable the mere association with others played a role in multiple decisions which determined the success of these executives throughout their careers.

Exposure-and-visibility. “The opportunity to demonstrate competence and performance is created by a senior manager’s decision to give a junior person responsibilities that require written and personal contact with other senior managers” (Kram, 1988, p. 27). This second sub-function of career development is actually two-fold. First, the mentee must be given multiple opportunities to prove their competence and skills within the organization. Then, in an effort to promote movement upward within the system, the mentee should also be given opportunities to share these accomplishments with others who have more authority and responsibility. In talking with these female executives, it was evident their mentors had given them many opportunities to ‘shine’ and be seen by others who held powerful positions within the organization. Each of them willingly credited their mentors for providing these experiences. During her first interview, Denise shared an incident where her mentor gave her such exposure many years ago. While Denise was serving as a high school assistant principal, she was given some of the job duties of the Director of Communications, even though she was not actually promoted to this position in central

office until some months later. She described her thoughts on being given these opportunities for exposure.

And then as she moved off campus, and then I came to have some other opportunities. She gave me one when she was Director of Communications. They needed a script written and the communications department, the guy who was supposed to do that, didn't have time. So they contracted me one summer. I know that came about because my mentor knew I could write. She's the reason I got it. But that also gave me a stepping stone when the position came open that I could list as some experience because I'd really worked with them.

Denise appeared to fully realize the importance of exposure-and-visibility and acknowledged the impact this sub-function has had on her personal career. Having recognized the value of these previous mentoring experiences, she consciously provides her current mentees these same types of visibility in her district. Denise readily admitted how she was mentored in the early stages of her career is the model she uses to determine how she mentors others today. She purposefully plans for her mentees to be included in activities which may highlight their talents and then ensures others in her district are fully aware of their successes. Denise put it this way.

If we are taking a team somewhere, then I will be sure that they are included because they need to know. Like we just went to another district because we are doing continuous improvement, and they are too....And David got to go. And Jim was on the team.

Just as is in the career development sub-function of sponsorship, there may be an inherent risk to the mentor when promoting others and ensuring their visibility within

an organization. Should the mentee fail in a particular task and the poor performance is visible to others in the organization, the mentor's judgment and credibility will likely be questioned, and they may find their reputation under attack. In contrast, however, the mentee should understand there will be some tasks the mentor simply will not feel comfortable assigning to others and should not take this as a personal affront. It is possible the mentor may be unsure of the stability of their own position within the organizational structure and therefore unwilling or reluctant to delegate those assignments which may promote the mentor's own visibility within the organization.

Coaching. Kram (1988) compared the actions typical of this sub-function to those of an athletic coach, who could be expected to provide specific strategies and tactics for achieving success to a team. Dependent on the mentor's power and position within the organization, the mentor's coaching advice to the mentee may range from the clarification of a vague job description to direct feedback on job performance. This sub-function of mentoring engagement should not be confused with the discipline coaching, which has become another topic of recent research. In that respect, "Coaching is a process whereby an individual engages the services of a coach who tailors a program of individual improvement or a series of interventions" (McDowall-Long, 2004, p. 522). One of Jennifer's male mentors had some novel advice regarding proper behavior in educational administration and coached her on acceptable behavior for secondary assistant principals. Shortly after she received her assignment as a high school assistant principal, her principal came to Jennifer and offered this advice.

When I got the job as high school assistant principal, and it was pending for weeks, my principal told me, he said, "I've just got a couple pieces of advice for

you.” And I said, “What’s that?” And he said, “The fishing trip that the assistant principals go on, just don’t ask.” And then he said, “Secondly, I don’t care what happens, don’t ever let me walk past your office door and look in there and see you crying.” He said that would kill you...dead. And uh, I don’t know if he was right about the first one. I didn’t want to go on the fishing trips anyway. But he was right about the second one because there were a lot of people back then who thought women didn’t have the stamina to be in an administrative position, particularly in a high school. So you had to, you know, keep it all together.

Coaching may even be as simple as giving advice to a mentee, as in Denise’s case, on how to dress for an interview. She routinely advises her female mentees on proper attire for interviews.

...someone to provide advice for them, for even proper behavior on an interview. Somebody can tell you honestly, “Be sure and don’t wear those flashy earrings.” Because somebody is going to think, “Is she really professional?” And that really has nothing to do with it. But your mentor can be very honest....If you want to wear flashy earrings, get the job, and then wear the flashy earrings.

Coaching, which has proven equally important throughout one’s career, is always delivered with honesty and sincerity. This sub-function may have a different persona at various stages of a mentee’s career. Early on in a career when the mentee is searching for comfort in a new role, coaching may look similar to the advice on job requirements Jennifer received from her mentor at the beginning of her administrative career. However, it may even be as simple as tips for the proper dress for an interview as in Denise’s case. Later in one’s career though, this sub-function will likely have more of a

political connotation. Through organizational contacts and networks, mentees may be granted access to information which may have previously been invisible and/or inaccessible to them. Jennifer was fortunate her former superintendent took pains to ensure all of his assistants were afforded opportunities to gain access to information pertinent to their job assignments. She spoke of her mentor in this way.

His attitude about his assistant superintendents was to be very, very inclusive.

And he created all kinds of opportunities for us to not only grow in our jobs there in the district, but he took us to conferences, and he included us. He was at one time president of Texas Association of School Administrators and was a big wig in a bunch of national organizations, and he included all of us in that. And not many superintendents do that.

Although Jennifer credited her former superintendent with providing her personal access to valuable job related information during his three year tenure as her mentor, she lamented to me he was no longer available to continue to serve as a sage during political crises. As Kram (1988) chronicled in her work, coaching often can be seen as a sharing of the “big picture” and identifying those players who can be trusted. It can be discerned from the following conversation Jennifer recognized the value of her male mentor’s career coaching.

Well, it would have been helpful, I think, if my superintendent mentor had had time to talk to me more about the political things. He had been superintendent and knew what the pitfalls are. But his departure was so quick that he didn’t have the opportunity for that. But it would have been helpful if I had been better schooled in that because you can make some really stupid mistakes.

Each of the selected female school executives identified various mentors throughout their careers, and each also indicated they had, in turn, mentored many other individuals, which is an ideal situation, according to Kram (1988). Someone without a mentor would neither likely be privy to unwritten policies and procedures within an organization, nor would they be familiar with any informal existing power structures. Moreover, those with only one mentor to coach them throughout their career would possibly be at a disadvantage as well, since they would be exposed to only one particular political perspective, which may or may not be advantageous to their career advancement. “Those who have several coaches at various career stages are most fortunate” (Kram, 1988, p. 29).

Protection. Often, during the course of a mentoring relationship, there may be occasions when the mentor feels the need to shield or protect the mentee from situations which they perceive as potentially damaging to the mentee. Denise gave a perfect example of being protected by her mentor and readily confessed she was not aware of the potential dangers of the curriculum decisions she was making when she served as an assistant superintendent. Her school district had gone through an open process of selecting a new curriculum, Self Responsibility, which was essentially a sex education program. Once this curriculum was implemented and being delivered to students, a small faction of the community rose up against it and openly attacked anyone they thought may be even remotely affiliated with its implementation. Denise disclosed the following account.

[My mentor] called me in and she said, “We have got to stop this.” And I said,

“But we have just gotten results back from the poll, and the parents loved it. We

have 90% parent support rate.” Because it was telling kids what they needed to know. You know me, Miss Ideal. We just got this information back. It says that we are doing the right thing. Ninety percent of our parents support us. She said, “It is taking all of our time... We’ve got to stop it.” I wouldn’t have stopped it. I would have just kept barreling right down that road to oblivion, you know. I mean she was not going to let me ruin my career, and I think that’s what she saw coming.

None of the executives shared an example of protection occurring during the course of a cross-gender mentoring relationship; neither relationships where they served as the mentor nor where they served as the mentee. Such data verified Kram’s (1988) work. Protection is the one career development sub-function she identified as being a possible detriment to cross-gender mentoring relationships. In her early research she indicated a concern with the conflict which may ensue as a result of protection surfacing in a cross-gender mentoring relationship. She gave the following warning, “The appropriate balance of this function appears to be more difficult to achieve in cross-gender relationships” (Kram, 1988, p. 30).

She specifically warned the good intentions of protection could be misconstrued as differential treatment of someone of the opposite sex and interpreted as such. Multiple researchers have since examined the effect of gender and the influence of this feature on the functions of mentoring relationships as identified by Kram (1988) and have recorded mixed findings. Ragins and Cotton (1999) did extensive research on the gender impact on the mentoring functions by using The Mentor Role Instrument, which was developed by Ragins and McFarlin in 1990. In order to measure protection, the participants in this

study were asked to rate each of the following using a 7 point Likert scale. “My mentor protects me from those who may be out to get me. My mentor “runs interference” for me in the organization. My mentor shields me from damaging contact with important people in the organization” (Ragins & Cotton, 1999, p. 550). The results these authors found support Kram’s warning. According to their findings, cross-gender in mentoring relationships may have an adverse effect not only in the realm of protection, but in multiple sub-functions of mentoring as well.

Challenging assignments. Although not all mentoring relationships are between a boss and a subordinate, this last job related sub-function of career development is applicable to a line and staff arrangement. The focus of assigning challenging work to mentees is solely to help promote and develop technical and decision-making skills according to Kram (1988). The mentor’s ongoing support and feedback are critical to this growth and development process. In her influential work, Kram cautioned,

Without this function, a junior person remains unprepared for positions of greater responsibility and authority. While sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, and protection open avenues for advancement, challenging work assignments equip the individual with the skills to take advantage of these opportunities. (p. 32)

When Jennifer discussed the kinds of experiences she always attempts to provide for her mentees, she gave a perfect example of how she directly contributed to the organizational competency of one of her mentees. At the time, this mentee was serving as one of Jennifer’s assistant superintendents. Because of the assignments Jennifer purposefully designed for her mentee, along with the critical feedback she offered on a regular basis, Jennifer contributed to the confidence her mentee felt in her next role as the superintendent of a large school district.

