

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS:
A FEMINIST LIFE HISTORY APPROACH

By

TIFFANY RENEE BALLARD

Bachelor of Arts in Education
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, Oklahoma
1997

Master of Education
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, Oklahoma
2003

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Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Hongyu Wang

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Pam Brown

Dr. Ravi Sheorey

Dr. Ed Harris

Dr. Mark Payton

Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

I am a female educator with several dreams of the future. One dream of the future is to become an administrator for a public school. After my Master's degree, I took the state's version of the administrators test and passed. I applied for several jobs, but I did not receive any offers. I heard I was too young, did not have experience, and many other "excuses." But, after making it into the top two spots several times, I learned that in every job I applied and was in the finalist pool, a male received the job offer. While other factors might also come into play, I felt that gender was the forefront leader of why I continually hit the "glass ceiling" at every juncture. After hitting the glass ceiling several times, I realized that I had to offer more than my male counterpart. Thus, I went back to school to obtain a PhD in curriculum and social foundations.

My story is not a singular case. Many other women face similar challenges if they strive to attain leadership roles in education. Even though there are large numbers of female teachers, there are very few female administrators in public education. According to Banks (2007), "There is no justification for the small number of women and minority educational leaders" (p. 327). In fact, "75 percent of women hold jobs as teachers in public education while men hold 60 percent of the administrative positions" (Adams & Hambright, 2004, p. 209). Adams and Hambright (2004) report that changes are needed to encourage female leadership roles in education, as well as retaining the females in those roles. Banks concludes, "Insights gained from such research will lead to more

inclusive leadership that represents the diversity in our pluralistic society. As our knowledge about the experiences of women and minorities in educational leadership deepens, we may be better able to select, train, and nurture more effective leaders for schools” (p. 328). Only through these efforts can schools and children have the most effective leaders from diverse backgrounds in a more equitable society. Women, along with minorities, have much to offer in administrative positions within education, but I focus my study on women’s experiences.

This research utilizes the life history approach to study four female leaders within the public school system. By exploring their experiences, identity, and barriers much can be learned. I believe that by listening to others who have diligently worked towards breaking the barriers it will make the road less difficult. Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000) found that most female superintendents believe that gender is a barrier to attaining the leadership role of superintendent. My research included a variety of research roles, such as elementary and high school principals, an athletic director, and a superintendent. I researched gender barrier issues, as well as what life experiences contributed to their becoming leaders and how they negotiate their gendered identities in educational leadership.

Statement of the Problem

Throughout the last year during the presidential election, women have repeatedly been told that this is the year of the woman, that the glass ceiling holding women back has cracks in it that will never be together again. But, in the arena of public school education societal rules of women being the teachers and men holding the administration positions still holds true. Qualified women are still underrepresented in school

administration with 75% of the nation's teachers being women, but few women hold the top position of superintendent of schools (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Even though women have seen an increase in administrative positions, the number is still relatively low compared to males in the same positions and barriers still exist, which prevent females from entering leadership positions within public schools. For instance, the American Association of School Administrators' (AASA) mid-decade study of the superintendency reports the number of women superintendents increasing from 6.6% in 1992 to 14% in 2000 and 21.7% in 2007 (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The lack of women in education leadership roles magnifies the patriarchal separation of male leaders and female teachers in the workforce of public school education. Bank (2007) states, "Future research needs to have a broader scope and to reflect the dynamics of race and gender within the changing nature of our society" (p. 327).

This study focuses on gender and education through the voices of female leaders. Only a small amount of research has emerged that gives females a forum to discuss their "own stories and their own framing of the meaning of their lives" (Munro, 1998, p. xi), even though research on gender and leadership has increased. Consequently, women leaders in education are still not being heard adequately in their own voices within this patriarchal society. In fact, Munro later states, "I found a large body of literature on life history and biography, but few of these works focused on presenting women teachers' experiences" (p. 8). According to Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan and Ballenger (2007) even fewer studies focus on female administrators' experiences in education. A few dissertation studies focus on public school superintendents (Barbie, 2004; Barr, 2007; Daye, 2007; Scott, 1999), teachers (Bray, 2008), middle school principals (Fecher,

2007; Jones, 2006) or elementary principals (Bayouth, 1999). Not one study found focused on various avenues of leadership areas including superintendents, high school principals, elementary principals, and athletic directors. This is how my study is different with my focus on female leaders from all of the above categories, allowing for differences of experience by different categories of leaderships within the public school systems to be presented. Goodson and Sikes (2001) express, “There is a need for rigorous research which does not ignore, but rather . . . explore[s] and take[s] account of different objective experiences and subjective perspective” (p. xi). My research study addresses this need, to take account of the perspectives of the female leaders at different levels and highlight their own voices and experiences. Atkinson (1998) writes, “More life stories need to be recorded of women . . . The feminine voice needs to be given opportunities to be heard, analyzed, and theorized about . . .” (p. 18).

Purpose of the study

Because of the gendered construction of the public school arena, most females shy away from trying to enter into the administrative roles in education. In 1909 Ella Young became the first female superintendent of Chicago Public Schools. She predicted that the twentieth century would be dominated by females at the helm of public schools (Noel-Batiste, 2009). A hundred years later, this prediction has not been fulfilled. In fact:

less than five percent of public school superintendents are women and less than twenty-seven percent of public secondary school principals are women. Despite the fact that teaching has remained a feminized profession, educational

administration continues to be dominated by males, making this disparity one of education's most challenging issues. (p. 1)

Even though more females are making their way into the administrative roles in education, there are still barriers and socially created constraints directly related to gender and identity that hinder females from achieving the top positions in public school administration. The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of females in top administrative roles and how they negotiate between being a female and a leader. The study intends to understand how their life experiences contributed to them choosing this career path, what gender barriers they faced and the role of gender in their professional lives. As the research progressed, I listened to those women's voices in order to learn from their stories that "have traditionally been dismissed" (Munro, 1998, p. 5). This study examines four women who have obtained administrative positions in several sizes of public schools, in a mid-west state. Their lived experience is told through their own voices and their experiences are moved to the center stage. By using a narrative life history methodology, this study allows the lived experiences of the women participants in the study to illuminate the issues of gender and the multiple identities they continuously live.

Gender refers to the social attributes associated with being male and female. These attributes are socially constructed at early ages and throughout one's life. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, intersecting with race, class, and other cultural issues (Maher & Ward, 2002), and influence what is expected, allowed and valued within a society for both men and women. My study does not intend to show both

men and women's perspectives but highlight women's experiences through the lens of gender.

Research questions

1. What life experiences contributed to these women becoming educational leaders in a public school?
2. What difficulties did these women encounter in their career path of leadership?
3. How did they deal with those difficulties?
4. Is gender a factor?
5. What other factors are revealed?

Theoretical Framework

Because of my interest in the role of gender, feminism is a guiding framework for my study. Most feminists have a general agreement that historically females have not had the power and privilege of the male. Various feminist perspectives help shape my view and ideas. According to Johnson (1997), "It helps, then, to think of various feminist approaches as threads woven together to form a whole. While the threads are distinctive in many ways, they are strongest in relation to one another" (p.113). Thus, weaving certain assumptions from each approach is appealing to me and multiple schools of feminist thought come together to inform this study.

There are different ways to categorize feminisms, but currently the most accepted are liberal feminism with its focus on gender equality, radical feminism with its focus on women's difference, multicultural feminism with its focus on the intersection of gender and race or other social construction, and post-structural feminism with its focus on

multiplicity, singularity, and fluidity of gender (Johnson, 1997; Maher & Ward, 2002; Miller, 2005). From the Liberal Feminism thought, I gain the insight “that prejudice, values, and norms deny women equal access to the opportunities, resources, and rewards that society offers” (Johnson, 1997, p. 109). From the Multicultural-Radical view, I gain the understanding that every unique difference, both within and across women of diverse backgrounds, should be celebrated and valued. From the Post-Structural view, I approach gender identity in a fluid way. Wang (2004) discusses Kristeva’s three generations of feminism. While the first two waves more or less correspond to the liberal and radical feminisms, the third wave suggests that females have multiple identities and should not be reduced to one essentialized, fixed identity. Wang writes, “In [Kristeva’s] vision, the third generation of feminism . . . not only provides a generative space for an individual woman’s unique expression of herself. It also challenges the very notion of a stable identity” (p. 94). The multiplicity and fluidity within women’s identity speak to me. Thus, my study brings the focus on equality, difference, and multiplicity together.

In fact, Haig (1997) states, “that feminist researchers use a variety of existing research methods, adapted to their own purposes, and that the arguments against a specifically feminist methodology are largely beside the point” (p. 222). Feminist methodology, according to Haig (1997), has urged researchers to acknowledge and portray women’s experiences (p. 223). This idea is crucial in my research dealing with the experiences of female leaders in public school administration. My approach to educational feminist theory starts with the individual female, from diverse backgrounds in age, class, or race, and acknowledges each of their differences. From these individualized differences, created by their own life experiences, emerge shared themes

that are related to gender and leadership. For this study, I negotiate through the patriarchal language society has accepted to bring forth women's own voices and make connections across different individual women's stories situated in historical contexts.

Life history as a method has the great potential for illuminating participants' own perspectives. Munro (1998) suggests, "How individuals construct their stories, the tensions, the contradictions and the fictions, signifies the very power relations and discursive practices against which we write our lives" (p. 5). Just as Munro demonstrates in her book, *Subject to Fiction: Women Teachers Life History Narratives and the Cultural Politics of Resistance*, a feminist life history approach can give an avenue for the female to speak for herself because it "addresses feminist concerns that research be empowering and transformative" (p. 9). Life history presents an expanded view of each female's perspectives and gives a better understanding of the past in a collective context and allow a glimpse into the future for other female leaders.

Methodology

Life History

This study uses narrative life history as the methodology. Atkinson (1998) states, "An individual life, and the role it plays in the larger community, is best understood . . . through the process of putting them together in story form" (p. 7). The telling of a life story enables the life historian to be "heard, recognized, and acknowledged" (p. 7). The purpose of using narrative life history is to see "how respondents . . . impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 3). I am interested in understanding how women leaders make sense of gender and gender identity in their lives.

According to Goodson and Sikes (2001) in their book *Life History Research in Educational Settings*, there are three reasons to use life history. The first recognizes that all areas of individuals' lives are interrelated. The second reason is the relationship between the experiences of the individual and historical, social contexts. Finally, the life history method shows "how individuals negotiate their identities and, consequently, experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live" (p. 2). I chose the life history approach because these three reasons underlying my purpose of my study. First, I seek to understand these female administrators' experiences in an interrelated and holistic way. Secondly, I want to situate each female administrator's personal experiences in a broad social context. Lastly, I want to understand how these female administrators negotiate their identities within their constructed space.

Topical Life History

Ward (2003) presents three basic forms of the life history method: the complete, the topical and the edited. The topical life history fits into my research best. The topical life history will be long, complex and have many sides, but will focus only on "one phase or aspect of the participant's life" (Ward, 2003, p. 30). According to Ward, the topical life history can be either comprehensive, which "examines a particular issue/subject," or can be a limited topical life history, where less material is covered than the comprehensive, "usually these life histories will include more than one person per volume" (p. 31). In my study I adopt the limited, topical life history method. Ward states, "A life history in whatever form, can make a valuable contribution to the learning process" (p. 39). The life history allows me to study the personal experiences of each

woman leader, specifically the experiences of career choice, barriers, and identity through the lens of gender.

Participants

In this research study I follow Goodson's and Sikes's (2001) suggestion on purposive and convenience sample selection. According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), the research sample selection is considered purposive if "The research is concerned with specific characteristics, attributes or experiences and informants are 'selected' because they meet the criteria" (p. 24). Purposive sampling is used since I selected those who are female, hold administrative positions currently in public school education, and have been in these positions for five years or more. Patton (2002) writes, "Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). Each participant selected yields insights from their rich experiences into the research questions. Convenience sampling happens when, "the researcher has easy access to the informants" (p.24). I selected female administrators who were easily accessible according to demographics and time constraints.

The sample size is small, but Goodson and Sikes (2001) state, "If the aim is to reveal shared patterns of experience or interpretation within a group of people who have some characteristic, attribute or experience in common, then ideally [a small] sample size will be adequate" (p. 23) when sufficient data are collected to reach saturation. They argue that the research should not depend on quantity "but the richness of the data" (p. 23). My study generates rich data through multiple data collection activities.

Data Collection

Within qualitative research, Patton (2002) discusses the use of triangulation to strengthen a research study. According to Patton, triangulation is the use of “creative mixed inquiry strategies” (p. 248). In my research study, I collected in-depth interviews, life artifacts of photographs and personal writings, and historical documents obtained from their community libraries and other available resources that relates to their lives. Also, I completed several observations of their day-to-day interactions of the administrators to reach what Patton calls triangulation. Goodson and Sikes (2001) state when discussing life history data collection, “A range of data is employed: documents, interviews with relevant others, theories, texts, even physical locations and buildings. These data are, so to speak, triangulated to locate the life story as a social phenomenon existing in historical time” (2001, p. 62). Next, I discuss four types of data for this research.

Atkinson (1998) believes that the interview process for a narrative life research should be carried out as an art form. The structure of the questions is a good place for the interviewer to start, but throughout the interview process, the questions might lead to other questions not written in a sequential, logical order. Considering a Robert Frost poem, “The Road Not Taken,” the speaker acknowledges, “Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back” (p. 80), which makes the point how the interview questions may be different and emergent. The in-depth interviews in this study sought specific themes or issues relating to gender and whether any patterns emerged within and between each of the participants. Atkinson (1998) suggests using the open-ended question, “encouraging the person to follow a ‘stream of consciousness’ type of approach” (p. 31), leading to a more in-depth response. I interviewed each participant

three to five times with each interview lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes.

Atkinson (1998) believes that “much can be learned about the person’s life in a two-part or three-part interview that extends over 3 hours” (p. 23-24). The interviews were designed with open-ended questions with a broader focus, but throughout the interview process the questions narrowed according to each individual’s story and life experiences.

Second, observation is an important part of the research process in qualitative research (deMarris & Lapan, 2004). Patton (2002) suggests, “There are limitations, however, to how much can be learned from what people say. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” (p. 21). The observations were completed in the participants’ work environments, to gain a richer, deeper description of their leadership in action to complement interview data. Many insights can be learned from the participants’ mannerisms, silences, work space, and how they interact with other people within their work space. Each participant was observed once or twice in any type of setting in which they exhibited their leadership role. From a teachers’ meeting to a board meeting, the participants were observed in numerous settings. This enabled me to provide a “thick description” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 241) to help with transferability.

Third, personal artifacts and personal writings of the participants were very helpful with memories, jump starting conversations, and providing more insights into the lives of the participant. “Photographs and other objects of memory can help people recall the stories and events of their lives” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 29). Copies of the photographs, letters, or other personal artifacts were made for analysis. Also, I invited the participants

to write a journal reflecting their thoughts through my interviews and observations with them. I collected the journals as another source of data.

Finally, historical data from the community was used to “understand both the local history and broader historical context in which these women lived” (Munro, 1998, p. 11). According to Ward (2003), “If a comprehensive life history is to be written, public archival records should be combined with private and personal data” (p. 34). Community newspapers, magazines, and school records were accessed to collaborate and elaborate information gained from the participant’s stories.

After approval by IRB, all participants were provided with consent forms and confidentiality statements, and their names were changed to protect the identities of the participants. In all interviewing processes a tape recorder was used and the participants knew this in advance. Participants were given transcripts to member check for accuracy and for insights found through the reading of the transcripts, which also added to the data.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis started immediately with the first interview and observation. After each interview I started the transcription as soon as possible. After the first transcription was completed for the interview, I rechecked the transcription with the transcript, which helped me to get closer to the data. While rechecking the data, I annotated the transcription with tone of voice, body language, and gestures that occurred during the interview. “To be more true to the speaker whose reality we wish to understand, we must transcribe text purposefully, carefully, as completely as possible, and clearly reveal the theoretical underpinnings of transcription and re-presentational decisions” (Poindexter, 2002, p. 73). Member checks were then completed. And then

the initial interview, observations, and member checks were coded and compared to find consistencies and differences. This initial coding from the data, along with the artifacts and historical documents, helped inform the next interviews and observations with the female leaders in this study.

Throughout the process, I brought a feminist perspective to analyze what patterns emerge within and between participants regarding the role of gender in their career choice and professional lives as educational leaders. Themes related to gender barriers and gender identity were highlighted. At the same time, when participants did not see that gender was a factor in their leadership, or their perspectives were different from my own theoretical lens, I respected their own interpretations and let different understandings be present in my data analysis.

During this process the researcher's reflective journal/field log was an important aspect of the research, documenting learning and adjusting process during the data gathering. The field log provided a record of observations, interviews, and contact with the participants, and my own reflection on the researcher's subjectivity. I used this tool as a reflection and a way to present connections within and between participants. Also, this was a place I sorted documents, jotted down notes or ideas that were worth pursuing. Hughes (1994) writes, "The quality, or even adequacy, of a research project is not only the result of the questions asked or concept used, it is also the result of keeping rigorous field notes" (p. 36). I am aware that I am female and I have certain feminist perspectives concerning this research, but I remained open to all ideas even if they contradicted my position.

Rigor of the Study

According to Atkinson (1998), when doing a narrative life history, “no two researchers will record a life story in a completely replicable way, and no two researchers will analyze the life story data in a replicable way either” (p. 59). But, there are standards to follow when going through the process of a narrative life history to maintain its rigor. In positivist orientated studies, rigor is judge upon validity, reliability, and objectivity, which does not hold true for a narrative life history. Guba and Lincoln (1989) use credibility and transferability criteria for a qualitative research.

In my study, I achieved credibility through the techniques discussed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) in *The Fourth Generation Evaluation*. First, prolonged engagement was reached with each participant by conducting the three interviews and two observations along with other data collection, within a four month time period. Secondly, persistent observation was achieved by the use of thick, descriptive field notes from the interviews and the observations of the administrators’ day-to-day activities. Thirdly, while going through this process of inquiry, a writing partner was used to create a peer debriefing. “The purpose of which is both ‘testing out’ the findings with someone who has no contractual interest in the situation and also helping to make propositional that tacit and implicit information that the evaluator might possess” (p. 237). Fourthly, progressive subjectivity was achieved through the use of a researcher journal that “at regular intervals throughout the study the inquirer again records his or her developing construction” (p. 238). Finally, in the area of credibility I did member checks with all participants continuously, “both during the data collection and analysis stage” (p. 239). The member checks served several functions during the inquiry and were an important part of my research.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) define transferability as “an empirical process for checking the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts” (p. 241). Guba and Lincoln use the idea of thick description to establish transferability and state that the goal is to “facilitate transferability judgments on the part of others who may wish to apply the study to their own situations” (p. 242). Thick description was presented in my study.

Futhermore, with credibility and transferability my study met the “authenticity criteria” (p. 245). Wherein, all the data gathered were “solicited and honored” (p. 245), during the evaluation process. My role, according to Guba and Lincoln (1989) was “to seek out, and communicate, all such constructions and to explicate the ways in which such constructions—and their underlying value systems—are in conflict” (p. 246). Each individual, according to their values had ideas and thoughts that were different from the other participants. It was my job as the researcher to find these values, identify how they were related to their experiences even when in conflict, and to stay true to their experiences when I articulated this within my research.

Significance of the study

“Silence—institutional silence, political silence, personal silence, even silence about silence—multiple and intertwined silences all related to absent, stifled, or prohibited speech” (Skrla, 2000, p. 611). Within the area of research in educational administration, the female voice and the female experience has been largely left out, keeping the silence as Skrla describes in her research study of women superintendents. This study helps to break the silence so that female leaders have the opportunity for their experiences to be heard, through their own topical life history narrations.

To date there has been limited research on female leadership in public schools. The studies that do exist focus only on one type of administrator within the public school. Few qualitative studies exist in the area of female school administrators, their experiences, barriers, and their identities through the eyes of several facets of leadership. This study contributes to a currently expanding literature.

The information from this study can be used to design curriculum for multicultural and diversity programs and classes for teachers, future administrators, and future leaders in the K-12 education system. Results from this study can be used to enhance the curriculum in women's studies for women to navigate beyond the barriers to ascend into positions of leadership within the public school system. The results of this study will be critical for leadership as a whole through leaders understanding the diverse and positive experiences and perceptions of how gender influences career choices. Therefore, there is a need for research that will provide an opportunity for female leaders to tell their stories, share their perceptions regarding barriers and identity as they function in a patriarchal society.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature situating and informing the study. Chapter three presents a detailed description of the methodology used for the study. Chapter four and five contains the stories of the females who participated in the study, with the analysis of the themes that emerged during their stories. Chapter six contains a summary of the study, with a discussion of further research possibilities.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

In the last decades, there have been some gains in females attaining leadership roles in public schools, but the majority of educational leaders are still white men. Brown and Irby (2005) state that the more we know about females in leadership roles, how they obtain their positions, and how they have become successful, the greater the likelihood of increasing their numbers in the field. Skarla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) argue that it is important that the research context encourage an empathetic dialogue that provides a comfortable place where women can tell stories of successful professional work. Within my research I strived to achieve this goal of providing a comfortable place where my female participants could tell their stories about their experiences, difficulties, and negotiations to reach where they are now and continue their leadership role.

Charol Shakeshaft's (1989) compilation of research of the experiences of females in administration positions is seminal to the scholarship of females in educational administration. Shakeshaft's book was a first of its kind concerning educational administration and was groundbreaking in challenging research to include both men and women. Shakeshaft states the purpose of her book is "to collect and synthesize in one place this literature . . . in an attempt to document the experiences of women administrators so that we may begin to expand the theory and lore of the field to include them" (p. 10). Shakeshaft draws on three different types of data for her book. First is synthesis of research literature including "dissertations, journal articles, ERIC documents,

and unpublished papers – on women in educational administration.” Second is research that she, herself has done, “published or presented at scholarly meetings previously, but most is discussed here for the first time.” Her own work includes “mail surveys, observational, and interview studies – all of which try to discover how women view their worlds” (p. 11). The third data source is from her personal experiences of directing a program for women in educational administration. In her book, Shakeshaft (1989) addresses three issues: the history of females in administration and what is happening now, barriers that keep females out of the positions, and finally, the examination of females and their day-to-day experiences that differ from men, demonstrating how current theory in educational administration fails to take into account the experiences of women. This omission of the experiences of women that Shakeshaft discusses leads to a deficiency of ways to overcome the patriarchal society and lends society to support this patriarchy system of under-represented females in leadership positions. Gender inequality is still an issue for females in almost every occupation and in almost every country of the world. Almost twenty years later, Shakeshaft (2007) collaborates with several authors to once again examine the research concerning women administrators. They found that little has changed for females in administration. Shakeshaft’s groundbreaking works provides the starting point for my literature review.

The review of the literature consists of an inquiry into the existing body of knowledge regarding the experiences of females in the administration positions of principals and superintendents in order to situate my own study. The review of the literature is organized in the following manner: (a) principals, (b) superintendents, (c) barriers encountered by both principals and superintendents. Since my study involves

different levels of educational leadership, I divide the review into separate sections on principals and superintendents. Moreover, I find that the largest body of literature relates to barriers for women to enter into administration, I devote a section to the issues of barriers. The section of barriers is organized by the themes of marriage and family responsibility in conflict with career expectations, gender norms, sex discrimination, good old boy network, and mentors and role models. Throughout the review I present different viewpoints concerning women administrators' experiences and insights.

Principals

Entrance into Leadership Positions

For many women, the advancement to leadership in the public school educational system is laden with many obstacles resulting in the low numbers of female principals (Oplatka, 2006). Spencer and Kochan (2000) completed a quantitative study with 550, or forty-two percent of both male and female principals in Alabama. They sought to discover the numbers of female principals in Alabama, their career paths and if there were any career barriers hindering their entrance into the principal administrative position. The researchers found that most females had higher levels of education and more teaching experience than their male counterparts. Most male principals were selected from outside of the school system that hired them, while females were hired more often in places they are known; usually within the school district they are presently employed. "Thus, [female] opportunities for employment as principals appear more limited than those of male" (p. 12). The researchers thought this finding was something that needed to be investigated further. Spencer and Kochan conclude with several points of interest concerning future studies of the female career path, mentoring, and gender free

hiring practices of principals. Also, they conclude with the recommendation that researchers should study female principals within their home states to add to the body of literature concerning female administrators.

Jones (2006) found through interviewing middle school principals how their career paths of becoming an educational leader emerged. Jones states the career paths of the three middle school principals she studied echoed the literature of Ortiz (1982), Crutcher (1992), and Browne-Ferrigno (2003). They all find that it takes a woman longer to reach certain positions in school systems than it takes a man for the same type of positions.

Also, Smulyan (2000) found that one participant became a principal because a mentor told her she should apply. “Her path to the principalship reflects gendered patterns: an extended teaching career, a lack of administrative preparation, and a push into the principalship by a male mentor” (p. 595). Unlike many men who plan their career path into administration from the start of their career in education, these females did not plan their career into the leadership role, but “was propelled into it by others” (p. 594). This is echoed in Shakeshaft’s (1989) research showing that when females try on their own to get an administrative job, she only tries once or twice before she ceases pursuing the administration career path. But, if the female is “tapped” for the job the female finds herself in the elementary principal position or a subject matter specialist. If the female wants a bigger career jump, the female usually finds herself in the position at the central office of a curriculum director or some other program.

