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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS'  
CAREER LIFE HISTORIES

by

Jan Bradshaw Hansen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Education  
(Curriculum and Instruction)

Approved:

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Martha L. Whitaker, Ph.D.  
Major Professor

---

Susan Turner, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Michael Freeman, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Susan R. Madsen, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

---

Sarah K. Clark, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

---

Mark R. McLellan, Ph.D.  
Vice President for Research and  
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2014

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**ABSTRACT**

A Qualitative Study of Women High School Principals' Career Life Histories

by

Jan Bradshaw Hansen, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2014

Major Professor: Martha L. Whitaker, Ph.D.  
Department: Education

Gender inequalities in the workplace continue to plague aspiring career- directed women. In public education, it is established that there are fewer women high school principals than there are men. In a profession predominantly employing women, the question remains, “Where are the women high school administrators”? This study examines the sociopolitical gender systems and psychological dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality. It then discusses the encumbered or constrained choices women make that are burdened or made more complicated by gendered sociopolitical or psychological dynamics.

The study is a qualitative study narrowing the life-history method with an innovative *career* life-history focus. Seven high school women principals were interviewed and then data were transcribed and analyzed. Participants provided an external participant who shared their perspectives of the career life histories of these women principals, which added to the richness of the data analysis. Resumes of the

principal participants were collected for triangulation purposes. Finally, a narrative from the data analysis was written.

The findings reveal unintentional career journeys. The women in the study were invited to join administrative teams, reluctantly accepted, and embarked on their career journey, psychologically transitioning from teacher to administrator. They navigated through sociopolitical systems and barriers, finding support from family, supervisors, and friends. The women's new identities led to reconfigured families and brought diversity to high school administrative teams.

(269 pages)

**PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

A Qualitative Study of Women High School Principals' Career Life Histories

by

Jan Bradshaw Hansen, Doctor of Education

Utah State University, 2014

Gender inequalities in the workplace continue to plague aspiring career-directed women. In public education, it is established that there are fewer women high school principals than there are men. In a profession predominantly employing women, the question remains, “Where are the women high school administrators”? This study examines the sociopolitical genders systems and psychological dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality. It then discusses the encumbered or constrained choices women make that are burdened or made more complicated by gendered sociopolitical or psychological dynamics. This study explored the unintentional career journeys of seven women high school principals and analyzed their career life histories.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to educators everywhere. They are a special group of men and women, dedicating time and efforts to caring for and teaching students. To elementary educators, thank you for nurturing the children and helping them build the foundations of their future education. To middle/junior high school teachers, bless you. Thank you for keeping them safe in your watch. High school teachers, thank you for accepting late homework and working things out for that senior who finally realizes a diploma is a good thing. School coaches and extracurricular advisors, thank you for helping your students build skills, self-esteem, teamwork, hard work, and commitment in our future leaders. University professors, thank you for asking questions, researching answers, promoting thought, and mentoring aspiring professionals.

I thank the seven participants of the study for their time and career life histories. My journey with you has been invigorating and inspirational. You are women of substance and courage. Thanks go to the six external participants. Your enthusiasm for sharing your observations of these women's career life histories was contagious.

I extend a generous thank you to the assistant administrators I work with every day. Without their sense of teaming, I could not have done all that is required of me.

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Thank you to committee members, Martha Whitaker, Susan Turner, Susan Madsen, Sarah Clark, and Michael Freeman, for your questions, support, and guidance.

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Jan Bradshaw Hansen



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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Statement of Problem**

A high school principal's job description cannot be easily written (Copland, 2001). The job is demanding, time intensive, and in continuous disruption. Principals oversee a small city of students, faculty, staff, parents, and community members. With burdens of building management, competitive athletic demands, community expectations, high stakes testing, professional development, and oversight of student learning and curriculum, a high school principal is a busy, multi-tasking person. My first weeks as a high school teacher made me realize the intense and complicated influence high school principals have in a community. There were over 2,600 students and preparation was underway for the division of the staff, students, and traditions between two schools the upcoming year. It seemed to me that our principal was actually the mayor of the school.

In my experiences as a teacher and an administrator, I also noticed that women in high school leadership positions were rare. As a graduate student, I realized that although women's "underrepresentation in school administration continues to generate research interest" (Adkison, 1981, p. 311; Blount, 1998, 1999; Lad, 1996; Mertz, 2006; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Patterson, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1989; Skinner, 2009), this 20 plus years of research has resulted in minimal changes in the gender gap.

There were several indicators bringing me to explore the career life histories of women high school principals who have broken barriers, stereotypes, and gender

conflicts as they secured their administrator positions. First, women are underrepresented in educational leadership (Adkison, 1981; Blount, 1998; Rusch & Marshall, 2006; Shakeshaft, 1989; Skinner, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Utah State Office of Education, 2013; Young & McLeod, 2001). Second, this is a loss for women, personally, professionally, and financially (Blount, 1998, 1999; Cohen, 2013; Eberts & Stone, 1985; Meier, 2002; Sandberg, 2013; Shakeshaft, 1989; Stone, 2007). Third, it is a loss for students who learn about gender by participating in communities that normalize stereotypical career and leadership norms (Barnett, 2004; Eckman, 2004; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Ridgeway, 2001; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Whitaker & Lane, 1990). Fourth, it is a loss for school communities, for whom the pool of good leaders is unnecessarily limited by the implicit expectation that administrators will be men (Blount, 1999; Coleman, 2005; Meier, 2002; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). It is a loss for the community, who could be benefitting from the contributions of women leaders (Björk, 2000; Blount, 1998, 1999; Criswell & Betz, 1995). Finally, it is a loss for our society when rigid gender norms limit the choices of both men and women, constraining their possible contributions to the common good (Adkison, 1981; Blount, 1999; Grogan, 1999, 2000; Ridgeway, 2001; Whitaker & Lane, 1990; Young & McLeod, 2001). One of the high school's purposes is to educate its students to be contributing citizens of a greater community. Gender balance in leadership expands the examples, points of view, and styles present in schools and provides opportunities for students to witness men and women working together to lead the school.

## Purpose

Books, journals, articles, and dissertations document women's historical and current careers (Blount, 1999; Domenico & Jones, 2006; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Fuller, 1971; Herbst, 1989; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Shakeshaft, 1989; Smith, 2011; Turner, 1964; Valian, 1998). After browsing in the library for books on women, Woolf (1929/1957) found shelves of books written by men about women. "Here I drew breath and added, indeed, in the margin, Why does Samuel Butler say, 'Wise men never say what they think of women?' Wise men never say anything else apparently" (p. 29). The mysteries of womanhood continue to bring researchers to the writing table, attempting to answer questions of why this or why not that. I, too, attempt to address a small portion of the mystery, asking, "Where are the women in educational leadership?"

Although more women are currently pursuing high school leadership positions, there are, nevertheless, substantially fewer women than men holding these leadership roles (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Utah State Office of Education, 2013). This study documents, then moves beyond the existence of the gender imbalance in the high school principalship, including literature that examines the sociopolitical and psychological dynamics that sustain a gendered status quo. Interviews were conducted with women currently in positions of leadership in high school settings throughout one state. The career life histories of these women informed an examination of the choices women make that contribute to a lower female representation in the high school principalship.

## **Research Questions**

This study examined the career life histories of a group of high school women administrators in the state. The research questions that were the focus of this study were: (a) What characterizes the career life histories of the participants? and (b) What dynamics have impacted study participants' decision to become high school administrators?

## **Rationale**

This study is important because changing the gender imbalance in the principalship has ramifications for not only women who wish to be administrators, but also for students and community members who benefit from diverse leadership. In order to foster that transition, greater understanding of the dynamics that influence the existing gender imbalance is needed. If all students are to form independent thoughts and beliefs before entering society as an adult, it is crucial for both boys and girls to experience gender balance, have equitable opportunities, and build aspirations, giving them the “leverage to challenge the gender structure of the workplace” (Gilbert & Rader, 2001, p. 162). It is important to examine high school administration gender imbalance from the perspective of women who have chosen to pursue administrative careers to add to our understanding of the way gender norms operate and limit possibilities for women and all of society. Documenting the career life histories of women provided information about the nature of their journeys and both positive and negative influences that have supported or deterred their progress toward the goal of an administrative career in a high school setting.

## **Summary**

Although women dominate the education field as teachers, they are not well represented in leadership and administration positions. Leadership gender balance in the high school students' education is crucial to their gender understanding. This study examined this dilemma through career life history analyses of women high school administrators' experiences, using a theoretical lens that focused on the ways women's choices are shaped and constrained.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

For the review of literature, first I used statistical data on women in educational leadership to establish the gender discrepancy in leadership. Second, I examined feminist literature that critiques the way sociopolitical systems perpetuate gendered hierarchies, influencing women's lives, including the literature about work/family conflicts. Third, literature that highlights the psychological processes that shape gender, including gendered challenges women face in the world of career leadership was examined. Fourth, I accessed literature about the gendered dynamics in education leadership. Fifth, literature about the encumbered nature of women's choices was consulted. I conclude the literature review by locating my own positionality in relation to these bodies of literature. Finally, the theoretical framework for the study is presented.

#### **Statistics of Women in Educational Administration**

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Condition of Education report of 2010 indicated that nationally, in recent years, women have comprised less than 30% of the secondary high school principals (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011) as shown on Table 1. Gender statistics for high school principals in Utah, where this study was conducted, show an even greater imbalance, with women currently comprising less than 25% of the secondary principals in the state (Utah State Office of Education, 2013). The 2012-2013 Utah Education Directory (Utah State Office of Education, 2013) reported 87.0% men and 13.0% women

Table 1

*Percent of Men and Women Principals for Secondary Schools in the U.S.A. and in Utah's School Districts*

Year	Men middle/high school principals	Women middle/high school principals
National statistics		
2008	70.9	29.1
2010	71.5	28.5
Utah school districts		
2008	67.9	32.1
2010	72.2	27.8
	Men high school principals	Women high school principals
National statistics		
2012	69.1	30.1
Utah school statistics		
2012	87.0	13.0

*Note.* Data include secondary school populations with greater than 750 students.

administrators. These numbers show a lower representation of women than the national statistics for the most recent year most available.

According to the 2008 National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Digest of Educational Statistics, the greater the enrollment of students in a school, the greater the likelihood that there will be a male principal. Schools with 750 and more students have 70.9% men principals and 29.1% women principals, whereas schools with 500-749 students have 47.4% men and 52.6% women (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

The most recent national records for 2011-12 (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) did not specify the population number of students in a school but separated secondary schools into middle school and high school.

This 2013 report indicates there were 69.1% men and 30.1% women administrators in high schools. Given the greater likelihood that women are more likely to occupy smaller school leadership principalships, this statistic may not represent a reduction in gender imbalance.