I took her everywhere. I put her...I gave her lots of leadership assignments. I exposed her to all kinds of training opportunities and each year she had more roles than she had the year before. And by the time that our working relationship ended, I made very few decisions without asking her what she thought about them. I never hired a principal that she didn't agree with. She had a lot of input. And when she became superintendent, because she had been exposed to construction, H.R., business and all of that, the learning curve for her was not nearly as steep as it is for a lot of people. A lot of women.

It is important to note by delegating challenging assignments to their mentees, the mentors usually gain additional time to work on other job assignments and are then free to use their talents elsewhere within the organization. In Jennifer's example, her mentee enjoyed more of an equal playing field during the latter part of her assignment in their district, and it appears as if many important decisions were made using a collaborative team approach.

All of the five sub-functions of Kram's (1988) career development function, sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments, focus on the mentee's career development and career advancement within the organization. Not all sub-functions, however, will be evident in each mentoring relationship, and neither the inclusion of, nor the absence of, any of these sub-functions guarantees a successful mentoring relationship. Kram explained each individual's important needs, their interpersonal skills, and the organizational context of the relationship actually determine the possible range of sub-functions which will surface during an informal mentoring relationship.

Psychosocial Function

Kram's (1988) second category of mentoring functions, the psychosocial function of mentoring relationships, includes the sub-functions of role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship. While career development sub-functions are dependent on the position of the mentor and enhance the mentee's career advancement, psychosocial sub-functions tend to focus on the emotional bond and the interpersonal relationship between the mentor and the mentee, as well as relationships with others outside the mentoring pairing (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). These sub-functions refer to the interpersonal aspects of a relationship and affect the individual on a more personal level. They typically can be expected to "enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional role" (Kram, 1988, p.22).

Role modeling. Role modeling, the sub-function reported most often in mentoring relationships, may be either a conscious or unconscious psychological process. This dimension involves the mentor setting an example which the mentee consciously chooses to emulate, and in the process the mentee develops a clearer sense of their own identity. As the mentee begins to mold and model their own personal behavior after the examples the mentor has set, certain behavioral aspects may be incorporated into the mentee's style and personal identity, while other specific behaviors may be consciously omitted. According to Kram (1988), this identification process is quite complex. "Over time, [the mentee] differentiates himself from the admired object by incorporating some aspects and by choosing to be different in other respects. As this

differentiation process occurs, the junior person develops a clearer sense of who he is” (Kram, 1988, p. 33).

Although early research indicates role modeling is even more complex in cross-gender relationships, Katherine spoke highly of one of her male mentors whom she credits with helping her to develop her decision making skills. She put it this way.

So I modeled after him the kinds of tough decisions that have to be made. And then I modeled after my superintendent that he was deputy to in terms of learning how to let time be your friend in making decisions. I watched him; it would just gall me that he wouldn't make certain kinds of decisions public that I knew he and I had talked about making, because I was Director of Special Education at the time. And I would watch as he let time go by; two weeks or three weeks or whatever and then it was the appropriate time to do whatever. So I learned that time piece with him, and I've used it very successfully a lot in my career.

When thinking back to others she still emulates in her mentoring practices today, Denise readily associated certain practices with her female mentors. When she spoke of one specific mentor, the pride in her voice made it obvious this was an influential person in her life, someone she still felt emotionally connected to. Denise's eyes sparkled when she spoke of the impact of this female mentor.

Her bravery, her ability to address whatever needed to be addressed regardless of personal costs. I saw that time and time again, and that message was stronger than her sitting there and trying to give me a list of ten rules.... She was always helpful to me in knowing what was important to do. Because I think when you are a beginning administrator, you sometimes are blinded by the light. There are

so many lights out there, it is hard to know which lights to focus on. And she helped me know what was the most important for me to really center on....and then her work ethic model. I already had some of that anyway. But I know that when I was a teacher and she was an assistant principal, that's when I came to realize that it was not an eight to four job. It was different from teaching because I saw the number of hours she worked.

One of these female executives had a female mentor whom she chose to emulate, while one of them modeled her practice after a male mentor. Such a finding is actually in consensus with the current research. The quantitative research which examines the effects of gender components and subsequently, the gender impact on the psychosocial function of mentoring, specifically role modeling, is contradictory at best. For example, Sosik and Godshalk's (2000) study confirmed "cross-gender relationships provide high levels of role modeling, a critical psychosocial support function" (Sosik & Godshalk, 2005, p. 47). Their study, which focused on 200 working professionals from various industries, indicated female mentor and male mentee pairings were associated with a higher degree of role modeling than pairings composed of two males. Whereas, Ragins and McFarlin (1990) in their earlier research found results which were in direct contrast. After completing their study, these researchers maintained "female protégés [mentees] with female mentors were more likely to report that their mentors provided role modeling than were protégés [mentees] in other gender combinations" (Allen, Day, & Lentz, 2005, p. 156). In addition, Scandura and Williams (2001) also found same gender mentoring pairings reported greater levels of role modeling behaviors than cross-gender pairings (Allen et al., 2005). Clearly this is an area for further research.

Acceptance-and-confirmation. Along with role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation is one of the sub-functions, as identified by Kram's (1988) pivotal mentoring research, which also enhances the mentee's sense of competence and self-worth within the bounds of the organization. Acceptance-and-confirmation behaviors of mentoring relationships have been found to be more significant to females than to males (Levesque, O'Neill, Nelson, & Dumas, 2005).

The phrase, within the bounds of the organization, is key for the acceptance-and-confirmation psychosocial sub-function. In order for this component to fully develop, there must be a depth of respect and trust present in the working relationship which allows both members of the relationship to tolerate differences in each other. This basic trust permits the mentee to take risks, knowing that possible mistakes will be used only as an avenue for personal growth and self awareness (Kram, 1988). Denise provided a perfect example of using a mistake as a springboard for a deeper understanding of self and personal development, as opposed to using the mentee's mistake as a rejection of her organizational contributions. Obviously, Denise had created a safe working environment where both members of this relationship felt comfortable discussing their differences in personnel practices.

I had the most respect and trust in her. And I think she had the same for me. So I could just go in and say, "OK, I'm really worried." I'll give you an example of something that happened one time. She was tenacious about crossing her t's and dotting her i's, and everything had to be perfect. And a principal had taken; he and his wife had gone on a trip. This lady was also a principal. They were both high school principals. And so they went on a trip together, and they brought

back their reimbursement forms. And Debbie came up to me, and she said, “I just don’t think we should be reimbursing her because, after all, that wasn’t her school.” And I said, “Well, you know, let’s just think about it and why she went. And what was the benefit; was there anything they shouldn’t have done?” ...So we worked through it. What she did was, she sat down with the principal, and talked to him about it and said, “This is why I’m having some difficulties. We are going to go ahead because I didn’t expressly tell you not to take Linda.” ... With Debbie, it was a case of black and white. With me, it wasn’t quite so black and white....We could agree and disagree. It was ok if we didn’t always see eye to eye.

As a result of the previous conversation Denise had with Debbie, her mentee, the next time a similar personnel issue was encountered, Debbie handled it in an entirely different and more effective manner. Consequently, due to Denise’s acceptance-and-confirmation of her mentee’s contributions, Debbie was able to accept the challenge of transforming what had heretofore been considered a personal weakness into a personal strength and in doing so apparently increased her level of competency and job performance.

Both the mentor and mentee reap benefits from developing such a deep level of trust and respect for each other within the confines of this sub-function. As the mentee continues to realize the acceptance-and-confirmation of the mentor, less energy will need to be spent trying to gain acceptance, allowing more time to be devoted to identifying their role in the organization and thus developing a sense of self worth in the process. The amount of time spent gaining acceptance is usually inversely proportional

to the amount of time spent developing competence, identity, and a deeper understanding of self (Kram, 1988).

In addition, the mentor also can be expected to gain a renewed sense of self-worth to the extent the mentee serves as a newfound source of respect and support for them. “As the senior manager [mentor] confronts aging and possible obsolescence, the junior manager [mentee] provides support and appreciation that enables the senior manager [mentor] to find value in what he or she still has to offer to younger individuals and to the organization” (Kram, 1988, pg. 36). While Katherine was sharing her mentoring experiences, it was evident she had gained personal pride and satisfaction, as well as an increase in her own self-worth, from helping others become superintendents. She proudly labeled this type of assistance which she gave to her mentees as her legacy to public education.

I’ve mentored quite a few women along the way, both here and in xxxx [another state]. And I have, let’s see, I haven’t even counted it up, but I should. I have three or four women who I have mentored along the way and who now have become superintendents themselves, and then a bunch of men also. I am very proud of them....It was where some of them came to me and said, “I really want you to mentor me and help me figure out how to become a superintendent. That is what I want to do.” And so I did. I feel that one of my responsibilities as a public educator, and especially at the superintendent level, is to help develop our next round of leaders and so that we can continue to have the strong public educational system. And if I do not do my part, I will not have left a legacy. So

one of my legacies is that I have some very fine superintendents around the country that I have mentored.

Such a mutual trust and respect often proves to be beneficial to both the mentor and the mentee. This sub-function of mentoring provides the mentor with a source of support and loyalty within the organization, as well as creates an avenue for leaving a legacy for themselves, as so aptly described by Katherine. This psychological nurturing by the mentor usually allows the mentee to develop a sense of competence as related to job performance, and thus the mentee usually discovers a sense of self-worth in the process. The end result is a mutual admiration between both the mentor and the mentee (Kram, 1988).

Counseling. “Counseling is a psychosocial function that enables an individual to explore personal concerns....an individual finds a forum in which to talk openly about anxieties, fears, and ambivalence that detract from productive work” (Kram, 1988, p. 36). According to Sosik and Godshalk (2000), females are generally more willing to serve as mentors than males, and when they do accept this task, they tend to provide more of the psychosocial sub-function, counseling, to their mentees. Several samples which supported Sosik and Godshalk’s study were embedded in the conversations with these female school executives. Each example of counseling, which was reported, occurred during a female to female mentoring relationship. Denise compared her female mentor to a safety net and explained her belief a female has a greater need in educational administration for this type of psychosocial function.