Shakeshaft states that the elementary principal position for females is a dead-end job and is part of the glass ceiling for those females. Bascia and Young (2001) discuss

gender patterns and assumptions that contributed to the elementary principal position being a part of the glass ceiling for females. They find that gender plays an important role in differentiating various level of leadership for females. The elementary schools are generally thought to be smaller in population, less organizationally complex and have smaller budgets than the high schools. Women who choose to enter the elementary leadership position are faced with fewer career alternatives later. While it is a gendered assumption that elementary principals are less prestigious than secondary school principals, social and cultural reality reinforce such a hierarchy which makes it more difficult for women to play more prestigious leadership roles.

Smulyan's (2000) and Shakeshaft's (1989) findings are similar to Chapman's (2006) mixed methods study to explore female perceptions of the lack of representation in educational administration, mainly the secondary level. Chapman's study includes a quantitative survey and three qualitative focus groups. She finds that a majority of the females who participated in the study assumed leadership roles within their own schools, and most were encouraged by a mentor or another leader to pursue leadership positions.

These studies, along with the Spencer and Kochan's study (2000), show that females have difficulty in cracking the glass ceiling into administrative positions, giving up easily after a few unsuccessful attempts. If they are able to crack the ceiling, there is limited access for females to excel beyond this starting point of administrative role, never fully breaking through to further their careers to become superintendents, being pushed aside by their male counterparts' promotions. The questioning of the complexity of gendered difficulties in assuming these leadership roles continued to emerge during the review of the literature. Because I did not find adequate answers in the literature to the

question of what life experiences positively contributed to females who choose to pursue a leadership career, I attempted to find more definitive answers and fill this gap in the literature.

Gender as a Factor

Gender is a factor for some females in their principal leadership roles (Reynolds, White, Brayman, & Moore, 2008). The qualitative dissertation study of leadership experiences from three female middle school principals by Jones (2006) contributes to the “limited understanding of the challenges and contributions” (p. vii) of female leaders. The study revealed that gender negatively affected their experiences as middle school principals and is demonstrated through denial, a lack of awareness, or a conscious or unconscious silence.

Adams and Hambright (2004) are instructors in a teacher leadership program at Wright State University. The students in this leadership program are mostly females seeking master’s degrees in educational leadership. The program works mostly in cohort groups for three years, allowing the professors to see promising leadership potential through many assignments and projects. When a job fair with twenty-five administrative positions was held, and only one female applicant applied for the principal position, Adams and Hambright felt that there was a gender gap so they decided to poll their students to find out why there were not more of the female graduates choosing to be administrators. The results of the poll indicated that changes were needed in several areas for females to be encouraged and retained for administrative positions. Some of the changes include, “examining the roles performed by administrators, resolving salary issues, and countering the prevailing perceptions and beliefs about administrative

positions” (p. 210). Furthermore, although Adams’ and Hambright’s (2004) research is an experiential study and the earlier mentioned Spencer’s and Kochan’s (2000) research is a quantitative study, they share similar findings concerning female administrators and gender. Both studies suggest that gender plays a role in female’s reluctance to go into the profession of administration.

Gender is not always a negative factor for some female principals. Evans (2001) and Jean-Marie and Martinez (2007) discuss the idea of advantages for female administrators. Evans (2001) found that females in the principal position have more freedom from gendered expectations of society, and can progress in their roles the way that they want to proceed within their leadership positions. In another study, Jean-Marie and Martinez (2007) found that principals talked about how their gender was valuable to their leadership role. The principals thought they were allowed more opportunities as leaders to have a caring attitude towards people and students they encountered because they were females.

Jean-Marie and Martinez (2007) conducted a study based on the experiences of eleven female leaders. Their study sought to provide an understanding of how race and gender impact women’s accession to the principal position and how the female principals dealt with experiences as they continued to be in that position. My dissertation involves a greater range of leadership roles situated in different organizations within the public educational system by including not just the female principals this study was concerned with, but including a superintendent and an athletic director. Thus, my study will contribute to the literature by gaining insights into the female experience through a myriad of administrative positions.

Difficulties of Leadership Positions

Adams and Hambright (2004) found that most of their students thought some of the difficulties of assuming a leadership role in schools involved the time constraints and the political issues. Some respondents noted that female administrators were not as respected as male administrators. Because of the difficulties females encounter when they aspire to leadership positions within public education, females have trouble making the decision to pursue the administrative positions. Therefore, a great deal of female talent is lost to the difficulties of the administrative career paths. Furthermore, Spencer's and Kochan's (2000) data suggest that females may have to deal with more stresses and difficulties in acquiring and functioning in principal positions. Females' perceptions of difficulties in leadership roles in the Adams' and Hambright's (2004) study are confirmed by their actual experiences on a larger scale in the Spencer's and Kochan's (2000) study.

The difficulties that females encounter while trying to assume leadership roles and while they are employed in leadership roles will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Even though females encounter difficulties, some lead by embracing their feminine qualities.

Leadership Styles

Even though the principal position is a male-dominated profession, many female administrators bring their own unique qualities usually associated with feminine values. These values include trust and caring, an investment in social justice and equity related to changing the status of females in society, thus disrupting the socially accepted leadership landscape.

Jones (2006), Ortiz (1982), Crutcher (1992), and Browne-Ferrigno (2003) found female principals faced and felt they overcame most difficulties associated with being a principal by being flexible in decision-making and with a sense of humor. In addition to flexibility and humor, female leaders also bring their commitment to an ethics of caring and the cause of social justice to their leadership roles.

Normore and Jean-Marie (2008) conducted a qualitative study that explored the leadership experiences of four female secondary principals and “how gender impacts the participants’ accession to and work at the secondary level” (p. 188) in a southwestern state. They conclude that all four females engaged in leadership praxis through various avenues, but practicing an ethic of caring was a critical dimension for all of the females in this study. All of the females commented on confronting educational challenges of social justice, democracy, and equity in their schools. Each of these females, while in an administrative position, seeks to challenge the social structure that privilege some, while disadvantage others. According to Normore and Jean-Marie (2008) females value having influence more than having power, creating an environment of caring, trust and respect which links to social justice and fairness.

Lee and McKerrow (2005) assert how females in leadership roles advance the social justice cause by trying to improve the lives of those who have been marginalized or oppressed. Smulyan (2000) indicates that females in educational administrative roles find ways to redefine the power for positive implications instead of focusing on the gender difficulties they experience within their career paths and the continuation of their career paths. Smulyan also found a tension in the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

Researcher/Participant Relationship

In a feminist research study, Smulyan (2000) discusses the issues of conducting a feminist study with participants who do not identify themselves as being feminist. The findings that emerged from the data suggest, “Gender is a powerful dynamic in the experiences of the three women principals with whom I worked” (p. 590). As Smulyan listened to each individual participant’s story, she heard a tension between their experiences in their world of being female, and their willingness to explore those experiences through a gendered lens, even to the point that all three principals did not think gender had made a difference in their lives and work. But from these women’s stories, Smulyan reports that gender had played a role. Such tension is particularly relevant to my study.

Smulyan’s overall goal was to use a qualitative research to study three female principals’ experiences to better understand the role of gender in school leadership. Not only does the role of gender within female leaders experiences connect to my research study, but also Smulyan used a feminist theoretical framework with a life history methodology to “illustrate, challenge, and expand our views of the styles and experiences of school administrators, placing the behaviors of the individuals within both the particular school and community contexts and the larger social and cultural contexts within which they work” (p. 591). Using the life history approach within a feminist framework highlights the complexities of each participant’s experiences represented within a great context of the social system of power.

Other Countries

My review also has shown similar patterns in other countries. For instance, Kaparou and Bush (2007) conducted a qualitative research study with six women principals in Greece. Like my study, the participants were selected by purposive sampling, based on the criteria set up by the researcher. The findings demonstrated that the main reasons for the under-representation of females in the leadership positions within the Greek school system were personal factors, covert discrimination, gender stereotypes, and constraints experiences through their socially defined roles. In their conclusions, the researchers state that even though Greek legislation provides equal opportunities, men still outnumber women in leadership positions within the school systems. This is not unlike the United States, with legislation creating the supposedly equal opportunities for females, but still having the same low numbers in female administration.

In the UK, according to Moreau, Osgood and Halsall (2007), the government continues trying to hire men, while ignoring the low numbers of women in the managerial jobs. The researchers' aim was to identify the factors influencing women teachers' career development and access to management positions in schools. Their research came from a study of women teachers' careers and promotions in England conducted in 2003-2005. The researchers analyzed the initial interviews and focus groups with the women teachers, exploring the teachers' "entry into the teaching profession, their career trajectory, job satisfaction, career aspirations, factors identified as affecting their career" (p. 240). They argue that the imbalance of the under-representation of women in school management positions "may convey to pupils a vision

of society where it is legitimate that men occupy the most valued positions” (p. 250). This is consistent with research in the United States that males are preferred for leadership positions (Eagley and Karau, 2002).

In 1996, Coleman (2000) conducted quantitative research of female secondary headteachers in England and Wales covering leadership and management styles. Coleman points out the tendency for gender to be ignored in research. Coleman quotes Hall’s and Southworth’s (1997) study:

Using a gender perspective creates new possibilities for exploring the lives of men and women who teach, manage and lead in education. As researchers into headship we have both concluded that educational leadership is firmly rooted in professional identity. Gender, in turn, is a crucial component of that identity. Future research into headship that fails to take this and the gendered nature of schools and colleges into account is likely to be incomplete. (p. 14)

Coleman agrees that gender should be an important part in future research into leadership positions within education. In the survey response analysis, the major finding was the continuing discrimination faced by female leaders in education. The females experienced feelings of isolation and instances of sexism within their working environments. The female leaders felt the need to prove themselves to others, often working longer hours than their male counterparts. Coleman’s idea of gender being a crucial component of a female’s identity is related to my research concerns over the role of female administrators’ experiences.

Despite the difficulties of obtaining a leadership positions for the females surveyed, Coleman states that once the female achieves the administrative position “they were aware that there were advantages in being a women” (p. 13). They reported benefits of diffusing male behaviors of aggression with other men, being singled out for opportunities because of the lack of other female administrators, and connecting better with the girls, parents and female teachers.

Summary

In summary, most research on women principals have found through their experiences that gender is a factor in leadership styles, with most females administrators practicing an ethic of caring, advancing the social justice cause, and not focusing on the gender difficulties they experience, but find ways to redefine the issues into positive implications for themselves and for others around them. Research indicates that gender is a factor within female administrators’ career paths, taking most females longer to reach positions within school systems than it does for males. The females usually have higher levels of education and more teaching experience, but usually only find administrative positions within the school systems they initially started teaching at, leading to their opportunities being more limited than males. Futhermore, the research findings suggest that once the females acquire the position of principal, they have to deal with stresses and difficulties concerning gender within their professional lives.

Superintendents

Research conducted by Glass and Franceschini (2007) indicates that the percentage of female superintendents has increased from 12% in the 1990s to 22% in 2006. Unfortunately, at the current annual rate of increase Derrington and Sharratt

(2009) predict, “It won’t be until the year 2035 that we will see a 50-50 gender ratio in superintendents” (p. 8). This is disheartening and indicates that there are still barriers that block women from a career path to the top of the leadership ladder. “Surveys indicate that in spite of apparent opportunities for women, a set of particular immovable barriers prevent them from aspiring to and attaining the superintendency” (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009, p. 9). From an earlier study the researchers completed in 1993 that reported the barriers that prevented a female applicant from attaining the superintendent position, Derrington and Sharratt conducted a comparative study in 2007 to find any changes occurring in the 14-year interval. In the 1993 research, the barriers heading the survey were sex role stereotyping and sex discrimination. The 2007 survey indicated the top barrier as self-imposed barriers of family responsibilities. Self-imposed barriers were at the bottom of the list in 1993. This indicates, “Women still face tough choices when it comes to career, marriage and motherhood” (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009, p. 10), although the situation of sex discrimination has been improved. The United States Census Bureau characterized the position of school superintendents as being the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

Evans (2004) analyzed the lived experiences of ten female principals from the elementary, middle school and high school levels that were superintendent certified. Their perspectives concerning the disadvantages they may have experienced were highlighted, as well as how these experiences affected their career paths of not reaching the superintendent position. Evans (2004) cites the American Associations of School

Administrators data published in the *2000 Study of the American School*

Superintendency:

1. Women are not in positions that normally lead to the superintendency.
Women today are 75 percent of elementary classroom teachers. High school and middle school teachers have many more entry points for a move into administration and the superintendency.
2. Women are not gaining superintendent's credentials in preparation programs. Nationwide data indicate women constitute more than 50 percent of the graduate students enrolled in educational administration programs. Women also are achieving the doctorate at comparable rates to male candidates. However, only about 10 percent of women in doctoral programs are opting to earn the superintendency credential along with their degree.
3. Women are not as experienced or as interested in district-wide fiscal management as men. School boards see the management of fiscal resources to be a critical component of the superintendency, placing a high degree of emphasis on budget and financial decisions by using skills and experiences in these areas as key hiring criteria. Women typically, have responsibility in management, curriculum, or are instructional leaders.
4. Women are not interested in the superintendency for personal reasons. The abundance of work hours, interference with family life is consistent with gender socialization. Many physical career moves are anticipated in a superintendent's career.

5. School boards are reluctant to hire women superintendents. A glass ceiling exists in school management in conjunction with most boards still containing a majority of men. Women superintendents perceive some restrictive forces working against them being hired by boards.
6. Women enter the field of education for different purposes. Women today may choose to enter education as a career and may only want to be teachers, not administrators, due to the tradition of teaching being accessible to women.
7. Women enter too late. AASA's 10-year studies have always shown that women superintendents are older than their male counterparts because many women teach in the classroom for more years than men or took several years out for child-rearing. (p. 29-30)

These insights given for the lack of representation in the position of superintendent for females and illuminating their experiences supports my research in a profound way.

Evans (2004) cites gender as the connector to all the issues her participants discussed and explored for lack of an upward progression of leadership within school systems and their current varied career path. The stories of the participants revealed the "complexities of aspirants' lives and career paths that included their capabilities and their difficulties" (p. 161). Their capabilities included, "teaching experience, a variety of experiences, gendered traits, being willing to take risks, having a positive attitude, growing the next generation of administrators, having a strong faith, extra education, and family" (p. 56).

Even though the difficulties are highlighted in most gendered studies, female administrators do possess abilities, discussed in this particular study, making them

qualified for leadership positions. But, while most females have the abilities to lead in an administrative position, few get to showcase their talents.

Another interesting aspect of this study is the particular discussion of the complexities of the participants' lives from the gendered perspective. The importance of gendered differences is highlighted through the intersection between their professional and personal lives. Gender equality in leadership cannot be achieved without considering these differences. Participants also discuss the intersections between and among gender, race, class, and age. This multiplicity of self requires a complicated gender theory to understand female's lived experiences, which I intend to accomplish by connecting three feminist theories to enable a more vibrant study.

Scott (1999) examined two female superintendents with a study that was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm and used qualitative research methods that were informed by a feminist perspective. Scott states, "Few studies have been conducted on sitting superintendents and even fewer on exemplary superintendents, or those women who have found ways of successfully blending gender and the superintendency" (p. 232). Scott believes, "Women leaders must be studied through their own words and within the contest of the work environment" (p. 8). Clearly, my research accomplishes this recommendation by using the life history methodological approach. Both of the females in Scott's study survived early critical incidents in their careers, which built coping skills of toughness, calmness, control of anger, and finding networks of allies (both male and female) to help with the politics and challenges of this high level of leadership. One of the participants "ran squarely into the glass ceiling in her district" (p. 236). At one time or another, this female had served in almost every conceivable campus administrative

position, but was denied the assistant superintendent position. She left the school district to seek one that would be open to a female progressing to the highest administrative position. The other female administrator participant encountered prolonged and serious sexual harassment from the superintendent of the school that employed her. Eventually, she found a superintendent position at another school district. Both females created an individual solution that enabled them to succeed under the existing social conditions. Through these critical incidents, the females learned how to establish networks with powerful men and work with the patriarchal system to meet their goals.

Also, Scott (1999) found the female superintendents navigated between multiple constructions of gender identity by balancing traits of both genders. Scott depicts how these females' personal and working lives are contrasted, providing a picture of the extremities of existence these female endure as they juggle work, home, and love relationships. The female participants in this study both adopted a professional manner of competency, power, decisiveness, aggression, and confidence, mostly traits associated with being male. But, both females also managed to play the nurturing role of caring that is associated with the feminine gender. Both superintendents utilized societal ideas of male traits or female traits at different times throughout their superintendent careers to become successful leaders within public schools. This balancing of gendered traits creates a multiplicity of self for the females within their personal and professional lives.

Through a narrative study, Comeaux (2009) studied the lived experiences of four women superintendents of small, rural schools in Texas to show how their role as superintendent affected their personal and professional lives. Comeaux focused the study to describe the complex reality of each woman's experiences. All four women entered

into the profession for different reasons. One entered to increase her salary, one entered because she saw a need for change in education and felt she would be a good role model of change, two entered because the leadership position because it provided an opportunity to help more people within in their particular districts. All women superintendents discussed how they had to be in the role of superintendent at all times, with others' eyes constantly watching them. This affected their personal life, making it hard to maintain a structured family life and to maintain friendships. The female most micro-managed and unappreciated was the only female who had an all male school board. Another interesting finding of the female superintendents is that three of the females had grown up in the district they were working and one had lived and worked in the district in which for eighteen years. These findings echo Spencer and Kochan's (2000) study of Alabama principals and Chapman's (2006) mixed methods study of Northern Virginia's principals. All of the researchers of these different types of studies found most females are usually hired in places they are known or within school districts they are presently employed.

Another study (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999) based on fifteen Indiana female superintendents found that the participants experienced external barriers more often than internal barriers. Several of the participants noted, "Female applicants had to have higher qualifications, including academic degrees and experiences, if they were to be competitive for superintendencies" (p. 34). This expectation shows that leadership roles in administration are a male occupation and females have to have more qualifications in order to get the job. Interestingly, female Indiana superintendents reflecting on their encountering common career obstacles did not see gender as a crucial factor. The researchers state, "because elements of this barrier are often vague, individuals may not

recognize that they have been adversely affected” (p. 35). The lack of conscious knowing of gendered career barriers was attributed to two conditions. First, several of the female superintendents were asked or encouraged to apply for the job. Secondly, some of the participants of this study were hired internally. Thus, Kowalski and Stouder believe those females to be advantaged applicants, already having the support of a current administrator, or the school needed a female to counteract the arguments of not having a female administrator on staff. This study echoes Smulyan’s (2000) study of female principals discussed earlier in the section of principals. Like the superintendents in this study did not think that gender had made much difference in their professional and personal lives, the principals from Smulyan’s study were asked to apply for the jobs and they were hired internally. These studies lead to my question of female administrators’ life experiences contributing to them entering administrative positions at different levels of leadership.

In summary of the literature concerning the administrative position of superintendent, researchers have argued that women are not accepted into a culture in which male-dominated norms exist because female voices, ideas, and beliefs do not parallel the traditional institutional and masculine culture (Kanter, 1977; Wilson, 2003). The superintendent position is one of the most male-dominated organizations in the setting of public schools. Most females retain jobs where they are known or are currently working, similar to the findings regarding female principals discussed earlier in this literature review. Gender seems to be a connector to most issues the female superintendents participants discussed for the lack of an upward progression of leadership within the schools systems. Most female superintendents discuss the complexities within

their lives, dealing with all the stakeholders of their district, as well as families and friends. Even though the barriers female superintendents face seems to be highlighted in most research, female superintendents have the unique ability in weaving societies gendered notions of female and male together, creating a successful, complex leadership style.

Barriers to Female Advancement

There has been much research examining barriers to women entering the administrative hierarchy and most of the barriers that existed in the mid 1980s are still evident today. Research by Adkison (1981) revealed the lack of female representation in administration. Adkison studied several factors that contributed to this lack of representation. These factors included: socialization and stereotyping by gender, mobility and socialization within the career, organizational structure, and power and women's status within society (Adkison, 1981, p. 311). Since this research, barriers to female advancement in administration are categorized as external and internal barriers (Sadker, Sadker and Klein, 1991, p. 283). Internal barriers are defined as barriers that could be overcome by change within the individual. External barriers are defined as barriers that require social and institutional change (Sadker, et al. 1991).

Shakeshaft (1989) describes three explanatory models adopted from Hansot's and Tyack's (1981) study to explain gender barriers. The third model is male dominance, which prohibits females from gaining important positions and prestige. Male dominance is "the cause of all barriers to women in school administration that have been identified in the social science literature" (p. 83). Later, Shakeshaft (1989) proclaims that even the internal barriers are, in actuality, an external barrier that can be traced back to a male-

dominated society. Coleman (2003) also claims that patriarchy is a dominant force that creates the barriers that hinder females in their pursuit of leadership positions.

Recognizing a barrier is the first step toward overcoming the barrier. Hence, the importance of continuing research related to female experiences and the barriers they continually face. Past barrier research has opened “the questions of female approaches to leadership and to seeing the world from female lens” (Shakeshaft, et.al, 2007, p. 105). The impediments to career advancement for women are concrete and abstract with the “study . . . needing to address as many of the barriers to promotion as possible while providing increased knowledge about how females lead” (Nogay, 1995, p. 30). Recommendations for future research from Shakeshaft, et al (2007), include, “studies of successful women and minority administrators” (p. 119).

While these barriers present themselves at all levels of administration, they seem to be more complicated as females move higher up the career ladder (Jones, 2006). Many of the categories of barriers are blurred and murky and can be categorized under one or more subheadings. I will summarize these barriers in the next section through the categories of: marriage and family responsibilities in conflict with career expectations, gender norms, sex discrimination, good boy network, and lack of mentors or role models. As I describe barriers, strategies of dealing with these difficulties as females negotiate their leadership roles will be discussed as well, when applicable.

Marriage and Family Responsibility in Conflict with Career Expectations

Many females who have family responsibilities plan their careers around their moving in and out of the workforce due to family responsibilities (Orenstein, 2000). The difficulties of combining career responsibilities with family responsibilities reflect,

“Rather an accurate assessment of hours in the day and the very real limits of the human body” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 89). The level of stress in these administrative positions, along with the caring of family, could account for the higher divorce rate (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Also, the research clearly indicates that many females place their careers behind their families’ needs (Young & McLeod, 2001). Shakeshaft (1989) states:

Thus home and family responsibilities provide obstacles for women in administrations in two ways: The woman not only must effectively juggle all of her tasks, she must also contend with the bulk of male school board presidents and superintendents who erroneously believe that not only is she unable to manage the balancing act but that it is inappropriate for her to even attempt it. (p. 113)

Traditionally, lack of mobility has been another barrier to career advancement for females. Because of several reasons, including family ties, a spouse not being able to transfer jobs, most females do have a boundary issue which puts a limit on the job opportunities, which might be available for them in other areas if they could move more freely (Harris, Arnold, Lowery & Marshall, 2001).

Gender Norms

From the moment we are born, we are influenced by society to fit a mold based on gender. Societal norms are taught to us at a very early age. Girls are swathed in pink and cuddled close. Boys are held up to the world and immediately their freedom starts. As young boys and girls, we learn that we should act a certain way in order to keep societal gendered expectations in place. Leaders of school administration carry these societal gendered expectations with them into their jobs. “Men are socialized to

persevere and seek professional success while women are socialized to nurture and support others as they assume the traditional role of mother and caretaker of the home” (Whitaker & Lane, 1990, p. 12). Likewise, Bonuso and Shakeshaft’s (1983) study found this gender bias to be true during the job interview process. Men and women were rated equally competent based on their resumes, but after the interview process conducted by committees, made up mostly of men, women were not hired for the administrative positions. Smulyan (2000) found once females were in the leadership position, acknowledging the role of gender in their lives seemed to them to be an admission that they could not be leaders in the schools, or that they may not be able to perform their jobs as well as their male counterparts.

A method of examining potential bias against women has been labeled the Goldberg paradigm in honor of Goldberg’s (1968) initial experiment of bias in studies of actual wages and promotion. Eagly and Karau (2002) report that, “men were preferred over women for jobs rated as male sex-typed and women over men for jobs rated as female sex-typed” (p. 582). The compilation of this qualitative research supports the researchers’ theory of bias against female candidates for certain positions. Also, Eagly and Karau (2002) state that “women have to meet a higher standard than men do in order to be considered highly competent and able to lead and that they often elicit disapproval for behaving assertively” (p. 585). Because society perceives men as:

meeting high standards for competence and more readily accept them when they behave confidently and assertively, they are more likely to be thought about as leaders, to behave as leaders, and to emerge as leaders, especially for leader roles given relatively masculine definitions. Such effects are likely to be important in

organizational settings, where people who are perceived as able to lead are more likely to be promoted to higher managerial roles. (2002, p. 585)

A female has to be better and more qualified than a man to be considered for a leadership role (Kruger, 2008). The female has to exhibit a larger knowledge base of the leadership position and the female has to have a higher degree to be considered for a leadership position.