### **Sociopolitical Analyses of Gender Systems**

Writing in 1979, Sherif (1979) asserted that the women's movement brought awareness and acceptance to greater gender equity. "Many women and men have accepted viewpoints, tasks, and changed relationships that they would not have dreamed of a mere decade ago" (p. 126). Although there is noted progress, there continued to be conflicts surrounding women's position in the sociopolitical environment, as Beauvoir (1976) expressed:

Sometimes the "feminine world" is contrasted with the masculine universe, but we must insist again that women have never constituted a closed and independent society; they form an integral part of the group, which is governed by males and in which they have a subordinate place. (p. 597)

Breaking into an "independent society" is a difficult task and even if women began to do so, Sherif (1979) said it will take time because "individuals change themselves as they change their practices, and their practices as they change themselves" (p. 127). Beauvoir (1976) discussed the conflict inherent in assuming women will unite because of their similarity. When they are "compelled...to band together in order to establish a counter-universe, they always set it up within the frame of the masculine universe" (p. 597). This does not unite women into an "independent society" as Beauvoir observed for it is fashioned in the way of the "masculine universe."

Women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to struggle with their “subordinate place” (Beauvoir, 1976, p. 597) as they choose to go beyond that status and join men’s universe in the workforce in greater numbers. However, their quest may be constrained by their culturally shaped understandings, as Beauvoir explained. Insufficient progress toward gender equity in the workplace suggests that Beauvoir’s cultural analysis may still be relevant today. “The lot of women is a respectful obedience. She has no grasp, even in thought, on the reality around her. It is opaque to her eyes” (p. 598).

Beliefs that women cannot lead high schools has deep roots in the history of public education. Research (Blount, 1999; Grogan, 1999; Herbst, 1989; Shakeshaft, 1989) verified the inequity and maleness of school administration. In Blount’s publication, *Manliness and the gendered construction of school administration in the USA*, she presented historical explanations of inequality in school administration and its sociopolitical impact on women in education today. When women “appeared as though [they] might begin making inroads into the administrative realm, school administrators worked aggressively to increase the masculine appeal of the work and to recruit into their ranks men who were icons of manliness” (p. 56). In the early twentieth century, Blount added that administrators “labored to separate themselves socially, intellectually economically and politically from the larger feminized profession” (p. 56). This practice continued especially after World War II with efforts to recruit more men into education, “administrators once again stepped up their efforts to enhance the masculine appeal and stature of the work” (p. 56). Blount argued that the masculinization of school administration “has been driven by the perceived need for creating acceptably masculine

havens for men in schoolwork” (p. 56).

Until sociopolitical values begin to reflect a changed view about men’s and women’s capacities, communities will miss contributions women can bring to society. But, although still the minority, some women do occupy positions of leadership in society. The voices of women who have broken their “subordinate place” and broken away from the “masculine universe,” were central to the development of the career life histories of women high school principals conveyed in this study.

Ehrenreich and English (1978) asserted that there are solutions to our gender inequities in the past, however, forgotten. They link the restrictions on women’s contributions to the marginalization of human values.

There are clues to the answer in the distant past, in a gynocentric era that linked woman’s nurturance to a tradition of skill, caring to craft. There are the outlines of a solution in the contours of the industrial era, with its promise of a collective strength and knowledge surpassing all past human efforts to provide for human needs. And there are impulses toward the truth in each one of us. In our very confusion, in our legacy of repressed energy and half-forgotten wisdom, lies the understanding that it is not we who must change but the social order which marginalized women in the first place and with us all “human values.” (p. 323-324).

Such a view suggests that increasing women’s presence in the world of work will benefit society. The women of this study are at the forefront, leading the way for others in changing the sociopolitical values of who can lead a high school. Ehrenreich and English (1978) foreshadowed the progressive career pathways that led the women in this study to become high school principals when they discuss women’s determination. “We refuse to remain on the margins of society, and we refuse to enter that society on its terms” (p. 324).

## Work and Family Conflict

It is impossible to think about gender conflicts in the workplace without considering the connections between work and home responsibilities. In a nation claiming to eradicate discrimination, women continue to have conflicts and frustrations in the workplace and home. Shakeshaft (1989), in her work describing historical research of women in educational administration, explained that women do not have the opportunities, career related experiences, or the privileges granted to men (p. 23). Teaching and educational administration for men was encouraged, yet for women, it was only a “semiprofession that would allow the duties of wife and mother to go undisturbed” (p. 46). Shakeshaft explained the foundations of women educators’ experiences, suggesting they continue to affect current practices.

Initially, women had been urged to enter teaching because it prepared them for marriage and motherhood; during the 1950s, teaching was presented as a good job for married women because it was a vocation that made it easy to combine motherhood, wifehood, and work. The summer vacations and the shorter in-school working day were seen as an ideal compromise. (p. 46)

Shakeshaft added that men’s credentials as teachers and administrators were not influenced by marriage or family responsibilities, if he was a parent. When women initially entered the profession, contracts restrained them from dancing, prohibited marriage, dictated eight hours of sleep each night, and careful eating to maintain good health (pp. 47-48). In time, school board’s changed their preferences to preferring to employ married women. Then, preferences regarding women’s status as married or single changed as men’s need for employment after war years increased, limiting her career opportunities. Women have been forced into “extreme cultural stereotypes” (p. 47).

The descriptions of single women include the woman administrator and teacher as a unidimensional person whose sole energy is targeted toward her work and who has no outside life, or the prissy unwanted schoolmarm no one wanted to marry, or a schoolmarm who out of her total devotion to her profession chose not to marry (suggesting that she could not handle both realms of life simultaneously). She may also have been a fuzzy-headed coed, attending college or becoming a teacher only until Prince Charming arrived. (p. 47)

The image of women in education through decades of teachers is encumbered with the expectations for their effectiveness as teachers, administrators, wives, or mothers.

Women's conflicting home and work related choices are also encumbered by responsibilities and relationships. Blount's book *Destined to Rule the Schools* (1998) explored women's changing roles as educators as society changed its needs. School Boards in 1963 restructured administration duties with longer hours and responsibilities, which, "required that administrators have a helpmate at home." When the School Board employed an administrator, it brought his wife and family into the community. Assuming that the administrator was male, School Boards claimed the "executive's wife must adapt her life pattern in the best interests of her husband, her children, and community." The administrator's wife was defined as a "competent homemaker and family partner aiming her attention toward rearing of her children and supplying both practical and emotional support to her husband," therefore, freeing him to deal with his important duties in the school administration. These expectations were an advantage for married men administrators, "but a problem for women whose male partner usually worked full-time and customarily shared few of the family responsibilities" (p.12). Women's conflicting home and work related expectations are encumbered by responsibilities and relationships as well as society's point of view, making their choices difficult.

Contemporary literature documents that women continue to shoulder the bulk of the responsibility at home, even when they are working in the public sphere (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004; Grogan, 1996; Hochschild & Machung, 2003). Decades ago, Ehrenreich and English (1978), in their watershed analysis of the way the market and pseudo-scientific thought have dominated women's lives and choices, discussed the persistence of this dynamic. They point out that this dilemma is framed as a woman's problem when its roots are actually located in the structures of society. "The reason we hang back is because there are no answers left but the most radical ones. We cannot assimilate into a masculinist society without doing violence to our own nature, which is, of course *human nature*" (italics in original, p. 323). Their attention to social messages suggests that women are encouraged to cling to fairy tale ideals yet are saddled with social expectations and economic requirements pushing them to independence. "Nor can we deny that the dilemma is a social issue, and abandon each other to our own "free choices" when the choices are not of our making and we are not 'free'" (p. 323).

Ehrenreich and English elaborated further:

The Woman Question in the end is not the question of *women*. It is not we who are the problem and it is not our needs which are the mystery. From our subjective perspective (denied by centuries of masculinist "science" and analysis), the Woman Question becomes the question of how shall we all—women and children and men—organize our lives together. This is a question which has no answer in the marketplace or among the throng of experts who sell their wisdom there. And this is the *only* question. (1978, p. 323, italics in original)

The only question "...how shall we all... organize our lives together?" implied a collaborative approach to living together but this conflicts with gender inequitable social



and economic realities that are supported by our dominant sociopolitical traditions (Gerlicher, 2002; Grogan, 1996; Oswald, 2008; Valian, 1998). Historically and today, women's movement toward social and economic gender equity has been characterized by political struggle, not collaborative process (Cole, Zucker, & Duncan, 2001; Kimball, 2001; Sherif, 1979). Fallaize (1998) studied the writings of Simone de Beauvoir in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader* and discussed Beauvoir's views about the ways in which an emphasis on freedom from dependence on men would emancipate women, but would also come at a cost.

As long as women are prevented from earning their own living, they will always be dependent on others. Women actually seeking paid work, however, are confronted with class exploitation and sexist oppression at every turn. Oppressed at home, they find themselves exploited, underpaid, and alienated at work. Under capitalism, Beauvoir writes, there is nothing liberating in factory work; no wonder many working-class women would rather be housewives if only they could afford it, particularly since they usually have to do the housework anyway. Under such conditions, women are caught in an internal double bind; without paid work they are delivered up to male exploitation; with paid work they find themselves working a double shift, with very little money to show for it at the end of the week. While some women heroically struggle to change their condition by becoming politically active in trade unions or various socialist parties, most—quite understandably—do not have the energy to spare. (p. 74)

Fallaize (1998) explained that “a painful paradox thus emerges: only work can emancipate women, yet nothing enslaves them more completely. For genuine freedom to be possible, the social conditions of woman's lives must be radically transformed” (p. 74). For women, freedom from dependence on another for life sustenance liberates and enslaves at the same time. Her workday continued (Hochschild & Machung, 2003), even after the time clock of employment ends.

Women's domestic work interrupts her daytime employment as she arranges,

organizes, and schedules family matters. Although she may be “at work,” she feels the responsibilities of the family and carries on with tasks dictated by her multiple roles. Emslie and Hunt (2009) add to the literature that women continue to work after punching out on the time card and “are seen as being responsible for maintaining smooth, or preferably imperceptible, transitions between the worlds of home and work life.” Eckman (2004) found men high school principals balanced their family responsibilities by bringing their wives and children to school functions and activities. The women high school principals tried “to balance their home and work lives without imposing the principalship on their families...[reflecting] the dominant gendered discourse, which expects women to balance their lives and careers around the needs of their children and the careers of their husbands” (p. 205). Cultural expectation says that women “put the family first” and have “tradeoffs like reducing or eliminating their paid labor” and reducing household tasks by hiring outside help and choosing premade meals (Milkie & Peltola, 1999).

Ehrenreich and English (1978) insisted that society should be organized around our human needs and not by gender. They envisioned “...a society in which child raising is not dismissed as each woman’s individual problem, but in which the nurturance and well-being of all children is a transcendent public priority...a society in which healing is not a commodity...” (p. 324). They suggested that the “‘womanly’ values of community and caring must rise to the center as the only *human* principals” (italics in original, p. 324). Some women choose a teaching profession as “employment which could dovetail, and not challenge, mothering roles and the need of women to be flexible in relation to

their husband's employment opportunities" (Arnot, David, & Weiner, 1999, p. 73), maintaining her career as second class in the family. Others enter teaching as young women, leave to raise children, and returning years later, find promotion opportunities as well as skills learned in child rearing experiences are ignored in later employment (p. 73). Therefore, women must begin the promotion trail again, thus perpetuating the sociopolitical order of "womanly values of community and caring" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 324) by staying home as the main caretaker. "Caring must rise to the center as the only *human* principles" (italics in original, p. 324) with choices for women and men to pursue education and careers equally as they share the responsibility for maintaining "human principles."