I would say that everyone needs a safety net. But as a woman in a job typically having males, it is even a stronger need. Because sometimes, even today, women

can get into trouble quicker; maybe because people have different expectations of them. But to have another woman, I'm not saying you can't have a man, because I'm mentoring some fellows, but for me to have had a woman mentor was the very best kind. You just need it. You as the leader have situations for which you are not prepared. Having a mentor allows you to tell somebody, "I don't know what to do. I'm scared. This may not turn out the way I want it to. Got any advice?"

Counseling early in a career generally helps the mentee to align personal concerns about self, career, and family with effective work practices. Kram (1988) reported these personal concerns at this career stage fall into the following three stages: (a) how to develop professional competence and potential, (b) how to relate to others without compromising values, and (c) how to incorporate and balance expanding commitments at work with responsibilities in other areas. Balancing a career and the needs of a family often proves to be problematic, at best, for females. Katherine gave a perfect example of how she provided counseling in this area to a novice superintendent she was mentoring.

I had a woman that I was mentoring who was a superintendent out in a little bitty district out in west Texas, and she had a husband who was a professional teacher in the district and a couple of kids. And she was just going under. She just didn't understand how do you do this, being a superintendent as well as a mom and a wife. So we did a lot of conversations back and forth for about a year and a half to two years on the phone. She wouldn't have been able to talk about those things to a man.

Young and McLeod (2001) reported a lack of mentoring and feelings of isolation are two of the reasons female school executives often give for leaving stressful leadership positions. Katherine gave another example of how she encourages and counsels her current female mentee to balance her social and emotional welfare in the context of occupying such a demanding position. She has three questions which she typically asks all of her mentees to help them discern the importance of balancing a professional and a social life and then includes a script for them to use should they have difficulty following her advice.

...I don't mind asking the tough questions like how are you taking care of yourself? Have you had fun going out? Are you doing things with your friends and family?...You have to make time to do that. You have to specifically mark time on your calendar that's sacred, that you don't violate. Your secretary will come in and say, "Well, that's the only time that they could meet." You have to say, "Sorry this time is already taken. We'll have to look at next week."

She provided even more specific advice on how she mentors one of her current mentees and gave examples of how she personally helps her to incorporate her social activities with work related activities. Katherine assists her mentee in developing professional competence and potential while engaging in an activity that is enjoyable and fun.

...one of my assistant superintendents, and she is now the superintendent in...here in town. She is making a wonderful, wonderful superintendent, and they love her. But we meet together. What I learned from the men is: You go out and play golf. And you figure out a day that you can take on your calendar and go do

that on a work day. That's what the men taught me. And so we go play golf once a month and talk and work through some of the things that she's dealing with in terms of her first year as superintendent and what are those tough issues that she has to deal with and how she might look at them and how she might deal with them. I know that she has enjoyed that counsel because she has followed through on some very, very tough personnel issues she has had to deal with and working with her board and working through some other administrative issues, financial issues.

In later years, as a mentee gains professional experience and expertise, the concerns may shift somewhat and become more focused on personal and private issues. However, the need to have someone act as a sounding board never disappears. Denise talked solemnly about how she had counseled one of her female mentees through the retirement process at the end of her mentee's career.

Debbie decided the year before she died that she was going to retire, and she's two years younger than me. She had just qualified to retire, but her husband had retired several years before. So she called, and she said, "You know I've really been thinking about this, and what do you think about this retirement thing?" I said, "Well, you've got to decide and if you think that you have done everything you want to do for your work, and if you are comfortable with that, then go ahead and enjoy Will. If not, then stay on because I know they want you to." She ended up retiring, and I'm really glad she did because she had a year with her husband.

Kram (1988) called the type of relationship Denise was referring to an alliance. She reiterated counseling can counteract many of those organizational forces which lead to an executive's isolation and feelings of depersonalization.

Friendship. While all psychosocial sub-functions affect the mentee on a more personal level and may possibly extend to multiple areas outside of the working relationship, none does more so than the sub-function, friendship (Kram, 1988). This dimension is defined by social interaction among the mentor and the mentee. Informal communication, both about work related issues and also about experiences that are not work related, should occur regularly within the confines of this sub-function. As a result of this social interaction, a mutual liking can be expected to surface in the relationship, which helps to enhance the experiences at work. Katherine, who has mentored someone for approximately 25 years, included in her mentoring story how she and this female continue to exchange personal information, even though at one time they lived in different states.

So we have stayed in contact with each other all this time. She always had my telephone number in case she ever needed to call me. She had my telephone in Oregon. We would always send each other birthday cards in December, because we both had December birthdays.

Kram (1988), in her influential work, gave a comparison of a relationship between an authoritative figure and a mentee and a relationship in which a friendship had evolved. "Whereas relationships with authority figures are generally more distant, evaluative, and parental, a developmental relationship that provides this function combines elements of a teacher, a parent, and a good friend" (Kram, 1988, p. 38). When

Denise was sharing how she and her mentor often took business trips together, she actually used the term friend to describe her mentor.

...we roomed together. So we would have discussions at dinner or on the way to where we were going. Another friend of ours also roomed with us, we would room three to a room sometimes and save money. You just get a lot of issues dealt with and that's the advantage of being the same sex cause men don't share rooms. I think that's weird, but I never minded it at all. Indeed that provides other opportunities to hear what she was thinking in terms of other issues....And so, what emerged from our conversations, was a friendship. Now we are great friends. We celebrate birthdays together.

Denise touched upon a challenging situation for a cross-gender mentoring relationship. In fact, Kram (1988) warned there may be substantial limitations in this sub-function among mentoring pairs of different genders. Although these individuals may choose to avoid informal settings for a variety of reasons, often they may be fearful of destructive gossip and discrediting innuendoes which occur under the scrutiny of others. Data from a study done by Ragins and Cotton (1999) support Kram's stance on the gender limitations of this sub-function. These researchers reported, "Male protégés [mentees] with female mentors reported significantly less friendship functions than female protégés [mentees] with female mentors" (Ragins & Cotton, 1999, p. 543).

As with many of the sub-functions of mentoring, friendship also offers the mentor opportunities to benefit from the mentoring relationship. Once a relationship has developed into a friendship, the mentor usually exhibits a renewed sense of self worth as a result of connecting with and maintaining a relationship with a younger colleague.

Typically, the mentor can be expected to exhibit a sense of vitality and exuberance.

Katherine gave a perfect example of the sense of vitality she appears to feel when she related how she had personally benefited from mentoring others.

You always learn from your mentees. You learn what their passion is, and check yourself. Are you still passionate about that or do you need to become passionate about what they are passionate about? You establish friendships with them; you learn professional things.

Although the dynamic social interactions at work in this psychosocial function cannot be disputed, there is one caveat to consider when examining the friendship dimension of mentoring relationships. Not all individuals in a mentoring relationship may choose to engage in informal social interactions outside of the workplace setting for a variety of personal reasons. Many simply may not feel comfortable in that role and consequently choose to keep an emotional distance between themselves and the other person in the relationship (Kram, 1988).

When studying mentoring relationships, Kram (1988) cautioned researchers to be cognizant career development and psychosocial functions may not be distinctly delineated and recognize that at times the boundaries between the two may even be blurred. In addition, researchers should consider the profound effect organizational structures and processes could potentially have on mentoring relationships.

Strand II: Attributes of Successful Mentoring Relationships

This analysis of the mentoring relationships of these three female school executives uncovered a second strand of mentoring interactions which correlates with the mentoring attributes Gardiner et al. (2000) outlined in their book *Coloring Outside*

the Lines. The authors found, “Quality mentoring relationships can be distinguished by certain ways of relating, by expectations and parameters placed on the relationships” (p. 52). Their studies of successful mentor and mentee relationships revealed the following attributes are typically interwoven and intertwined in quality mentoring relationships: open communication, reflective practice, opportunities for leadership, and professional support and encouragement. These attributes provide a basis for effective, quality relationships which are based on care and collaboration (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Open Communication

Open communication usually affords mentors and mentees opportunities to connect on both a personal and professional level, and thus they may establish and maintain a high degree of emotional rapport. As reported by Gardiner et al. (2000), “Good communication between mentor and protégé [mentee] is evident when both can freely speak their minds and express differences of opinion” (p. 54). During the course of these interviews, all three of the female school executives shared a personal bias concerning this attribute of communication. They unanimously disclosed they felt their female gender helped to foster communication in their mentoring relationships. Denise appeared to feel being female affected her mentoring relationship in the following way.

I think I have a personal bias, I think that women are generally better communicators than men. There is actually research to show that we are more open about our mistakes, and we generally talk about them. I mean we are more open than men are, and I think that helps with relationships that I have with a couple of other individuals. I don’t mind telling them, “Watch out for this. This is not a smart move. This is what I did. You need to be really careful.” I don’t mind

talking about what went wrong, and you need to be able to do that. Everybody makes mistakes. It's how you handle them. It's not as much the mistake as it is what you do about it. And so I think being a female helps me be more open with them.

Both Jennifer and Katherine echoed Denise's bias and openly stated they felt being female enhanced their ability to communicate with their mentees and thus enabled them to connect at a personal level. Jennifer seemed to think being female actually helped her to communicate, not only with a specified mentee, but also with other females in educational leadership positions around the state.

Oh yeah, I mean I think if we are honest with ourselves, women sometimes talk better to other women than they do to men....You know we create opportunities to be together. And sometimes it is really social; of course, we talk about work the whole time.

Katherine stated the same sentiments during her interview when she talked about one of her female mentees who lived quite a distance away. She did not appear to feel distance hampered this relationship in any way. As she was lamenting about the various roles females must play in order to combine business and family responsibilities, she put it this way.

I think my female mentees have been able to talk about those female issues that men don't have to deal with. Men have wives who....My male superintendents' wives have generally, I would say 90% of them to 95% of them were stay at home wives. So they had someone who went and did their cleaning, went to the shoe shop, did mailing at the store, went to HEB, did all of that stuff; whereas

women don't... We talked about that, and she was able to be open and honest with me as a woman.