Noel-Batiste (2009) conducted a study for the purpose of describing obstacles and enablers that have affected female administrators' career paths to educational administration. From a survey issued to 208 female members of the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals, 111 responded to the survey. The number one reason selected for females being under-represented was cultural stereotyping of appropriate roles for men and women. Similarly, Whitaker and Lane (1990) found that fifty-nine percent of the females questioned in their research study felt they had been discriminated against in their careers. Also, they found women in education are subject to biased social attitudes regarding performance. These social attitudes describe women as too emotional, not task-oriented, too dependent on feedback and evaluations of others, and lacking independence. School leaders who believe this will not support women advancing to higher level of leadership positions.

Hidden, and not so hidden, gender biases are common in society. These biases frequently result in the not hiring of a female or the eventually dismissal of the female. Unfortunately, the bias does not only come from males; it comes from other females, as well. "Strong evidence exists that women do not support other women in getting and

keeping a superintendency. The reasons are directly aligned with endemic cultural biases regarding men's and women's roles" (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006, p. 29).

Also, Noel-Batiste (2009) discussed the enablers that affected the female administrators. The enablers for females entering an administrative position were: aspiration, motivation, obtaining a successful female mentor, and utilizing networking opportunities within the community.

As Smulyan (2000), points out, silence about the role of gender itself can be a barrier. Some female leaders do not think that gender has made much difference in their lives and work. But, as the research progresses, females seem to discover instances where gender has made a difference. In fact, Chase (1995) discovered in her study that female superintendents spoke freely on subjects of professional lives, accomplishments, and difficulties, but when they were asked about gender in their experiences, they became guarded and did not want to discuss the issues of personal examples of discrimination or conflict. Feminist scholars believe that this silence on gender issues (Miller, 2005) in educational administration is equal to lack of support for their advancement. The silent voices of females in administration result in sexist curricular material in the administration classes (Shakeshaft, et al, 2007) when female's experiences are devalued. According to Monument (2006), Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004), coauthors of one of the most widely used educational administration texts are the only scholars in educational leadership who include gender related theories within their text.

Sex Discrimination

Dunshea (1998), reports an incident of a male teacher who, when learning of a new appointment of a female principal, generated a computer banner which suggested a

link between the female principal and her sexual relations with powerful people in the educational community. This incident between the male teacher and the new female principal gave her an idea of doing a qualitative study of female perceptions, reflections and experiences on their first year of being a principal. The participants gathered for this qualitative study was a small group of beginning women principals in Australia.

According to Dunshea, “Sexism takes many forms and creates many difficulties for beginning women principals” (p. 207). The author found that participants confirm gender discrimination as an obstacle, which increases the pressure to perform and hence labels the female as incapable. The line between sexism and sexual harassment is blurred. For one of Dunshea’s (1998) participants, overt sexism was “an issue of such magnitude . . . it required systematic action” (p. 209). The participants mentioned jokes at their expense at conferences and meetings. Also, most participants recalled what Dunshea (1998) labeled as backhander comments. These comments, most delivered by men, stated that some females got the job because the school district needed a token female since the school district did not have enough females as leaders, in essence saying that the female was not qualified.

As a coping strategy, some female leaders try to joke the sexism out of the comment. When a male issues a backhanded comment, the females come back with something everyone in the room can laugh about, making the sexist comment a thing that passes quickly. Smulyan (2000) echoed this finding in her research with the female administrators either ignoring the issue of gender or they developed individual solutions to their obstacles, like using humor or ignoring the issue since the social structure does not support an activist approach.

Nicolson (2000) confirms that sexism is alive in the workplace, ranging from, “sexist remarks and jokes in meetings or public spaces at work, to violent and abusive behavior from sexual harassment to rape” (p. 92). These situations are no-win situations for the females since they “risk making dangerous and permanent enemies, being further labeled as outsiders, accused of lack of humour, and being excluded from such panels in the future because they cause trouble” (p. 93). Most females choose to let these jokes and remarks slide in order to not cause any problems, thinking it will eventually go away when they prove their worth in these jobs and committees. For instance, “Women making complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination are routinely humiliated and their working environment is often hostile” (p. 93). Smulyan (2000) reports of one female principal participant’s story of how her male superintendent would kiss the females working within the school district from the school in public places during school hours and even after school hours. This made the participant uncomfortable, with the feeling that she could not acknowledge her uncomfortable feelings to him because of the power dynamic between them.

Good Old Boy Network

Loyalty from males to other males is frequently called the good boy network or “old boy network” (Nicolson, 2000, p. 94). Men groomed for power, often find themselves in formal and informal decision-making contexts with men they have known at school, university or in previous career posts . . . reinforced through membership of formal or informal groups such as elite golf clubs, membership of gentlemen’s clubs, after-hours drinking, rugby clubs and similar activities from which women are either by

definition excluded, such as the Masons, or made to feel uncomfortable by being there, such as all-male after-hours social events. (pp. 94-95)

Another researcher, Smulyan (2000), discusses a particular participant's revelation of using gender to analyze her interactions with the other administrators, most being male. The participant described the "old boys' network" (p. 606), while describing feelings about being the only female and sharing her differing point of view. Commonality establishes this "good old boy" network. The men have interests, language, jargon, and a sense of teamwork, allowing this network to continually exist. Females who do not share these commonalities are unlikely to be allowed by the men to participate within the network.

In this network for men, the rules are made by the men and the men are the gatekeepers. Females are not supposed to play in it and are not provided with the rules. Shakeshaft (1989) discusses the need for a system for females that can compete with this network for men. She recommends that females become a part of networks, groups and associations that are specifically for women, allowing for females to find support and mentors, as well as learning about future job openings.

Lack of Mentors or Role models

Another barrier to female achievement is the lack of female role models and mentors. Shakeshaft et al. (2007) describe a role model as people who serve as an example of success, usually with similar backgrounds or characteristics. A mentor is someone who takes an active part in developing another person. Mentors are usually categorized into informal or formal mentoring relationships. Informal mentoring is usually based upon mutual identification, the fulfillment of career needs, with a duration

between three to six years. The goals of the informal mentoring relationships evolve over time and adapt to the career needs of the individuals. Formal mentoring is usually an assigned relationship and the formal mentors are usually selected on the basis of their competency level and assigned by a program coordinator. The goals of the formal mentoring are specified at the start of the mentoring process and the length of the formal mentoring relationship lasts between six months and a year (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Because of the lack of female administrators as role models and mentors, “or lacking experiences with them, the stereotyped notion among some observers that men are simply better principals, and more a part of the ‘group,’ is reinforced” (Nogay, 1995, p. 25).

A dissertation study by Crutcher (1992) found that self-esteem is increased by associating with a mentor. “Because White males are still the majority of superintendents and principals, they provide not only the largest number of possible sponsors for women, but also the highest likelihood of supporting others like themselves” (Shakeshaft et.al., 2007, p. 111). Thus, women mentors are especially important for women leaders’ professional development. Unfortunately, with the low numbers of female administrators, there are not enough mentors for each female leader. So, females have to rely, once again, on the males to serve as their mentors and role models or not have a mentor or role model at all (Jones, 2006).

For females, it is crucial to have a relationship with a mentor. “The importance of role models in helping both the women themselves and others within the system to view women administrators as a normal occurrence, rather than an exceptional one, cannot be overstated,” but, “A sponsor or a mentor is much more important to the individual woman . . . because it is the sponsor who advises the woman, supports her for jobs, and

promotes and helps her” (Shakeshaft, 1989, pp. 115-116). The Rand research brief (2004) results suggest, “Early career mentoring or support for female educators might be an effective policy lever for encouraging gender parity in the transition to school administration” (p. 2). According to the Rand research brief the greatest barrier to female participation in school administration is in the initial decision to switch from teaching to administration (2004). Utilizing a female mentor during this transition, more than likely, will help in more females making the decision to enter into administration and helping make the transition more easily.

Summary

There is now a general belief that gender issues for females are no longer a problem in today’s society (Maher & Ward, 2002). However, gender issues are still present. It is likely, according to Coleman (2005) that many females shy away from administration because of the difficulties and barriers presented within the literature. Coleman (2003) gives several ideas concerning gender and leadership that still exist in today’s society. For instance, there is still a general expectation that the leaders of a school will be men, so women leaders feel the need to justify their existence as leaders. Women are still likely to take the major responsibility when dealing with childcare and household duties, even in dual-career households.

These ideas lead to the belief that many amazingly qualified females do not go into administrative positions and many students do not reap the benefits of these talented females because of the females’ decisions. “If we are to live successfully in a diverse and pluralistic society we will need to take into account all perspectives rather than relying on one that is dominant” (Coleman, 2005, p. 16). So, if even one barrier discussed in the

literature review is removed, that single change could provide one more opportunity toward promoting diversity within public education leadership. It is important to not only hear (the passive process of perceiving a sound) but also listen to (an active process with the brain absorbing and interpreting the meanings of the sound), the voices of females in administrative positions. This will lead to females of today and future generations taking the road less traveled, but will make all the difference within their journey within educational administration.

Conclusion

A review of the literature on the experiences of female principals and superintendents reveals that most females going into administration teach longer and have higher education than their male counterparts. Most females of administrative positions encounter difficulties during their accession into the role and while they maintain the role of administration in public schools. Usually, the female administrators are hired internally and if they do seek positions outside of the district they currently work, they hit the glass ceiling and do not move to a higher administrative position. Also, the literature concerning the life experiences that positively contributed to the females becoming educational leaders is limited, showing a gap of literature my study attempts to fill.

Female administrators use a variety of coping skills to negotiate within the field of public school administration. Some of these coping skills include using humor, networking, obtaining a mentor and balancing gender traits. More needs to be discovered in this area and my study, while looking at the different positions of administration, will

acknowledge the strategies dealing with the difficulties of being a female in this male-dominated profession.

The literature suggests that gender factors are difficult for administrators to discuss, and most female administrators admit that if they acknowledge the role of gender it makes them seem unsuitable for the administrative position. Sometimes gender elements are often vague partly due to patriarchy socialization, so the administrators failed to recognize this factor. When most females are asked or encouraged to apply for the leadership position, they are usually under the protection of male authority. Such situations make it more difficult to see the effects of gender. But research also shows that such a difficulty of understanding will decrease participants' dives into telling their stories more deeply.

There is much literature on the career barriers female administrators' encounter, but most literature is limited in the way that "not all studies distinguish women administrators by role or disaggregate findings by role. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the finding represents assistant superintendents, superintendents, or principals" (Shakeshaft et al., 2007, p. 107). There is limited research if any at all that include female athletic directors within their studies of female administrative positions within a public school. My study with its focus on the life experiences contributing to female principals, athletic directors, and superintendents ascending to the administrative position promises to contribute to the literature with new insights for understanding the complex identity of a female administrator.

Chapter three presents the research design, theoretical framework, methodology, selection of the participants, procedures, data collection, and data analysis utilized in my research study.

Chapter III

Methodology

Chapter III presents my research design. I go into depth concerning my feminist theoretical framework, which weaves different feminist orientations together. My study utilized a topical, life history methodology to address the issues of how female administrators make sense of their experiences within the patriarchal society of public schools. Within this chapter, I also discuss the criteria for a good life history methodology, the selection of the participants, procedures, data collection, and data analysis for my inquiry.

Theoretical Framework

My research study was conducted from a Feminist theoretical perspective. Patton (2002) states, “we owe much too feminist theory for highlighting and deepening our understanding of the intricate and implicate relationships between language, voice, and consciousness” (p. 65). A moving quote that encompassed my thoughts as I went through this dissertation process was, “feminist theory is not so much something that I do as it is something that moves me about, positioning and repositioning me in its shifting currents” (DiQuinzio, 1993, p. 20). This quote speaks to me because it emphasizes that feminist research is dynamic. Feminist theory is not static, it is encompassing and ever changing, making my weaving of the positions from different feminist approaches important for this holistic inquiry.

It has been argued that feminist theory is not a true theory, but “If feminism is invisible, patriarchy is invisible. And if feminism is distorted and discredited, patriarchy is safe from scrutiny, for feminism is the only critical perspective on patriarchy that

we've got" (Johnson, 1997, p. 101). Johnson (1997) expands this idea further, "once we accept the reality that patriarchy exists, we open a door that swings just one way; and once we pass through it to the other side, feminism is our best hope for figuring out where we are and what to do next" (p. 101). Also, concerning leadership and power in education, scholars argue that feminist theory should be part of the mainstream dialogue within research (Coleman, 2003). Using feminist theory within educational leadership invites an expanded vision and a fuller range of forms of knowing for educational leaders.

Since the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of females in top administrative roles and how they negotiate between being a female and a leader, feminist approach using the methodology of life history was a natural fit. Smulyan (2000) reflects, "Life-history . . . used within a feminist framework, allow for this individual, context-based approach in which the complexities of people's daily lives can be represented and examined as part of larger institutional and social systems of power and interaction" (p. 607). Therefore, my research of lived experiences of female administrators naturally aligns with feminist theory, illuminating the females' experiences within this larger patriarchal system of power.

Petra Munro (1998) in her research regarding women teachers sets the stage for my framework when she identifies herself as a "feminist" (p. 17). Munro firmly states "my evolving personal experiences, as well as my theoretical positions, are intimately and subjectively intertwined. Together, they weave the context for understanding this work" (p. 17). The feminist framework I adopted for this study does not mean a single approach, but weaves different orientations together. Johnson (1997) argues, "It helps,

then, to think of various feminist approaches as threads woven together to form a whole. While the threads are distinctive in many ways, they are strongest in relation to one another” (p.113). Weaving different threads, my study shows a multifaceted and complex (Acker, 1987) picture of females in leadership that generates new insights for education.

Also, Harding (1987) recommends that feminist researchers adopt multiple epistemologies and methodologies in the effort to dismantle any notions that there is one best way to conduct research. My personal experiences, combined with an interwoven approach of liberal, radical-multicultural, post-structuralist feminist theoretical framework, worked together to serve the purpose of my study. Aspects of each feminist theory that were taken into account for my overall theoretical framework are highlighted below.

Liberal Feminist Theory. Liberal feminist theory seeks to secure equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender. The objective is for the female to reach their full potential. Liberal feminists believe that this should be accomplished through extensive legislation changes in laws and reforms. Enns and Sinacore (2005) point out:

The ideals of individual dignity, autonomy, equality, and right to seek self-fulfillment are central to liberal feminist analyses. Oppression is viewed as the consequence of rigid or inflexible gender role conditioning as well as irrational beliefs that women are less capable than men. The solutions to these problems are achieved through engaging in rational argument; overcoming traditional gender role injunctions that have limited individual achievement; and enacting institutional, legal, and legislative reforms and gender neutral policies designed to

ensure that all individuals have access to equal opportunities to exercise their free choice and skills. (p. 26-27)

Liberal feminist pursuit of equality guided my study since the four female participants are exceptional in their efforts to go against traditional societal ideas by being a female administrator even though being an administrator is a male-dominated position.

Gender roles are learned at a very early age, first from families, then at schools. These “traditional attitudes and orientations which limit their [girls’] futures unnecessarily to sexstereotyped [*sic*] occupational and family roles” (Acker, 1987, p. 423). Students’ education is laden with society’s patriarchal norms. These gendered roles define females as teachers and males as administrators (Maher & Ward, 2002). Therefore, liberal feminism applauds equal opportunities and access in all areas of society, but strongly in the area of school settings, realizing that female administrators can be role models for not only the students, but also the teachers. Liberal feminism seeks to alter society’s patterns of roles, change attitudes and use the legal system for the equality of gender to exist. For instance, Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972 needs to be supported and enforced since “athletics is a primary setting for the growth in self-esteem needed for women to compete on an equal basis with men in our society” (Maher & Ward, 2002, p. 87). Even though Title IX is most commonly known and used as a way to ensure gender equality in the area of athletics, sports are not the only area addressed by the law. The law includes ten key areas for gender equality such as: Access to Higher Education, Career Education, Education for the Pregnant and Parenting Students, Employment, Learning Environment, Math and Science, Sexual Harassment, Standardized Testing, and Technology. All of these key areas need to be supported and

enforced to increase gender equality. Unfortunately, gender legislation alone cannot ensure gender equality and the glass ceiling still exists. Hence, aspects of other parts of feminism theories were also important and applied to this study.

Radical-Multicultural Feminist Theory. Radical-Multicultural Feminist theory goes beyond the affirmation of equality of the Liberal Feminist theory to embrace females' differences (Maher & Ward, 2002). These differences include females' differences with men and differences among females due to their intersection with race, class, and other social diversity. Gender, race, and class are usually interconnected in society and the ability to illuminate differences, according to Tong (2007), will result in liberation of the oppressed. The Radical-Multicultural feminist thought emphasizes the positive value and special strengths of females' differences, building upon the notion of the whole female to create a more just and equal society (Enns and Sinacore, 2005). In fact, Dietz (2003) cites four key features of the diversity perspective of feminist ideas. First, the feminist thought emphasizes the differences, pluralities and multiplicity of females, rejecting the idea of a unifying category. Secondly, there is an emphasis on the situated historical context focusing on the sociocultural identities. The third is the political empowerment of those displaced, marginalized, exploited or oppressed under the patriarchy society. Finally, the negotiations of females are recognized and dialogues are encouraged.

This idea of knowledge for empowerment is a key component to the Radical-Multicultural feminist thought of diminishing patriarchal domination. Positioning this thought within my study, I illuminate the experiences of female administrators, giving ways to new insights and knowledge within education. I emphasized the participants'

negotiations, historical positions, and their differences within their lives elaborating how these differences are a positive contribution to society.

Post-structural Feminist Theory. Post-structural Feminist theory argues that the multiple versions of self exist at the same time and the weaving of gender subjectivity is complex and ever-shifting. Munro (1998) utilizes post-structural feminist theory to attempt to “understand how women negotiate a self within and against cultural norms and expectations” (p. 1). The idea of post-structuralism is to reject grand narratives and it “offers possibilities for reconceiving the subject, resistance and agency in more complex and powerful ways” (p. 28). Therefore, women simultaneously work with and challenge the social system; through this lens, women are not perceived as passive victims of patriarchy, but play an active role in constructing their own identities. Munro (1998) suggests that we look into the ways women negotiate the tensions between the dominant gender norms and meanings that women make through their works to reveal their standpoints concerning their dynamic identities. A critical idea for this inquiry is women’s multiple roles and how these women continually construct their identities through their interactions with others within schools or school districts.

Denzin (1989) draws on the work of Derrida to suggest that looking into a person’s life needs to adopt multiple lenses, including context, language and symbols. Furthermore, these lenses do not stay the same. The experiences, when deconstructed, provide multiple meanings to generate possible new perceptions and insights. Possible examples of women leaders’ identities that contribute to their generating multiple meanings are their role of administrators, love relationships, mothers, teachers, and counselors, to name just a few.

Conclusion. In summary, combining several thoughts within my feminist theoretical framework creates an interlaced, enhanced framework that leads to new insights into the field of education. Although these three feminist thoughts have some contradictions, the basic principal of social justice for females connects them together. I intertwined the three thoughts together to form a unifying feminist lens for my study. The liberal feminist theory brings to my research the idea that schools need to realize that female administrators can be role models and through laws, equity will be pursued and society's stereotyping gender roles will be decreased. The radical-multicultural feminist theory enforces female differences as the site for transforming society and also suggests that gender intersects with race, class, and other factors. This allows for each individual's diversity to be celebrated while creating a sense of unity among females. The post-structural feminist theory highlights multiple versions of self, while rejecting the grand narratives of society. The self continuously changes, and the experiences of the females, when deconstructed, will provide multiple meanings and new perceptions will emerge. Therefore, I used the lenses of equality, difference, and fluidity to orient my study.

Methodology

Life history is a methodology that is especially useful in making sense of educational topics or issues. Each study and each researcher will use different features and characteristics of this methodology as there is not one right way to employ it. The life history methodology is likely to appeal to the "incurably curious who are interested in, and fascinated by, the minutiae of others' lives, and particularly in how people make sense of their experiences and of the world around them" (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p.

20). I am curious about female administrators' experiences within the patriarchal society of public schools and how they make sense of these experiences, so life history is a good methodology to address my concerns. In fact, "Feminist researchers have been particularly vocal in their support of the [life history] approach" (Goodson, 2001, p. 133). Therefore, a feminist theoretical perspective was linked with the life history methodology in my study.

The life history is a holistic, dynamic process where the researcher recognizes that the participants are collaborative partners, involved in exploring, discovery and understanding. The researcher guides the participants through remembering and telling their stories, encouraging the participants' reflections, interpretations, and insights through the process (Haglund, 2004). Through interviews, I asked open-ended questions, which was an effective way to guide the participants and facilitate the telling of their stories in a dynamic process.

Specifically, the topical life history approach was utilized through this inquiry. According to Ward (2003), a topical life history takes into account only one phase or aspect of the participants' lives. Throughout my inquiry, I focused on the experiences of four female administrators through a feminist lens. Since gender is only one aspect of the participants' lives and I did not completely look at their entire lives, and my study situated the participants within the experiences of their careers, one phase of their lives, topical life history method suited my inquiry better than other forms of life history.

Boldly, Dhunpath (2000) suggests, "the life history approach is probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience" (p. 544). Life history emphasizes

each person's experience, while highlighting their dynamic self interactions within the larger social context. While emphasizing their experiences, their impulses, instincts, memories, and dreams are told as stories to the researcher. Topical life history methodology was a good way to reveal the stories of these females as powerful tools, providing data from real people, emerging and rich in detail.

Criteria for a Good Life History

Credibility

To ensure credibility, my study provided prolonged engagements with each participant, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks, and triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Because of the numerous interviews and observations completed during this process of prolonged engagement, numerous themes of similarities and differences emerged, indicating that I spent an adequate length of time with each participant. Through my field notes and researcher's journal, I found my notes contained thick, rich description that Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) calls transforming events. Transforming events is only found by being close to the participant and being a part of the event, even if only by observing. Through my four month research, I maintained this prolonged engagement of interviews and observations with each participant.

Peer debriefing was utilized in several capacities within this inquiry. First, my peer served as someone I discussed my preliminary findings and thoughts. Lather (2004) discusses how researchers, especially with a feminist perspective, can use a peer to shake, disrupt and shift her feminist investments. My peer provided feedback, while challenging

me to continuously refine and redirect my thoughts, ideas and emerging themes through my inquiry.

Through member checking, I sought each participant's assistance in verifying her own data. The participants had the opportunity to look over their transcripts for any additional information they wanted to add or modify. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) this activity is a critical process in establishing credibility. The member check provides a way for the researcher to find out what the participants think about their stories and analyses (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The member check is another way that data emerges, and where participants' interpretations, even if different from the researcher are valued and appreciated.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree in which a study's findings can be applied to other situations and with other respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). I used the strategy of thick description during the inquiry through the major sources of data of interviews, observations, and documents. While analyzing the data, I described each participant's experiences in detail and contexts so that readers can find adequate information to establish the degree of similarity between the cases in my study and the case to which findings might be transferred.

Selection of the participants

The individuals selected to participate in the research included females who were serving as leaders within the public school system. The participants for this study are four female leaders from various schools. The female leaders consisted of an elementary principal, a high school principal, an athletic director, and a superintendent. The females

vary in age, time spent in the public school arena, and size of the schools that employ them. The population included three school systems with various sizes, with two of the female leaders from the same school district.

Purposive and convenience sampling was used in finding participants for this study. These types of sampling are usually used within a life history research (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). According to Patton (2002), “Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). All participants selected for this study fit the criteria of being female, an educational administrator within their school systems, and exhibited characteristics that provided rich data. I chose four females to produce a fuller, richer description. Convenience sampling was also utilized since all four participants were easily accessible because of the time constraints of this study and the participants’ job requirements. The position of administrator is a highly demanding and time-consuming profession; therefore, all female participants needed to be easily accessible to fit their time schedules and the time table of this study.

Procedures

First, I obtained consent from the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board. Following approval from the institution, I sent out invitation letters to female leaders known through social networking and/or prior working relationships. Once the letters were received, I contacted, through telephone, four female school leaders to ensure that the time constraints of their jobs would allow them to have the time to participate in this research study.

After receiving verbal consent to participate, I drove to each participant's school to discuss the study and get her signature on the informed consent document. I informed the participant of the confidentiality of her name, school district, and all data collected for this study. I informed her of all IRB protocol, in order to gain trust for the participant to feel comfortable in sharing her experiences with me. At this initial meeting, I set up a time and date for the first initial interview. All of the participants but one, because of convenience, wanted to use their offices for the interview process. Anticipating interruptions happening during a school day and in their offices, I decided to use this as an opportunity to observe the participants in their work environments while they exhibited leadership skills. Within a month, I conducted one interview each week from one participant, completing the first interview session. Thereafter, I conducted an interview each month with each participant for a total of three interviews in three months. Within those three months, I observed each participant in the workplace before the interviews and after the interviews. Also during this three month prolonged engagement with the participants, I completed an observation of a school event and I analyzed the personal and historical documents of each participant that was given to me from the participants or I found through research.

From the first, initial contact, a researcher's field log/ reflective journal was kept to record any thoughts or observations not obtained by the interview or observation process. This journal proved to be an important piece of data throughout the inquiry. I described conversations before and after each interview took place that were not audio taped, provided initial insights and reflections on how I thought the interview had progressed, and wrote notes on themes I wanted to discuss more in following interview

opportunities. Any time I had any contact with the participants, I recorded in this journal what happened during the email exchange, phone call, interview, or observation. This provided me a place to reflect, expand, and question emerging ideas that might be helpful during the data analysis.