Although education is a caring profession, the men and women in education have different career aspirations. Eckman (2004) explained how the career paths of men and women in her study differed.

The males followed a self-directed and earlier path to the high school principalship receiving support from a network of male administrators and male high school principals. The females, on the other hand, delayed their careers due to family responsibilities, and considered educational administration and the high school principalship only when specifically encouraged by others. (p. 203)

Men's careers had a "steady progression from teaching into administration that was motivated by the financial needs of their young and growing family" (Eckman, 2004, p. 204), whereas, women's careers were interrupted with child rearing. Women's delayed entry into "high school principalship had a direct effect on their tenures as principals and their career aspirations" (p. 204). Furthermore, once women entered the principalship, they were older than their male counterparts and "felt the position marked the end of their

careers. They discussed retirement rather than future career aspirations” (p. 204). The Eckman study was one example demonstrating the sociopolitical dilemma women have in pursuing principalship.

Sherif (1979) asserted that although women have the skills, strength, and fortitude to accomplish their goals and aspirations, changes in society’s expectations for women may not come quickly. Sherif said, “The rest of the world changes more slowly than the new awareness of self, and parts of both resist change or simply stay the same. Social power is not equitably distributed” (p. 126). As women (and men) find the courage to change their lives, society struggles to accept it.

### **Psychological Processes That Perpetuate Gender Inequality**

Shedding light on the complexity of gender relationships that shape women’s and men’s career choices, Ehrenreich and English (1978) summarized the common roots of many thinkers who were agitating for equality during the early years of the second wave of feminism.

The founders of the early feminist movement were activists schooled in the civil rights and antiwar movements.... Where sociologists saw “roles” and “institutions,” psychiatrists saw “feminine adjustment” and the medical authorities saw “biological destiny,” feminists saw oppression. Sexual romanticism, for all its chivalry and sentiment, existed only to conceal the most ancient injustice: the forcible rule of men over women. (p. 315)

Recognizing that modern day iterations of romanticism that continue to mask the “forcible rule of men over women” were more subtle but continued to oppress, feminism gained strength and women grew in their understanding of who they could become.

Feminist literature (Blount, 1994; Coleman, 2005; Eberts & Stone, 1985; Grogan, 1999;

Johnson, 1994; Rusch & Marshall, 2006) embarked on a steady critique of the psychological processes that perpetuate gender inequality.

Women's femininity is questioned when they are successful in the "big world," however; it is diminished if they are "just" stay-at-home-mothers or wives (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Valian, 1998; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). "*Career women and feminists* are stereotyped as not nice but competent...in contrast, housewives are stereotyped as nice but incompetent (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001, italics in original, p. 362). Women who are infertile "are frequently considered 'desperate' or objects of pity; women who are childless by choice are more likely to be criticized as selfish and unnatural" (Woollett & Marshall, 2001, p. 173).

An examination of contemporary feminist literature confirms that, although Ehrenreich and English were writing over three decades ago, their question remains unanswered. Augmenting their sociopolitical analysis, feminists grounding their work in the principles of psychology have written extensively about the differential stereotypes that exist for men and women (Blount, 1999; Gerlicher, 2002; Gilbert & Rader, 2001). Man is encouraged to attain high esteem, powerful intellect, prestige, and love of his children all in the same package while keeping his masculinity. Whereas a man's professional successes require "masculine abilities and traits, a successful man can reasonably credit himself with the abilities and traits that are necessary for success—and feel masculine into the bargain. A man's success and his masculinity reinforce each other" (Valian, 1998, p. 20). Explaining the way our collective schema includes gender norms that are limiting for women, Valian asserted that woman, on the other hand,

confronts conflicting feminine expectations. Professional success comes at a personal cost.

She must either see herself as having masculine traits—and thereby run the risk of seeming unfeminine to herself and others—or as having compensated in some way—through luck or extraordinary effort—for lack of masculine characteristics. Unlike a successful man, a woman has something to lose from success: her gender identity or belief in her ability. Conversely, failure and femininity reinforce each other. Women are expected to fail and potentially have something to salvage from failure, namely, reinforcement of their femininity. A woman who fails is more of a woman than one who succeeds. (p. 20)

Valian (1998) examined men's and women's success rates by describing women's "puzzles."

Women enjoy fewer successes and suffer more failures than comparable men. Men and women live in different environments, environments that are the same only on the surface. Women have puzzles to solve that men do not. Some women decide that they are exceptional and will succeed where others have failed. Others ignore the unstable relationship between cause and effect, action and result. Still others forgo professional ambition, perhaps without realizing why. (p. 22)

Valian (1998) continued to explain a professional world of men and women and the assumptions and abilities associated with each gender. Professional men have "instrumentality and task orientation" traits whereas women are "nurturing, emotionally expressive, and communal" (p. 168). It is perceived that women do not belong in the professional world and act "out-of-role" when they try to join it.

Because a woman's good performance is incompatible with our gender schemas, we either ignore it when we see it—literally fail to perceive it—or we treat it as an exception. And, since job performance is often ambiguous, we can interpret it in positive, negative, or neutral terms. Our beliefs about women and men color our evaluations of their performance. (p. 168)

If a woman succeeds in a male dominated field, her success is observed differently than her male counterpart's success. "Observers are less likely to attribute her success to her

ability, since they have already assumed that she has less ability than a man does” (Valian, 1998, p. 169). When she succeeds beyond expectations, her success is attributed to “luck, the tasks being easy, to the great effort she expended, or all three, depending on the task” (p. 169) therefore maintaining the observer’s original schema about women.

Smith (2011) discussed the tension between parenting and career for women and their limitations based on her gender.

The way a woman feels about her inability to be both a perfect mother and a consummate professional is affected by societal and institutional influences. Her life and career decisions are negotiated within the particular set of limitations particular to her life context. (p. 9)

Smith (2011) implied woman’s choices are encumbered by saying “...career decisions are negotiated...” continuing her dilemma in choosing if or when she will pursue a career. A woman may want to be all things to her family as well as pursue her career, which is a difficult and complicated task. She, in the caretaker, nurturer role, may put her professional self-actualization in the back seat until the right timing within her family aspirations or obligations. Her feminine role is at stake if she pursues career professionalism while simultaneously raising her family. The battle, the burden, and the conflict all influence her choices. In other words, her choices are encumbered by the expectations of her “life context.” The career and life decisions a woman makes “incorporate both conformity with and opposition to the constraints on her freedom” (p. 9). The difference for a woman is in the way she complies or resists, thereby “an act or decision that constitutes an act of conformity for one woman in the particular context of her life, might represent an act of resistance or self-determination for a different woman, in a different social, cultural and personal setting” (p. 10). Her choices are encumbered

within her particular life contexts.

Women who are seen as *feminists* or *career women* have become “synonymous with derogatory stereotypes of women who are not nice and not feminine enough” (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001, p. 361). Ann Hopkins, whose experiences illustrate the consequences of failing to meet femininity perceptions, was denied professional opportunity and encouraged to attend charm school (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Hopkins, 1996; Valian, 1998). An associate of Price Waterhouse, a large accounting firm, she was evaluated for and denied partnership. Her style was “assertive, task-oriented, and instrumental” (Valian, 1998, p. 291) and had brought 25 million dollars’ worth of business to the firm. Ann Hopkins had billed more hours for the company than any other candidate. “Hopkins’s senior colleagues apparently objected to the fact that she was too much of a leader and not enough of a lady” (Valian, 1998, p. 291). Hopkins won at each court level, finally prevailing in the U.S. Supreme Court. Hopkins was put into a precarious situation; her job demanded that she act assertively to succeed, yet she was rejected for that behavior. The Court “declared that businesses do not have the right to demand that women be ladies” (p. 295).

A woman seeking a leadership position may face a battleground in the work force. When she walks in a room she may be deprived merely because of her gender. Valian’s book, *Why So Slow?* (1998), described the schemas of men and women and how women are perceived differently than men.

Everyone must also understand that in most organizations women begin at a slight disadvantage. A woman does not walk into the room with the same status as an equivalent man, because she is less likely than a man to be viewed as a serious professional. Moreover, since her ideas are less likely to be attended to than a



male peer's, she is correspondingly less likely to accumulate advantage the way he might. A woman who aspires to success *needs* to worry about being ignored; each time it happens she loses prestige and the people around her become less inclined to take her seriously (p. 5, italics in original).

Christman and McClellan (2008) researching with a group of seven, accomplished, diverse educational administrators, explore how they have sustained their administrative roles and evaluate the sources of their resiliency. Their findings explain a part of the complexity of navigating subtle but powerful gender expectations. "Women must work to become more like those in positions of power; men must avoid becoming feminine and weak." They further explained, "...we expect women to behave like women or to be manly, and we expect men to act like men. And if one works at bending gender, then criticisms fly from our social expectations about the gendered norms" (p. 6). In this way, gender schemas play an important role in determining who holds positions of power. As women navigate the social norms of leadership, a dilemma they must face is allegiance to women's culture or alliance with the men's culture (p. 7). Her successes may conflict with her femininity. She may "learn to interact with men in ways that preserve the societal view that men are stronger and more capable than women and that women play a crucial role in empowering men" (Gilbert & Rader, 2001, p. 163). Such behavior can weaken the woman leader, as it strengthens the dominant male leader.

Gilbert and Rader's (2001) analysis of women's adult roles described the ways gender norms exert subtle influence on perception, quoting Woolf.

Virginia Woolf offered keen insights into how gender reproduces interactions between women and men. Women were described by Woolf as "providing men with looking glasses that possessed the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size...." That is, women learn to interact with men in ways that preserve the societal view that men are stronger and more

capable than women and that women play a crucial role in empowering men. (p. 163)

Gilbert and Rader's (2001) use of Woolf emphasized that gendered stereotypes conceptualize women as playing a supporting role to men's success. These engrained perceptions have serious implications in the workplace.

Marshall (1985) defined stages that women administrators experience in career development nearly 30 years ago. These stages of identity are (a) culturally defined (b) transition, and finally (c) self-defined. In the culturally defined stage, Marshall said women "mold their behaviors, attitudes, and choices according to the expectations of society" (p. 137) and that women administrators in this stage "form their career orientations in a career environment where the expectation is that they will remain as teachers and that administrators are male" (p. 137). Blount (1999) confirmed this belief in the discussion on the sociopolitical dynamics that perpetuate the social norms keeping women in their place. In the next stage of transition, Marshall claims that if women have support they may progress through "a difficult socialization process," and lastly, "become self-defined—comfortable, competent and placed in high administration positions" (p. 137). Marshall's career stages exemplified the difficult psychological shift aspiring women administrators experience in their career journeys.

In summary, woman's choices are encumbered with society's expectations about her identity. Perfect motherhood conflicts with the possibility of success in the workplace. Professional success comes with personal cost. Even exemplary levels of competence and skill can, ironically, interfere with her success. Women have psychological shifts as they transition into the masculine school administration system.

The determined work of many strong women leaders at considerable social and psychological cost, has built greater acceptance of feminist goals today, but we are not there, yet. Sanchez and Thornton's (2010) review of literature on K-12 educational leadership, gender issues, barriers, and strategies used by successful women administrators, express their reasoning about the gender imbalance in school administration "...perhaps part of a reason for persistent inequities in educational leadership exists because male leaders tend to dominate the field and tend to make employment decisions." Such social dynamics may be viewed as subtle contemporary versions of the ancient injustice of the forcible rule of men over women.