Reflective Practice

Any successful mentoring relationship necessitates the mentors take on a variety of roles. According to extensive research, one such role, reflective practice, is pivotal in the leadership development of mentees (Gardiner et al., 2000). As mentees encounter problems and make decisions, if at all possible, mentors should match their support with the mentee's cognitive development. The researchers Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1998) have contributed to a growing body of literature on developmental mentoring which suggests, "Significant new 'helping' experiences with appropriate reflection can promote more complex cognitive structures" (p. 42). These researchers also caution in the absence of these reflective experiences, which should be deliberately planned and implemented by the mentor, adult learners typically stagnate at stages below their developmental potential.

Jennifer, acting as a sounding board, helped her mentees to grow developmentally as she assumed challenging roles in her administration. Although Jennifer learned this strategy from one of her former mentors many years ago, she seemingly was able to transfer this knowledge of support-and-challenge to her mentee relationships and explained how she prepared her mentees for future positions in educational leadership.

Another thing that I learned from my superintendent, who was my mentor, is that if you...if you aspire to be a superintendent, you had better get as broad a background as you can because you can be a crackerjack in terms of what you

know about curriculum. That probably is not what is going to get you fired one of these days. It's the other stuff. It is business, it's human resources, it's the areas where, traditionally, women have known the least. And so, one of my assistant superintendents, the assistant superintendent of the business department, was a woman. And my assistant superintendent for instruction, the gal who followed me, had the same background I did. She was C & I. I forced her; I didn't have to force her; but I put her in all kinds of situations where she could learn the business side, and she could learn the H. R. side and by the time I left, she knew as much as I did.

Jennifer also mentioned she had personally benefited from reflective practice and related to me how she had once made what she considered to be a huge mistake. After discussing a situation which involved making a difficult decision with her former superintendent, she vowed never to make such a mistake again. Her account follows.

One of the biggest mistakes I ever made, uh...I hadn't been superintendent but about a year or two, and it was a real tight budget year, and we were doing the budget for the next year. You know the whole thing. And so it came down to: were we going to get a raise, or were we going to freeze salaries and increase benefits? And I made the wrong decision. I thought well now these people really need this hospitalization and this family coverage. Wrong! They wanted a raise, and they were mad at me for a year. So I never made that mistake again.

Most agree that even though reflective practice is the catalyst for developing problem solving skills, often the mentor's role requires no action, but rather the mentor should simply act as a sounding board for the mentee. Denise verbalized this underlying

premise in her following statement, “And if it is nothing more than just listening. I’m not sure mentors always give you the answers. I think sometimes they let you find them by giving you the space and the time to work it out.”

Opportunities for Leadership

In their research on quality mentoring relationships, Gardiner et al. (2000) determined successful mentors should be cognizant of opportunities to enhance the visibility of their mentees in areas which go beyond the pragmatic day-to-day routines of school business. All of the female executives in this study seemed aware of the critical importance of creating opportunities for their mentees. Denise gave two specific examples of this attribute: one when she served in the position of mentee and the other when she was the mentor in a relationship. Her communication demonstrates she still remembers her feelings when her mentor entrusted her with the high profile task of preparing for a bond election. She described her thoughts.

I got to do a bond package when I was Director of Communications. Part of that package was to go toward technology. And we were one of the first districts in the state to have technology in computer labs where kids would come and do instruction. Back then it was called YCAT. It was the company we used. So I got to go; it was located in Provo, Utah. And I was on the original team to go up there. Because the idea was if I knew as a communications expert, then I could help get the word out and sell it to parents.

When Denise was discussing the impact of her past mentoring experiences, it appeared she is cognizant of the importance of opportunities for leadership and realizes they are paramount to the development of the mentee. She seemingly created many

opportunities for her mentee, Debbie, to experience professional success outside the realm of her everyday duties.

We pulled her in, and she also did some central office work. She was just really, really, really strong....I used her for everything. I did a program one time and used her; it was fabulous. We used slideshows, and I got her to work with another teacher, and they simulated meetings and other things, and she was my star in this slideshow.

Jennifer conveyed she felt it was actually the opportunities for leadership she received when she was a mentee which catapulted her into educational administration. Her former high school principal astutely created leadership opportunities for her at that level and, based on those performances, nudged her into educational administration.

During the years that I spent as a teacher teaching for him (and he was my principal for 12 years), I had a reduced teaching load because I coordinated all of the activities for the school. That gave me a chance to work closer with him than I would have had if I had just been teaching. The longer we worked together, the more things he saw he could put in my lap....He eventually told me, "Now, you need to go into administration." Frankly it had never occurred to me. I mean women did not aspire to be administrators back then.

Professional Support and Encouragement

Some may argue the attribute of professional support and encouragement in successful mentoring relationships has a political connotation. As mentors encourage mentees to take organizational risks, they must also be prepared to buffer the mentees from the criticisms, both within and outside of the boundaries of the organization, which

most likely will ensue (Gardiner et al., 2000). Katherine reported how she routinely encourages her mentees to take risks, but at the same time, remains astutely aware of the inherent political dangers thereof and is available to offer her support and encouragement as needed.

We have a package that we give to them [community] that talks about her, what her expertise is, so that when they and their organization have committees and task forces, they'll ask her to be on those. So we're doing that right now. It's very important for a woman to have a mentor to do that.

As Katherine's mentee is out and about in the community making political contacts and decisions, Katherine attempts to remain available to offer her support and encouragement at pivotal times. Although she did not provide a specific instance in her interviews, Katherine seemingly alluded at times her mentee's decisions may have been unpopular with the community.

But when it comes time to make a final decision after input and all, and the decision is made, I stand behind those decisions. Once you get all of it there, and you know that it is the right decision, and it is made, then you stand behind your people, and you support them with that decision.

Jennifer recounted how she understands the value of professional support and encouragement as well and indicated she routinely provided this mentoring attribute for her mentee during their relationship. However, Jennifer's account highlighted the inherent risks that often accompany this attribute. She shared that at times during her career, simply promoting a female brought undue criticism to her own personal practice.

Oh, she's wonderful, very talented. But I think you have to create opportunities for continuing education, give them opportunities to grow and that. I also think that you have to recognize them for the good things they do. And I think that you have to not be afraid to promote them even though somebody is going to say, "Well, she's appointed another woman."

When speaking of professional encouragement and support, Katherine collectively accused the female gender subset of often failing to provide this critical attribute to other females. Even though Katherine gave specific examples of how she personally supported and encouraged her mentees, she apparently does not feel this is typical female behavior and actually correlated the relatively small number of females in educational administration to this negative behavior.

Women are the worst. You know, we bitch about the fact that we don't have enough women superintendents, or women this or women that, but yet we are the ones that claw each other's eyes out and don't help each other get there. Men don't do that. It's just amazing. I've watched it for 30 years. I'm just absolutely amazed at how we do ourselves in.

Strand III: Values of Successful Mentoring Relationships

As the conversations with these selected female school executives were analyzed, catalogued, and categorized, it became evident common threads were interwoven within each of the lived mentoring experiences. Upon examination, the following personal values persistently appeared in the findings: trust, respect, loyalty, confidence in competence, ethical practices, and honesty and sincerity. This list does not represent a definitive list of all possible values conceivably present in successful mentoring

relationships, but only is indicative of the values which surfaced in these female executives' stories of their mentoring relationships.

Although each of the relationships had a special quality that was unique, these mentoring values, which were persistent throughout the analysis, surfaced among the various conversations and seemingly proved to be a basis for a special connectivity or creative energy evident between the mentoring partners. In the research on mentoring relationships, such values, or guiding principles as they are sometimes called, help mentees to make difficult decisions. These values are recognized as necessary in order for professional and personal growth to occur (Kiltz, Danzig, & Szecsy, 2004). Although these females may not always have been aware of these values, it was apparent they were an important part of the mentoring process for each and thus meaningfully contributed to maximum levels of personal and professional growth for each of them.

Trust

This guiding principle has been identified by many as a vital component of all mentoring relationships; a value which must be developed and nurtured until both the mentor and mentee explicitly trust each other. Gardiner et al. (2000) specifically mentioned trust must be present in relationships before the attribute of professional support and encouragement can be fully developed. Unambiguous trust allows the mentors and mentees to engage in difficult conversations without feeling threatened or personally exposed when sharing thoughts and ideas or negotiating conflicting opinions. Denise shared with me an example of how she has learned to trust her mentor's judgment on some of the more unstructured political issues which superintendents must sometimes address.

I talked to her about board members.... You know, how you deal with board members, and what you have to do. And the model that she presented for me was that she never let anybody know when there was a difficulty with a board member. Our staff never knew. She took care of it all. And so as I'm working, I don't have any bad board members, thank God, but I have a challenging one. ...And I always think about how she modeled that for us and rely on that. Because what happens is, it allows the staff to treat them all the same. It's just easier..... She was a trusted friend and confidante in terms of my career in that way.

Jennifer also gave an example of how learning to trust her mentor sometimes came as a result of having many difficult conversations. Trusting someone does not mean that ideas or opinions should never be challenged, but rather this value embraces feedback, a critical component of effective communication, as well as one of the critical attributes of successful relationships (Gardiner et al., 2000). Jennifer shared how the communication process had provided her an avenue to learn to trust her mentor's judgment.

One of the things that I learned from my mentor principal was that you don't have to put out every single fire every single day. Sometimes you could have a problem that I would be inclined to get in there and tackle this immediately, but he'd let it sit two or three days. I had to learn to trust his judgment, and sometimes it would just go away. And so I learned from him not to react too quickly. And sometimes you have to decide, you know, is this issue important enough to me to trust my mentor. Is this something I can compromise on?

Respect

Often referred to as unconditional positive regard, Wilkins (2000) concisely defined what it must be like for a mentee to experience respect in a relationship. “To experience the unconditional positive regard of another, I must be convinced of their deep, unqualified esteem and respect for my total being” (p. 34). Conventional wisdom holds mentees would tend to respect and subsequently admire their successful mentors, and as expected, these female school executives readily identified such relationships and conveyed how they felt emotionally connected to their mentors. When Denise first began her conversation describing her mentor, her respect and admiration were evident. She communicated what could be perceived as an emotional attachment to this female mentor. Denise disclosed she credited her mentor’s like gender as being largely responsible for the maximum level of assistance which she enjoyed during the relationship; as well as the respect she has for her achievements. Her mentor was one of the first females to become an administrator in her district.