Data Collection

Interview

The initial method of data collection was based on interviews with each participant. “A one-to-one interview conversation between informant and researcher is perhaps the most commonly used strategy for collecting life history data” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 27-28). The general, first interview questions were compiled and agreed upon by my committee and advisor. The initial interview questions (see Appendix I) contained twelve open-ended questions regarding personal experiences, educational experiences, career preparation, mentors influencing their career choice, changes about their careers, and difficulties in their leadership roles. These open-ended questions allowed me to follow participants’ responses and go beyond the written questions to collect rich data. All interviews were audio taped and then transcribed. For the following interviews, I used questions generated from the first interview or the previous interviews. Additionally, during the interviews I would stop the audio recording when the interviews were interrupted by telephone calls or people dropping by the participants’ offices with questions or problems. Even though I would observe these interactions, because of ethical concerns on issues of privacy, confidentiality, and areas of participants’ consent, I did not audio record these moments. The spontaneous interactions provided rich description for my field log and researcher’s journal.

Observation

I observed all but one participant in the workplace before and after interviews and all participants at a school activity they were required to attend, most being athletic events because of the time period of my research. During all of the observations, I kept extensive notes. While I spent time in their districts, I was privileged to observe the intimate workings of each participant's leadership position. For instance, before and after interviews I was allowed to observe phone conversations, initial contact of parent meetings, and interactions with teachers concerning a myriad of issues. These observations afforded a unique insight into the ways female administrators negotiate gender, conflict, politics, and self.

Personal Artifacts

I drew detailed floor plans of the offices, noting spatial arrangements and types of artifacts the females had in their offices. These artifacts included photographs, awards, books, wall hangings, and personal notes/cards. I asked to make copies of several personal letters and notes given to them by stakeholders within their school districts, as well as personal ones from family and friends. These details allowed for a deeper glimpse into each participant's life, since these particular artifacts were showcased in their offices. The artifacts gave me a different lens to view their professional and personal lives.

Historical Documents

I reviewed documents such as newspapers, board minutes, the districts strategic plan, and the demographic information for each district. The newspaper was an interesting source, finding articles that related to important historical events named from

their interviews, articles that were related to each individual and the conflicts they mentioned in their interviews. The demographic information contained aggregate student performance data, financial data, district demographics, and personnel demographics for each district.

Additionally, I went to each district's internet home page to gain additional information. These websites provided information about the district's priorities and modes of communication between the parents, students, teachers, and administration. They also included information concerning classes offered, personnel, job vacancies, district mottos, letters posted by the superintendent and a schedule of events concerning activities within the school districts.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis started with the transcription of the audiotapes after each individual interview. Within the life history methodology, analysis begins as soon as the researcher starts working with each participant (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible following each interview, and the transcription was given to the participant for member checking as soon as the transcription was completed. I transmitted some of the transcripts by email and some were delivered personally to the participants. Some of the participants made notes of reflection concerning some of the stories they told, some made notes to make their stories more clear to the researcher, and others made comments that they hoped they did not actually talk as recorded on the transcripts within their professional lives. At times, because of time constraints from the participant's administrative jobs, they just looked over the transcripts, without a response to anything within the transcripts.

Following the transcription process I used Wolcott's (2001), Patton's (2002), and Emerson, et al.'s (1995) ideas of literally hand sorting through the data of the transcriptions and observations. I printed multiple copies of the data and while reading and rereading the data, I made notes in the margins and attached notes on certain ideas about shared themes. According to the notes on the data, I cut out the data and placed them onto note cards so they could easily be sorted from the patterns that emerged.

Johnson-Bailey (2004) states that because of my feminist lens, I should pay special attention to the nonverbal indicators such as silences, code words, and communication patterns since females usually relate important information through these nonverbal indicators. Emerson, et al. (1995) refers to open coding where the researcher should read with an eye toward identifying any and all ideas. I cut out any data that might lead to shared ideas, or emergent themes that were specific to a particular participant.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) emphasize that within life stories, a researcher needs to make room for the emergent story since the participants are complex, dynamic individuals. Taking this advice, I continually kept coding data throughout the research process as the stories emerged, immersing myself within the data. Moreover, I took some time for what Patton (2002) refers to as a state of incubation. I stepped away from the data for a period of time, allowing for a "space of awareness . . . toward a clear and profound awareness of the experiences and its meanings" (p. 486). Taking this time away from the data allowed me to come back with fresh eyes and a new awareness for the data analysis process.

During peer-debriefing sessions, my peer and I continuously sorted through the data to uncover any ideas that I did not uncover in my coding processes. The new information from my peer generated new ideas for my research. Kramp (2004) describes the data analysis and finding revealing themes that “will reveal themselves to you in each narrative are like threads, that when woven together, create a pattern with a plotlike structure. Your task is to grab on to those themes by lifting appropriate words and phrases of the narrator from the text” (p. 117). Through my coding process, the immersion and incubation period, and peer debriefing, I utilized this simile to the fullest by grabbing on to these threads and weaving them together through a feminist lens for a rich, varied analysis.

Conclusion

By weaving different perspectives of feminist thought together, my study shows a complex picture of females in administration. Liberal, radical-multicultural, post-structural feminist thoughts are the aspects I took into account for my overall theoretical framework. My feminist theoretical framework was linked together with the life history methodology, a methodology especially useful in making sense of educational topics or issues. To ensure credibility, I had prolonged engagement with each participant, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks and triangulation. I used thick, rich description through the data of interviews, observations, and documents to increase transferability of my study. I sorted through all forms of data for a rich, varied analysis to increase my understanding of the female administrative participants. Chapter four and five contains the stories of the females who participated in the study, with the analysis of the themes that emerged during their stories.

Chapter IV

Women's Experiences, Difficulties, and Navigations

This chapter provides an analysis of the data collected in accordance with the methods set forth in Chapter Three. Data was gathered through interviews, observations, personal artifacts, and historical documents. This chapter is divided into four different sections. First, the female participants of my study are introduced. Secondly, the experiences of the females and how those experiences influenced their career decisions of educational leadership are explored. The difficulties in the female's career paths of leadership are discussed. Finally, the female's navigations through those difficulties are illuminated. The chapter concludes with a summary of the data.

Participants

The four female participants for this study are referred to by pseudonyms and each pseudonym has no connection to the participant or her story. All four females are experienced leaders with at least nineteen years of experience in the public school system and at least thirteen years as an administrative leader.

Joan

Joan is currently fifty-two years old. She has been an educational leader for nineteen years and has been in education for a total of thirty years. She has a degree in secondary business and an elementary and secondary physical education degree. But, to be more marketable, she has obtained teaching certificates in a myriad of subjects. She holds a master's degree and has sixteen additional hours above her graduate degree. These sixteen hours were taken in order for her to get her superintendent's certificate. Her career includes teaching and coaching basketball at three schools, and in the third

school she took the junior high principal position. She held the junior high principal position for twelve years when she moved up the career ladder and took the high school principal position when the male principal left to take an assistant superintendent position outside of her school district. He left in the middle of the year and she did both the junior high and high school principal jobs until the end of that school year. She currently has been in the position of high school principal for six years, and is the only female in the school's history to hold this position. She is married and her husband, also in education, retired recently from an educational leadership position. She has two grown children, both successful in their chosen fields, which is not education.

Sandy

Sandy is forty-two years old. She has been an educational leader for thirteen years and has been in education for a total of nineteen years. She has a biology science education degree. She has certificates to teach biology, anatomy, and physiology at the junior high and high school levels. She holds a master degree and a doctoral degree. Her career path includes one school where she taught science classes and coached girls' basketball. During her teaching and coaching, she was named co-athletic director over women's sports at this particular high school, within a multi-school district. When she was twenty-nine years old, she applied for and was named the head athletic directors position over every school in the multi-school district. She is the only female to ever hold this position in the school's history, and she is the only female to ever be named to a multi-school athletic director position within the state she resides. She has two small children, both under the age of five.

Dana

Dana is fifty-four years old. She has been an educational leader for twenty years and in education for thirty-two years. She has a degree in elementary education, a master's degree in educational administration and a doctoral degree. Her career path includes teaching at one school. Within this school system she has taught every grade in the elementary school system, from the transitional first grade class all the way to sixth grade. She then became the elementary principal in this school system, never wanting to move up the career ladder. She is married with two children. Both children are grown and successful, with one in education.

Mariah

Mariah is fifty-nine years old. She has been an educational leader for twenty-five years and in education for thirty-eight years. She has an elementary education degree and has a certificate to teach English. She has taught in two different states, teaching elementary students in one state and middle school students in another. While getting her master's and her doctoral degree, she taught at the college instead of in a public school. After receiving her graduate degrees, she went back to the same school she had previously left and became a curriculum specialist for the secondary level grades. She eventually became the curriculum director for K-12, a job she held for twenty years. She is currently a superintendent of schools, having held this job for two years. She is the first female superintendent of her school district. She is married and has two grown children, one of whom is adopted.

Becoming Educational Leaders: Female's Life Experiences

Each female leader's own individual experiences contributed to how she became an educational leader. Each participant through their stories describes her career path. Their stories captures personal and social dimensions of their experiences while moving up the career ladder. Even though each female leader has unique experiences of her own, their journeys have emergent patterns that connect them. Strands of their stories include male mentorship and expectations, leadership experiences, and influences of political or social situations.

Male Mentorship and Expectations

Shakeshaft et al. (2007) described a mentor as someone who takes an active part in developing another person. A mentor is important at all ages of life and can be anyone who takes an active role in the development of a person's life and direction. Crutcher (1992) found that it is important for a female to have a mentor because it increases self-esteem. Unfortunately, with the low numbers of female in leadership positions, most females rely on males to serve as their mentors while they are involved in moving up the career ladder in leadership positions. My study also revealed that male mentorship in the female participants seemed to have a greater influence than any female mentoring, such as being tapped or pushed into the leadership position by male superiors. An additional finding was that they identified with their fathers from their childhood.

Relating to Fathers. All of the females talk about their childhoods in a positive manner, and all females felt they were brought up in a loving, safe, and secure home. All of the females, except for Joan, whose father died when she was three years old, even though they had two-parent, loving, secure homes, felt they related to their father more

than their mothers. Mariah stated, “I am a whole lot like my dad and I identify with my dad. And my personality is like my dad” (Interview 2). Sandy agreed even going as far to say that her father “gets it more . . . and he’s just kind of more in tune” (Interview 3). Being more “in tune” means that her father understood her leadership position and the difficulties she faces on a daily basis because he held leadership positions within his profession while she was growing up. She and her father are very close and Sandy contributed how she got started on this career path to him.

As Dana gets older she thinks she has taken on her father’s characteristics. She laughingly declared, “Well it kind of freaks me out to say it, but I almost think [like] my dad. The older I’ve gotten the more I think I act and think like him . . . you know it kind of scares me” (Interview 3). This idea of relating to the father was not found in the literature review. All three of the females’ mothers were “stay at home” moms, which seems to indicate that they observed their fathers taking leadership roles in their professions, and their connection to their fathers might have influenced their becoming leaders themselves.

Most Mentors were Men. These female’s identification with their fathers was carried over into their professional paths. According to the female participants, most of their mentors within their profession have been males. Sandy attributes three men mentors being “key in decisions that I’ve made” (Interview 1). These men and decisions include: her father directing her into sports, her principal telling her to get her master’s degree, and her superintendent encouraging her to get her doctorate. But, she was very adamant that, “had my dad not encouraged me . . . I wouldn’t be where I am” (Interview

1). These male mentors, in her mind, were pivotal in her career, a career that is mostly a male-dominated career.

Mariah listed a former superintendent as a mentor, citing several examples of why this particular male was an influence on her career path. She attributed the fact that she was on the cutting edge of the effective teaching movement because of his influence. Another influential mentor was a former principal from her first years of teaching who now conducts leadership training for teachers and administrators. During her first year of being a superintendent, the state she worked in initiated a leadership program for setting up mentors for new superintendents and she picked a male superintendent whom she had known, but never worked with in any school system. What was interesting to me was that this mentor never initiated any contact with Mariah. She mentioned how she never had a chance to call him and would catch him to visit on the way out of meetings they both attended. Mariah stated, “I would have loved . . . really should have taken more time to talk to him” (Interview 2). It never occurred to Mariah that he had never contacted her during that whole first year of “supposed” mentoring, until I asked her in the next interview.

I asked why he had never contacted her during that first year. She responded, “I hadn’t even thought about that. I mean that might have been nice, but, you know, we’re big people and plus I’d see him every month at the superintendent’s meeting and, of course, one time I did grab him and share a little something with him. But, you know, he’s headed out the door, you know” (Interview 3). In my field notes, I wondered why she felt the need to defend his position of his lack of mentoring and I wondered why she did not try to find a female mentor. When I asked the last question of why not pick a

female superintendent, she responded with she “hadn’t thought about it” (Interview 3). Since the superintendent position is a male-dominated position (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2001), female superintendents are hard to find when she picked a mentor for an entry year into the superintendency, so she picked a male superintendent whom she knew previously.

Joan described a choice in her life that was paramount to her becoming an educator and eventually an educational leader. This choice was the choice to go to college. Joan had moved to another state to work during the summer after she graduated high school. She was trying to make the decision of either going straight into the work force, or going to college. Her male high school basketball coach called her and advised her to go to college and not to let the college educational opportunity pass her by, influencing her to take the college route. She stated, “I immediately made a reversal, you know, in my direction and went on to college and I didn’t regret it” (Interview 1). She did not question his advisement and immediately did what this male mentor advised her. Her husband was another man instrumental in her furthering her career. He encouraged her to start working on her master’s degree. Through a joint effort of each taking classes every other semester, because of small children and money issues, they both finished about the same time. An interesting part of this question emerged when she stated, “So he was very instrumental in allowing me, you know, I mean I was uh, uh, he wasn’t selfish and thinking only he should have the master’s degree or whatever” (Interview 1).

When she realized that she said the word “allowed” she stammered and changed her wording, redirecting the conversation to the idea it was a “joint effort” (Interview 1). It is interesting to note here that there is a contradiction within Joan’s language usage.

While Joan values the thought of a joint effort between her and her husband, when she stated that she was “allowed” to get her master’s degree revealed that she saw it as his “permission” perhaps at the time she went on to an advanced studies. A post-structural feminist lens locates such a contradiction as demonstrating both female’s passiveness and agency at the same time. Munro (1998) states:

The ‘discursive subject’, rather than being seen as a passive subject wholly determined by social forces, entails, according to Heckman (1995), subjects finding agency within the discursive spaces open to them in their particular historical period. Agency is a product of discourse . . . The non-unitary subject that is in flux, fragmented and decentralized has multiple sites from which to engage in acts of agency. (pp. 34-35)

Seen through this lens, Joan demonstrated both resistance and compliance to gendered norms.

Joan does have other mentors that she mentioned who were not men. In fact, Joan describes her mother as being a “strong woman as a mentor” (Interview 2). Interestingly, Joan’s father passed away when she was three years old. By the time her father passed away, Joan had six brothers and sisters. Her mother “had to raise all of us kids, herself. She never remarried and so . . . you know, struggle, worked at minimum wage jobs” (Interview 1). She saw her mother struggle, and her mother continually wanted her to stay in school. Another strong mentor for Joan was a high school, female, English teacher. This English teacher had a huge impact on Joan’s life, staying after school so Joan could do janitorial work for extra money during the school year, taking her home with her over weekends because “she loved us” (Interview 1). She attributed her success

to these three mentors, her coach, mom and English teacher. Joan reported they “made me do more than I would have done otherwise” (Interview 1).

Joan was assertive, strong, and confident on a higher level than some of the other participants. This difference may be attributed to her having more female mentors than male mentors. While observing her at a school athletic event, I noticed that she never had a chance to sit down and enjoy the event because she was continuously networking or communicating with community members. At all times, she looked each person in the eye and her confidence level was apparent in her posture, hand shake, and voice communication. Several times she was assertive and went up to groups of people to start conversations or to welcome individuals. The strong, female mentors’ characteristics are apparent in her leadership style.

Dana’s story is a slightly different story. Dana is an elementary principal, which the literature review shows that there are more females in this leadership role than any other positions in school systems. Dana’s mentors, besides the connection she has to her father, were all female. She cited a former female principal and a college professor from one of her master’s level classes as being mentors. Her former principal told her to get her master’s degree to become a principal, an innovative idea she had not thought of before her principal mentioned this notion. But, she specifically named her college professor as a mentor because this mentor:

flipped my whole perspective on education upside down and sideways,
crystallized things for me that I intuitively knew but didn’t know that there was a
theory behind it. And then when I became the principal, she came in and did staff

development with my staff. I couldn't have done what I've done with this school if it hadn't been for her. (Interview 1)

Dana continued her relationships with her mentors even when she became the educational leader. Through conversations with Dana before and after interviews that were not audio taped, I realized that Dana continuously seeks knowledge and uses the expertise of her mentors to bring their knowledge to her faculty, widening the mentoring circle.

All four females discussed mentors' influences, but the majority of these mentors are male. The only female participant who had all of her mentors as female is an experienced leader within the elementary spectrum of public education. Most of the male mentors for the other females lead the females into new educational thought processes, which led to new jobs. The females never seemed to question their male mentors and immediately did what the male wanted them to do concerning their paths. Joan did acknowledge her mother's influence as a strong female mentor, but Joan was the only participant who grew up without a father. After her father passed away, her mother never remarried, so all Joan knew growing up was her mother's strong influence in her life. Joan's mentor influence included both males and females. The elementary principal, Dana, besides relating to her father, had only female mentors. It is important to note that there are more females a part of leadership positions in the elementary career level than any other level in public schools (Grogan & Brunner, 2005), so Dana is around more females and female leaders.

A part of the mentorship expectations of the females is the mentor suggesting they pursue leadership opportunities and pushing or tapping them for job opportunities, as we will see below.

Pushed into the Job. Another similar theme that weaved through most of the female participant stories was that they were “tapped or pushed” into their leadership position by a mentor or another leader within the school system in which they worked. The literature review found some females, who were in the leadership positions within public schools were asked to apply or pushed into applying by a leader within their schools systems where they were teaching, and most were encouraged by mentors to pursue leadership positions. This was also true for my participants. Three out of the four participants were mentored to get their master’s degree for future doors in their careers to open for them. For instance, Dana was tapped for the job by her female principal:

I had a female principal when I was still in the classroom who called me in and said I’m getting ready to move. I am going to leave the state. If you want this job, then you need to take it. You need to get in and get your master’s right now. So, I started on my master’s and it took me three years to do it. I had to suffer through another hideous [female] principal [after her female mentor left] and after she left and the next one, when he left I interviewed for the job and got it.

(Interview 1)

In a later interview, she stated, “I never had a man say oh go get your master’s so you can be a principal some day, but I had women, two or three women tell me that” (Interview 2). Once again, more females are in the elementary principal position and they have a better opportunity to mentor prospective female leaders.

Joan has another type of story concerning her being mentored for a leadership position. When Joan went into to quit her basketball coaching duties, they asked her to be a teaching administrator until she obtained her master’s degree. “I went in to resign

from basketball . . . and a job was opening up. They actually offered it to my husband . . . and he didn't take it. So, uh yeah, and I hate to say it this way, but you know why didn't they offer it to me first? You know, uh and no hard feelings. . . I jumped at the chance because I thought it was a good career move for me and uh that is a role that I'm glad that I fell into" (Interview 1). Joan is now the high school principal and she did not apply for her current position, either. "The just offered it. I applied for neither principal's jobs. I fell into it. It's been my life story" (Interview 1). Joan's experience is another example of a typical career path for a female within public school administration.

Sandy's story was not much different from the previous two participants. A male principal who Sandy currently worked for called her in to ask her what she saw herself doing in thirty years. She knew immediately that she was not going to be in the classroom. She stated, "I remember he said to me specifically, you know that there are certain doors that could open for you but they will not open unless you have a masters and he's right. Because there are a lot jobs in education that, you know, if you want to try and move up that you can't even apply for if you don't have a master's degree, so he really pushed me" (Interview 2). After receiving her master's degree she was named the co-athletic director for one of the high schools within this multi-school district. A fellow teacher challenged her to apply for the head athletic director position when it came open. When she was hired, the superintendent encouraged her "the same way the principal encouraged me to get my masters" to get her doctoral degree. Each time the suggestions were made to further her educational degrees, Sandy never hesitated and never told her mentors no; in fact she credited the superintendent in being a "really huge part of my career" (Interview 1). An important factor revealed through my study is Sandy is

surrounded by men in her administrative role. She recently hired a female assistant athletic director to help with the lower grade level athletic responsibilities, but other than her secretary and this one other female, she is engulfed by men in and around her leadership position. This could be a contributing factor of why she has only had male mentors.

Looking at the role of the male mentorship and expectations in my participants' process of becoming educational leaders, the liberal feminist concerns of creating equal opportunity for females is clear. This goal of equality cannot be achieved by females alone, but requires the changes of societal gendered expectations and structure. This structure is oppressive to females and contributes to the societal expectations of gender roles, especially in the area of appropriate jobs for females. The male mentors in these particular female's lives show how men can be allies while living in a society of patriarchy. The male mentors encouraged these females, where many males do not encourage their female co-workers. But, in a sense that both the males and the females are so immersed within this patriarchal society, the females do not realize that they did not, as Joan puts it, "fall into" (Interview 1) their leadership role, they were in a sense, "allowed" these roles and given permission by their mentors to seek them. This creates a conflict between being allowed these positions and actively wanting or taking these leadership positions. This leads to a more passive than active position for the females in their careers.

Leadership experiences

The female leaders within this study each have a unique way of interacting with others. As a researcher I wanted to gain knowledge of how or when this leadership desire

and way of interaction developed. Several themes emerged through the interviews, observations, personal artifacts and historical documents. Each of the participants reported having at least one sibling, and each female stressed their love of school. Two of the females expressed a personal belief system and how it gave them a different lens to view their leadership position. These themes provide new insights into how their life experiences positively contributed to their career choices.

Interaction with Siblings. All of the female leaders have at least one sibling. The leaders all mention their siblings and how important these siblings were to them and their childhood. Two females, Dana and Mariah, were the oldest in their families, having only one younger brother. In fact, Mariah equates her childhood with her sibling as a “Leave it to Beaver” (Interview 2), wonderful childhood and how close her and younger brother were as children. Sandy is the middle child with an older sister and a younger brother, and she also made the claim that with her siblings it was a “great childhood, great childhood, great family” (Interview 2). Joan is the sixth child of seven, with a younger brother. She stated, “growing up was a little tough . . . it wasn’t Ozzie and Harriet days . . . I had a very loving and very you know, home life was good, just poor, which was okay” (Interview 2). All of the female leader’s interactions with their siblings during childhood, regardless of birth order, were important to their future leadership positions. Each of these participants learned qualities from having siblings that they now use as leaders. For instance each of these females cited the idea of being flexible and giving, traits that could be linked back to having siblings as a child and learning to share.

Leadership Activities before Their Leader Positions. At one time or another, each of these female leaders took on a leadership position or was a part of leadership activities.

Joan and Sandy were involved in playing basketball in all areas of their schooling, even college. Joan comments, “because of athletics it gave me a leadership role” (Interview 1). Sandy stated, “my senior year [of high school] I was one of the class officers and I was involved in a lot of stuff, but athletics that was my niche” (Interview 2). Dana was involved in many different activities including the Scouts, 4-H, music clubs and “if there was something to join, I joined it. If there was something to try, I tried it” (Interview 2). Dana’s attitude of trying new things was not just limited to her childhood. Within her capacity of leadership she mentions several times in several of the interviews that she loves to try new things educational with her school, faculty, and students. She strives to be an innovative leader, a theme that has been apparent from her childhood. Therefore, all these females share the commonality of actively constructing their identity as leaders. The participants are not passive and they exhibit ongoing effects of their early leadership activities in how they lead in the present. Miller (2005) discusses the “fluidity and malleability of identities and differences” (p. 181), this malleability of the participants’ identities contrasts to the more passive role revealed in the previous section.

Mariah discussed her leadership positions, “you know I’ve been involved in leadership positions whether it be, you know . . . from junior high on. I mean I just like to be involved . . . got in a sorority [in college] and assumed a leadership position with that. I wasn’t president, but I was rush chairman” (Interview 2). This theme of involvement was important to Mariah, stating it as one of her leadership characteristics, being involved in every process of public school including committees and organizations. In fact it is so important to her that she reported telling other aspiring female leaders to get on committees and organizations. “While you’re a teacher, you need to step up. You

need to be on staff development committee. You need to write curriculum in the summer. You need to be involved” (Interview 2). Even though this is a positive idea for all teachers who aspire to become leaders to become involved, there is a gendered expectation that a female should sacrifice herself for the good of the team. According to the research (Spencer & Kochan, 2000), a female has to work harder than a male and that includes being involved in as many committees and organizations as she can in order to have career options.

Each of the participants showed characteristics at an early age of their leadership capabilities through many different avenues and outlets. They also developed the energy and a willingness to be a catalyst for social change through these experiences.