### **Women in Education Leadership**

This study researched the career journeys of women high school principals. There is literature on women superintendents (Bañuelos, 2008; Björk, 2000; Blount, 1998; Gil, 2008; Grogan, 1996; Haack, 2010) and women leadership styles in high schools (Baxter, 2009; Buckner, 2011; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; McFadden, Maahs-Fladung, Beck-Frazier, & Bruckner, 2009). There are no studies on women's career life histories that "illustrate the uniqueness" and "complexities of a person" causing the readers to "reflect upon themselves" and perhaps question personal career life histories (Glesne, 2006, p.11).

Adkison (1981), in her review of research on women in school administration, and Blount (1999), in her postmodern feminist examination of educational leadership, used very different forms of scholarship to come to common conclusions. Adkison

suggested that the masculinization of education administration brought men out of the classroom and kept women as teachers. She found that educational “professionalization served to differentiate administrators from teachers, emphasizing the ‘masculine’ concerns of financial, organizational, and mechanical problems rather than the ‘feminine’ concerns of nurturing, imparting values, and instructing children” (pp. 313-314). Blount’s historical review of the “gendered construction of school administration in the USA” (p. 55) explained how “masculinity has been a powerful defining force in the historical development of school administration” (p. 55) and that much of it is “driven by the perceived need for creating acceptably masculine havens for men” (p. 55). Women are often expected to teach in the subservient role as men lead them in an authoritative role.

As women filled their ranks of teachers, the duties, expected demeanours and entrance requirements for the work changed to align more closely with social expectations for women rather than for men. Essentially, prevailing notions of middle-class femininity and of women’s “proper” social roles became powerful defining components of school teaching. (p. 55)

The stereotypes for both men and women plague educators (Adkison, 1981; Blount, 1999; Criswell & Betz, 1995; Gerlicher, 2002; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Young & McLeod, 2001), as they experience conflicts if they do not behave within the stereotypes. Blount further elaborated men’s conflicts, “...some wondered about the manliness of men who would remain in the classroom and take orders instead of giving them” (p. 60). Such sociopolitical dynamics may perpetuate norms of masculinity in educational administration. Historically, superintendents preferred to hire women as teachers because “they were less likely to question administrative authority and policies than men” (p. 59), and the male administrators

“managed to find other males by rising above the sphere of women and associating laterally with men in business, government and other organizations” (p. 66), thus keeping women in their place.

Benefits obtained from women administration have been explored by researchers (Adkison, 1981; Grogan, 1999; Whitaker & Lane, 1990; Young & McLeod, 2001) indicating greater instructional supervision. Adkison asserted, “There is evidence that female principals are more likely than their male counterparts to involve themselves in instructional supervision, to exhibit democratic leadership style, to be concerned with students, and to seek community involvement” (p. 317). Adkison continued to explain, “[Women administrators] spend more time in the teacher role before becoming administrators. As a result, they have acquired more expertise in instruction and are more confident and willing to engage in instructional supervision” (p. 317). Whitaker and Lane agreed, stating that “women principals have a greater knowledge of and concern for the instructional supervision” (p. 10). Young and McLeod found similar results, “female administrators tend to have an average of 10 more years of teaching experience than men and thus are older than most men when they enter administrative positions” (p. 464). With more experiences in the classroom than their men counterparts, women administrators “tend to be problem solvers, task oriented and have high expectations of self and others” (Grogan, 1999, p. 523). Grogan continued to report research that women have “strong instructional backgrounds, a focus on curriculum, and a focus on student growth and achievement...are collaborative, caring, courageous, and reflective” (p. 523). Sanchez and Thornton (2010) added that “women’s practices of inclusion, collaboration,

valuing others and their contributions, and the ability to balance work and family are helpful in breaking barriers to gender equity in educational leadership” (p. 9). These attributes contribute to the importance of understanding the sociopolitical barriers keeping women from high school administration.

These analyses suggest that women’s decisions about education, career choices, and ambition are more complex than those of men (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Skinner, 2009; Turner, 1964; Valian, 1998). This is especially important to consider when examining the absence of women in positions within educational administration. Skinner, using a critical feminist approach to assess women’s barriers to the principalship, found that some women aspiring to become principals earn doctoral degrees with hopes of leveling the playing field in becoming an exceptional candidate to compete with male candidates who only have master’s degrees (Skinner, 2009). Equalizing women’s opportunities in school leadership is a difficult task.

In summary, literature about women in the field of leadership demonstrates that they have struggled to equalize the playing field (Adkison, 1981; Blount, 1999; Criswell & Betz, 1995; Gerlicher, 2002; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Skinner, 2009; Young & McLeod, 2001) with men but continue to be disadvantaged by today’s more subtle gender norms (Valian, 1999) that perpetuate the ancient injustice of men keeping forcible rule over women (Ehrenreich & English, 1978). Studies on the benefits of women school administrators were also presented (Adkison, 1981, Grogan, 1999; Whitaker & Lane, 1990; Young & McLeod, 2001).

### **Women's Encumbered Choices**

Powell and Mainiero (1992) examined the influence of personal, organizational, and societal factors on women's choices and outcomes. They concluded that there are two concerns regarding women's choices that "influence the lives of women who are working, contemplating working, or temporarily not working: (a) concerns about career and personal achievements...and (b) concerns about family and personal relationships outside of work" (p. 219). They assert that the measurements of success and satisfaction for women are subjective whereas they are typically objective, for men (pp. 220-221). Men "may choose to accommodate competing priorities between work, family and career decisions. Women, on the other hand, primarily handle the bulk of family responsibilities, even when both members of the couple have full-time jobs" (p. 224). The dual roles of domestic life (wife, mother, and caretaker) and career in each of those responsibilities bring a complexity to her career choices men do not typically manage. Powell and Mainiero summarized the complexity of women's career pathways with its "tradeoffs and temporary sacrifices" (p. 231). A woman's career pursuit and choices are encumbered by historically limited career options as well as the multiple roles she fills and the associated dual workload. Gendered social expectations and femininity schemas also encumber her choices. Such complexities can leave her waiting for a later date for career satisfaction.

Dependent on family obligations and goals, as well as her spouse's career successes, a woman may choose to "reduce her hours, or move to part-time work to ease the family situation" (Gilbert & Rader, 2001, p. 162) because her career continues to maintain the secondary place in family economics. Gilbert and Rader further explained

women's dilemma concerning family and career choices.

Women construct an ideology of the "personal choice" that reproduces gender. An illustration from the study is a woman who said, "I do not think that marriage limits women more than men. I want to have a family...if my marriage influences my career I will accept that because I want to have a family" thus, a woman's wish to sacrifice a career for a family is represented as her own decision, a decision unrelated to the sociocultural context of women's lives and husbands' breadwinning role. (p. 165)

In this way, women's choices may become encumbered with marital status desires and family responsibilities. Women's determination to excel at a chosen career tends to depend on complex life choices that are encumbered by her experiences, which may not blend easily with a planned route of stepping-stones of promotions. As long as men continue to excel in career pursuits and make significantly more income than women, "we perpetuate a situation in which women bring in the second income and do most of the caretaking and men progress in careers and control most of the power over social policy and legislation" (p. 162).

Today, female leaders in academia and politics (Slaughter, 2012), and business (Sandberg, 2011, 2013) continue to describe the persistence of women's career ambitions being diminished by the existence of "pseudo-career or secondary career objectives" described so long ago by Turner (1964, p. 274), which are dependent on family aspirations. Women's dual roles, career interruptions, and family demands (Correll et al., 2007; Powell & Mainiero, 1992) may interfere with her choices and intentions for feelings of success.

Shakeshaft (1989) described why women historically turned to teaching if they were able to work outside of the home and why men did not stay as teachers.



Because women had few professional options, many of the brightest women chose teaching. Men had more professional opportunities than did women, and traditionally the most able men sought professions that offered both higher salaries and higher status than teaching. Teaching has been a profession comprised of strong, gifted women whereas the majority of men who entered teaching were either unable to procure other work or were on their way to another profession. (p. 23)

Shakeshaft (1989) continued to suggest why women, although, strong and gifted teachers, prefer not to have career paths of power or prestige, “For many women, perhaps, the glories of the top are not worth the sacrifices and they choose career paths where the quality of work life makes up for the lower salary, lower power, and lower prestige” (p. 74). Shakeshaft added:

We don’t know all the reasons that women’s career paths are the way they are. We know that discrimination exists and we know that the organizational structure precludes people in certain positions—positions usually held by women—from moving up. However, we do not fully understand why women themselves choose these paths when given other options. (p. 74)

Clearly, women’s career choices are personally encumbered. Returning to and building upon Sherif’s (1979) comment, Adkison (1981) offered an explanation for the slow change.

Sherif explains that while the women’s movement successfully inspired consciousness-raising efforts to help women redefine themselves and change the social relationships which maintained stereotypic self-definitions, “the rest of the world changes more slowly than the new awareness of self,” and the inequitable distribution of power may deter change. (p. 328)

Although research acknowledges gendered deficits for women in the field of education (Adkison, 1981; Bount, 1999; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), updating socialization norms continues slowly. While women may see themselves as competent career women and nurturing family members, their choices are encumbered

and constrained within those dual-roles.

Women's choices in career decisions are rooted in years of traditional roles and expectations (Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Smith, 2011). The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that although a slow change is apparent in the last century, historically, "women's work outside of home and marriage was restricted to a handful of occupations such as domestic service, factory work, farm work, and teaching" (Spotlight on Statistics, 2011). Persistent inequitable patterns in today's economic structures of employment maintain a secondary status for women in salary, decision-making, and promotions.

In summary, women struggle to hold positions of leadership, including educational leadership, because of family aspirations, dual-role expectations, and historically limited career choices that continue to shape perceptions today.

Women have work and family conflicts. A woman's femininity may be questioned in the work force (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Valian, 1998; Woollett & Marshall, 2001), her "free choices" are not free (Ehrenreich & English, 1978), and career choices must be negotiated with typically feminized roles and responsibilities in mind (Smith, 2011). "Only work can emancipate women" (Fallaize, 1998, p. 74), yet she becomes enslaved by the challenges of managing it, as well as the gendered social norms that characterize her expected roles. For women to become free, social conditions must change. Breaking away from dependence on others brings her freedom, yet she is still responsible for the housework (p. 74) in her "second shift" (Hochschild & Machung, 2003).

Researchers (Adkison, 1991; Blount, 1999; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Goodman & Fiske, 2001; Valian, 1998) discuss femininity conflicts for women in the workplace as they perform in competition with men. Breaking the ranks of traditional schemas and social norms in order to become leaders brings struggles to women that are much less likely to affect men (Adkison, 1981; Blount, 1999; Christman & McClellan, 2008; Gilbert & Rader, 2001). Women earn doctoral degrees to compete with men with master's degrees in an attempt to equalize the playing field (Skinner, 2009), and a court finds it necessary to rule (Hopkins, 1996; Valian, 1998) that "businesses do not have the right to demand that women be ladies" (Valian, 1998, p. 295). Women continue to be disadvantaged (Adkison, 1981; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Valian, 1998) as long as contemporary gendered norms perpetuate the ancient injustice of men's dominance over women.