My initial mentor, of course, was a female, which was not easy because at that time it was not a common practice for females to go into administration. So it was really good to have a woman who I admired and respected move up in the ranks before me because she cleared out the way, more or less, because she did a wonderful job. And because of that, she made it easier for me, I think. She assisted me because she had climbed the same ladder, and she had stepped on some rungs that were broken, and she could let me know which to avoid. I never recall her telling me to watch out for so and so. What she did was very subtle. You do the great job where you are. You take advantage of the opportunities

that you have....I was just very fortunate that my boss ended up being my mentor. For her to become a female assistant principal at a high school was unheard of. That was a huge message to the staff. I loved it because she was just the kind of person we wanted there, well respected, competent, and female. It was like having an advocate in a central place and that had never happened.

Although one of Jennifer's mentoring relationships occurred many years ago, she appeared to still hold this gentleman in highest positive regard, and he continues to serve as an inspiration for her practice. She seemed to be in awe as she described her former mentor and related how he was so protective of her when she was a novice administrator.

The other very important mentor was my major professor, and he was the Dean of the College of Education when I was getting those certificates at TWU. And when my principal wasn't pushing me, he was. And he was just an absolutely incredible person. Prior to becoming the dean, had been the superintendent of Houston schools. So, he wasn't in an ivory tower. His experiences were unbelievable. And he was just a very sharing and caring, well respected person. And he just shepherded me a lot.

Loyalty

Chosen loyalties give insight into a person's inner thoughts and ideals. According to one researcher, loyalty means "to operate within a certain framework of caring seriously about the well-being of others....This is very different from being a rubber stamp. Loyalty operates on a higher level than that" (Bennett, 1993, p. 665).

In several instances, when the executives described their relationships, it seemed they remained loyal to their mentees, and they continued to care about their well being even after the mentor/mentee relationship as such had terminated. When one of Denise's mentees felt ready to assume a superintendent's position in another district, she demonstrated she wanted what was best for him by actively promoting his abilities to others in a neighboring district. She explained her thoughts during the second interview session.

I don't mind picking up the phone to help a friend. When Gary was searching out his position in his current district, I did everything I could to support him. I wrote him a nice letter. When the board and the board president called, we had a really good discussion about Gary and his strengths. You need to be able to do that. If you think that these folks are ready, then you need to put your weight behind them in any way you can and help them.

Although this next scenario did not have the happy ending Jennifer had envisioned, she likewise remained loyal to her mentee while she was seeking a promotion to a superintendent's position. When Jennifer decided to retire after serving 14 years as the superintendent of a large urban school district, her mentee, who was her assistant superintendent at the time, applied for the position. Jennifer was loyal and supportive of her mentee's ambitions and described her thoughts this way.

When I left, she applied. And I wanted her to have it, and I thought that she had earned it. And I thought that they couldn't find anybody who would be any better than she would. And she didn't get it. In fact, she and I were in a meeting in

Santa Fe when the research firm called to tell her that she had been eliminated. It was very hard for her and because it was hard on her, it was hard on me.

Confidence in Competence

Confidence, regarding the competence of both parties of the mentoring relationships, is one of the values which persistently appeared in the conversations with these female school executives. There were multiple instances during these interviews where the unstated confidence which the mentor had in the mentee's abilities was easily discernable. And vis-à-vis, it was also seemingly apparent in many conversations the mentee felt a reciprocal confidence in the competence of the mentor. In the first interview with Denise, she shared her confidence in her mentor's ability as a leader.

I looked to her because she was the expert. If something was happening in our district, and she [my mentor] didn't know about it, then it wasn't worth knowing about because she was involved in everything. She led, uh, we went through a Southern Association while we were still there together, and she led the whole endeavor.

Denise continued to share her confidence in her mentor's abilities, both as a leader and as an investigator, with the following account. She reported she associates success with this mentor and, therefore, routinely emulates this problem solving model in her own professional practice.

Because of her I always know that there's a second side to every story, and possibly a third, and a fourth, and a fifth side. And that you had better be investigating it because you want to have all the facts. She is the most effective investigator that I have ever seen. Whether it is a new curriculum product,

software, or an administrator who is making some bad decisions and you need to see is that a symptom of something deeper or if it is just he made some bad choices. I mean she is tenacious about that. And so I always have her voice in my head. You better find out about that, you'd better ask about this, and see if anybody did this.

When Katherine described how she was currently working with her mentee and helping her to secure an educational foundation for her district, the confidence in her voice was evident. She seemed assured and convinced of her mentee's capabilities and explained, although her current mentee was educated and quite accomplished, situations did arise on occasion which were not covered in textbooks. Katherine stated it was at these times she felt her assistance was most needed.

She is a very, very well researched administrator. She has taught leadership and organizational skills and so on at the university level. So she knows what needs to be done. It's those very specific instances of walking through what needs to be done. It's those very specific instances of walking through what you have to do because textbooks don't teach you that. So that's part of my mentoring right now with her.

When Jennifer was asked to talk about the possible impact of family responsibilities on a female school executive's practice, she spoke with pride regarding the accomplishments of her mentee in a challenging assignment. Her confidence in the abilities of her former mentee was apparent as she described some of her job responsibilities.

And the division that she headed in our district was the biggest of all divisions in the district. She had the most people reporting to her, and she had the broadest scope in terms of her responsibility. I'm not saying she had the hardest job, but the biggest. And I mean the way she juggled all that was unbelievable. She never missed a lick at work, and she taught Sunday School, and she never missed her kids' ball games, or Boy Scouts, or whatever it was. She did it all. But the way she did it was sleeping four or five hours a night. That's the way she did it. She very successfully juggled what a lot of people can't do.

Ethical Practice

In educational leadership, ethical practice refers to modeling leadership behaviors such that one's behaviors are in direct correlation with one's values and ideals. Put more succinctly, "Ethics deals with practicing what is preached. Those in a mentoring relationship must act in ways that reflect the individual values and beliefs that each hopes to encourage in others" (Kiltz et al., 2004, p. 140). During Katherine's interview, she implied she felt an obligation to females and society in general. Since she was one of the first female school executives in the state, she gave the impression she felt ethically obligated to help others, especially those females who traveled after her. Katherine shared her thoughts on her perceived obligation to mentor females and detailed how her actions mirrored her beliefs on the value of mentoring.

I was kind of the first out of the shoot for pushing the glass ceiling up. I went into the superintendency in July of '85. The thrust for my year as president of the Texas Council of Women School Executives was to create groups around the state for women to be able to be mentored and to come together and learn how to

mentor each other so that they could have night meetings, or they could have luncheon meetings or Saturday meetings or whatever they wanted to do to encourage teachers to become administrators, or to encourage current administrators to become superintendents, etc. So we really began working on our mentoring of our Texas women.

In addition, because Katherine felt so ethically responsible to all of her mentees, she converted her thoughts into actions with purposeful planning. According to her, she would turn her mentees' unique hopes and dreams into realities by developing detailed plans which were aligned with their personal goals. She gave the following account of the kinds of experiences she routinely provides for those she mentors.

Well, when I am mentoring someone, I ask them, "What are your goals? Where do you want to be in five years? Where do you want to be in 10 years?" To see if they have looked at some type of a plan because you have to plan, just like we have campus improvement plans, we have plans for life that we have to actually sit down and write up and see what our objectives are and keep ourselves on track. So I do that. And then we talk about what are some specific areas where you feel like you need additional learning, additional work to gain knowledge, etc....It's not just haphazard. It can't be just haphazard and help someone. You do have to plan on how you mentor.

When asked how she felt was the best way to support and promote other females, Denise answered she perceived she was ethically bound to help lead others into administrative positions by mentoring them. She also verbalized in her answer a sense of regret for missed opportunities to mentor and encourage others.

And I don't think that women need more than an equal opportunity. I'm not asking to be chosen first. I'm asking to get the interview. I'm asking to be given a chance. And that's what I would ask for any woman that's trying to get a job. Another way is to be a mentor, and to look at folks who really might need your assistance and might not even know it. It's our job to help encourage people who have a skillset that would make them outstanding principals or central office leaders. I think sometimes you would think that women would be very nurturing about that, but sometimes I think we get so caught up in our own work and issues that we may not be looking out as much as we need to. Maybe I should say, "I don't like I should."

Honesty and Sincerity

"To be honest is to be real, genuine, authentic, and bona fide....Honesty is of pervasive human importance....Every social activity, every human enterprise requiring people to act in concert, is impeded when people aren't honest with one another" (Bennett, 1993, p. 599). When speaking with these three female school executives, their genuineness and sincerity transcended their levels of accomplishments. Although each of them had attained administrative levels which commanded respect, and certainly each had incredibly busy schedules, none of them were pretentious or ostentatious. The climate of each interview session was unequivocally comfortable, welcoming, and unhurried. When sharing her experiences, Denise seemed proud of her mentor's genuine attitude toward job responsibilities and described her honest, can-do attitude this way.

She is absolutely genuinely fearless....There is not a task she doesn't have the courage to do. When she was an assistant principal, she had to go take a gun off a

kid by herself. You know back in the old days, we didn't have safety rules or anything. So she got this little wimpy guy, who was in special ed., and she got him to come help her, and, of course, he hid. So she did it by herself. I mean that's an example of her. Where I've seen it most effectively is when we had to honestly deal with some really hard personnel issues, and she would do it.

Whatever it took, she would do it. So I still have that. Her strength helps me be honest in my decisions.

Although most likely all of the mentees worked consistently to do the very best job they could and would never want to intentionally disappoint their mentors, Denise was the only one who actually verbalized those feelings when discussing her mentor. During Denise's first year as a superintendent, she was forced to make some tough personnel decisions. In the first interview, she voiced her appreciation of her mentoring relationship and continued to give credit to her mentor for providing a mental script which helps her make those honest and sincere, although tough, decisions. Denise described her thoughts this way.