Importance of Education. Each of the female leaders stated through the interview or during my observations with them interacting with other people while in a leadership capacity that they loved school, even while they were children. Joan commented, “I have always loved education because it was a, the happiest place that I could be . . . I always wanted to be at school . . . so, I was always there, everything at school was positive for me” (Interview 1). Mariah stated, “I absolutely loved school” (Interview 1). She went on to say, “So I think, and now I think that’s the way it is with a lot of teachers. School was a positive experience for them” (Interview 1). This emergent theme of loving school is very telling; these females became the leaders within their school systems to establish that same love of school for their students, parents, and their faculty. While observing an interaction with Dana and a small student, I heard Dana even ask the student if he loved school. The student in trouble for what he did in the classroom, replied with a stout yes, and Dana then replied that if this student truly loved school they would do the things

necessary to stay in school. Dana transferred her beliefs of school in a way that this younger student could understand and take ownership of his own love of school. During this interaction with Dana and this particular student, I noticed the importance of the layout of Dana's office. Dana's office is small, but long. Her desk is placed in front of the window in the back of the room, but I rarely saw her in her desk when I had the opportunities to observe her. While participating in conferences, she sits in one of the two comfortable chairs facing each other in the front part of the office. The comfortable, low light atmosphere seemed to help in diffusing tense situations with students, faculty, and community members during the meetings I observed. In particular, even though this particular student was in her office for a discipline problem, the student seemed to relax because the tone of the meeting was initially set by the reflection of her warm and inviting office.

Faith/Personal Belief

Both Dana and Mariah expressed a Christian perspective and how a higher power destined them to be in the positions of leadership. Dana believed, "I don't think we cross anybody's path by accident. I don't think there's a family here or a teacher here that hasn't been, for some reason, appointed to be here at this time and this place . . . as Christians we need to work that out and say okay what can I do for this person. What can I learn from this person that's crossed my path and that includes the students, the teachers, their parents, you know, the community as a whole" (Interview 2). She expressed, very clearly, that God forges her path. Mariah elaborated, "My faith is real important . . . well you pray a lot. That is very helpful and I always wonder how people that don't have that faith deal with things" (Interview 1). Each day, both of these female

leaders utilize their faith and they make their decisions and lead with their personal belief system in mind. They reported utilizing their faith to reflect on their daily decisions that are made in their positions and to guide them in making choices on those difficult decisions. Their personal belief system has been beneficial to them in how they interact with others around them in their career and it assists them in getting through the obstacles of their careers. This is a positive difference from the other participants in that their religious faith supports their leadership role. Multicultural Feminist theory acknowledges how gender intersects with other social factors; in this case, religion plays a role.

Summary. Each of these themes interconnects to emphasize the positive value and special strengths of the female leaders. Their childhood relationships with their siblings, their love of school, and their faith illuminate their shared experiences and their differences to positively show how each female leader contributes to society. Also, these female leaders continually construct their identities through their interactions with others. Their experiences of siblings, school and their faith helped in developing a complex, but relevant view of their own particular reality and their sense of self is not passive. They negotiate their identity in a way that is meaningful for them through their interactions, their finding a profession that incorporates their love of school, and through their faith.

Political/Social Situations

In a topical life history methodology it is important to situate the female leaders' experiences in a historical, social, and political context. Each of the female leaders described historical or political situations that help to shape their identities and positions them within a leadership capacity. The age of each female leader is highly important when viewing how political and social events are connected to their experiences. With

two of the female leaders in their fifties, they mention the historical moment when John F. Kennedy was killed, a major political and historical moment for them and their experiences. One, in her early forties, equates all of her experiences and her leadership position to the passage of Title IX. Almost all of the female leaders discussed the political issues associated with education because of the current issues of technology, money, and political agendas from state leaders.

JFK. The death of President John F. Kennedy was tragic in the eyes of many Americans. Mariah's important historical moment was "when President Kennedy died . . . when he was killed every person grieved" (Interview 3). She feels that the death of President Kennedy was a time when most citizens were united. Now, she feels that the country and most citizens are fractured, with everyone having their own agendas. When Mariah decided to become an educational leader, one thing that was important to her and her leadership style is the bringing together of people to work on things as a team.

Another female leader who mentioned Kennedy's tragic death was Joan. Even though she was young when this historical event happened, she remembered that "he was publicized so much and he had such a perfect, we all thought, life and family, and he was some of the pretty people" (Interview 3). She equated good-looking men and women to success, saying "this is bad to say but you don't see successful people that are ugly . . . successful people were pretty people. Tall." (Interview 3). In my field notes and observations, one thing that I noticed about Joan is her tall, perfect appearance. Every time that I meet with Joan, she was in tailored clothing, heels, with her make-up and hair always in place. Later in another interview, she mentioned that she never goes anywhere without matching clothes, hair and make-up in place because she is always in the role of

a leader and does not want anyone to think she is not successful. The idea of success equating to being tall and beautiful is interesting. Joan does not push away her own female consciousness of wanting to appear beautiful, a positive trait that most females strive to accomplish. What needs to be questioned is the negative duality side of this could be an unconscious need to be accepted in her leadership roles by male expectations of what the female leader should appear to be at all times. For instance she mentioned a story of being strong:

I remember walking when I was a junior high principal. I was walking down the hall to my superintendent's office and I had on high heels that made a lot of noise. And I was clipping along and I remember the superintendent telling the high school principal, now that's the sound of a strong woman. Now what does that mean [pause] I don't know what that meant. I was walking at a good pace, not slow and feeble I guess, had my high heels on, and he thought it sounded like a strong woman. I'm tall, that grants you authority. I can look people in the eye and let them know what I think. (Interview 2)

Here her subjection to male's expectations is clear. However, Joan's embrace of her own feminine traits should not be dismissed in a simple way if we value female's differences. The issue is whether Joan can negotiate through contradictions to claim her agency, while not giving in to male notions of female beauty.

Limited Job Pursuits of Females. In previous time periods there were not a lot of professional opportunities for females. For instance, Dana stated:

I think it [gender] was a factor in my original choice as a career because I originally wanted to be an attorney. And being an educator which is what was the

easy thing to do for women at that time. There wasn't a whole lot out there, you know, people weren't lining up and asking us to be engineers or, you know, mathematicians or [pause], it just, the door wasn't as open for women to look at a whole host of careers. It was either teaching or nursing and that's pretty much the two girl things. So, I think it probably impacted my original direction. (Interview 3)

Joan discussed how the only professional people she knew were teachers and how this influenced her career choice. "I never knew any, I knew no doctors, lawyers, no physical therapists. You know they weren't in my life. Teachers were in my life. So as I had the opportunity to get an education, that's naturally where I went . . . I never thought about not being in education" (Interview 1). So, we become what we know. Most young females only saw females in the profession of teaching, and since Joan loved school this was a natural procession of thought process for her.

When Sandy was asked why she thought she was the first female to hold her leadership position of athletic director, she comments, "at that time, the whole perspective on women and working and all that was much different . . . I would certainly think that when I leave this position that whether they hire a man after me, but the future is certainly, the door has been opened for another woman to have this job" (Interview 2). This statement that Sandy made during the second interview is particularly noteworthy. For future female leaders, the door has been opened for them by the educational pioneers like Sandy, Joan and Mariah, who have proven that females can lead in public school systems.

Racial Tensions. Mariah also discussed the racial tensions that happened after her high school education and the civil rights movement that happened before her high school education. She maintained that during her high school years all of the social and racial groups intermingled, and it “influenced my life” (Interview 1). Also, Mariah struggled with the unjust situation of the Civil Rights Movement and she still struggles against and the prejudice of today, “You know, I think the civil rights movement, I mean I still struggle with that. I still cannot believe that there is, you know, prejudice, and there is. Just is” (Interview 3). This working together for a more just society emerged very predominantly within Mariah’s leadership characteristics, and she cited on numerous occasions that her ability to bring people together is a character trait she uses in her professional life. In her previous leadership positions during college, she continuously used her skills of bringing people together to solve problems within the community. I believe that Mariah became a leader in the educational system, consciously or subconsciously to help people to come together as a society and to reduce prejudice while increasing tolerance. This provides a good example of gender and race intersecting for women leaders’ commitment to social justice.

Government Assistance. The only female leader to mention any political government programs was Joan. Through government assistance, Joan was able to work during her junior high and high school years doing janitorial work for the school that she was attending. Also, when she graduated high school she considers herself very lucky, “There was some government assistance that hadn’t been before and allowed me to go to college. And I think whatever political, there had to be something political behind the programs to pay to fund poor people that allowed me to go to college. The called it the

basic educational opportunity grants, the BEOG and there was also something called the CETA” (Interview 3). This political grant money was the reason Joan was able to go to college and become a successful educational leader. This experience of government assistance influenced her leadership style in her mentoring other young students to use any means necessary to increase their education. She mentioned several times in the interviews that education is something that nobody can take away from a person and that education is a way to be successful no matter what background of life a person comes from. She also mentioned how she wants all her students to be “warm and fed so they are open to learning” (Interview 2). She talked about how for some kids, “School is the best place to be. School is the warmest place to be. It’s got the best food. There are the nicest people there” (Interview 2). These examples of what is important to Joan clearly goes back to her social economic background and the fact that school was the place where she felt the safest, school was a place where she was fed, and school was a place where she was warm. Joan is committed to social justice and leads with this commitment.

Title IX. Title IX is very important for females in athletics, as well as in job opportunities. Sandy highlighted this important legislation as significant in her and attributed it to her being a successful athletic director:

I have a picture in my office that’s and it’s a copy of something that was in a magazine. I want to say it was like around 1920, and the caption now says, “Why we need Title IX” and it shows these girls with basketballs and their hair all up in a bun and these kind of boot-looking shoes. You know, what they would normally wear with a basketball, but at the bottom it says that they shouldn’t under no

circumstances are they allowed to eat chocolate. They must drink milk for their healthy bones, and I mean just crazy, crazy, crazy stuff, but people thought, and so I think that just the mentality of women in general has changed. (Interview 2)

This picture was intriguing to me. It indicated just how important Title IX is to Sandy and her career path. Sandy has several other personal artifacts in her office, but she only brought up this one artifact in the interviews, showing the importance it holds for her and what it means from her position of leadership. Title IX gave young girls the opportunity to play sports and it paved the way for young girls to have more opportunities within the work force. It afforded Sandy the opportunity to get her college paid for through playing basketball and because of her playing a sport, it led to her position of leadership in athletics now.

Right Now in Education. Mariah believed that right now “is the scariest of all, politically. I mean I’ve never been in a position where my day-to-day fate is resting on the politicians like today” (Interview 3). Dana agreed, “The social climate of our culture is impacting the schools” (Interview 2). Mariah, Dana and Joan throughout their interviews discussed how political times and technology is changing the face of education. Dana commented “the future technology and information systems and knowledge . . . is really going to impact education” (Interview 2). Joan agreed even going as far as naming some technology, “the communication factors with MySpace or Facebook or which ever one is the most popular now, and Twittering and I am sure there’s lot of other things that I am not even aware of” (Interview 1). Mariah discussed the amount of money spent on education, “I don’t care who you are, as a superintendent, right now you are not sleeping, worrying about the budget” (Interview 3). This is a

turbulent time with politicians and budgets, but an exciting time with the new technology in education. This historical time in education provides these females an opportunity to use all of their experiences and what they gained from those experiences from past political and social situations to work together with their faculty to get them through this rocky time in education.

Summary. Situating these female leaders within political and historical time frames brings to light experiences that contributed to these females becoming the educational leaders they are in education. These experiences of John F. Kennedy's death, their limited job pursuits, racial tensions, government assistance and the present issues within education, gave these females insights into how to lead and rocketed them into leadership positions in way they can use these insights. Consciously, none of the participants exclusively named these political/social events as a catalyst for their becoming leaders, but I believe that they provide backgrounds for them to live through those past experiences to reach their current leadership positions.

In examining the personal and social dimensions of these women becoming leaders, we can see both negative and positive experiences of how these particular females became leaders in public schools. It is a complex picture in which women are subject to men's expectations while assertive of their own capacities for leadership.

Difficulties in Female's Career Path of Leadership

Each of these females cited several difficulties they have encountered in their leadership positions. The difficulties from the school community include the parents, faculty, community members and the school board. Sometimes these leaders faced legal issues and political issues. Not only do they deal with professional issues, but also they

deal with family and personal issues. I will discuss these difficulties through the following three realms: school community, legal/political issues, and family and personal issues.

School Community

Within the community of public education, there are many stakeholders who have a say on the decisions of each particular school district. Those stakeholders sometimes create difficulties for the female leader. Every stakeholder has their own agendas, desires and problems. A job requirement of the leader is to listen to each stakeholder and make decisions based on the information given to them. At the point the decision is made, several stakeholders will not get exactly what they want and therefore they cause difficulties for the female leader. The stakeholders involved include: parents, faculty, community, and the school board. Sandy described the difficulties in education, “In education you are always going to have controversy, you are always going to have an angry parent, you are always going to have a problem with a teacher, a coach, or the facilities or with a kid” (Interview 1). Each of these entities poses different difficulties for the female leader.

Parents of students. Several of the female leaders cited parents as being a difficulty they encounter during their leadership. Mariah said that she encounters “very sensitive parent things and there are parents that aren’t happy” (Interview 1), on a frequent basis. Dana agreed, “There’s two main problems in leadership role . . . or with parents of the kids that you are working with” (Interview 1). One of the problems Dana reported as a difficulty was that parents who are affluent within their profession and think they know more about educating children than she does with her degree in education.

If it is a socioeconomically affluent district, they [educational leaders] run into that more because the doctors and the lawyers will come in and say you don't know this . . . not even say it but they are implying it: 'I know more than you do.' And they don't know more than you about their kid or what makes that kid tick. (Interview 1)

Also, another issue raised by the female leaders is the lack of trust from parents within the educational system. Joan expressed this as an ever-increasing problem, "the biggest change that really causes me concern is the lack of trust that the school, that parents have in the school" (Interview 1). Joan felt that the old adage of when a student gets in trouble at school, they get in trouble at home is a thing of the past because of the mistrust of parents in the schools. "Now it is more defending the child even though they know they're wrong. And that is probably the hardest thing is the lack of trust that parents have in the school, to trust us to . . . We have to convince them, yes, they did do this, or yes they are wrong" (Interview 1). Dana commented on parents not accepting their child's wrongdoing, "Parents who, first of all, are in denial about whatever needs to be done with their kid or what is going with their kid and will not accept your expertise as an educator" (Interview 1). Joan felt this has to do with how different parenting styles have changed over the years, even since she started in her educational leadership career. Each parent, with every different student, brings their issues to the female educational leader for her to try to solve. It seems that when there are issues happening in society, education is the first place that society places blame, hence the lack of trust from the parents. Also, if the parents did not have a good experience in their educational careers,

they will lash out at the school systems anytime they feel conflict between their children and the schools.

Faculty. The faculty who work for the female leaders brings a whole new set of difficulties for the female leaders. The first issue that some female leaders have to face is their change of status within their school systems. Most female leaders are hired from the school system where they were teaching. Their staff who now works for them were once their teaching peers. Dana stated, “The thing I struggles with the most when I first became a principal was these people that I was now their principal, I had been their friend and colleague and coworker and now all of a sudden I’m their principal” (Interview 1). In fact some of the most difficult issues concerning working with teachers previously are the female teachers. Mariah had this problem, “I can remember two instances, both with women actually, where I finally had to say look what’s going on, we’ve got to clear this up and it did after that point” (Interview 2). Sandy has had several problems with other females in her school district. A few female administrators were angry because one of their faculty members did not get Sandy’s leadership position:

I’ll never forget and I hadn’t been the AD (Athletic Director) for three month and I had a principal become unhinged and wondered what are you going to do about so and so and so and so. And I’m like well and I said what I knew and she threw her pen across the table and said are you kidding me? And, you know, that was again an athletic director at her particular school wasn’t happy that he didn’t get the job . . . at the same meeting anther woman principal was the same way, just treating me like total crap . . . There are so many women who are so jealous.
(Interview 3)

Sandy summed this problem up very nicely, “I think probably a lot of it comes down to, you know, women that are in positions that they’re in at the upper levels of administration in public schools or wherever have fought their way to get there and maybe there’s a little intimidation” (Interview 3). Becoming a female leader in the same school district in which the female leader had previously taught does bring some difficulties to the female leader’s career. These faculty members were once the peers of these leaders, equals in most aspects. Now, this female is their boss and the equality is not there, creating a tension between the faculty and the leader. This conflict is from the relationship that once was and the current relationship between the leader and her faculty. Female jealousy of their female administrators demonstrates the internalized gender image: When the faculty member cannot move up the career ladder, the rejection of those who did increases their jealousy. Freire (1993) discusses internalized oppression and how the oppressed “instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub-oppressors.’ The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped” (p. 45). This gendered internalized oppression is almost more invisible than the external oppression, but can be more harmful.

But, females are not the only members of the faculty who present difficulties for the female leaders. Although this topic will be discussed later concerning gender factors, the subject of men and groups of faculty are important to mention here with faculty difficulties. Sandy talked about when she first started her leadership position, “there were a lot of bitter people and a lot of angry men who thought that they should have gotten the job or somebody else should have got the job” (Interview 1). Sandy went on to

say about faculty in general, “There were and are people who are just flat out disrespectful and rude” (Interview 1). Mariah talked about groups who create difficulties, “Well because you’re working with groups of teachers to develop new things whether it’s benchmark tests, and they’re not always thrilled about being there” (Interview 2). This tension between men and groups of faculty is created from the female leaders breaking societal expectations. The binary opposite of the masculine/feminine idea puts these female leaders immediately at a disadvantage when it comes to being a leader in groups and or with males. Society has produced preconceived ideas of who a leader should be and when that notion is challenged the female leader feels the difficulties. But, this is not the only difficulty concerning the faculty the participant had to endure. Sometimes the female leaders have to fire one of their faculty members, creating another tension.

Mariah spoke of a situation of firing an employee, “Just this year a situation occurred where we had to dismiss a teacher. And I had, I was amazed as much as I felt for that teacher, there was no question in my mind that I had to do what was best for the kids in the district” (Interview 2). Joan concurred by saying, “I’ve fired a few people and that is not enjoyable” (Interview 1). Dana discussed several situations concerning an employee who did not fit into the staff whom she thought provided the best education for the students. “Those are problems because if you have a basically good staff and one or two that don’t fit, they stick out like a sore thumb. And you have to either counsel them out, put them on a plan of improvement . . . the most painful ones are the ones that you know. You knew them before like in the community or in another situation. They come in and they didn’t work out. That’s very painful, but it is something that as a leader you can’t let them stay if they are not a good fit for you and your school and your kids”

(Interview 1). Firing an employee is never pleasant and can cause difficulties for the female leader, but the female leader's first priority is the students within her school district. Each female leader made unpopular decision for the student's best interests, which included firing faculty members. This is a positive difference concerning power and the female leader owning up to their power to make a difference in their schools for their students. Power is an issue that envelops the whole of the community, as well.

Community. Community members are another stakeholder within public education that presents difficulties for the female leader. For instance, Joan talked about the community:

There's different factions in the community and some people feel that they're deserving of things that they are not. And they feel that they should be, maybe, have more consideration than others. And it's probably the political aspect of small communities that I dislike the most . . . one group feels that they might have more power than another group and I, you, have to be really careful about not making enemies. (Interview 1)

Not only is power an issue concerning the politics of the community, but also the acceptance of females being hired is another problem. Joan comments, "There's people in this community who could never accept having a women superintendent and I think that's too bad" (Interview 3). Through observations, I personally saw the female leaders diffusing one problem after another from different community members during school activities. The community member would usually seek out the female leader, pull her off to the side, and state the problem. When talking to the female leader after the observation, the female would usually let me know that not only would the community

member state their problem, but also they would usually tell the female leader how they thought she should handle the difficulty. Community members, because they are considered stakeholders, do have a say in several aspects of public school systems. Mariah spoke of one particular incident, “One time I was in a meeting with the city and someone I’ve known practically all my life was very condescending” (Interview 2). The position of multiple areas of resistance is found within the power struggle between the separate community groups and the female leader. This creates more tension than the initial difficulty presented by the community members, which now the female has to restructure to solve both tensions. Not only do the female leaders have to deal with the community, but also the school boards that are ultimately in control of the school district.

School Board. School boards can prove to be a difficulty for the female leader. This subject of school boards will also be discussed in greater detail later in the next chapter. The make-up of the school board sometimes proves interesting when female leaders deal with the school board on sensitive issues. Joan agreed, “It’s just interesting to see the makeup of the different school boards and how each one is different” (Interview 1). She expressed that usually a school board decisions, especially of a hiring practice, “comes down to a school board being more in favor of a man than a women” (Interview 2). Mariah stated “I think, gosh did I have three different interviews? They asked some really hard questions, and I think part of it though is they knew me as a person, so their question was the same questions I had of myself, can you do the hard stuff” (Interview 2). Also, there has been several times that Mariah wanted to make a decision and she had to call each one of the board members to discuss the issue and make sure they were on board with what she wanted to do. Each school board has their own

make-up and personalities, creating certain difficulties for the female leaders.

Unfortunately, first the female leader has to take care of any issues the school board has before she can even start working on the difficulty that has been presented. Each participant in this study brings to her school board her own ways of being a female leader that positively affects the school district. But, the power struggle between the female leader and the school board does create a conflict for the female, making her choose between being an active participant or being a passive leader when making the difficult decisions.

Summary. The whole of the school community brings the participants conflicts that seem to abound from many different sources. The participant constantly reshapes her identity through her experiences with each of these stakeholders of education. The parents of the students present a power struggle from the mistrust most parents feel to the workings of the school. The leaders' faculty presents tensions from their change of status, to their relationships with their staff and their own struggles of finding the right faculty for their students. Power struggles ensue from all different groups within the community, each group vying for their role to be in control. Finally, the school board can create difficulties for the leader. Changing the traditional leadership of discourses of the school can be very challenging for the female.

Legal/Political Issues

Another challenging experience for the participants involves the legal and political battles they face on a daily basis. These "battles" create a level of stress for the participants and an ongoing struggle that seems never-ending for the participants. Legal issues concerning putting teachers on plans of improvement and lawsuits were both

named by the participants as difficulties. State mandates include paperwork, assessments, and budgets. Also, since these female leaders are public figures they are scrutinized in newspapers.

Lawsuits. Controversy is nothing new to some of these participants. For example, Sandy talked about instances that cause her stress from her job: “I have been in federal court, I’ve been sued, and those things are challenging, but that is part of it. I had two attorneys after me . . . luckily that went away . . . I’ve been through more than one [lawsuit] and that’s not fun” (Interview 1). In fact when Sandy took the athletic director position, the school was under a Title IX lawsuit, so her first few months in her position was challenging. Through historical documents, I found the consent decree which Sandy’s school district through negotiation and compromise gives a framework for applying Title IX’s requirements. Some of the major requirements Sandy and her staff applied was updating softball fields, girls’ facilities, and having the same number of coaches for each sport, regardless of gender. Dana discussed how sometimes lawyers are needed to dismiss a faculty member. “There’s been a couple of incidents with personnel where I’ve had to do plans of improvement, work through the lawyers and all that to counsel someone out of my school district and those things are painful” (Interview 2). During these instances of lawsuits, Sandy and Dana experienced pain and challenges. Most of the tensions were from external conflicts, but some conflicts were internalized by Sandy’s desire to achieve equality for all of her student athletes.

State Mandates. Several of the participants talked about the hoops they have to jump through when it comes to state mandates, including the challenges of state testing and requirements. Joan mentioned that the accountability is one of the factors for her

dislikes of her job. Dana also mentioned testing, “Sometimes the bureaucracy, red tape that comes out from the state department ties our hands in terms of what we can do. I’m okay with having a state curriculum. I am okay with having assessments. I think they’ve [state department] taken it way too far. We test too much” (Interview 1). In the next interview Dana added, “All we are doing is trying to prepare them for the test” (Interview 2). Dana had a problem with testing too much because she felt that it takes the creativity of the students away. Also, she felt that by testing too much it took the joy out of the students learning for the love of learning (Interview 2).

Another issues concerning the state is the budget problem happening right now within education. Mariah said, “I don’t care who you are, as a superintendent right now you are not sleeping worrying about the budget” (Interview 3). These state mandates create external pressures from the parents and community, since the school system is the first to be blamed when students do not perform well. Then there are internal pressures from their leaders to have good test scores and be creative with budget problems. Once again, these experiences show how the females do not respond by passively accepting the mandates, and they critique the system that does not serve the educational purpose well.

Media. The media creates an obstacle for the females by printing stories about them and their jobs. At one point Sandy stated, “I have had to see an attorney about some stuff in an area newspaper . . . one that was printing [things] about me personally and his response is well, yeah, that’s sad but because you are a public figure, the level of crap you have to take is up here, where everybody else is down here . . . I guess I’ve gotten pretty thick skin through the years” (Interview 1). Mariah also mentioned how the media creates difficulties for her. She referred to an article that highlighted her salary in this

trying time for education. “There was an article about my salary . . . oh it was just ridiculous. It was insane and I am the most private person about my finances” (Interview 3). I found this article that Mariah mentioned. The article title was about another local superintendent’s salary from another town, but it had a picture of Mariah by the article. The article does mention the alleged raise that Mariah received, but does not mention that the small raise concerned insurance and not money. Also, the article reported all of the area superintendents’ salaries, but it did not explain that out of all the area superintendents, Mariah is the lowest paid while leading the largest school district. The media’s biases create more tensions for the female administrators in their jobs, as well as in their communities, by highlighting all of the problems within their school districts and dismissing the positive aspects of their leadership.