Women's career choices are encumbered by her gendered roles and responsibilities. Her aspirations for family, relationships, and personal achievements (Powell & Mainiero, 1992) are constrained and require "tradeoffs and temporary sacrifices" (p. 231). We do not know all the reasons why women's career paths are as they are, but we do know there is discrimination and organizational structures may interfere with women's pursuit of career goals (Shakeshaft, 1989). This study examined the career life histories of seven women to find reasons for the persistence of the question, "Where are the women in high school administration?"

Feminist analyses of the causes of persistent gender inequities span a wide range of theoretical perspectives. This study was informed and guided by literature that

examined

- The sociopolitical systems that perpetuate gendered hierarchies, and
- The psychological processes that shape gender

Women's choices are shaped and constrained by both sociopolitical systems and psychological processes. Their choices are encumbered.

Within the area of educational administration, researchers concerned with the absence of women in administrative positions, have drawn on both sociopolitical and psychological feminist literature to develop a clearer understanding of this gender imbalance.

This study extended these efforts by examining the career life histories of women high school principals. In particular, it sought a deeper understanding of the way sociopolitical systems and psychological processes that have influenced their choices.

Presented next is an explanation of the ways the researcher's positionality and perspectives ground, define, and inform this study.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

In my experience of over 26 years in public education in elementary, junior high, and high school, I have had 18 administrators, 5 of whom were women (28%). As an administrator, I work in a district where there are only six women in any of the possible high school administration positions (30%) with 14 men fulfilling the other high school positions. Of the six women, two were high school principals, two were intern assistant principals, and two of us were assistant principals.

Out of the 92 certified staff at the school where I am an administrator, there were 53 female and 39 male certified teachers (paraprofessionals, secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, and part-time coaches are excluded from these numbers). I am one of five administrators.

I am 58 years old. The ages of the other school administrative staff in the school where I currently work are 29, 38, 41, and 42. I am the only woman administrator for our school. I was a teacher in the classroom for 20 years, whereas, the men served as teachers for 5-7 years, on average, before becoming administrators. All of us had a variety of jobs that put us through schooling and university studies. Each of my teammates has four to five children with stay-at-home wives. My husband and I have been married 22 years. We do not have children together, but he has five married children who never lived with us in their younger years. I provide this information to situate myself in these surroundings, ground my questions, and explain the ways I have seen gendered differences within my own work context.

I have experienced disadvantages as a woman administrator that I believe are related to my gender. It is my perception that I have to work harder to “earn” the same status of professionalism as my men coworkers. I agree with Valian’s (1998) assertion that “independent of all other factors, gender appears to play a major role in people’s ability to get ahead. Gender schemas are objectively costly for women. Relative to women, men have a leg up. Men look right for the job” (p. 18). In my experience, position, responsibilities, assigned tasks and perceptions of appearance seem divided by gender.

What is it that women want? Do we want our self-esteem to be grounded in the homage of chivalrous men? Do we want the power of intellectual knowledge and the prestige of being decision-makers in the public sphere? Do we want the love of our children as they grow into admired and respected adults? Do we want all of these just as men do? These are questions I ask myself as I observe women educators seeking positions beyond the classroom and witness their struggles in gaining respect and opportunity.

I do not claim to be a feminist, but I must be. Life, for me, just turned out that way. Voices from the past have caused me to think more deeply about gender. Encouraging women of her generation to step out into the public sphere, Wollstonecraft (1792) tells me to give my voice in voting, and to maintain my citizenship. I do and I do. Woolf (1929/1957), writing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, said I will drive an engine and my “protections” will be removed. I do and that’s right. More recently, Beauvoir (as cited in Fallaize, 1998, p. 74) warned women of the mid-twentieth century (and me) that they/I will have a career, come home, and then do housework. I do and I do. Butler (1990) believed women must become a “subject” to study. I do that, too.

Have I turned into a feminist because of life’s experiences, or because I have seen misconceptions about women and someone like me needs to say something? Because of my history and sociocultural background, I came to this project reluctantly. In the world where and when I grew up, being a feminist was viewed negatively. I now realize the importance of the many choices that have led me to my current situation and my career.

I am a white, middle-class woman raised in a “traditional” environment. During

my young childhood years, my mother stayed at home to raise the children, and my father went off to work. We lived in a home on the same street as many of our cousins, and grandparents were active participants in our lives. I now hold advanced degrees that have created both a deeper and broader understanding as well as a critique of the traditional perspective. I was born in Utah in the middle 1950s, graduating from high school in the early 1970s. In retrospect, I perceive these years as happy, yet revolutionary times for the U.S. “Typical” families consisted of mom, dad, and 1.6 children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). I knew of only one friend’s mother who worked outside of the home during those years. Believing I would eventually get married and raise a family as my career, my choice to get a job rather than build skills for a career, delayed my educational pursuits until my late 20s and early 30s when I earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees. While a young 20-something woman, I made a decision to train in a field I would enjoy until marriage. At 30-something, I changed that decision and earned a master’s degree in a field I could enjoy for a long time, *in case it became* a career. At 36, I married. Prospects of children of my own dwindled, stepchildren became a distant and limited relationship, and my job became a career. I eventually discovered I was the master of my destiny and moved into a career pathway leading me into high school administration and the pursuit of a doctoral degree.

Despite what I perceive to be gender misconceptions within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in which I am a member, commonly known as the Mormon Church or the LDS Church, my experiences provided me with examples of many women leaders at every level of the church’s hierarchy. Experiences taught me that women can

be and are great leaders. I saw that women, young and old, were valued members of the leadership positions in religious organizations locally, but also, globally. Women lead church members worldwide right along with the men. This seemed to be a natural fit that men and women work alongside each other in leadership. I saw no leadership conflicts as a young woman in this culture.

My life led me to choose a field of study with options and opportunities for women. I chose special education for my master's degree and served as a teacher for over 20 years before transitioning into a high school assistant principalship. I chose the marketable field of special education, so I could find jobs in any state where I chose to live and if, by chance, I found a spouse along the way, I could continue to work if I chose to, raise children if they came, and combine both family and career. Special education was a career with fluid choices—just in case.

I have observed over the last few years in my own experiences, the many ways that women's work is shaped, is invisible, and is underappreciated. These dynamics influence our responsibilities where we work. In short, I am a woman raised in a conservative state in a conservative religion, with conservative goals, and conservative confidence. I believe women are strong and capable and should be considered as viable choices for a career they qualify for and should not face discrimination. My perspective shapes and informs my research.



### **A Theoretical Framework for Someone Like Me**

As I read the *Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls Conference, 1848* (Stanton, 1848) the truth of her words rang straight to my soul. Education makes me think, makes me ponder, makes me commit, and makes me know. Without my years of continuous learning and teaching and my knowledge of the historical impact of the Declaration of Independence, Stanton's parody of that document may not have affected me as it did.

Am I a feminist? *Ain't I a woman?* (Butler, 1998). Of course, I am a feminist. My newfound understanding has brought me to ask, "How can one be a woman and not be a feminist?" Sojourner Truth's history in activism from slave to freedom portrays her passion for womanhood (Truth 1863/1998 as cited in Butler, 1998). I, too, feel her passion for womanhood. Although it is difficult to pinpoint which feminist theory is more prevalent in my thinking, I find the *Declaration of Sentiments* (Stanton, 1848) to be clever, powerful, and truthful. Therefore, perhaps I am a liberal feminist (Butler, 1998; Stanton, 1848; Wollstonecraft, 1792) determined to have legal equity. Although my conviction aligns with cultural feminism (Alcoff, 1988; Butler, 1990; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Valian, 1998; Woollett & Marshall, 2001) in that I am troubled by the loss of women's unique contributions in the public's sphere, I know that claiming that certain female characteristics exist across all women has not been good for women or the public sphere (Blount, 1994). Contemporary female leaders (Sandberg, 2011, 2013; Slaughter, 2012) continue to make this case. Additionally important to me is understanding the subtle ways that marginalization is perpetuated; therefore, I look at postmodernism feminism (Blount, 1994; Ebert, 1991; Johnston, 1994) to guide my

thinking and my work. Johnston offered an interpretation of postmodernism as “a general cultural sensibility, incorporating poststructural and postpositivist movements, reflecting the transformation of social life in a postindustrial social formation” (p. 117). The “cultural sensibility” and the necessary transformation of social life for women educators in high school leadership positions seem to have merit for this study. As a postmodernist researcher, I hope to use the “theoretical tools for challenging essentialist feminist tendencies toward limiting, grand narratives” (Blount, 1994). However, through my feminist experiences and understanding, I hope to “offer strong theories for social critique and political action geared toward dismantling oppressive systems” (p. 49).

While these broad understandings developed across feminism will inform this study, the theoretical work that will serve as the primary lens for this research will draw on the literature that examines the way women’s choices are constrained or encumbered (Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Sandberg, 2011, 2013; Smith, 2011; Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, & Wentworth, 2007).

Women’s choices in education, marriage possibilities, or career aspirations, may be laden with caveats, such as “wait until,” “once this or that happens,” or “as soon as \_\_\_\_\_,” happens. These choices seem constrained by possibilities in an unknown, unplanned future, all the while influencing that future significantly. Gendered expectations influence women entering a career path in their 30s, 40s, and even 50s. The evolution of such career paths are shaped by contextual constraints. Research critiques such terms as “free choices” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978), “personal factors” (Powell &

Mainiero, 1992) “personal choices” (Gilbert & Rader, 2001), and “life contexts” (Smith, 2011) explaining the power of these contextual constraints. These ideas resonated with my own experiences which lead me to this study. Evidence of the continuing relevance of these academic analyses can be found in the voices of contemporary women leaders today who continue to discuss the challenges of “finding balance” (Sandberg, 2011).

There are different discourses used by researchers to describe this phenomenon, however, all have a similar focus. Although women may want “equality of opportunity and individual advancement” (Arnot et al., 1999) their decision-making processes are encumbered by many “what if” questions. This study adds to the discourses that address these persistent challenges by examining the encumbered choices of female high school principals. The intent of this study was to understand the complexities of the participants’ career life histories, from the beginning of their journeys toward the principalship through the initial stages of their administrative employment.

### **Summary**

In summary, I presented national and local statistics that report underrepresentation of women in high school administration. Drawing on analyses of sociopolitical gender systems and psychological processes that perpetuate gender inequalities, I set the stage for examining these dynamics in the lives of the research participants. Next, I presented research on women in education leadership that provides information that establishes the need for this study. I then defined and discussed the concept of women’s encumbered choices. Finally, I explained my positionality and my

theoretical framework—a lens that is appropriate for someone like me. The method of study is presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### Design of the Study

To complete the research presented here, I used qualitative life history research as the basis for the study (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Creswell, 1998, 2005, 2007; Dollard, 1935) although limiting the life history to participants' *career* life histories. I developed this unique iteration of the established life history method as a way to bound the study of these women's experiences to include those aspects of their lives that lead them to high school leadership. A career life history narrows the focus of the participants' journeys and guides the study toward access to the details of their journeys toward careers in high school administration. The research questions were:

1. What characterizes the career life histories of the participants?
2. What dynamics have impacted study participants' decision to become high school administrators?