When I don't want to do it, I know she [my mentor] is there. I had to; uh, it was a secondary person when I came here that really needed to go. And I knew that he was not ready for the hard conversation that we were going to have. I got through it by knowing that if I didn't do it, I would disappoint her. That she would have done this. And it worked, and he left, and it was a beautiful thing.

Jennifer's mentor was honest with her as well. Even though she did not follow his advice, she is appreciative he offered his honest opinion regarding her career decisions. She shared this mentoring incident with a smile.

My superintendent told me one day, he said, “You know you’re 45. If you want to go be a superintendent, you had better go do it. They’ll hire a 50 year old man, but they are not going to hire a 50 year old woman.” And he told me something else that I think is generally true. He told me this the night that they made me superintendent. He said, “I’m going to tell you this. If you want to retire from this district, don’t take the job. He said that because the odds that any superintendent would last that long are very, very poor.

Katherine, on the other hand, learned from her mentors to be honest and open as she delivered tough messages in a subtle way while continuing to validate others. She shared how she perceived mentoring had changed her leadership style.

Well, it made me understand that you have to truly be a very, very strong leader, and that, I didn’t say a mean leader; I said a strong leader. And I think people would describe me as that all along the way, but using a velvet hammer along the way if I had to. Because I know my administrators, some of them, have said to me, “You know, three weeks ago when I had to come to your office, I think you really chewed my butt out, but I left feeling so good about it. It took me three weeks to figure out that’s what you really had done.”

Strand IV: Mutual Attraction, Reciprocity, and Interpersonal Comfort

The course of the conversations led each of these three female school executives to share experiences where they had benefited from informal relationships with numerous mentors during their careers, as well as many instances where they in turn had served in the role of mentor, and thus had helped to guide and assist multiple mentees. However, as these accounts of their various mentoring experiences were ultimately

studied, three emerged which had something different; something akin to those mystical, magical descriptors Daloz (1999) used in his writing to describe mentoring relationships. The mutual attraction and reciprocity, as well as the shared identities and interpersonal comfort, which were unmistakable in these pairings enhanced these relationships and helped to set them apart from the others.

When Jennifer spoke of her mentee, with whom she has shared a 35 year relationship, it was as though a certain chemistry was present; a deep and caring involvement not evident in her other mentoring relationships. Denise likewise disclosed a deep emotional connectivity with one of her former mentors, as well as one of her mentees. She described a special, unique relationship with a mentee this way, “She just ended up being a really, really close friend of mine. My daughter was born on her birthday. She was special to the end.” Moreover, the following comment is evidence of Denise’s realization this relationship transcended to a higher level and was one that cannot be replicated easily.

And then to be able to work with her again was just the greatest blessing. The guys, it’s never going to happen here. First of all, I’m at a different stage, and this relationship is a little different. And, second of all, they are men.

Mutual Attraction and Reciprocity

When each of these females began to describe these three special relationships which were particularly significant to them, ones with a deep emotional connectivity, they noted the beginning of the relationships were not labeled and identified as mentoring. They each began when the participants were in close proximity to each other, and there appeared to be just an unusual attraction which superseded the traditional

professional mentoring relationships. Denise described the initial stage of the relationship with her mentor this way.

Well, it was very informal. I guess it was informal all the way through because what happened to us is that we became very good friends, in addition to being workmates. And the way that she came into my life, of course, is that we were fellow teachers. And so the beginning was simply her, I never even knew the name of it. If you had asked me what the relationship was, I would not have said mentorship. I would have said, “Well, you know, she’s helping me. She advises me.”

Jennifer also shared that one of her deep and caring relationships, where she served in the role of mentor, actually began as simply as two teachers working next door to each other. She appeared to give the beginning of this relationship a serendipitous nature.

How did this relationship develop? Well, we were teachers together. And she was, gosh, she is 10 years younger than I am. And when I first knew her, she was a beginning teacher, and I had been teaching about 10 years. We were at the same high school. We worked together.

Denise also shared a mutual attraction for one of her mentees. Although not defined, this mutual attraction differentiated the relationship from other professionals in the building. She commented.

She was a couple years younger than me. I was teaching next door to her when she became a teacher, and I guess I really did serve as her mentor. I never really thought about it, but I did because I took care of her that first year. I saw how

bright she was and encouraged her. She was a ripe and ready learner. It was so much fun to see her do well.

As each of these females related how their work relationships with these individuals were characterized by sharing work responsibilities with reciprocal benefits, it was evident these feelings of nurturing, caring, and deep involvement dominated the relationship. Jennifer talked about her mentee and related her personal benefits.

Well, I have learned that mentors gain as much or more than mentees. And you get the personal satisfaction of seeing them grow. For the one thing that I did for her, she did two or three for me. Some of the successes that we had in the district are directly attributed to her. It was a two way street. It wasn't me. I wasn't pulling her up by her bootstraps. She would have gotten there. It has just been a good relationship, I think, for both of us.

Denise, too, appeared to feel this same kind of beneficial reciprocity and on three different occasions spoke about the great things they had accomplished by working together. She did not give her mentor the credit for these endeavors, but simply stated they had occurred. When referring to the district's state accountability rating, she said, "And we did a wonderful job, and we became recognized. It was a very challenging population, but we were recognized. We did some great things." She also related how on occasions an issue would arise which necessitated the two of them working together on weekends.

Once when we had an issue that we had to resolve, we met on a Saturday and spent all Saturday working on it together and creating this response. I can't

remember now if it was a legal issue or a parent issue, but I thought we just work together. Whatever it takes, that's what she does, and that's what I did.

Denise spoke of one other specific example of the reciprocal benefits she shared with her mentor while working on a task delegated by the state. Even though their district implemented this instrument some 15 years ago, employees, and ultimately students, continue to reap the benefits.

The state required us, or they asked us, to look at student performance for administrator appraisals. And they actually came out with a model and everything....The difference between us and the thousand other school districts in the state of Texas is that we did it. We put it in there. Over about 50% of the principals' evaluations were based on student performance, and mine was the same way. And so you can imagine it was a major change, and it was a scary change. But we did it. And they still use it today....I mean I'm talking probably 15 years ago that we did it. We worked together on it, we sold it, and they are doing it, and they are still doing it.

Interpersonal Comfort

Research suggests interpersonal comfort, when paired with a shared identity, are key conceptual components of successful mentoring relationships (Allen et al., 2005). Many researchers have come to the conclusion the level of these theoretical perspectives in a mentoring relationship could offer a partial explanation as to why some relationships are considered more successful and effective than others. When Denise was in the process of interviewing for a superintendent's position, she indicated the shared identity which she shared with her mentor, and thus the comfort level, was invaluable to her.

When I was attempting to get this job, my mentor was a huge help. I would call her before the interviews and talk to her about what I was thinking and what I wanted to share. I would say, “Is that silly?” Sometimes you just need somebody who has done it to be able to fill you in. I would say in terms of affecting her relationship with me that the same would hold true for her. She was very honest and able to communicate what she saw in terms of what was right and what was wrong.

As Jennifer was responding to a question regarding communication with her mentee, she spoke of the social support she received from females as a subset of the population of school executives in general and reiterated to me how much she enjoyed the support of her mentee, who was of the same gender. Such an account personifies the heightened interpersonal comfort which often results from the shared identity present in same gender mentoring relationships.

You know they laugh, and they kid and joke a lot about the ‘good ole boy’ network, the men’s network....There is a network of male administrators in Texas, and it is very, very strong. For years women did not have a network because there weren’t enough of us. That’s changed. We’re still in the minority, but there is a network. But my mentee, we just helped each other out. It was even more than a networking kind of thing.

In contrast, Jennifer also explained how the lack of such social support from those of the same gender had impacted her career. Even though she realized the importance of having the support of your administrative staff, she was criticized as a superintendent for some of her hiring decisions regarding gender. She seemed to realize

the negative aspect of building shared identity and interpersonal comfort into her administrative team. Such precise appointments served as the source of criticisms from others within the organization.

There are times when you don't feel like anybody is supporting you. What was an issue for me was the fact that when I was superintendent, part of the time I had five assistant superintendents....Three of them were men, and two of them were women. And then one of my assistant superintendents died, and we divided up his duties, and then it became two and two. And there were things said in the coffee rooms and in the lounges and all that about the, uh, they called us the "Petticoat Junction". And there was a perception that I put a lot more women in administrative positions for support. It just wasn't accurate, but perception is reality. So it is difficult for a woman at the top to surround herself even with a minority of women.

Authors have labeled interpersonal comfort as shared identity coupled with a deep personal closeness and emotional intimacy (Allen et al., 2005). This closeness is identified by the extent the mentor and mentee reveal themselves to each other and is related to the level of comfort in a relationship. When Jennifer was discussing her mentee, she shared she had known her for 35 years and was particularly appreciative their relationship had morphed into a close personal friendship.

I've known her; it is getting close to 35 years. I've watched her, and she is fabulous. She is good. She is one of the most respected superintendents in Texas. We're still very, very good friends. We still get together. Gosh, she and I are both going to Vail this summer for Malcolm Baldrige training. It's been not only a

wonderful professional relationship for both of us, but I know her kids, her grandkids. We're personal friends.

As Denise was telling a story about her mentor, she made two revealing statements which divulged the level of personal connectivity and interpersonal comfort she experienced with her former mentor. She appeared to realize this relationship had transcended to a level of interpersonal comfort not always present in the vast majority of mentoring relationships.

She could tell me what she needed to tell me, but in a caring way. Sort of like a big sister. Be careful about this because it could cause you problems. I could not do without her. Of course, she is the one who has been forever by my side. She's my forever mentor.

While Denise was also recounting how her relationship with one of her former mentees had developed, she used the same analogy to describe both relationships. When speaking of her former mentee, Denise explained, "We had that relationship. It was nearer like a big sister. That's really how I felt to her, like a big sister." Denise referred to both her mentor and her mentee as though they were a part of her family, certainly indicative these relationships were more in-depth than could be expected of typical mentoring relationships.