Summary. The females face the difficulties of legal issues, state mandates and the media while they lead in their school districts. These difficult experiences help construct their identities as leaders. While discussing these particular legal and political difficulties, I noticed that they seemed to have been through these issues so many times that it truly was just part of their job and they did not want to focus on them. These difficulties that create tensions for them are highly publicized by the media, which in turn creates more difficulties and tensions for the leaders.

Family and Personal Issues

Being a female leader poses many challenges from tensions with family and other personal issues. Most of the issues relate to their spouse or their children. Joan even comments that mobility is one of the problems since she does not want to move because of her family (Interview 2). This has created a lack of a job market for her to move up

the career ladder. She is complacent to stay in the school district she is at and wait it out for some of her superiors to retire. This idea of lack of mobility is not a new difficulty, but only one of my participants mentions it as a difficulty. Most of the participants comment on family issues between their spouse and children.

Children. Mariah discusses that most educators “have kids” (Interview 3). This seems true for all of my participants. All of my participants have two children, ranging in different age groups. All of the participants had several photographs in their offices of their children, most being displayed on the bookshelves, top of filing cabinets, and their desks. Also, I noticed that a computer station was usually adjacent to the desk of each of the leaders and all of them had pictures of their children by their computer; a place that these leaders admitted to spending a lot of time during their day. Having children posed many challenges for the female leaders, as Dana commented, “Now if you have got little kids, it’s kind of going to be extra work for you because you are a working mom and that’s harder” (Interview 1).

Joan commented that having children actually changed her career path from coaching to administration:

I got out of coaching because one of my children came home one day and told me, actually her teacher told me that she said she couldn’t study for her spelling test because her mother was always at a basketball game. And so I thought hmm, there’s something more important here, and I’m not spending enough time at home is what I figured and so I just went in and resigned from coaching”

(Interview 2)

But, later on Joan discussed how much time she spends doing administrative duties, changing one time-consuming job for another one. It is unclear whether she had more time with her children in her leadership position.

Mariah commented how she would bring her son to work with her when he was younger. She would work late into the night, bringing him a bedroll so he could sleep while she worked (Interview 3). Also, Mariah spoke of going to a parent-teacher conference for her son when she was in the first years of her administration career, “I would go for parent conferences and one teacher would say, well I think he is the class clown because maybe you don’t see him enough and he is wanting attention” (Interview 3). The female leaders feel torn between their professional responsibility and their responsibility as mothers.

Dana mentioned that she was her children’s principal, and “they [her children] didn’t like it, they didn’t like me being their principal” (Interview 1). She discussed how sometimes her job position was in conflict with her children and their teachers, friends, or the parents of their friends. Because of the time demands of their leadership position, these females find it hard to balance family and work. The females wanted to meet the traditional expectation of being a good mom who stays home to take care of her children, but they could not find time for doing so. Therefore the females have to continually rework and redefine their roles in both areas of responsibility. Because of the societal expectations of what is traditionally appropriate for males and females, these participants’ attempt to establish new roles makes it uncomfortable and uneasy to balance family and work. Not only do having children present a difficulty, but also their spouses can be a difficulty for the participants.

Spouse. Almost all of the female leaders discussed how supportive their spouses have been in their careers, and they also talk about their time consuming job positions and how it affects their personal lives with their loved ones. Joan stated, “It affects my personal life. My husband thinks I devote too much time to my work. He thinks I should retire . . . but I enjoy my work and I want to be here. I am going to do what I want to do. And if I enjoy working, I’ll continue to work” (Interview 1). Her strength in her resolve to work was very apparent by her comments, but her husband does not seem to be as supportive as she thinks. The power struggle between male and female is shown very clearly in this experience.

Mariah stated that she never took on the submissive role and attributes that to her being single for seventeen years after the death of her first husband. She is currently married. When I asked her why she did not attempt to move up the career ladder during her many years as an assistant superintendent, she replied, “I have a very wonderful husband and that, he is the reason I did not try to be a superintendent earlier. Because I was single for seventeen years, I really put my marriage as a priority. And I knew that I would see him less, and the first time that we had a superintendent retire when, you know” (Interview 1). At this point Mariah did not finish her sentence, indicating her hesitation to speak what she experienced with her husband. She thinks that her husband is wonderful, but whether or not he supported her to take the leadership role at that point in their marriage is unclear. Mariah went on to say that after that superintendent left her husband told her, “Now I’ll support you, but I probably won’t be going to all those things with you . . . And so I knew that he would go to some things, but not others. And then that takes me to why did I do it this time” (Interview 1). There was a conflict in the

language that Mariah used in describing this story. It does not sound like her husband fully supported her.

Summary. These females discussed their contradictions of self that is created by having families and a career. These females constantly construct how to balance their career and their families, resulting in an inner battle of questioning their own personal aspirations with the needs of their families. Also, through deconstructing the ways that they use language, I think that they credit the support of their husbands, but depict a different picture in their stories. These difficulties are unique to females because of the societal expectations of females. Society is hard on females who work outside of the household and if they do work their difficulties increase. They have to excel at work and at home for society to be forgiving. Males are expected to work outside of the home, therefore, society is more accepting if they excel at work and lack in the aspect of family obligations. Through these contradictions, I see how these female leaders' realities are constantly shifting to reveal other truths than the one they continuously want to believe.

Female's Navigations and Negotiations

In the previous section, several difficulties of being a female administrator were presented. This section focuses on how these females navigate through their job positions with unique styles. They do this by being themselves, even if it goes against what is traditionally accepted. They make and maintain relationships with faculty, parents of students, students and community members. They also navigate and negotiate by communication, holding their tongue, working hard, and using humor to diffuse difficulties. Finally, these leaders use their growth in their profession and being a life-long learner to maintain their success as a leader. Most of the navigation skills are

developed after females reflect on early mistakes in their careers and find ways to deal with them.

“Be Yourself” to Becoming Yourself

One of the first things that Mariah said in the first interview concerning being a female leader was “You just have to be yourself” (Interview 1). This is an important statement that Mariah makes, but the statement holds a lot of truth for all of the female participants in my study. While each of these females tries to be their self, they discussed different and shared ways of how they do this while leading their schools. As the females tell their stories, I noticed that some of the characteristics are not natural characteristics for these leaders. For instance, some characteristics are learned through being a leader and recognizing the necessity of a particular trait to stay in the leadership position. Therefore, even though the participants acknowledge the importance of a leader embracing who they are, they also demonstrated the learned skills of becoming the educational leader.

Through the interviews and observations I found that there were several leadership apparent capacities that are worth mentioning that the leaders exhibited or discussed. Several participants named confidence, consistency and fairness as leadership traits that were necessary for them when dealing with difficulties. Mariah and Sandy, the two that interact with men the most in their leadership positions, cited how they have to show that they are not intimidated by anyone or people who try to use intimidation to get what they want. They must demonstrate self-confidence in confronting challenges.

At the same time, they bring caring into leadership. Caring is traditionally considered a feminine trait, but is a necessary capacity for them to be a good leader.

Mariah stated, “I want to be someone who cares” (Interview 3). In an earlier interview Mariah again mentioned caring as a one of her capacities, “I care so much about people and I want everybody to be happy” (Interview 2). Another participant, Sandy, brought the social justice aspect to her caring leadership attitude, “You know if I am guilty of anything, it’s probably doing more for the ones that don’t have as much as others” (Interview 2). These females bring their feminine differences into their leadership style and they care about those who are within their schools or school districts, particularly those who are marginalized one way or another.

Along with caring, these female leaders show their empathy for people. “I think I have a lot of empathy for people . . . there are many times I have had to say no and this can’t be work, but I try to be sincere about it and say this isn’t what we would prefer but this is what’s going to happen” (Mariah, Interview 2). This trait goes along with Mariah’s tendency to want to make everyone happy. Dana also commented on the importance of empathy (Interview 3). But, as discussed earlier, these leaders cannot make everyone happy and sometimes they have to fire one of their employees. Mariah is aware of the necessity of saying “no,” but she also would like to bring sincerity into assertiveness when she sets up the boundary.

Sandy described her style of leadership as a “leadership style of servanthship. That’s how I really am. I try to make things better for people and I try to get along with people and I try to give people what they want and it’s a lot easier in my position to be a people pleaser sometimes” (Interview 3). In combining servanthship and caring, empathetic attributes into leadership styles, these females embrace who they are as women in a traditionally male profession. But they also have to unpack what society

expects from them to outgrow their comfort zones. As Miller (2005) argues, “Certainly we must scrutinize and work to change the very discourses that reify institutions . . . But we also must attempt to scrutinize, challenge, and, if necessary, change the very discourses that function to construct, normalize, and thus limit our identities” (p. 105). “Making everybody happy” is part of the discourses that Miller asks women to challenge. Women need to balance between their desire to please or to serve others and their capacity for being self-assertive as leaders when their decisions make some people unhappy but are beneficial for the community. In their leadership roles, they are not only “being themselves”, but also “becoming themselves” in navigating and negotiating the gendered system.

Listening is another important capacity my participants value. They not only listen to one side, but also they take into account all sides to make a well-informed decision. For instance Sandy shared, “I think sometimes us women we’re kind of quick to judge or jump to conclusions. And I have learned before I do that, I really need to hear both sides. There are always two sides to a story. I always need to listen” (Interview 1). Sandy said that females are quick to judge, but she has learned to listen to multiple sides. By contrast, Mariah discussed listening as one of her strengths and how listening from every side makes decisions hard for her while she is leading. She described this leadership characteristic as “a blessing and a curse” (Interview 2). Mariah indicated that she sees the value of listening in a leader, but realizes she may listen too much without making a definitive decision, so “listening too much” can bring negative effects. Here we can see that these females try to balance the binary sides of the good and the bad in listening, and they regard reaching such a balance as a learning process.

The female participants also mentioned how important it was to be organized and prepared. To Dana this was a learned capacity, “You’re forced to be analytical to a certain extent in this office because you’ve got deadlines and you’ve got things you have to do. So I’ve learned how to do that. That was my learning curve, how to stay on top of the organizational part . . . that’s not in my nature” (Interview 2). For Dana, being analytical and organizing is not natural for her, but learned characteristics are necessary for the leaders to navigate from “being themselves” to becoming a good leader. By comparison, Mariah commented, “I enjoyed organizing while being in a leadership position” (Interview 3). This contradiction between the two leaders is a good example of how “being yourself” and “becoming yourself” are intimately linked.

By being their selves, each of the females negotiates all of these characteristics together to overcome the difficulties in their jobs. Even though some of these characteristics are considered feminine, these females do not give up on what they value, but they combine these capacities with traditional capacities to create a balance between different styles. They bring something new and different to the ways of leading that makes them and their leadership styles uniquely their own. While being a leader that is uniquely their own, these females build relationships with the people around them to deal with conflicts.

Relationship Building

Most of these participants exhibit how forming relationships with the stakeholders in their schools are necessary to get through the difficult times. In fact, throughout this research process, I saw how important these females value their relationships with all different groups in their schools. I saw their interactions with teachers, parents, students

and how the longevity of being in their positions helped them maintain those relationships. In my observations, I saw these females always treat everyone around them with respect and smiles. Females value close relationships with students, staff, colleagues, parents, and community members as key in school leadership, and in schools headed by females, relationships develop constantly (Norman & Jean-Marie, 2008; Smulyan, 2000). My participants relied on these relationships they had fostered to handle problems within their school systems.

First, most of the females stated they liked being around people. When I observed them, I realized immediately that these females knew many different people from their communities. One of the key characteristics I noticed is what Mariah stated: “I make each person feel their value” (Interview 1). In Mariah’s office, there is a conference table of the same deep, rich, mahogany wood as the rest of her office furniture. This table is surrounded by matching chairs, with the seat cushions in a beautiful blue color. This blue color matches the school colors. During our interview sessions and any observations, I noticed that when she was in her office, she always used this conference table when meeting with individuals. This conference table was an important part of Mariah’s relationship building for bringing people at work together. Also, anytime I visited these leaders, I noticed that their doors were always open and many different groups of people, from students, community members, parents, school board members, and their faculty were in and out of their offices all day. Dana commented “I keep an open door policy” (Interview 3). This idea of keeping an open door policy is important for the females so everyone feels that what they have to say has value, even if the leaders do not make the decision in their favor. “The more you smile and the more you talk to people and the

more you shake peoples' hands and the more you bullshit with them and all of that crazy stuff, the more friends you make. Having a lot of friends and people like you is never a bad thing" (Interview 2). Not only does Sandy see the importance of having relationships, but also the other participants do as well, especially relationships with their faculty.

Despite the frustrations and difficulties that have happened because of their faculty, the females in this study viewed their relationships with their faculty as key to solving those difficulties. Everyone of the leaders in my study bring their feminine values to the way they lead, and embrace female's differences and the complex identities that each has within their relationships, echoing Normore and Jean-Marie's (2007) research from the literature. Sandy reported that she tries to show her faculty, "I support them . . . I want them to be successful. I want them to do well" (Interview 2). Joan agreed with this but shows her faculty "that caring and that personal touch I think is what they [her faculty] need and that develops your relationships" (Interview 3). That caring attitude is essential to her relationships. She goes on to say:

A lot of times I can't get anything done because one teacher is waiting to get in here and visit and another teacher is waiting to get in here and visit and another teacher is waiting to get in here and visit. A lot of times I can't, I spend a lot of time and I almost feel like a therapist and really all they want it just to be heard. They may have to sit down and cry because really they've got some problems somewhere else. So they just want that personal connection. They want to know that at work we care about them as an individual and we care if they're healthy and if they're [pause] so I think just the personal contact. You know, they'll walk

through that dadgum cinder block if they feel that you care for them . . . if they're the most important thing, they're going to die doing what you want them to do. So, if the teachers feel that I give a hoot, whether they're in a good mood or whether they feel good that day that do a good job. (Interview 3)

Through building relationships with her faculty, she sees the difference of how her faculty performs in the classroom.

Dana reported striving to help her faculty in many ways so they will excel in the classroom. Dana called her faculty the experts: "They're the experts. You hired the best you could find. You hired the absolute shiniest stars in the planet for your school" (Interview 1). She indicated that she tries to help them with curriculum and planning, and takes care of things to reduce their stress and worry so they can do their job to the best of their abilities (Interview 1). Dana thought by doing this, it was a sure sign of a true leader when, "they're getting the best out of the people that they're leading and I truly believe that I am getting the best out of the people that I am leading" (Interview 3). She indicated that each teacher needs something different and that it is her job to find out what they need to be successful in the classroom (Interview 1).

At one point Dana talked about the tragedy of two of her faculty members passing away and how close her and her staff became at this point, "We cried together. I felt like I was able to just put myself out there and they did the same and we became tighter than tight and closer than close. We prioritized and figured out, oh, this is what's important in life. And we learned that lesson together" (Interview 3). Emotions are the key in feminine leadership styles that makes a relationship good within their faculty. Emotions are traditionally associated with females and usually in a negative connotation. Cheryl de

la Rey (2005) lists the traits commonly associated with leadership and emotion was not on this list. In this instance, Dana took ownership of the emotional connection with her faculty and utilized this feminine trait of emotion for a positive contribution to her relationships. The connection between students is also important when leading a school district.

Mariah and Sandy both expressed regret that their positions of superintendent and athletic director take them away from the students and personally connecting with them. But, Joan and Dana both interact with students as principals on a daily basis. Joan said that having communication with students can lead to strength when dealing with difficulties from students (Interview 2). Joan constantly interacts with the students, “When that bell rings, and I’m deep in paperwork, I just get up and leave it and make a round, act like I’m shooing them to class but I’m just out there. I want them to see me and I want the kids to know I’m here. I think if they know you’re here they’re going to be better” (Interview 3). Dana also tries to mix and mingle with students. Both suggested that it is important to personally connect with students because it makes a difference to them and the way they act when difficulties are presented. Another group the females reported as an important group to form relationships with is the parents of the students.

Parents pose many challenges for administrative leaders. Many parents do not have trust in schools, so it is important to communicate and build relationships with those parents to help with trust. “You know if I can sit down with a parent and let them know: here’s what we have done before, here’s how we have tried to prepare your students to know the rules. We’ve done this step, this step and this step” (Joan, Interview 1). Most

of the leaders use communication to establish the relationships with the parents. For instance Dana stated:

Parents will disagree on silly little things like how we run our classrooms . . . what teacher I gave them [their children]. I always try to tell them I don't have any secrets about why I made the decision . . . I tell them it was a thought out decision. I'll tell them what my rationale was for making that decision and then, we can agree to disagree about it and sometimes they do change my mind if they have a better reason than I had for making that decision. (Interview 2)

Dana expressed the importance of trying to instill in the relationships with her parents that each of them are on the same team and they all want that particular student to be successful. This is imperative when building relationships from untrusting parents. Joan commented, "Usually if you can sit down with people, look them in the eye, and let them know you care for their child and you care that their child behaves properly at school, then usually parents come around and they get on your side" (Interview 1). Once again, the leaders use care to build those relationships.

These leaders cited having communication with everyone involved in the school as an important part of their strategy to calm tensions and help build relationships. Dana commented, "I don't get a whole lot of mad mommies because we do such a good job of communicating and preempting with information to the parents" (Interview 3). Joan commented of its importance, "Communication is key. You know everybody has complaints. So I try to be proactive in communicating with them. I try to find a myriad of ways, whether it is via email, messages home, or the web site" (Interview 3). All of

these leaders are proactive when it comes to communicating in their position, utilizing all avenues of communication that technology offers them.

Also, longevity in their job positions help in forming relationships. While these females acknowledged that they have been in their same positions for a long period of time they feel that this is an asset when building relationships that are key in diffusing difficulties. “The personnel problems can be fixed . . . because the longer you stay, the more you can get the kind of people you want” (Dana, Interview 1). This longevity works for Sandy, as well. Sandy talked of dealing with difficulties from faculty that are no longer there because of her staying in her same job position. “I think some of those guys have retired and as they have retired new guys have come in. They came in and I was their boss and that helps” (Interview 2). Even though some of the literature states that longevity in female leadership job positions might be because of created barriers to their career, these females use the longevity of their job to create a working environment that is beneficial to everyone in the district. Dana commented, “Experience, long years of experience in the same community gives you a leg up on that because I knew your momma, I know what her issues are. I see where you fit in with your family. I see what your community is like and in terms of the teachers, it’s the same thing” (Interview 2). As the leaders worked through their difficulties by being in the same position for a length of time, they navigated through their difficulties with navigations and negotiations they have learned through experiences.

Balance Between Determination and Flexibility

These female leaders have a determination to overcome difficulties. For instance, Joan gave her motto, “And you shall overcome” (Interview 2). To overcome difficulties,

they are active participants within their leadership positions and balance their determination with flexibility. When needed, they hold their tongues and they also use humor and laughter to deflect behaviors of others.

All the participants use a strong work ethic to navigate through the difficult times. “You find ways. So, you work, work constantly. I developed a strong work ethic because I had to” (Joan, Interview 1). Not only does Mariah think this, but also she related work ethic to making wrong decisions and how she reported making up for it by working harder the next time (Interview 3). Sandy commented, “When I start something I want to finish it” (Interview 1), so by being tenacious her work ethic is shown. This work ethic may relate back to them being female leaders within a male based area. In order to survive and maintain their leadership positions, they feel that they have to work harder than anyone around them to gain respect as leaders. Paralleling work ethic is the idea that they have to be prepared when they negotiate their decisions. Mariah mentioned being prepared several times in the interviews. One comment was, “Every time I am going to take anything to the school board I did the devil’s advocate . . . what if they ask this and where’s our stance from this. And sometimes, you miss and you can’t be prepared for everything, but I think that is the key. If you really work hard, even if you make mistakes, people will understand” (Interview 2). Each of these females has had long careers within leadership because they are not afraid to work hard and they try to be prepared for any conflict. In educational leadership though, a female leader is expected to work harder than any other leader, a gendered notion of sacrificing themselves for the good of others. Mariah made the comment of working hard so her mistakes will be

forgiven; a comment that accepts societal higher expectations for a female leader.

Another navigation the females have learned is to sometimes say less.

Sometimes, the leaders realize that communicating their thoughts are not the best way to navigate through problems. In their leadership position, each of the females had to be careful in not speaking about thoughts or feelings they are having about the situation because it only brings more tension into the already strained conflict. Sandy discussed maintaining her professionalism at all times (Interview 2) and how there are times “I have wanted to say screw you, but I never have” (Interview 2). At times, Dana has had to “bite my tongue” (Interview 1), to hold back what she really wanted to communicate. Even though this seems to be a passive quality, it can play a constructive role for these females. Through previous experiences, these leaders know that by holding their tongue they can accomplish more and work through the difficulties at a faster pace than if they said what they really wanted to say. They also used humor and laughter to make the navigations easier.

Humor is a way to soften some of the negative behaviors and difficulties that the leaders come across in their career. Only Mariah mentioned humor in the interviews (Interviews 1 and 2), but in my observations I observed each of the females using humor and laughter as a way to negotiate through tough situations. After a student conference with the teacher of a student, Dana showed humor and laughed with the teacher about the situation, making the teacher more comfortable with Dana’s decision when she initially did not agree with Dana. I also noticed Sandy, during one particular phone call with a site athletic director, using humor to make light of a situation, giving the site athletic director a chance to calm down before they discussed how they were going to handle a

particular sensitive difficulty. The leaders, in order to achieve in their positions, are flexible and know how to utilize both humor and laughter as a balance to their working harder and holding their tongues.

Growth/Life Long Learner

An interesting commonality between these administrators was their stressed importance of how they have grown into their jobs through their experiences and how that growth is a continuous journey for them. Dana commented, “Every year that you work, you have more experiences, more interactions with different kinds of people, more knowledge. You just have a whole lot more lived experiences to pull from” (Interview 3). Also, Sandy reported that group is a part of becoming a better leader. “We all need to grow and change with our positions, you grow you get better. If you don’t get better then you’re in the wrong profession, in my opinion” (Interview 2). Also, they each love education and emphasized that to be an excellent leader they need to go to conferences, they need to learn from other administrators, and they need to be life-long learners.

Learning through their experiences from performing their jobs has been a helpful tool for these participants. Joan has learned that there is not one right way to lead (Interview 2). Mariah commented, “People teach you how to deal with difficulties and you learn how to problem solve” (Interview 3). Sandy talked of the initial job experience for her, “The first couple years you just learn so much. There’s so much stuff you have to learn simply by experience . . . I think some of my decisions I would make differently now, but at the time you make the best decision you can with the knowledge you have from the experiences you have” (Interview 3). Experience is key in Dana’s leadership ideas as well, when she stated several times that some of her decisions were based on her

“twenty-something years of experience” (Interview 1). But, all the leaders agreed that their leadership style has changed based upon their experiences.

Dana said that being a leader was “a work in progress” (Interview 1). Female leaders have changed the challenges thrown at them into opportunities for them “to grow and to change into this position” (Mariah, Interview 1). Later in another interview Mariah stated, “I am getting to where I can stand up for myself and I have found a more sense of meaning. For instance, being tough is not always being belligerent or combative; it’s just hanging in there” (Interview 2). Another leader, Joan, made this statement concerning how experiences have made her grow as a leader, “I learned that not everything is going to go my way. That I’m going to have to be flexible and give a little and see everybody’s side of the situation and not just my side. And you don’t make as many enemies that way when you can look on their side of it and understand where they’re coming from. This has helped me as a principal” (Interview 2). As their experiences change, they change. Miller (2005) states, “We are in-the-making, then, in the sense that our pedagogical, professional selves—our multiply inflected and constructed identities as gendered, raced, classed selves, for example—are always ‘sites of disunity and conflict,’ unfinished and incomplete” (p. 229). These leaders’ identities are works in progress.

The female administrators cited going to conferences and learning from others as an essential part for their growth. Mariah modeled this from a former male mentor who would go to conferences, take copious notes, and then come back to his faculty to see what they learned and have a dialogue of the ideas presented from this conference (Interview 1). Joan mentioned a conference she attended where she was able to mingle

with principals from across the nation and how that was a tremendous event for her (Interview 3). Both Joan and Dana suggested that learning from other administrators is a great way to gain knowledge. "I just try to lap of their leadings and soak up whatever I can. That's one of the ways I learn I think is by watching others" (Interview 3). Dana used her colleagues to discuss current issues, "It helps to tap into your colleagues, other principals and other administrators, and go okay, here's what I did, was I off? And they will tell me" (Interview 2). Collaborating with other females in leadership positions, working together to solve difficulties, and igniting a spark that will lead to other females in leadership positions are important to these females. Feminist emphasis on building women's own networks is made clear here (Shakeshaft et al., 2007).

All of the female participants confirmed that as an administrator, especially a female administrator it is important to have as much as education as they can. Mariah even said, "I know that maybe I'm not the most knowledgeable, but I am going to learn, listen, and ask questions" (Interview 1). Dana indicated that a challenge for her is not to sit back and be comfortable in all she has achieved, "When you've done this as long as I have, then the next challenge is not to sit back and go we're good and rest on our laurels. You have to constantly be not looking to change things so much, but to look to keep things fresh and bring in new ideas. Keep the research and stuff going so you can bring it to your people" (Interview 3). She even mentioned that she will "go to my grave a lifelong learner. I love learning" (Interview 3), which helped her to become a very successful administrator.