I now present the population, data collection, and the interview protocol for the study. Then I will discuss data triangulation, analysis, and methods. Next, I will present limitations and definitions. The appendices include communications with participants (Appendix A), additional interview questions (Appendix D and Appendix E), and informed consent information (Appendix B).

#### Population

I interviewed five women who were principals in Utah's high schools at the time

of the study. Two other women were interviewed, one, a retired principal from another state who was working as a high school assistant principal, the other is a retired principal in Utah, employed in another district's offices. The state educational directory provides personnel information annually. I searched district websites to locate current administrators' email addresses to make initial contacts. I found seven participants from multiple districts with the intent of accessing views from a broader array of contexts for maximum variation (Patton, 1990). I then invited the women to participate in the study, detailing time commitment, confidentiality, and IRB information (Appendix B). I used a "convenience sampling" from the "nonprobability sampling" method described by Creswell (2005, p 149) because the participants were "available, convenient, and represent some characteristic[s]" I sought to understand through the research. Replication and generalizability is limited due to this specific convenience sampling limited to Utah.

Because the study sought to understand the career life histories of women who had completed the journey toward the high school principalship (the career in K-12 education where women are least represented), women who are located as principals in other schools (middle, elementary, or specialty schools) or who are obtaining credentials to become administrators were not asked to be a part of this study.

### **Research Site**

To provide context for the data, I now present information about the state in which participants lived. Utah's neighboring states' demographics are shown in Table 2 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Although Utah has the lowest median age (29.3), it ranks among the highest in median household income (\$58,164). Utah also ranks well in

Table 2

*Comparative Demographics*

Demographics	National	Utah	Arizona	Colorado	Idaho	Nevada	Wyoming
Population (2010 census)	308,745,538	2,763,885	6,392,017	5,029,196	1,567,582	2,700,551	563,626
Population (latest estimate, July 2012)	313,914,040	2,855,287	6,553,255	5,187,582	1,595,728	2,758,931	576,412
Median age	37.2	29.3	36	36.1	34.7	36.3	36.9
Business & industry (no of companies)	27,092,908	246,393	491,529	547,770	151,671	221,260	61,179
Education (high school graduate or more)	85.7%	90.6%	85.4%	89.9%	88.6%	84.4%	92.1%
Housing units	131,642,457	979,848	2,841,432	2,211,615	666,718	1,171,300	261,430
Median household income	\$53,046	\$58,164	\$50,256	\$58,244	\$47,015	\$54,083	\$56,573
Origins & language (foreign born population)	39,784,305	228,889	868,819	489,954	94,014	518,914	17,980
Poverty	14.9%	12.1%	17.2%	12.9%	15.1%	14.2%	11.0%
Veterans	21,853,912	146,524	530,693	405,895	125,905	229,570	51,203

high school graduation (90.6%). Utah's poverty level is 12.1% compared to the national 14.9% rate. I present these demographic statistics to demonstrate Utah's education and economic strengths.

In order to become a high school administrator, graduate or professional degrees must be earned; therefore, I present data detailing the number of graduate or professional degrees earned. In all neighboring states and nationally, men have earned more graduate or professional degrees than women (see Table 3). Nationally, the ratio of women's to men's graduate and professional degrees is 0.93 and in Utah the average is 0.59.

However, the ratio of Utah women's to men's wages among those achieving graduate and professional degrees is similar to neighboring states, as shown in Table 4 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). In other words, in Utah, the ratio of women to men among those who attain graduate and professional degrees lags behind both the nation and the region. However, for those who do achieve these advanced degrees, the financial benefit is similar to women within the region and the nation. These statistics highlight the fact that

Table 3

*Gender Comparison of Graduate and Professional Degree Achievement*

Variable	Women (%)	Men (%)	Ratio of women to men
National	10.2	11.0	0.93
Utah	7.2	12.3	0.59
Arizona	9.1	10.4	0.88
Colorado	12.7	13.7	0.93
Idaho	6.4	9.1	0.70
Nevada	7.1	7.7	0.92
Wyoming	7.8	8.4	0.93



Table 4

*Comparison of Earnings by Men and Women with Graduate and Professional Degrees*

Variable	Women	Men	Ratio of women to men
National	\$55,344	\$83,141	0.67
Utah	\$50,957	\$76,717	0.66
Arizona	\$51,701	\$76,088	0.68
Colorado	\$51,647	\$80,616	0.64
Idaho	\$48,217	\$70,363	0.69
Nevada	\$55,778	\$77,204	0.72
Wyoming	\$53,688	\$65,589	0.82

the problem that is the focus of this work has special importance for the women of the state in which the research is conducted.

Utah is the headquarters of the LDS Church. According to current church membership statistics (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2014), approximately 68% of Utah's population are LDS Church members. Table 5 illustrates the approximate percentage of state population and church membership based on census estimates and church records (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2014; United States Census Bureau, 2014).

Acknowledging the unique religious context of the state in which the research was conducted highlights the added challenge of conducting the research with both an awareness of these dynamics and a resistance to succumbing to what might be unwarranted stereotypical ideas about the gender consequences of the state's religious demographics. One study participant mentioned that although she was not a member of

Table 5

*Membership Statistics for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Variable	Members 2014	Census 2010 estimate 2012	%
National	6,398,889	313,914,040	2
Utah	1,975,939	2,855,287	69
Arizona	410,263	6,553,255	6
Colorado	149,876	5,187,582	3
Idaho	425,739	1,595,728	27
Nevada	180,600	2,758,931	7
Wyoming	66,259	576,412	11

the LDS Church, she attended the church-owned university, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, for her administration endorsement program. Another participant attended and has taught at Brigham Young University. No other participant mentioned LDS Church membership or affiliations or perceptions of the local prevalence of that religious demographic on their own experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Four forms of data collection were used, enabling triangulation and validity of data (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 1990).

- Personal interviews
- Follow-up communication for clarification of questions via phone calls, emails or subsequent interviews (Appendix C)
- Current resume or VITA
- Participant recommended interviews, one for each participant, with someone familiar with her career journey

There are no known risks to the study. However, since this was a “convenience sampling” (Creswell, 2005, p. 149), readers familiar with Utah high school dynamics and leadership, may have insights and recognize possible participants’ identities. At any time during the research project, participants could choose to discontinue participation or not answer questions. Anything shared was confidential. Interviews were recorded for accuracy. The recordings were transcribed and names and any identifying information were coded and not disclosed. All information was kept in my home office in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed in three years, after the study’s completion.

### **Interview Protocol**

Each interview began with introductions, an explanation of the study, and its purpose. Questions about IRB, recording, confidentiality, anonymity, transcriptions, analysis, and so forth, were answered before interviews began. At the time of the interview, each participant was given a list of questions (Appendix D) to guide the interview with an explanation that additional questions would be used as the interview evolved. I interviewed participants for one to two hours, in a place chosen by participants. One follow-up email was sent to participants with a clarification question. Recorded notes were taken using a *Livescribe* pen, which records as notes are written and an electronic recording device was used simultaneously to ensure accurate data collection.

After interviews were completed, they were transcribed by an outside source. Individual transcriptions were sent to each participant for approval and corrections before coding. I then manually coded and analyzed the interviews, seeking patterns, themes

related to the research questions, literature reviewed, and theoretical framework.

### **Follow-Up Communications**

Participants were asked to communicate with the researcher describing additional thoughts and information after the initial interview. However, no one sent additions. Transcriptions of interviews were then sent to participants for approval and corrections. No one requested changes. One follow-up email chain requesting either an external participant information or vitae/résumés was sent to participants. No other communication was received or solicited.

### **Résumé or Vita**

Each participant provided a current resume or vita. Participants were teachers from 2 to 21 years before beginning administration classes. Four of the seven women worked in district office positions before principalships, and one participant had a different career before becoming an educator. The seven women taught speech and debate, English, mathematics, science, history, special education, and business. One participant taught in elementary and middle school before high school, while another only has teaching experience in middle school. Two participants began their careers in middle school before moving into high school. Two women's teacher careers were high school only. One of the seven women was a middle school principal before obtaining high school principalship. This vital information verified career steps, mobility, and experiences leading to principalship.

### **External Participants**

Each participant was asked to suggest an interview participant who was familiar with her career journey. Similar questions (Appendix E) were asked in these interviews, although adjusted to refer to the participant who recommended the external interviewee. These interviews provided triangulation from an outside voice, describing the formation and progression of participants' career life histories. The resulting narratives expanded the career life histories, verifying and adding to participants' perceptions, and giving the data another dimension. External participant interviews created another layer of data, adding an increased depth of understanding of their career life histories.

### **Triangulation**

Personal interviews, follow-up communications, current resumes, and participant recommended interviews (external participants) gave dimension to each participant's career life history and often confirmed the information provided by the primary participants (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Creswell, 2007; Dollard, 1935).

### **Analysis**

Data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for common themes and patterns. I looked for patterns and similarities in resumes, emails, and interviews in participants' career life history. I sorted the data several times searching for common threads and themes. Each attempt to arrange the data brought me closer to the final result. This was a challenging process, but necessary. I arranged and rearranged the data until a multi-layered version was the most effective method I could find in the analysis. If participants

want the results of the study, they will be provided. The results will be published, although neither names nor identifying information will be used.

### **Coding**

As I read the interviews, I began to find several similar themes. I set up a chart of color-coding the themes to be consistent in my readings, read each interview, and highlighted statements in the determined color. I then gathered the colored-coded statements into themed documents: (a) barrier/roadblocks (b) roles conflict (c) leadership (d) encumbered choices (e) involvement (f) mentors (g) persistence (h) external supporters (i) family supports (j) systemic problems, and (k) advice.

With each attempt at organization, my committee chair questioned my thinking and guided me into deeper analysis. The first round of organization was a beginning of several reconfigurations, themes clustering, and analysis of data. I then re-read the literature review and determined to adjust themes according to the literature review headings. In the *Social Political Analysis of Gender Systems* section, I clustered barriers/roadblocks, systemic problems, involvement, roles conflict, family support, and mentors. Persistence, external supporters, and advice were clustered under the *Psychological Processes that Perpetuate Gender Inequality* section. The final sections were organized into the following sections, *Women in Educational Leadership* with themed statements of participants' leadership skills, and *Women's Encumbered Choices* section with themed statements of participants' encumbered choices. I re-wrote the document with this organization. This structure was weak and did not flow well for a reader. Some themes did not seem to fit with the other clustered themes and several

statements were repeated throughout the sections.

My committee chair and I discussed the underlying themes of the subsections and suggested there were three phases of the career life histories: (a) early career, preadministration; principals in the making (b) transitional career into administration; transformation into principalship; (c) career as an administrator, participants as principals; and (d) encumbered choices made by participants throughout their career life histories. I began using an outline format to assist me in the reorganizations.

A new organization developed and my writing followed this structure until it was ready for another discussion with my committee chair. Again, one more structure was organized and rewritten with clarified section titles and subtitles. This final restructuring was presented to my committee chair for approval. The data analysis is organized in that approved structure and presented in Chapter V.