Summary of Findings

While mentoring plays an important role in the successful career development of all school executives, studies have shown it is even more critical to the advancement and success of female school executives (Burke & McKeen, 1996; Gardiner et al., 2000; Kamler, 2006; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989; Scanlon, 1997; Sherman, 2005). The purpose

of this study was to examine the past mentoring relationships of female school executives and discover the perceived influence, if any, of these experiences on mentoring practices when these females, in turn, mentored others. With this task in mind, three female school executives were selected and conversational interviews were held with each. These interviews focused on their past relationships where they were mentees, as well as on relationships where they had served as a mentor to others in the field of educational administration. This chapter described the findings of the investigation of these lived mentoring experiences and provided quotations from the female executives to support the said findings. Chapter V further delineates these findings by presenting the conclusions drawn from them, as well as provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Sisyphus' representation of futile labor can be distinguished on two levels. The first aspect of this Greek myth involves the graphic of Sisyphus struggling to roll the massive boulder up the mountain. Such representation has come to epitomize the modern term "Sisyphean Task", a term used to describe members of our country's past presidential staff (Marcome, 1992). In the arena of educational leadership, the fate of Sisyphus also may well be compared to those female school executives who have ultimately achieved success while seemingly toiling in isolation.

As referenced in Chapter IV of this study, by remaining unconscious of his plight, Sisyphus may possibly have outwitted his tormentors and negated his eternal punishment which was relegated to him by the gods of the underworld. The second aspect of this Greek myth could be representative of the defining apparent unconsciousness and lack of awareness of the underrepresentation of females in executive leadership positions. The relatively small number of females who have attained these educational leadership positions has caused some to claim victory and assume the mentality that all is well: ignoring the apparent contradiction that the number of females in the field of education is significantly higher than males. Although there have been a number of advancements in these efforts, considerable barriers are still in existence. Females remain marginalized with regard to occupying educational leadership positions.

In the author Camus' writings about Sisyphus many years ago, he warned in most instances, "Boundless grief [such as that of Sisyphus] is too heavy to bear and crushing truths perish from being acknowledged" (Camus, n.d.). Findings such as the ones presented in this study may serve to add to the literature base and contribute to the acknowledgment of truths as we know them regarding the importance of mentoring for female school executives, as well as help to identify the best course of action for transferring leadership talents and skills from mentor to mentee. As the barriers slowly become exposed and solutions are presented in the literature, perhaps the burden of the underrepresentation of females in educational leadership positions may become lighter and conceivably, in time, nonexistent.

Conclusions

This interpretive qualitative case study is an attempt to contribute to the existing knowledge of mentoring relationships found in educational research by drawing on the individual accounts of three selected female school executives. Capturing the lived mentoring experiences of these executives necessitated lengthy sequential interviews with each of them. This chapter includes the conclusions of this study which was based on these interview sessions. The following overarching questions, (a) How do you perceive your past mentoring experiences have influenced your current mentoring practices? and (b) What impact, if any, do you feel gender has had on your past and current mentoring relationships?, served as a framework for these interviews and provided the basis for the data collected. Some of the conclusions were forthright and glaring, while others were more obscure and ambiguous.

As the sequential interviews with the three female executives were analyzed and categorized, it was relatively simple to discern each of the participants unequivocally felt their past mentoring experiences had influenced the way they in turn chose to mentor others. It was equally evident each of these females felt the impact of gender on their personal and professional practices and recognized the role gender had played in their various mentoring relationships. Such a forthright admittance of the androcentric effect of gender on their professional practices is in direct correlation to previous research conducted by Skrla (2000) which can be found in the literature.

The challenge, as this study unfolded, morphed into something more complex than simply ascertaining the probable influence of past mentoring experiences on relationships where these females had served as mentors. But rather, shortly after the initial interviews had been completed, it became evident the dynamics and underlying conditions of some relationships allowed the females to maximize past mentoring experiences. In contrast, a number of the relationships appeared to be more superficial and could, therefore, be deemed less effective. A concentrated effort was made to study the interactions of various relationships in an attempt to explain why some relationships had the capability to maximize past mentoring experiences and thus provided the most benefit to females who aspired to school leadership positions. An explanation as to why, other relationships, on the other hand, appeared unable to procure full advantage of the mentor's past experiences also was sought. The core collected data provided the basis for determining the presence or absence of these identified mentoring interactions.

As these interviews were dissected into minute bits of data, it became apparent the scope of the relationships evidenced four distinct strands which reflected a wide

array of mentoring interactions. The interactions suggested in this study were present in one or more of these relationships and thus can be assumed to have directly affected the intensity of the influence of past mentoring experiences. Figure 1 provides a complete visual representation of these identified mentoring interaction strands.

The first strand to emerge in this data authenticated and supported Kram's (1988) early research on mentoring. This initial strand of mentoring interactions was comprised of the functional aspects of mentoring: career development and psychosocial functions. Although the nine sub-functions of Strand 1: Career Development and Psychosocial Functions were not always delineated and sometimes intersected, they were nonetheless present and evident at some time in all aspects of the mentoring experiences which were related by these three female school executives. These mentoring interactions focused on career advancement within the organization, as well as the development of the mentee's sense of professional competence and self-identity.

The second and third strands also depicted the interactions of mentoring relationships. Although Strand II: Mentoring Attributes of Successful Relationships and Strand III: Mentoring Values of Successful Relationships likewise typically had boundaries which were blurred, these interactions were still clearly evident in the conversational interviews with these female school executives. Each of these participants described the positive effects of their mentoring relationships and gave specific examples of open communication, reflective practice, opportunities for leadership, as well as professional support and encouragement. The dynamics of these relationships were often defined by the presence of the following personal values: trust, respect, loyalty, confidence in competence, ethical practice, and honesty and sincerity. The

absence of any of these aforementioned mentoring interactions, and thus the positive or negative effects thereof, was not addressed in this study.

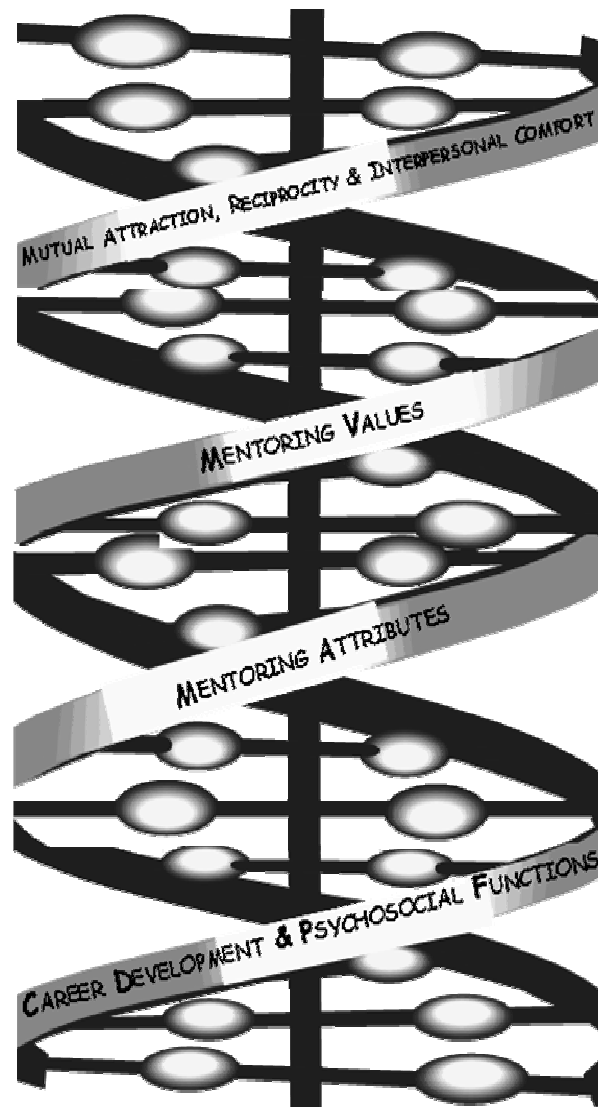


Figure 1. Mentoring interactions for successful relationships.

The mentoring interactions of Strand IV: Mutual Attraction, Reciprocity, and Interpersonal Comfort emerged from the deconstruction of three specific relationships.

These female school executives spoke of a deep and caring emotional involvement which permeated only three of the examined relationships. When these females related these specific mentoring pairings, they indicated with clarity and conviction each of these mentoring relationships had significantly influenced both their personal and professional lives. The deep interpersonal comfort evidenced in these relationships allowed the female school executives to talk openly and candidly about their prior experiences, offering their own interpretations of past events. Without such a comfort level, the influences of past mentoring experiences may have been either invisible or may have become grossly distorted in the translation. This definitive emotional attachment and interpersonal comfort related in the accounts of these experiences were directly proportional to the level of influence of past mentoring relationships.

Although these relationships unequivocally evolved into successful mentoring relationships based on interpersonal comfort and personal identity, each of these specific relationships began with a mutual attraction which consequently developed into a shared reciprocity for each other's well being on a personal level. These informal relationships could not even be recognized and labeled as mentoring during the initial stages of the relationships. An extended period of time passed before these female school executives came to realize the extent of these relationships and could verbalize the magnitude of the relationships' influences on their professional and personal practices.

While each of these females related at some time during the interviews how they passed specific tidbits of knowledge, which they had learned from their mentors, on to their mentees, the shared identity and interpersonal comfort these females felt towards the partner of these special mentoring pairings, was noticeably absent in some

relationships. The mentoring interactions of mutual attraction, reciprocity, and interpersonal comfort reported by these females had a direct correlation to the level of influence of past mentoring experiences. This pertinent conclusion was drawn after carefully studying the collected data. The greater the level of these interactions identified in Strand IV, the greater the influence of past mentoring relationships on mentoring practices. This new deconstruct of mentoring interactions and the plausible findings of this study provide a new way of assessing the effectiveness and successfulness of mentoring relationships.