The only regret Joan has had in her career path was that she did not continue her education by getting her doctoral degree. She commented, "If you have a woman who's

stuck with it and has her doctorate degree, they can't argue with the degree. It proves something. It proves you're smart, it proves you're diligent, it proves your tough" (Interview 2). She mentioned that through education, females can achieve positions that they would not be able to do otherwise. Sandy said that her "doctorate degree certainly helped" (Interview 1) with her position, especially in gaining respect from her peers. Dana thought her education was helpful to keep her and her staff on the cutting edge of where education is going (Interview 2). Often feminist literature cites education as a way to gain equality for females (Maher & Ward, 2002). These females used their higher degrees to get equality and to maintain equality. Three out of the four females hold doctoral degrees. This relates to the literature that many females in school administration hold higher degrees than their male counterparts (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

Summary

In this chapter the life experiences of the female participants and how those experiences led them to a career path of leadership in a public school system, were discussed. Several difficulties were named by each participant, and they construct their ever changing identities in dealing with these difficulties. The navigations and negotiations that the females adopt to overcome difficulties in their career paths were also discussed. In the Chapter five, the role of gender within these participants' lives is presented, along with other factors that were found in the data.

Chapter V

Gender and other Factors

Throughout my research with four female leaders in public education, I noticed that the tensions between the unconscious expectations of females and males became even more apparent when females hold leadership positions because of their gender. Through the experiences of these female leaders several commonalities became apparent and my findings suggest that gender does influence these four female leaders in their personal and professional lives. However, just as Smulyan (2000) acknowledges that “while gender influenced the experiences of these principals, it did so as a part of a process of principaling that was also affected by the principal’s race, class, personal and professional background, and the context within which she worked” (p. 593), I acknowledge that these leaders are also affected by their race, class, and the context in which they work.

Gender

The stories of these participants can illuminate the often hidden complexities of gender in leadership positions within public education. Gender becomes apparent when discussing their jobs, moving up the career ladder, salaries, all male situations and the good ole boy network. Interesting to note, though, is how these leaders navigated through the complexities of gender to accept it and create positive aspects out of the negative.

First in Jobs and Other Leadership Opportunities

Three of the female participants are the first females in their school district to hold their leadership position. It is interesting to note, that the one female who is not the first is Dana, the elementary principal. Traditionally there are more females in elementary education therefore creating more opportunities for advancement for females. Sandy, the athletic director, stated, “Being a woman in my position is very rare” (Interview 1), which is a completely a different story than with Dana. Sandy is the first female leader of a multi-high school district in the state and thirteen years later, she still holds the title of being the only female athletic director in a multi-high school district.

When I researched this position of a female being a multi-high school athletic director through personal artifacts of emails that Sandy had supplied for me, I found that nationally it was rare as well, with only three other females holding this position nationally. When I asked Mariah, the superintendent if she was the first female superintendent in her school district, she replied adamantly, “Absolutely, yes, yes” (Interview 3). This is the same story with Joan, the high school principal. She has been the only high school principal in the school’s history. This position of gender inequality among administration positions in education is acknowledged by Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan and Ballenger (2007), “Women still do not fill administrative positions in proportion to their numbers in teaching or in proportion to those who are trained and certified to become administrators” (p. 104). Feminists have fought for equality for several decades through legislation and educational reform, but clearly equality is slow to happen, even in the year 2010.

The governing body of athletics in Sandy's state has been around since the late 1800s. This year a monumental event happened within this organization. Sandy became the first female president in the history of the organization. According to Sandy, "They don't very often have even a woman on the board" (Interview 1). This is an incredible accomplishment for not only Sandy, but also for females in general. Sandy has paved the way for other females to now have this opportunity. She is truly a pioneer in this leadership position of athletics, a position that is dominantly male.

Entrance into the Leadership Position

Joan's entrance into the leadership position is very interesting and contains a bit of irony. The irony of this situation was that they offered the position to her husband first and offered it to Joan only after he turned down the position. Joan discussed this issue, "So they offered it to him because they're going to, and I don't want to sound like a feminist or anything but they're going to offer those positions to the men first, I just got to tell you, you got to be bigger and better" (Interview 2). Later, during the same interview she justified the school board asking him first, "well he's a good leader" (Interview 2). She continued laughingly, "when I read the transcript, I thought oh well, that kind of popped out. I hadn't thought of that in twenty years, you know" (Interview 2). In this thought process, Joan tried to reconcile between her identity as a leader, and the social reality that being a leader needs to be better than the males that want the same positions. Her other tension comes from being a leader and being a wife with a husband in the same profession. She justified why her school offered the leadership position to her husband first, by saying that he was a good leader, although she must have been as good as he is, if not better. Another interesting point about her use of language is that she

did not want to associate herself with being a feminist. Johnson (1997) discusses this issue of not identifying with feminism, “Trashing feminism is now so routine that most women won’t openly identify with feminism even when they support feminist goals and ideas” (p. 99). Joan indicated through her word choice that in her mind, being a feminist is not an attractive position, and for many females including Joan, being a feminist is not a politically correct position. Another researcher, Smulyan (2000), found this same problem of hearing the tension in her participants’ stories and their unwillingness to explore those experiences through a feminist lens.

All of the female participants became leaders within the school districts they were currently teaching. This echoes Spencer’s and Kochan’s (2002) findings that most females assume leadership roles in their school districts. Joan attributed her rise to leadership by “being in the right place at the right time” (Interview 3). Joan clearly has a tension within herself by making this comment. Not only does she not take an active role in how she became a leader, but also she plays down her positive leadership attributes that helped propel her into this leadership position.

Staying at the Same School

Once these female reached their leadership positions, they have all stayed at the same school. Each one of the participants has been in their school district for many years. In fact Sandy and Dana have never even taught anywhere else. Sandy and Dana, after reaching their leadership position, have not sought any other leadership positions in their school or anywhere else, for that matter. This is a commonality that is found in the literature. Mariah and Joan are the only two to move up in leadership positions, but only within their “own” school district.

Moving up the Career Ladder

Mariah moved up from an assistant superintendent position to the superintendent position in her school district. She was the assistant superintendent for almost twenty years before she tried for the superintendent's position. Her desire to become the superintendent was mainly because, "I have been in this position [assistant superintendent] forever, and I needed to kind of prove to myself I could step up" (Interview 3). Her desire to see if she could do the superintendents job was a starting point for her to see what was immediately available for her concerning job positions and taking it to another level by actually applying for the job. When I asked her if her school board were supportive of her, she answered, "Very, very supportive. I can tell you that they were, well, they were a bit nervous. I don't know if it was the female thing . . . many people in the community felt I was the obvious person for this job, but I had to really work hard to get this job [laughing]" (Interview 1). It took her twenty years to realize that she could move up the professional ladder, showing that gender is an issue. In this conversation, she diffused the tension of remembering her frustration from the process of getting the leadership position by laughing at her answer. I noticed several times through observation and in her answers from interviews that she laughs anytime she feels uncomfortable. Once again she used humor to lighten the situation and uplift the mood for her and others around her, a characteristic that Jones (2006) reflects upon in her study of middle school principals discussed in the literature review.

Joan moved up the career ladder from being junior high principal to being the high school principal. She did not apply for any of her leadership positions she has held in her school district; she was asked if she wanted the positions by people in higher

leadership positions. It is interesting to note that Joan is the only one that once she secured the leadership position within her own school, she sought higher leadership opportunities outside of her school district. She applied in several places for the superintendent's position. She went through several interviews with school boards but was always passed over for a male. When I asked her why she thought she was passed over she answered:

I just failed to convince the board that I had the leadership ability that a man that was in the same, he was a high school principal as well and he got hired for the job. He'd been a football star at a college. He probably could talk circles around me. You know just full of bull and which it's a communication probably thing that I need. You know, I need to be able to bull crap every once in a while, because that's how a lot of major wars are won, and so that's probably a weakness on my part. But, I think, I really think it comes down to a school board being more in favor of a man than a woman. Just the communication factor and they say well what are you going to do when a bus breaks down. Well, what does anyone do, they call a mechanic. I don't see too many superintendents fixing the buses. So, a lot times they don't have confidence that a woman can handle those aspects of the school. (Interview 2).

In this story, Joan made several interesting points concerning gender. First, in her reality she lays blame upon herself for not having communication skills needed to impress a school board. The next instance, though, she cited gender as being the issue, since most school boards do not have a confidence that a female can handle the traditionally masculine job position. She has not tried to obtain the superintendent position outside of

her school district since this experience. Joan's story is similar to other research (Smulyan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989) which shows when a female tries outside of her school district to obtain a higher leadership position, she only tries a couple of times before she does not try again, because gender obstacles seem too much to overcome.

In another interview, Joan mentioned how she applied for the superintendent position in her school district twice and both times they did not hire her. She attributed that to "There's people in this community who could never accept having a woman superintendent and I think that's too bad. In fact there was a board member who made the statement, we will never have a woman superintendent. I think that's too bad. I think you should have the best person for whatever position" (Interview 3). Unfortunately, gender was the one of the reasons Joan did not get her district's superintendent's position. Especially if the school board has a biased opinion of which gender does a better job in this particular leadership position. Joan communicated that school boards should hire the best person for the job and not based their decisions on a person's gender. Through this comment, Joan showed her thoughts on the importance of equal hiring practices. Another gender concern is the salaries of leadership positions in public education.

Salary Issues

Only one female, Mariah, mentioned salary differences between males and females. She stated, "The other negative [to being a female administrator] is, and I really can't go into detail on this, but I find if there are salary decisions to be made, I assure you there is a difference. They don't mess with male salaries like they will with female salaries" (Interview 2). She went on to mention in another interview that she only received a small raise and she attributes not getting a larger one to gender, "as I said

before, I don't think I'd have gotten a \$582 raise if I'd been a man" (Interview 3), a traditional problem that shows equity issues with salary since the average female only makes two-thirds of a male's salary (Maher and Ward, 2002). Sandy and Dana indicated that salary differs between female and male leaders, but Joan said it is dependent upon the school district. Joan's district has a set salary schedule based upon the leadership position.

Negative and Positive Female Perceptions

According to the female leaders there are many negative perceptions concerning being a female leader. Joan made the comment that one gender problem is "convincing a school board that you're not better off at home baking chocolate chip cookies" (Interview 2). Baking cookies is a gendered societal expectation for females, a notion that is taught by society at a very early age. For Joan, this expectation means she has to convince the school board that she is a better candidate for the leadership position since she does not fit into the gender stereotypes. Other negative connotations that have been associated with females and why they should not be leaders were suggested by the participants is being too sensitive and too caring. Mariah stated "you're more sensitive as a woman . . . I am trying to get tougher" (Interview 1), indicating a common contradiction between a male characteristic of being tough and a female characteristic of being too sensitive, and she responds to such a perception by trying to become more "masculine." Mariah also commented this trait, "I'm real sensitive and real caring, maybe too much so sometimes for the superintendent's position" (Interview 1). So for her, there is a real tension between her feminine characteristics and the male dominated profession.

Dana mentioned the negative aspects of gender role, but places that negativity on the female. She suggested that females make issues into a gender issue by tending to “overstep their boundaries, but yell a little too loudly to make their point” (Interview 3). In an earlier interview she commented, “A woman on a power trip is not an attractive thing” (Interview 1). Dana placed the blame on her own gender when they use other characteristics that are not traditionally female. Skarla (2000) finds, “These rules for appropriately feminine characteristics and behavior are widely shared and agreed-upon social constructions and the penalties for not following these rules appeared to be clearly understood as well” (p. 304). Society has deeply ingrained traditional gender roles and when a female steps out of that role they are considered deviant, even by other females. Sandy discussed something that I have personally heard many times, the stance that many employees do not want to work for a female:

I have said and I mean if we’re going to be hones and break it down here. I have said on more than one occasion that I would rather work for a man than a woman any day, but I have also said that I hope the guys that work for me don’t say the same thing. Because I have worked for women, that I think they get so die hard on proving themselves that they go over the top. And I think for women because we’re just, you genetically programmed a different way that we have to be aware of that. (Interview 3).

This stance of not wanting to work for a female relates directly to what Sandy mentioned in her comment. Many females do have to fight harder than males to prove they are worthy of leadership positions, which sometimes does not make others happy because of their societal deviant behaviors. Sandy even realized the contradictions in her statement

by saying that she hopes her employees do not think that about working for her. This relates to Freire's (1993) notion of internalized oppression; in this example it is a gendered internalized oppression.

Joan summed up the idea of the negative perceptions of gender for the female leaders, "I think it [gender] has been a limiting force in my career" (Interview 3). The acknowledgement of the negative impact gender has had on her career is an interesting finding, with most research finding that females usually do not consciously acknowledge gender being a limited force in their career. But, the perceptions of being female in a leadership positions are not always negative.

Some of the female participants mentioned that there are positive of being a female in a leadership position. Coleman (2003) found "The advantages were linked to the fact that they did not fit the stereotypical male mold and they felt that this freed their behavior. They did not have to operate within the dominate discourse of male leadership" (p. 330). Mariah indicated that there are positives about being a female and one of those is paying attention to small details (Interview 1). Also, she said, "Sometimes you bring people together better" (Interview 3). Mariah used her feminine characteristics as a positive factor in her work.

Dana stated, "The women will like try and find what is causing the source what is the source of the bleeding instead of just stopping the bleeding" (Interview 1). In this comment, Dana compared males to females with the trait of finding the source of the problem, while alluding to males trying to just fix the problem and not understanding what caused the problem. Also, Dana reported, "My experience is that women are more intuitive and they get to the heart of the matter or what lies beneath the surface"

(Interview 1). Sandy mentioned her intuitive thoughts in an interview by saying that she always goes with what her gut tells her when making big decisions (Interview 3). Here intuition is credited as women's way of thinking (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997) which integrates reason and emotion to reach insightful understandings and decisions. Dana summed up her positive thoughts of being female by saying, "I would say those innate skills and abilities that come with our gender to tap into those and use them" (Interview 1). These females do not hide their feminine characteristics; instead they take ownership of them and use them to make a positive difference in the way they lead. Even though there are positives of being a female leader, females in leadership positions will still find themselves in situations that they are the only female.

All Male Situations and "Just One of the Guys"

It is interesting to note that only Sandy and Mariah mentioned being in situations where they are the only females. These two participants are in positions that are usually dominated by males. Mariah addressed the situations where she is the only female, "I interject myself into situations that might typically be all male, and you just have to do that" (Interview 1). This seemed to be a normal occurrence for Mariah. She cited a certain situation when she had to deal with the city, "I'm the only female there, which does not intimidate me at all" (Interview 1). In another interview she cited another occurrence, "Yesterday is a perfect example. We had someone who is working up a big donation to the school system. So we had a meeting yesterday and I was sitting at the end in there and every seat is filled up and again, I am the only woman" (Interview 3). Because of Mariah's leadership position, she deals with mostly males. Through these experiences, I see the inequality between males and females in her job position and I

notice how she brings her female traits of caring, working together, and her sensitivity to the meetings that are mainly male. Mariah often times spoke of being “Just one of the guys” (Interview 2). In the next following statements, she then brought that statement to the view point of the males, “I don’t know what they would say about me being one of the guys . . . And I think they may not think I’m just one of the guys” (Interview 2). Mariah wants to believe that she has found an equal stance with the males that work around her and she values what she can bring to leadership as a woman as I mention earlier, but her statements of referring to herself as one of the guys indicates she also feels the pressure to be more like a man in order to be an effective leader in “a man’s world.”

Sandy spoke of being the only female in meetings, as well. Sandy deals with mostly males in her athletic position and equated this to, “I really don’t [deal with females] because I don’t deal with elementary which are where most of the [female] administrators are” (Interview 3). In several of her difficulties that were mentioned in chapter four Sandy reported about being in meetings where, as the leader, she was in front of a room filled with all males. “I had to go to these AD meetings with all these guys and I’m in charge and they just wanted to challenge me each and every month” (Interview 2). This experience reveals how there is an ongoing power struggle created by the gender issues for Sandy. Recently, while I was observing Sandy, I met a new female faculty member whom Sandy had recently hired. Also, through listening to Sandy in other conversations I heard her mention that before she hired her new female employee, Sandy had an assistant athletic director for several years that was a female. Because she is surrounded by males, I think she intentionally or subconsciously hires female

employees whenever she can to bring some equality to her office and to have a female support group in hostile situations.

Sandy highlighted many instances where the gender power struggle between her and males is evident. She once had a male come into her office and throw drivers education videos in her office and verbally make very abusive comments. Another situation involved another male in mandatory monthly meetings Sandy has with all of the coaches in her district. This male was very disrespectful and would hold up the newspaper reading it while Sandy held the meeting. These initial experiences could be attributed to the fact that she was a female in a socially positioned male role. Several females also talk of a network that is commonly known as the Good Ole Boy network.

Good Old Boy Network

According to the literature a common gender barrier for females into leadership positions is the good ole boy network. Many of the participants acknowledge the existence of this network, and Joan does not “see women breaking into the ranks of the good ole boy network” (Interview 3). But, in contradiction to Joan, Sandy indicated that females can break into the network saying, “Sure. I did” (Interview 3). But, in an early part of the interview, Sandy states, “I had no problems with the good old boy network because I’m not a part of it and never have been” (Interview 3). This contradiction between her earlier comment that she has broken into the good ole boy network and the comment that she has never been a part of this network is interesting. At this point in her career, I think that Sandy, because of the longevity of her job position, has hired most of the men who work for her, which leads her to think that she is a part of the network. But,

situations continually shift, making her unsure at times if she has broken into the ranks of this male network.

Interestingly, Dana saw the network but did not feel that it has impacted her (Interview 3). She stated, “I haven’t know it and haven’t felt wounded by it or anything, but I’ve observed it and it’s interesting to watch it because you can just, I mean you can just see it. . . You just watch it, how it plays out, who gets what jobs and who gets what positions and what not” (Interview 3). Once again Dana was not surrounded by males in her leadership position so it has not directly impacted her substantially, but since she is in a leadership position, she has seen it play a role in the hiring of other leaders around her in the same district. Also, Dana reported that the network does not have the power that it used to have (Interview 3).

Joan in her interview said the same thing about the network and how it is not as powerful as it used to be, but she has saw this network in action in her school district. “You know I’ve seen it happen at my school. I’ve seen someone come in and get hired when they weren’t the person for the job” (Interview 3). Since Joan is a high school principal she is higher on the career ladder than Dana and it seems to be a more impacting force for Joan. The good ole boy network might be another reason Joan did not get her last superintendent’s position she applied for because the male applicant who got the job played college football. Playing sporting events can be an entry for males into this network (Nicolson, 2000; Smulyan, 2000). Even though males have a network to position themselves into power, the female participants learn to navigate through the gender issues and keep their leadership positions.

Learning to Navigate and Accept Gender

Learning by their experiences, these leaders navigate through the gender system to continue making a positive societal difference in the way that they lead. Gender in the educational administration work place plays its drama, but as the leaders learn from their experiences, they accept their gender and use it to lead in proactive way. Mariah said “it’s learning to navigate and accept your gender and not try to be a man. You just don’t try to be something you’re not” (Interview 3). These participants take a proactive stance on gender and the problems of being a female leader as they utilize their differences to maintain their leadership role. As the previous chapter shows they utilize their strengths of being their selves to becoming successful leaders by learning from their experiences.

Research Relationship and a Feminist Lens

While taking a feminist lens to analyze the data, I struggled with how to approach the notion of gender with my participants in this study. Smulyan (2000) mentions this struggle when doing research with participants who do not relate themselves as feminists. I decided not to use the word “gender” until the participant used it during the interviews or observations. There were several reasons for not using the word immediately with the participants. First, I wanted to be open to the participants’ views while they told their stories instead of imposing my own feminist lens. Secondly, I did not want to shut off conversations by mentioning my feminist perspective if they considered the lens having a negative connotation. While not utilizing gender language immediately, I made notes in my researcher’s journal that I felt that I was not being completely honest with the females. Even though it did not take long for the participants to bring up their gendered

perspectives, I was conscious of my feminist position as I started this research and tried not to feed my own lens into the participants' own viewpoints.

In Smulyan's (2000) research, her participants did not acknowledge the role of gender; instead they tended to examine their lives and jobs from their own individual perspectives. Even though my participants examined their experiences through individual perspectives, they all used comparison of male and female in their storytellings. An example of this is when Joan told her story of being offered her first administration position only after the school board offered it to her husband first and he turned it down and she wondered why they did not offer it to her first. Another example is the story of Dana comparing females to males in how they handle problems, with females finding the source of the problem, while males just fix the problem. Another interesting example of the individual perspectives is when Mariah talked about the school board being nervous when they hired her, the first female superintendent for that particular school district.

Finally, at the last interview, I initiated a question directly using a gendered language: I asked the participants "How is gender a factor for you in your career?" each of them had a different answer. Joan replied, "I think it has been a limiting force in my career" (Interview 3). Mariah stated, "Don't ever think that it [gender] is not obvious that it is there" (Interview 3). Dana thought it was not a factor now in her leadership position, but thought gender influenced her career choice (Interview 3). Finally, Sandy replied, "I would like to think that my gender played nothing. That I was hired for what I had to offer" (Interview 3). Even though at times they used contradictory discourses on whether gender did or did not play a role in their leadership positions, it was clear to me

that gender did play a role in how they entered into the leadership path or their work sometime during their career as a leader. Even though my participants do not want to position themselves as feminists, they offer valuable insights through stories to enrich my feminist analysis.

I wrote about this process in my journal, as well as about my relationships with my participants. In the first interviews, I noticed that during the interview process I would ask the questions and they would answer the questions, without much conversation besides the questions and answers. In the last interview, I noticed the dynamics of the interview had changed with more interaction between me and my participants. As the trust between the participants and I grew, the more the interviews seem to flow like a conversation between friends. Smulyan (2000) states, “The connections the principals and I developed allowed me to have much richer insights into the women’s personal and professional lives, the meanings they constructed, the actions they took, and the choices they made” (p. 604). The relationships I developed with the participants helped to create a deeper, richer research project.

But because of the relationships I developed with the participants, I struggled with the issue of how to critique the women’s perspectives and experiences without feeling a sense of betrayal to them. At times during analysis, I would find myself highlighting their success and ignoring their conflicts, especially when they would buy into society’s notions and expectations. The complexity of this researcher/participant relationship was further enhanced by my goal to be in an educational leadership position. Therefore, at times I needed to peel back the layers of the simplistic idea of knowing and my romantic views of their success, to be more open in the ways of knowing on a deeper level. Doing

feminist research with women who do not explicitly identify as feminists is an ongoing learning process for researchers.

Other Factors Revealed

While conducting this research, I found other interesting factors that were revealed in the data. All of the participants revealed that regardless of the difficulties associated with their profession, they loved their job. Several mentioned that they felt they always played the role of administrator, even in their personal time, some attributing this role to their efforts to be on their job every day and all day. The multiplicity of their lives was an interesting factor, with the participants revealing that they took on different roles throughout each day. The participants' age, race, and class were also factors revealed through my study.

Love of Job

Each of these females expressed their passion for their jobs despite the difficulties they encounter. Mariah explained how she believes in the “system of public education” (Interview 1) and how she “loves my job” (Interview 2). Another participant, Sandy, said, “I still love what I do. I make a decent living and enjoy what I do and the people I work with” (Interview 1). Also, Sandy mentioned how she is “happy with my choices” (Interview 1). This relates to how Joan feels concerning the love of her job and her happiness concerning, “where I have ended up now” (Interview 1). These females recognize the difficulties, but they counteract those difficulties with their passion for education and making a difference through their leadership. Munro (1998) discusses how her participants create a space where they can “negotiate the conflicted gender terrain” (p. 99). I believe this is what my participants have accomplished within their leadership

positions. I think because they love their job, they make efforts to create a space in their profession to negotiate the conflicted gender terrain for successful leadership.

Always in the Role of Administrator

Being available at all times creates a role that is sometimes hard for the participants to break away from even after the traditional work hours. Most of the participants discuss how they are accessible to everyone at all times. Sandy has even “published my cell phone number in the coaches’ guide that is given to all the coaches each year . . . my office number is in the code of student conduct that goes to 42,000 homes . . . I feel like I am always on the clock” (Interview 1). Joan reported, “I am always in the administrative role . . . I think I’ll die with that role” (Interview 3).

Mariah spoke of all the commitments that her job of the superintendent requires and how she tries to go to all school activities, but it seems to be an impossible task. The expectation of always being in the role of the administrator seems to be deemed necessary to show they are capable of being successful in their positions and one way they show this is by working hard to prove their worth. Not only did the participants discuss the role of administrator, but also they took on several other roles during an ordinary day.

Multiplicity of Roles

The multiplicity of roles each of these participants take on each day is fluid and continuous. All of the female participants take on the role of mother, leader, wife, friend, counselor, and many others as they negotiate through their day. Joan mentioned that all of those things sometimes come before being a wife (Interview 3). Sandy mentioned all the multiplicity of roles she plays, “I’m a mom, I’m a partner, I’m the athletic director,

I'm a friend, I'm just Sandy" (Interview 3). Interestingly, she puts herself last. This indicates to me that all of her roles are taken care of first, before she thinks of herself. The multiplicity of roles the participants mention remind us that women do not "possess just one identity" (Capper, 1993, p. 21). Their discussed, fluid roles "allows the exploration of the shifting, contradictory, incomplete and competing interpretations of personal identity" (p. 21). The females play an active role in constructing their own identities since they recognize each of these identities.