### **Reflexivity**

“Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005); therefore, I worked to keep my positionality as a high school assistant principal from interfering with the data direction and interpretation. Nevertheless, I used my positionality as a researcher throughout the data collection, because I could draw from my experiences, giving me an increased understanding of participants’ contexts. Recognizing my positionality in the research process, I kept it in mind as potentially problematic as a researcher with a purpose in analysis of the data. I approached the data gathering by listening to the participant interviews, asking questions, and did not interject my experiences within the discussion. The career life histories revealed information that I

could analyze with an eye of understanding because of my positionality. Reading and writing summaries of the data several times became a necessary journey for me.

Although arduous and challenging, this work became “a process of discovery: discovery of the subject (and sometimes of the problem itself) and discovery of self” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210). Writing and rewriting the narrative kept me questioning my analysis and its directions. I have several drafts showing the discovery made not only in the data arrangements, but also, in my understanding of the data.

I interviewed thirteen participants in under ten hours. Interview duration varied from just over 15 minutes to 1 hour and 40 minutes. There were 179 pages of interview transcriptions and seven resumes. Data collection began in mid-June and continued until I received the last resume in mid-August.

### **Method of Study**

I chose to use qualitative methods for the research. A qualitative study seeks to find an intimate understanding of individuals in the culture of the research. I wanted to know the career life history experiences of women high school principals as they make decisions that lead to breaking the ranks in a male dominated leadership position. The *career* life history is an innovative method of study pinpointing the aspects of participants' life histories related to progression toward their careers and achievement of career goals. Such a project falls within the guidelines of life history although it is more specifically focused on dimensions of the participants' careers. A life history reflects on cultural, personal, or institutional, themes, and gathers data over a number of years (Creswell, 1998, p. 49). “A good life history illustrates the uniqueness, dilemmas, and



complexities of a person in such a way that it causes readers to reflect upon themselves and to bring their own situations and questions to the story” (Glesne, 2006, p. 11). Such a method responds to the curiosity with which people are “perennially seeking... a significant concept of the person to set off against our valuable formal descriptions of social life” (Dollard, 1935, p. 1) and locates life histories within the social sciences.

Dollard continues to assert the cultural aspects researched in a life history are not only for social workers or a “gadget of psychologists”:

It can also be viewed from the standpoint of the systematic student of culture. From this standpoint the life history is an account of how a new person is added to the group and becomes an adult capable of meeting the traditional expectations of his [sic] society for a person of his [sic] sex and age. (p. 3)

Borrowing a portion of Dollard’s (1935) language, this study proposed to research a section within the culture of high school principals by adding women into the mix, therefore adding *an account of how the new person [woman] is added to the group and becomes an adult capable of meeting the traditional expectations of [her] society for a person of [her] sex and age.*

My study brought a feminist perspective to career life history method as I explored the participants’ stories. Feminist ethnographers focus on issues of justice, power, and oppression (Glesne, 2006, p. 17), yet show the “transformation of asymmetrical power relations, particularly as applied to women” (p. 17). My feminist research has “put the social construction of gender at the center” (Lather, 1991) of my study and has examined the career life histories of women in the high school principalship, possible gender barriers, and limiting social schemas. The relationship between the researcher (myself) and the researched (participants of study) was critical to

the feminist thread in the study. I strove to be aware of my subjectivity, working to be actively reflexive as I gathered and analyzed the data and developed the narrative. Nevertheless, use of a feminist perspective to inform the work was paramount throughout interviews, coding, and analysis. This study adds to the existing qualitative literature, enabling the reader to understand pathways participants of the study travelled to become some of the few women principals in a high school. Creswell (1998) said, “Besides dialogue and understanding, a qualitative study may fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population” (p. 94). In this study, the women interviewed expose the nuances of their journeys and in doing so, become examples, role models, and mentors for other women. The research that began with their experiences “establish[es] a new line of thinking” and introduces *career* life histories as an innovative new method in qualitative studies.

### **Limitations**

Although I attempted to be a listener during interviews, allowing each of the participants to tell her story, my interpretation and analysis could have become unhelpfully biased according to my experiences and positionality. Caution was needed when intertwining my personal experiences with the interviewees’ experiences to avoid swaying their stories in directions not as fully representative of the participants’ actual experiences. An additional limitation was the narrowness of choosing women principal participants from one state. The results may or may not be similar or transferable to a study that would be conducted elsewhere. Readers of the research can consider their own

experiences and contexts and make decisions about its relevance to their circumstances.

### **Definitions**

For this study, career life history is defined as the experiences of the women as they journeyed toward and eventually became high school principals. Career specific experiences involving university studies, teaching in schools, job mobility, and mentoring relationships, were potentially influential pieces of a career life history. The data included incidents that began before the women's actual careers began that, nevertheless, eventually brought them to the field of education administration.

Encumbered or constrained choices is defined as choices and decisions made by women that are burdened or made more complicated by gendered sociopolitical or psychological dynamics. The literature reviewed for this study makes clear that such choices are encumbered, restricted, or limited for women because of sociopolitical structures, and psychological processes that perpetuate gendered schemas and stereotypes.

### **Summary**

In summary, I chose a qualitative study to analyze the career life histories of women high school principals, hoping to enrich the understanding of their journey in becoming women in leadership in a male dominated career field. Interviews, resumes, and external participant recommended interviews were used to collect data for triangulation. Data was coded as I looked for patterns and similarities in transcriptions of

the interviews, resumes, and any encumbered choices or constrained choices participants discussed.

Next, I present descriptions of the principal and external participants, and then the analysis of this data follows in Chapter V.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

#### **Introduction**

Meeting these women and talking about their career life histories was a pleasure for me. I anticipated hearing a spectrum of emotions highlighting opportunities and barriers they had experienced. As they told me their stories with alacrity, I heard understanding and sincerity as they reflected on their journeys. No one expressed any sign of resentment or bad feelings about their pathways to becoming a high school principal, although some had a more difficult road than others. The participants' skilled navigation through family dynamics, schedules, and transitions demonstrated leadership and strength. They exuded passion and understanding of their roles as leaders in education.

Six of the seven principal participants supplied me with an external participant who would be able to tell her career life history through a different point of view. Table 6 introduces participants and external participants. Again, I found pleasure and joy in listening to the support and appreciation the external participants had for participants' journey to high school leadership. They enthusiastically described what they perceived to be the excellent leadership of their spouse, mother, coworker, or friend. The principal participants are exemplary in each of the external participants' point of view. They have confidence that these women have the leadership and ability to take charge at a high school. The external participants described the principals' strengths in breaking barriers

Table 6

*Participants*

Participants	External participants
Alice	
Married (since 2008)/no children	None provided
Cindy	
Married/1 daughter	Daniel: Husband
Georgette	
Married/5? children	Randy: Son, entering graduate school at time of study
Leslie	
Widowed/1 daughter, 2 sons	James: 2 <sup>nd</sup> husband
Married/4 stepdaughters	
Megan	
Marred/2 daughters	Marsha: Friend, mentor, supervisor
Peg	
Married/1 son	Brent: Friend, coworker, assistant principal at time of study
Sandy	
Married/stepchildren	Sarah: Friend, coworker

and making difficult choices at various stages of their journeys. External participant interviews added information that helped me gain a fuller understanding of participants' career life histories.

The participants were first teachers from 2 to 18 years before their administrative careers began. All but one were intern assistant principals. Only one participant was a middle school principal before high school principalship. Three participants worked in district office positions. The women served as assistant principals from one to 12 years. Table 7 illustrates participants' education careers.

Finally, I include myself as a participant by describing my research journey to extend the information about my positionality presented in Chapter II.

Table 7

*Participants' Years in Education Positions*

Name	Teacher	Teacher specialist	Intern	Assistant principal	District	Middle school principal	High school principal	Total
Alice	9	0	1	6	3	4	10	33
Cindy	17	0	1	4	8	0	5	35
Georgette	5	0	1	7	0	0	2	15
Leslie	18	0	1	5	4	0	3	31
Megan	11	0	3	12	0	0	12	38
Peg	21	0	0	1	0	0	6	28
Sandy	2	4	3	9	0	0	1	19

Principal and external participants' names are pseudonyms randomly selected by me with the exception of two participants who supplied me with names they wanted to use. No identifying names of schools, districts, or communities is used in the narrative.

### **About the Participants**

I interviewed seven principal participants and six external participants who were suggested by the principal participants. Additional data was obtained from participants' resumes and one follow-up email to each of the principal participants. Five of the seven principal participants are current women high school principals; one is in her second high school as principal. One of the two other women interviewed was previously a high school principal who is now in a district position, and the other is a retired high school principal from a neighboring state, now employed as assistant principal in a high school within the state where this study was conducted. Ages ranged from early 40s to early 60s. Two of the five current principals serve in schools with more than 1,000 students from

grades 9-12. The remaining current principals have students in grades 10-12. Most high schools are located in a contiguous, urban area of the state, although they are not the same districts. One high school is located in a rural part of the state. None of the women aspired to become a high school principal. Megan was appointed as high school principal in 1999, Alice in 2004, Leslie in 2005, Cindy in 2006 and then again in 2011, Peg in 2007, Georgette in 2011, and Sandy in 2012 (see Table 8). Participants were eager to tell their story, express their passion, and expound on their school's progress. They know they are an anomaly, and understand the roles they play in paving the way for future women principals. Advice to potential women administrators was given freely.

### **Alice**

When I met Alice for the interview, she told me her initial thought about the study. "My first thought was... 'Oh my gosh, I hope she knows how much progress women have made in the last 10 years!'" She continued to explain her view of necessary changes still to come. "There is still a lot of change that needs to happen, but oh my goodness things have changed.... There were a few people that broke through." She humbly admitted she was one of the original women high school principals in the state. "Well, not the very first, but I'm one of the first ones that probably did."