Recommendations for Future Research

These findings, in conjunction with available research on the functional aspects of mentoring relationships, expose several areas for further research. Many questions remain unanswered when examining the interwoven strands of mentoring interactions and the role that mentoring plays in the success of females in the field of educational leadership. At times the process of interfacing available mentoring research with the stories and experiences of these female school executives uncovered more questions than answers and disclosed additional gaps in the literature. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the recommendations for future research studies regarding current mentoring practices. Such definitive research is needed to reveal clearly conceptualized mentoring practices, which when implemented, have the potential to benefit all marginalized groups, especially female school executives. The heightened awareness of the critical nature of mentoring relationships and the role interpersonal comfort plays in the quality and successfulness of such relationships may have significant programmatic implications.

Interpersonal Comfort of Diverse Groups

The findings of this study are in congruence with additional mentoring research which underscores the importance of interpersonal comfort in successful mentoring relationships, as well as research which associates and actually links the level of interpersonal comfort with the effectiveness of mentoring relationships (Allen et al., 2005). By identifying ways to increase the interpersonal comfort among diverse groups and implementing methods to augment levels of interpersonal comfort, the effectiveness of all mentoring pairings may be enhanced.

Although we know that by “offering opportunities for individuals to relate to each other and discover shared experiences in a relaxed atmosphere may help bridge difficulties encountered initially” (Allen et al., 2005, p. 166), researchers have not as yet identified definitive ways to sustain this interpersonal comfort in relationships. Additional qualitative research, such as this current study, may provide insight and help to discover ways to delineate those factors most helpful in maintaining and supporting interpersonal comfort in mentoring relationships. Such research has the potential to prove most beneficial to females and other marginalized groups in our society.

Gender Composition of Mentoring Relationships

In this present study, three specific mentoring relationships were identified as more effective and successful than others. Since these three relationships consisted of same gender pairings, the role of gender composition of relationships should be fully explored. Although there is some available research which indicates same gender may enhance the levels of interpersonal comfort and thus the quality of mentoring relationships (Allen et al., 2005), this is an area that remains controversial at best. The

researchers Scandura and Williams (2001) studied the correlation of gender and the effectiveness of mentoring relationships in regards to Kram's (1988) mentoring sub-functions and found same sex mentoring pairings typically can be expected to provide the most benefits to mentees within the confines of the sub-function role-modeling. Allen et al. (2005) also supported these same findings in their quantitative research.

Conversely, Sosik and Godshalk (2005) found diametrically different results in their work relating to the composition of gender in mentoring pairings. These authors' study confirmed "cross-gender relationships provide high levels of role modeling, a critical psychosocial support function" (Sosik & Godshalk, 2005, p. 47). Such mixed findings indicate further research into the correlation of gender and effective mentoring relationships is appropriate. Since there are actually four possible gender combinations of mentoring pairings and nine mentoring sub-functions as identified by Kram (1988), future research is needed which continues to explore the direct effect between different combinations of gender in mentoring pairings and each of the various mentoring sub-function mechanisms. Resolving these issues could have a potentially significant impact on current and future mentoring practices. Since the persuasive argument is the level of interpersonal comfort in these specific relationships was directly correlated to the amount of influence of past mentoring practices, it is of paramount importance to ascertain the effect of gender composition, when interfaced with interpersonal comfort, on the quality of mentoring relationships.

Program Characteristics

Since Noe first suggested in 1988(b) that "research regarding the benefits of mentoring relationships is in its infancy" (p. 66), formal mentoring programs have

flourished in both business and educational arenas in our country. Although most were designed to replicate the benefits of informal mentoring relationships, on occasion, some of these mentoring programs were begun without much thought or focus and could aptly be described as “the old folks teach the new folks” (Playko, 1995, p. 90). Unfortunately, some of these programs which suffered from poor vision were created for educational administrators.

Until all mentoring relationships are designed and implemented with the focus of promoting leadership, there will be continue to be evidence of ineffective programs. Written program objectives, in addition to policies and guidelines, serve as avenues to address this gap which sometimes exists between theory and practice. Further research is needed to explore how different program characteristics affect the success or failure of mentoring relationships. A sampling of possible delineating factors which could broaden the research on the organizational objectives and policies of mentoring programs include: training and education for mentors on how to effectively cultivate a developmental relationship with a diverse network of mentees, an extensive review of the matching mechanisms used to pair participants in a mentoring pairing, as well as the attributes and values each member brings to the relationship.

Moreover, the lack of extensive research on program characteristics further hampers the studies of the benefits of mentoring for marginalized groups, specifically females. There appears to be a gap in the literature which addresses the most productive components of successful formal mentoring programs for females who desire to enter educational administration. Although some have attempted to ascertain the career outcomes of females who have participated in mentoring programs and to compare those

to the favorable outcomes from mentoring which are reported for males, the data to date are inconclusive (Hezlett & Gibson, 2005). Rusch (2004) conducted a search of Dissertation Abstracts published during the decade 1991-2001 and found only four focused on gender and formal programs which attempt to prepare females for educational leadership. A concerted effort to identify those formal mentoring programs which have successfully prepared females for positions of educational leadership may prove to be beneficial to multiple diverse groups.

Negative Aspects of Mentoring Relationships

Since Kram (1983, 1988) and other researchers first identified the components and benefits of informal mentoring relationships in the 1980's, mentoring has been catapulted into the organizational limelight, where both private and public entities have attempted to replicate successful mentoring practices. During the timeframe from the 1980's until the present, multiple researchers have focused on the benefits of mentoring to the mentee, the mentor, and to the organization as a whole. Researchers who are continuing to clarify mentoring concepts should be aware this entire body of research on mentoring has a positive slant which may directly affect the findings.

Researcher McDowall-Long recently reviewed multiple peer reviewed publications published between 1999 and 2002 and found 27 articles focusing on mentoring relationships. A close examination of these specific writings "revealed that only one article mentioned potential negative outcomes or consequences of mentoring relationships" (McDowall-Long, 2004, p. 529). Her research indicates one should be cognizant, when studying the research on mentoring relationships, of the potential of authors to present positively skewed findings and their propensity to ignore the negative

aspects of mentoring relationships. Since Levinson warned, “poor mentoring is the equivalent of poor parenting in childhood” (Levinson et al., 1978, p. 338), it appears the importance of dysfunctional mentoring relationships has been neglected to date. Even though none of the selected school executives mentioned negative consequences which may have occurred as a result of being a participant in a mentoring relationship, this is an area deserving further systematic exploration.

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Although each mentoring relationship is unique and exhibits an array of mentoring interactions, it is this study’s intent to serve as a catalyst for further investigations of those interactions which are evident in successful mentoring relationships for females. Such an increase in the available academic knowledge of mentoring interactions could have critical implications for programmatic decisions regarding mentoring programs. But more importantly, it is hopeful studies such as this will exemplify and reinforce that practitioners in the field of education must be vigilant of the plight of females in educational administration and recognize the influence mentoring can have on the careers of females who enter this field. Perhaps, by exposing these burdens, they will be overcome, and all will truly be well.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for Female School Executives

Session I:

1. How do you perceive your past mentoring experiences have influenced your current mentoring practices?

Probing questions regarding past mentor relationships:

- 1a. Describe how your past mentor relationship developed.
 - Informal or formal relationship?
 - Personal or professional relationship?
 - Under what circumstances did this person come into your life?
- 1b. My mentor helped me personally by...
- 1c. Because of my experiences with my mentor, I always...
- 1d. However, it would have been helpful if only my mentor would have...
- 1e. A story that best captures my past mentoring experience is...
- 1f. How has having a mentor changed you as a leader?

Probing questions regarding current mentor relationships:

- 1g. Describe how your current mentor relationship developed.
- 1h. What kinds of experiences do you always provide for your mentee? How do you feel that you have contributed to your mentee's competency and confidence?
- 1i. Do you purposefully create critical opportunities for leadership for your mentee and enhance his/her visibility? If so, how?
- 1j. Have there been any disappointments or disillusioning experiences for you in this mentoring relationship? If so, explain.
- 1k. What have you learned about being a mentor from this relationship?
- 1l. A story that best captures my current mentoring experience is...

Session II:

- 2. What impact, if any, do you feel gender has had on your past and current mentoring relationships?**
 - 2a. How did being a female affect how you obtained a mentor? A mentee?
 - 2b. Do you feel it is necessary for females to have a mentor in order to succeed? Why or why not?
 - 2c. Explain how your mentor assisted you as a female to climb the career ladder. How has gender impacted the professional development of both you and your mentee?
 - 2d. How do you feel that being female helps you to foster communication with your mentee? How did it affect your mentor relationship?
 - 2e. What implication did gender have on your personal practice?
 - 2f. Have you experienced episodes of “horizontal violence” during your career? Do you feel that you and your mentee have the support of other professionals?
 - 2g. How have family responsibilities impacted your career? Your mentee’s?
 - 2h. In your opinion, what is the best way to support and promote other women?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The Perceived Influence of Past Mentoring Relationships on the Current Mentoring
Practices of Female School Executives

Consent Form

I have been asked to participate in a research study to determine the influence that past mentoring experiences may have had on the current mentoring relationships of female school executives. I was selected to be a possible participant because I have been identified by my peers as a successful female school leader. The purpose of this study is to examine past mentoring relationships and ascertain their influence on current practices. In the course of such discovery, the role that gender has played in the mentoring experiences of females will also be explored.

If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to participate in two interview sessions with the researcher and have my responses audio-taped during these sessions. Each interview session will last no longer than 90 minutes, and I can expect to review all written transcriptions of these interviews. This study will be completed within a six week period. The risks associated with this study are minimal, and there are neither benefits nor payment for my participation in this research.

This study is confidential, and the records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Diane Ashley, primary researcher, will have access to the records. All audio tapes will be destroyed after five years. My decision whether or not to participate will not affect my current or future relations with Texas A&M University. If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can withdraw at any time without my relations with the university, job, benefits, etc. being affected. I can contact either Diane Ashley by telephone at 281 579-xxxx or by email at bettyashley@xxxx.xxx or Virginia Collier by telephone at 979 862-xxxx or by email at vcollier@xxxx.xxx with any questions about this study.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelina Raines at 979 458-xxxx (araines@xxxxxxxx.xxx.xxx).

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent document for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

VITA

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