Age

The ages of the participants ranged from the youngest of forty-two years old to the oldest at fifty-nine years old. As I went through the research process, I noticed the closeness in age between all of the participants and how between three of the participants there is only a seven year age difference. This relates well to the historical time period that these three women position themselves in, and more than one of them discussed how there were not many jobs available to females. The forty-two year old, Sandy, highlighted Title IX as being an important historical event, which also relates to her age. When I asked these four females to be participants in my research, I did not know how close in age they were and if this would be a factor in my research.

Race

An interesting factor concerning all of the participants is that they are all White. Once again, this was a factor that came up in the research process. I did not intend to select all White participants. Even though they encounter gender difficulties, the majority of most power relations are held by Whites, especially within educational

administration. Perhaps if the participants had come from different racial backgrounds, their stories might be different. Whether or not race is a factor needs further study.

Social Class

Most of the participants grew up in a middle class family, with the security of having most of their needs met. The only participant from a poor background was Joan. Her mother was the only source of income, making minimum wage while raising eight children. Coming from a low socio-economic background affects Joan's leadership behaviors and styles. Her main concerns were if her students were "all warm and fed so they're open to learning" (Interview 2), and she wanted her school to be "the best place to be. School is the warmest place to be. It's got the best food. There are the nicest people there" (Interview 2). Joan also mentioned that she started working at a very young age to make money to help her family. She mentioned several times how she had to work hard and that developed her strong work ethic (Interview 1 & 2). Joan came from a different economic background than the other participants and it clearly played a role in her leadership position.

Summary

Within this chapter of gender and other factors, it is apparent that gender does play a role in educational administration for these female participants. Most are the first females to hold their leadership positions, a factor that unfortunately does not show that females have gained full equality in the workforce. Consistent with the literature review, I found that all of the females found leadership roles within their school districts and once they received their leadership roles, they never changed school districts. Also, only two females moved up on the career ladder in their school district. One participant tried to

move up again on the career ladder, but was passed over on the superintendent's position twice and has since then not tried to move up again. The salaries are inconsistent between the male leaders and the participants in their school districts and the females find themselves, because of the lack of females in administrative roles, as the only females in certain situations. I found that the network known as the Good Ole Boy network is still alive, but losing some of its notoriety according to my participants. Overall, women are still disadvantaged to have access to leadership positions and have to make more efforts to achieve what they have been able to achieve. At the same time, these women also find productive ways to navigate for success, including bringing in women's ways of thinking and leading. Several other factors not related to gender emerged from the data. These factors included always being in the role of administrator, the multiplicity of their daily roles, the consistency of their age and race, and the role of different social economic backgrounds.

Chapter six will present the conclusions of the study and suggest directions for further research.

Chapter VI

Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter I discuss the overview of the study including the process of data collection and analysis, synthesis of the major findings while highlighting the study's unique contributions, a holistic view of each participant, practical implications, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Introduction

Although women today occupy more leadership positions than they did a decade ago, the numbers are still relatively low compared to males in the same positions (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). In fact, Shakeshaft et al. (2007) found many of the same difficulties for women leaders that Shakeshaft (1989) found almost twenty years earlier. Even though research on gender and leadership has increased, few studies focus on female administrators' experiences in education, even fewer studies focus on more than one avenue of leadership positions within public school education. My research study addresses the need of rigorous research that includes most administrative positions within public education, while highlighting the women's own stories and experiences.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of females in the top administrative roles of public education and how they negotiate between being a female and a leader. I wanted to understand how their life experiences contributed to their choosing this career path, what gender barriers they face and the role of gender in their professional lives.

My research study used a life history methodology and a feminist theoretical framework. While conducting this study, I did not look through just one feminist lens. In order to fully analyze the multifaceted and complex picture of the participants, I weaved four feminist thoughts together, which included the Liberal Feminist Theory, Radical/Multicultural Feminist Theory, Post-Structural Feminist Theory. This weaving emphasized the differences of each woman, building upon the notion of the whole female, which rejects the narrative of having only one unifying category. Also, it illuminated the dynamic aspect of Feminist theory, giving me a more holistic picture of each leader. Each participant had different conflicts, multiplicities, and differences. Weaving the different feminist theories into one framework is this study's strength since just one feminist lens can not explain the complex experiences of each participant. I acknowledge that gender is part of a broader socio-cultural context that intersects with race, class, and other cultural issues (Maher & Ward, 2002) and use the lenses of equality, difference, and fluidity to orient my study. Such a combination of different lenses is unique theoretical contribution of my study.

My study did not intend to portray men's and women's perspectives, but to illuminate women's experiences through the lens of gender. The study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. What life experiences contributed to these women becoming educational leaders in public schools?
2. What difficulties did these women encounter in their career path of leadership?
3. How did they deal with those difficulties?
4. Is gender a factor?

5. What other factors are revealed?

To answer these research questions, I examined four women who have obtained administrative positions in several sizes of public schools and in various stages of their career. They all held different leadership positions and their experiences were told through their own voices. The issues of gender and the multiple identities the women administrators continuously lived were illuminated through my research study.

I used Patton's (2002) notion of triangulation to collect in-depth interviews, personal artifacts, historical documents, and completing several observations of the participants. I interviewed each participant three times with each interview lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes. The initial interview questions contained six open-ended questions regarding their personal experiences, educational experiences, career preparation, mentors influencing their career choices, changes about their careers, and difficulties in their leadership roles. For the following interviews, I used questions generated from the first and subsequent interviews that followed. Before and after the interviews and at a school activity, I observed each of the participants. These observations provided an exceptional opportunity to watch how these female administrators negotiated gender, difficulties, politics, and self. Personal artifacts were collected as a way to gain insights into their professional and personal lives. I made copies of personal notes and emails, as well as drawing detailed floor plans of each participant's office, describing the details of the office through spatial arrangements and noting the personal artifacts each female had in her office. I reviewed historical documents such as newspapers, board minutes, the district's strategic plan, demographic information of each district, and the internet home page of each district. The historical

documents provided more of a comprehensive life history of each participant (Munro, 1998; Ward, 2003). Finally, each participant completed member checks of each interview transcript for accuracy. Also, the member checks of the transcripts provided another opportunity for the participant to voice their thoughts and comments to the transcript adding to the data.

I transcribed the interviews as soon as possible following each interview since within the life history approach data analysis began as soon as I started working with each participant (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Next, I hand sorted through the data of transcriptions and observation notes, cutting out any data that I thought would lead to any shared ideas and emergent themes and pasting the data onto colored index cards. Each participant was assigned a color and all of their data was pasted on that specific color. Also, I labeled each card with which interview or observation the data came from as an organization tool. I continually kept coding the data, taking time away from the data after each coding to approach the data with fresh eyes. This analysis tool presented a new awareness for the data and for new codes to emerge. At this point, I consulted a peer to help generate new ideas from the data for a richer more varied analysis through another point of view. During the process, I remained open-minded to women's own experiences, stories, and voices to let the data speak to me; at the same time, I used feminist lens of equity, difference, and fluidity to orient my study.

Major Findings

The life experiences of the women played an important role in their becoming educational leaders. A finding that was similar to the literature was that most of the participants had more mentors that were men than women. Crutcher (1992) found that

for a woman having a mentor is vitally important, especially if they have desires to become educational leaders. Because of the low numbers of female administrators, my study revealed that male mentoring seems to have a greater influence on the participants. The men mentors of the participants became allies for them, encouraging them, and in some cases, pushing them into leadership roles. Women need more men to become allies by encouraging them to take leadership roles and they also need more women as positive role models to increase the number of women leaders.

Each participant experienced difficulties within their leadership roles. This was a commonly discussed area in the literature review (Shakeshaft, 1989; Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Adams & Hambright, 2004; Spencer & Kochan, 2000; Evans, 2004; Comeaux, 2009). Most of the difficulties for the participants are from external conflicts, for instance school communities, legal and political issues, and family or personal issues. An interesting commonality of some of the participants was a difficulty in their relationship with their husbands and what the women thought they valued and wanted to believe, to their actual reality. One woman had a clear power struggle with her husband because he thought she devoted too much time to her work and wanted her to retire, even though she enjoyed her time working. Another participant wanted to move up the career ladder, but her husband would not support her attempts. Her husband finally gave his support with the condition that he would not attend most of the school activities with her. These women talked of how they had wonderful husbands, but through their story telling, a paradox was established that contradicted their perceived thoughts and realities.

Some of the difficulties are internal difficulties from their construction of their identities to their shifting realities. The women discussed how women leaders have a

tendency to yell loudly, overstep their boundaries, and their desire for everyone to be happy. One participant even discussed how she would not want to work for a female, but hoped her faculty did not think in that manner. Once again this showed contradictions from their discourse of language and their situations. Most of these internal and external difficulties are unique to women because of societal expectations. Society places almost impossible demands of women who work outside of the home. They have to excel in their professional lives, as well as in their personal lives, and if they do not excel in both areas they are considered deviant because they do not live up to the societal gender expectations.

From the data analysis we can see that gender is a factor for these educational leaders. The difficulties the women encountered and the navigations they adopted to deal with the difficulties are gendered. To a certain degree, they are pioneers in paving pathways for women to become leaders. Most have the record of being the first woman in various leadership positions. They encountered doubled difficulties in having access to these positions, and once they were in these positions, their moving up the career ladder was more limited. But each woman battled societal gendered norms in their leadership positions to succeed as a leader. Interestingly, Joan consciously acknowledges that gender has been a limiting force in her career, which contradicts some of the research (Smulyan, 2000) that found that women usually do not consciously acknowledge gender being a limited force in their career. This is interesting, especially within this historical, social and political time period that has helped in highlighting gender issues, but unfortunately just because gender has been highlighted does not mean that the issue has been equalized. Gender is not the only factor that was discovered in my research study.

Other factors such as love of their job, multiplicity of roles, age, race, and social class were also revealed in my research study.

This study shed new lights on gender issues in educational leadership. First, the participants' family relationships with their fathers and their siblings, as shown in my study, seem to be a missing link in the previous studies. Most of the participants observed their father working outside of the home, taking on leadership responsibilities within their professions while most of their mothers were considered "stay at home" mothers. These particular participants' connections to their fathers and their leadership activities might have influenced their becoming leaders themselves. As society changes and the acceptance of women may not need such a connection with their fathers to become leaders. Also, most of the participants mention how important their siblings were to them and how their interactions with them were an important part of childhood. Through these interactions, the participants may have learned important leadership characteristics of being flexible, giving, and sharing. The participants' family relations seem to be transferred to their leadership role in their ways of leading and their treatment of all of the stakeholders in their school district. My approach of life history studies brings to light the influence of these leaders' childhood experiences in family.

The time period in which the women situated themselves, illuminates certain events that served as a catalyst for their becoming leaders. Through the historical, social and political contexts, the women subconsciously gained both positive and negative insights for their position of leadership. This provides an intricate, holistic life history starting from their childhood to present day, which helped to shape their identities and position them into their current leadership roles.

Through this analysis of their family relationships, social and historical influences I was able to address why the participants' adopt their particular ways of leading. The research abounds of women and their ways of leading, but through a life history methodology, the layers of these particular participants' ways of leading led to a clearer picture of why they have certain leadership characteristics. For instance, Joan was the most economically challenged participant and her main goals of leading were to make sure all of her students were clothed and fed properly so they would be open to learning.

Secondly, my study highlights the women's own agency through early leadership experiences and their use of multiple resources to overcome difficulties. The participants were involved in leadership activities when they were younger and this seems to have a direct effect on how they construct their identities as leaders in the present. The women leaders' agency is established by actively formulating their own identity. They exhibit how their early leadership activities help in contradicting the more passive role revealed in their experiences under men mentorship and expectations.

The women also use multiple resources to overcome difficulties by navigation and negotiations of "being themselves" to "becoming themselves" in their educational leadership positions. The women develop a harmonious leadership style of familiarity and learned characteristics for their success. Each of the participants used the negotiations differently, actively making them their own in order to form their own agency.

Third, multiplicity and contradictions in their identity demonstrate that women's work in leadership is a complicated, ongoing process. As their experiences change, the women change, creating an identity that is considered a work in progress (Miller, 2005).

The women took on multiple roles while being a woman and a leader. These multiple roles at the same time created contradictions and paradoxes for them. To deal with these contradictions and paradoxes, the women try to create a third space where the “contradictions are not only acknowledge and accepted but also put into movement to enable new layers of self . . . conflicts, as a result of these dynamics, are not dissolved but transformed” (Wang, 2004, p. 9). As they negotiate through their days as mother, leaders, wife, friend, counselor, among other roles, and deal with all kinds of internal conflicts emerging from such negotiations, they navigate towards a third space. They do not possess just one particular identity (Capper, 1993) and their identity is always a process of negotiations and navigations to become themselves.

The women exhibit contradictions in their negotiations, exemplifying that they are truly a work in progress. For instance, some of the participants discussed how they are tough and do not want to be intimidated easily, but yet they want relationships and value the intimacy found in these relationships. Communication is an important aspect to the participants’ leadership styles, but yet the participants have learned to hold their tongue in certain situations to not communicate what is in their mind in order to deal with the situation more effectively. Through these multiplicity and contradictions, the women learn something that is useful and helpful, which contributes to their success and confidence, also highlighting their work in progress within their leadership roles.

These educational leaders have the potential to reach their third space, but most have not fully reached this place, going in and out of their third space through their difficulties and successes. As they negotiate and navigate through their conflicts, the idea of them being a work in progress is illuminated and they may reach a third space

momentarily. They learn something more about themselves, and then a new conflict ignites, either internally or externally, which causes them to lose their way back into their space they created previously. Their search for this third space begins once again. Wang (2004) asks the question “Who or what can become the teacher’s loving third so that she can sustain this journey of traveling in and through the third space together with her students?” (p. 107). I ask the question of who or what can become the educational leader’s loving third so that she can sustain her journey of going in and through the third space with her family and all of the stakeholders of a public educational system.

Individual Portraits

While my data analysis focus on shared patterns among the four participants, here I offer a brief sketch of each individual woman leader and highlight her uniqueness.

Joan

Joan’s stories were unique in several aspects. Joan’s poor social class of her childhood affected her career choice of education and it impacts her ways of leading. An important aspect in Joan’s story is her equating pretty people to successful people. She makes a conscious effort to appear beautiful, embracing the societal expectation of female beauty. She is a tall woman and she feels that this grants her authority because she can look other people in the eyes. Her conflict of her reality of being a leader with a husband in the same profession, her language of not wanting to identify herself as being a feminist, presents an interesting discourse. She is the only one to not have her doctorate and this is a huge regret in her life. She is the only one to try to obtain a position outside of her school district and after several times of not succeeding she has not tried again.

She is the only one to explicitly point out that her gender has been a limiting force in her career.

Sandy

Sandy is the youngest of the participants. Her historical, social, and political context is of Title IX, which is interesting considering her choice of being an athletic director in her multi-high school district. This position is dominated by males and she seemed to have the most difficulties in the first years of her position from her male faculty. She is the first female in the history of her school to hold this leadership position and she is the first female to be the board president of the governing athletic body in her state. She has an interesting attitude of leading through servanthip, a term that is only used by her throughout my research study. This is not a common notion of leadership of an athletic director and may be directly related to her being a woman.

Dana

Dana, an elementary principal, was not the first to hold her leadership position. She was the only one to have women mentors, and felt that gender only affected her initial career choice because of the limited options for women during that time. Her childhood affected her ways of leading by always wanting to try new things with her faculty and students and her leading through learning since school was her favorite childhood place. From her perception, her best leadership characteristic is her ability to communicate with all of the stakeholders in her school district, but she admits that she had to learn to be organized and prepared.

Mariah

Mariah is the first superintendent for her district and made several comments that her school board were very nervous when they hired her for the position. She previously stayed in the assistant superintendent role for over twenty years. Within her leadership position, she is always in situations where she is the only woman. She considers herself one of the guys and uses humor to deflect the difficulties and negatives of her job position that she encounters. Her time was situated in struggles for racial equality and this context contributes to her unique ways of leading. Another interesting aspect of her story was her conflict with her husband concerning her decision to move up the career ladder. She wanted to believe that she had a supporting husband, but through deconstructing her language use, one can see that her reality does not fully support this belief.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study can be practically useful in many situations, such as recruitment of future female leaders, curriculum, professional development, or broader cultural implications. As my study shows, there are few woman mentors for current and future women leaders. Women and men in positions of leadership in the educational system must deliberately make an effort to mentor more females in the school systems to ensure that more women have the opportunities to become leaders. Also, the current leaders within the public school systems can use the findings to promote equality in their hiring practices for future leadership positions.

Another practical implication is for curriculum development for future educators and diversity programs. Female teachers need to be directed toward the leadership roles in public schools. Also, the findings can help in creating curriculum for the multicultural

and diversity programs to address gender issues so that these women learn how to overcome gender obstacles to take on leadership roles. Women in leadership roles should communicate with potential women leaders in the undergraduate and graduate education classes to emphasize the joys in the leadership positions, as well as discussing the difficulties and how to negotiate and navigate through those difficulties.

Furthermore, the findings can help in the creation of continuing professional development for teachers and administrators. This professional development should focus on gender, equality, and social justice issues within education. To improve education the professional development should be integrated within the districts goals. In addition, the professional development should emphasize time for the teachers to engage in dialogue to improve teaching techniques.

Also, promoting gender equity should start early at school levels. Women leaders can support and use legal policies such as Title IX as a strategy to increase young girls' participation in activities. My research found that all of the women leaders had previous participation in activities promoting leadership before they achieved their current career leadership positions. These activities were starting points for the women into their leadership positions and even influences their ways of leading. Influencing young females to participate in leadership roles during their school years is important for breaking down gender barriers in society.

Finally, the findings of this study can be useful in legal, social and cultural aspects of education. All educational leaders from the data of this study should realize the importance of ensuring that all equity laws are being followed and implemented to their fullest and promoting gender equality within their school districts. Educational leaders

should promote the success of all stakeholders within the educational system by understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, and cultural contexts.

Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to my study, mainly involving the scope of the study and sampling, although such limitations are not uncommon to qualitative methodology. The purposive sampling decreases the generalizability of the findings and the sample size being small. And, according to Patton (2002), convenience sampling has the lowest credibility and can be considered a limitation to my research study. However, proponents of the life history methodology argue that life history samples are usually quite small and that “adequacy is dependent not upon quantity, but upon the richness of the data” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Since my study aims to yield enlightening, rich, complicated data through multiple data collection, such a sampling was not a significant limitation.

While conducting this research study, I found that all of my participants were close in age sharing the same racial backgrounds. Knowing that gender intersects with other factors, including race, I recognize the limitation in having all of the participants relate to just the one race. This limitation is also related to convenience sampling as they are the most representative participants I can find within the time period of this study. The highly demanding nature of the leadership profession also puts a limit on when I can have access to them for this study.

Another limitation was the time constraints of my research study. I conducted most of the research from the participants within a three month time frame. I would have liked to have spent more time with each participant, for instance, Munro (1998) spent a

longer time with her three participants while conducting her life history research with women teachers. More time with each participant might have yielded more data.

Future Research

As I wove the strands of the data together, several other questions surfaced for future inquiries. First, because all of my participants fall into the age group of forty-two to fifty-nine years old, it would be beneficial for a future study to examine the experiences of a younger sample of participants and to situate them into their historical and political frames of reference. Researchers should continue to invite the stories of women in leadership with varying age groups and varying leadership positions to advance knowledge in order to increase females in leadership positions at a younger age.

Another recommendation for future research is to focus on female school administrators of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Because my participants are all White, it would be interesting to analyze the experiences of more diverse female leaders. Such a study would undoubtedly be enriching since leadership positions are most often viewed through the dominant White culture.

As educational leaders look to the future in this tumultuous time, there is a need for leaders to be able to work through new and difficult challenges, changes, and situations. The leaders must excel today and at the same time develop practices that will ensure their students and faculty will excel in the future. These women leaders have demonstrated the strength of adaptive leadership in dealing with gender obstacles in their professional lives. Future research concerning adaptive leadership practices of administrators in a broader scope beyond the lens of gender would offer deeper insights about educational leadership as a work in progress.

The participants within my study all had children. It would be interesting for future research to incorporate the lived experiences of the children or other family members concerning their mother being a female leader. Their perceptions could help current and future females balancing their multiplicity of roles between their professional and personal lives, while lessening one particular difficulty that seem to be a common issue in all of my female participants' stories.

Another recommendation for future analysis is the positive effects of the women being educational leaders. Several studies (Evans, 2001; Jean-Marie & Martinez, 2007) discuss the positive effects of women being leaders, but they do this in a minimal way. More research is needed in this area that highlights the positive attributes of their job, not just the difficulties the woman leaders encounter. This research could be used as a part of the curriculum to recruit women into leadership programs.

Finally, a comparison between males and females in their leadership experiences is needed for future research. While the focus of my study is about women and their experiences, gender does include men and women. A comparison study of the experiences of both men and women is recommended for analysis.

Concluding Remarks

According to Adams and Hambricht (2004) changes are needed to encourage female leadership roles in education, as well as retaining the females already in the leadership roles. Insights gained from research conducted from the experiences of women will help increase the numbers of women leaders in public education. Future research needs to have a broader scope to reflect the dynamics of gender in this changing society (Banks, 2007). My study helps fill this gap within research by focusing on

gender through the stories of current female leaders within public education. However, because society is dynamic, research of women and their stories can ignite “the hope for every generation of daughters to carry on [women’s] legacy, exploring new paths for the next generation of daughters” (Wang, 2004, p. 13). I hope the next generation of daughters can further the cause of overcoming the hindering effects of gender in their educational leadership career path. I hope the next generation of daughters stand at their crossroads and take their road that is less traveled toward widening the horizon of educational landscapes for both women and men.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, September 29, 2009
IRB Application No ED09111
Proposal Title: Gender Experiences of Midwestern Female Leaders in Public School Systems
Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 9/28/2010

Principal Investigator(s):

Tiffany Ballard

Hongyu Wang

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

Initial Interview Questions:

1. How did you become a leader within education?
2. What relationships in your life have been the most significant for your career choice?
3. Who influenced your career choice?
4. If you could change anything about your career path, what would it be?
5. Tell me the stories when you encountered some difficulties in your leadership role.
6. Tell me the stories of how you dealt with such difficulties.

Further interview questions will be formed from the initial interview process.

APPENDIX C

Second Interview Sample Questions:

1. After our initial interview, what are some things that you want to elaborate or discuss further that you might have thought about?
2. In the initial interview, you stated that you felt you were not hired for a superintendent position because you were a woman. Elaborate on this idea.
3. You stated that having your doctorate helped you establish respect within your position. Elaborate this for me.
4. You highlighted several times throughout our first interview that some people were disrespectful and rude during your first few years. Tell me these stories and tell me the stories of how you handled the situations.
5. What attributes do you have that makes you a good administrator?
6. Tell me the stories of when your personal life and your professional life did not fit together in your life.
7. What has been the most important learning experience for you in your career?

APPENDIX D

Third Interview Sample Questions:

1. Describe any social, historical, and political event or events that have had an impact on your life.
2. Describe the different roles you take on during a twenty-four hour day.
3. In the last interview you mentioned how peers have influenced your administrative ideas. Tell me the stories of how these peers have influenced you.
4. If you could redo your administrative career, what would you change?
5. Define gender.
6. How is gender a factor for you in your career?

VITA

Tiffany Renee Ballard

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS: A FEMINIST LIFE HISTORY
APPROACH

Major Field: Education: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2010.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Teaching at
Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in May, 2003.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Education at
Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in May, 1997.

Experience:

Educator for 9th to 12th grade in various schools, Fall 1997 to Present
Adjunct Professor for the Communications Division, Tulsa Community
College, Fall 1999 to Present

Professional Memberships:

National Writing Project
Oklahoma State Writing Project
International Learning Styles Community
AESA

Name: Tiffany Renee Ballard

Date of Degree: July, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS: A LIFE HISTORY APPROACH

Pages in Study: 179

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Education: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Scope and Method of Study: There is a need for research that provides an opportunity for female leaders to tell their stories as they function as educational leaders. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of females in the top administrative roles of public education and how they negotiate between being a female and a leader. I examined four women who have obtained leadership positions in several sizes of public schools and in various stages of their careers. They all held different leadership positions within public education. Life history methodology was used with a feminist theoretical framework to illuminate the issues of gender and the multiple identities they continuously live. Multiple data collection activities, such as interviews, observations, personal artifacts, and historical data strengthened the research study.

Findings and Conclusions: The life experiences of the women played an important role in their becoming educational leaders. Each participant experienced internal and external difficulties within their leadership roles. Gender was found to be a factor for these educational leaders. This study sheds new light on gender issues in educational leadership. First, the participants' family relationships with their fathers and siblings seemed to have a connection to them becoming leaders, as well as the time period in which the women situated themselves, highlighting certain events that served as a catalyst for their becoming leaders. Secondly, my study emphasized the women's won agency through early leadership experiences and their using multiple resources to overcome difficulties by actively formulating their own identity. Third, multiplicity and contradictions in their identity demonstrates that women's work in leadership is complicated and an ongoing process, exemplifying that these women's identities are a work in progress.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Hongyu Wang