Alice has several years as a leader in her community and school. Her love of debating as a high school and university student kept Alice in academia. She coached both high school and university students, traveling and competing frequently while leading teams to championships. She coached speech and debate teams to national



Table 8

*Participants' Career Journey*

Participants	Career journey						Current position	
	Teacher HS-1 1981-1984	Adjunct Instructor 1984-1997	#Teacher HS-2 1986-1991	Asst. Prin. HS-2 1991-1995	Asst. Prin. HS-3 1995-1997	District Appeals 1997-2000	MS Principal 2000-2004	HS Principal 2004-present
Alice								
Cindy	<sup>a</sup> Lang. Arts HS Teacher 1980-1989	<sup>b</sup> Lang. Arts HS Teacher 1989-1995	Asst. Prin. HS 1995-2000	District Compliance Officer 2000-2003	District Curriculum 2003-2006	HS-1 Principal 2006-2009	Director of HS 2009-2011	HS-2 Principal 2011-present
Georgette	Math & Science Teacher MS 1999-2004	MS G & T Specialist 1999-2004	<sup>b</sup> ESL Team Facilitator MS 2002-2003	Core Academic Leader 2002-2004	District G & T Coordinator 2002-2004	Asst. Prin. HS District 1 2004-2011	Adjunct Instructor 2004-present	HS Principal District 2 2011-present
Leslie		Science MS Teacher 1978-1982	Science HS Teacher 1982-1996	Asst. Prin. Intern HS 1996-1997	Asst. Prin. HS 1997-2001	District 1 HR 2001-2005	HS Principal 2005-2008	District 2 HR 2009-present
Megan	<sup>a</sup> History- English- Reading Teacher MS-1 1977-1979	<sup>a</sup> Social Studies Teacher MS-2 1979-1981	<sup>a</sup> Admin Intern MS 1988-1991	<sup>a</sup> Asst. Prin. MS 1991-1996	<sup>a</sup> Asst. Prin. HS 1996-1999	<sup>a</sup> HS Principal- District 1 1999-2008	<sup>a</sup> HS Principal- District 2 2008-2011 (Retired-out of state)	Assistant Principal HS-State 2 2012-present
Peg		<sup>a</sup> Reading Specialist E 1985-1986	Regular Ed Teacher E 1986-1987	Special Ed Teacher E 1987-1989	Special Ed Teacher MS 1990-1992	Special Ed Teacher HS 1992-2007	<sup>b</sup> Asst. Prin. HS 2007-2007	HS Principal 2007-present
Sandy	<sup>a</sup> Customer Requirement Specialist 1990-1994	CTE HS Teacher 1994-1996	<sup>b</sup> CTE HS Coordinator 1996-2000	Asst. Prin. Intern HS-1 2000-2003	Asst. Prin. HS-1 2003-2009	Asst. Prin. HS-2 2009-2011	Asst. Prin. HS-3 2011-2012	HS Principal 2012-present

<sup>a</sup>Out of state.<sup>b</sup>Began administration classes.

recognition at both high school and college levels. Alice thrived on her experiences in the debate arena.

Prior to marrying five years ago, Alice was able to devote her time to her career. She described her devotion to her career as consuming her life, “My life, my entire life was school. I wasn’t married. I didn’t have a family.” She acknowledged not having children, but “kids,” she cared for. “All I had to do was make sure my cats...my kitty cat kids...had some water and food.” Alice’s career was well developed before she married and she speaks only of extended family relationships.

Alice served as a teacher in high school and university. Teaching high school communications, speech, and debate in two high schools for nine years, Alice gained appreciation for the students. She enjoyed the competition and serving beyond the classroom. Alice then spent six years, first as an assistant principal in a high school, then an interim high school principal. She worked three years in a district office position, and served as a middle school principal for four years before landing her dream job, a high school principalship, which is her current position. She was one of the first women high school principals in the state, opening new opportunities for others. Her leadership skills and strengths were obvious to me. I could imagine her gathering people to her table so they could glean insight from her knowledge and experiences. Alice serves on district, state, and national committees, leading policy decisions and overseeing evaluations. She had been in the classroom for nine years before accepting an invitation to join administration. At the time of the study, she was completing her 10<sup>th</sup> year as a high school principal in a school with over 2,300 students, grades 9 through 12.

When asked if she had advice for potential women administrators, Alice suggested caution.

I would say that you have to be very cautious and that you can't be so strong as a woman that they dislike you because you have to work with the men.... You can't be this feminist; "Get out of my way!" because...they're not going to collaborate or work with you.... But, at the same time, you can't be the little, you know, stereotypical-like little woman that's weak and meek and can't make a decision... they expect the stereotype who can't make a decision or [who]becomes emotional [when there are] difficult decisions to make.

Alice made her decisions from her vested experiences as high school teacher, assistant principal, and principal.

### **Cindy**

When Cindy and I met for our interview, she told me what she thought about the study, "I think it's a good one. I think it's an unexplored one." She also added the importance of the work to others on a similar journey, "When you're finished, people could read it to gain a little insight about their own role."

Cindy was a woman with a variety of educational experiences and is trusted and respected in her roles as an educator. Daniel, Cindy's spouse, explained the respect she gained as she became principal at a high school after the principal retired mid-year. "She stepped into his shoes and the faculty immediately took a liking to her, and she played a very strong leadership role there in that high school." Cindy continues to be a trusted leader as she serves in her second high school as principal.

She and Daniel had one daughter, who was 10 years old when Cindy began her transition to administration.

Teaching high school English for about 20 years, Cindy was passionate about the

high school experience. She was involved with students in many extracurricular activities such as coaching Academic Decathlon and drill team, and served as newspaper and yearbook advisor before she became a high school administrator. She worked as an assistant high school principal for 5 years, served in two different district positions for six years, and then became a high school principal for three years. She then switched districts, returning to district office work for two years before returning to her current high school principalship. At the time of the study, Cindy was in her fifth year as high school principal. Her school has over 1,600 students, grades 9 through 12.

Now at her second high school as principal, Cindy's exceptional leadership qualities benefit her students, faculty, and community. Her abilities and skillsets have developed because of her past experience as high school principal.

It feels different this time.... If parents object to something, I'll calmly explain my rationale, and I almost always find they say, "Oh, okay." In the past, I could do that too, explain, and they would say, "Oh, okay," but I always felt like I had to maybe do a little bit of a song and dance for them.

Cindy's reflection on her growth as a principal demonstrated her strength as a leader.

When asked for her advice for other women who might wish to pursue the principalship, Cindy responded thoughtfully, "You only take your knowledge and your experience, and you get that knowledge and experience through relationships, and you take relationships with you too. You take that accomplishment." She continued later with an email message giving a suggestion on setting "short-term and long-term goals for your administrative career. Rather than just waiting for others to decide when/where you will serve, make those decisions at the beginning and then look for ways to meet those goals." Cindy also expressed the importance of creating networks of other female administrators.

I would also suggest creating a strong network of other female administrators. This has been very helpful to me along the way. Females see things differently than males do, and their perspective sheds new light on the “good old boys club.”

My conversations with Cindy and her spouse convinced me that she was a strong leader in her community. Her career life history reflections illustrated Cindy’s care for the education of her students.

### **Georgette**

When I met Georgette for our interview, her excitement for participating in the study was apparent. She told me of her realization of a gender gap when she was the only female in a regional athletic meeting. “That’s what I thought of when I read about your study, and that’s one of the reasons why when I got to talk to you I thought...there is some real work that needs to be done in this area.” She continued to tell me her beliefs about the importance of gender balance. “I really believe that the best leadership teams that we can have for our schools are going to be a balance of women and men.” Georgette now has three men as her assistant principals that she “really likes,” giving her administrative team balance.

Her passions for gifted and talented students, Spanish, math and building construction, are expressed in her love for working with students and expanding their capacities. Randy, Georgette’s son, explained his mother’s passion for education.

She is a HUGE advocate of...higher education, and...her own desire to kind of promote other people to educate themselves just kind of weigh[s] hand-in-hand with her furthering her education and going on from getting a teaching degree and.... Spanish degree to getting a master’s degree and starting to attain those higher positions.

Randy continued to describe his mother’s personal progression through gaining more

education, “She wanted to keep stretching herself and wanted to keep pushing and learning new things and tackling bigger and bigger projects [so] that eventually she just kind of took a step into administration.” Georgette’s passions contribute to her pursuit of education, building her capacities to serve effectively.

Georgette raised her family, with the exception of a kindergarten daughter and middle-school-aged son, before becoming an educator. She gained a love for teaching as she tutored students in the family home while raising her children. Her family supported Georgette as she earned university degrees and reconfigured responsibilities to maintain work and family balance. Now, her new school is over 70 miles away from her home, although for the school year, she and her spouse spend many nights in an apartment closer to her work, yet further from his work.

Georgette taught math in middle school for 5 years. While teaching, she also served in district assignments. She was an assistant high school principal for 7 years before she switched districts to become principal in her current high school. The school was in need of rebuilding and the district wanted to hire a principal with construction skills, which Georgette possesses. At the time of the study, Georgette was in her third year as principal, with over 1,200 students, grades 10 through 12.

Georgette’s advice came after the interview when she had time to reflect on what she had learned on her journey to become principal. Based on my own experiences, I perceived her advice as sage.

Sharpen your instructional leadership skills. Become a teacher leader, team leader, whatever. Develop relationships with admin/district level people through serving on committees, etc. When your application is submitted to a screening pool, they need to know who you are.”

She continued to express the importance of athletic connections, “Find a connection to athletics,” transitional periods, “Pay particular attention to transitions such a sixth-grade elementary to seventh grade Junior High, or Junior High to High School,” and skill sharpening, “Keep trying and open your mind to additional opportunities.” Georgette’s interview inspired me as I listened to her commitment to continual learning and to building progressive learning programs for students.

### **Leslie**

Leslie was a woman with pleasant people skills that enhanced her leadership. She was approachable, likeable, and trusted by her peers and students. James, her second husband, emphasized how well she works with people, “She’s just great with people.” He continued to tell me how she brings people together to “get the job done.”

She’s a consensus builder. She brings people together and formulates a decision and then puts it out there. But, she doesn’t make the decision without engaging the people it involves.... She works much better with people. She has the ability to laugh and joke and move along and not take anything personally and still get the job done.... She doesn’t engage in the drama that sometimes is behind the scenes of personalities.

Leslie’s first spouse passed away in her second year of administration. By then, she had two sons, one still in high school and the other in college, and one daughter in middle school. Leslie remarried later and raised four young stepdaughters.

Leslie began her teaching career in middle school for 4 years, and then spent another 14 years at the high school level. She taught biology, anatomy, physiology, earth science, physics, and chemistry. She was also a Certified Athletic Administrator, and affiliated with national professional associations. Her involvement with student activities

(student government advisor, drill team advisor and judge, cheerleader coach, and supervisor of athletic events) endeared her to the high school students. She loves being with adolescents.

After 18 years as a classroom teacher, Leslie was an assistant high school principal for 5 years before she took a position in the district office for 4 years. Her years as an assistant high school principal were some of her most cherished times. After that she became high school principal for 3 years in a school rich in traditions, some needing changes. Her high school had over 2,400 students in grades 10 through 12. She then retired from one district and was hired for a district position in another district where, at the time of the study, she had served for 4 years.

Leslie believed that confidence and building support systems helps. “I think your confidence is a real big deal.” She continued to expound on her thoughts on building a support system.

Make sure you have a support system that consists of either the people you go through the program with, the assistant principals that you’ve worked with, and/or the principals that you’ve worked with so that you can bounce ideas off of them, get input, and don’t feel like you’re alone.

Leslie expressed a commitment to administrative team building and including team members in decisions. “As a principal, I felt very strongly about using my team and keeping them included in everything. Some principals don’t do that. They keep everything to themselves, and that makes their stress level much higher.” She continued to follow her own advice recognizing that “using that support group is huge” in her current district position. Leslie’s emphasis on networking and the importance of building a team of decision makers gave me a deeper understanding of her success as a principal.



**Megan**

When Megan and I met for our interview, I asked her what her thoughts were about the study. She said, “I wasn’t surprised at all that somebody was doing a study like that because I have been on the end of being a pioneer in this field.” She then told me about a wall of portraits of the former principals at the school where she became principal. “There’s a whole wall from 1927 all the way up to me, it’s all men.... I was the first woman.” Later in our conversation she related an incident when she was introduced to her faculty as the incoming year’s principal. “Several of the retiring teachers had me [as a student] in high school,” Megan explained. One of them surprised her. “[He] brought me a dozen black carnations with orange ribbons and said, ‘I’m leaving just in time, I hope this goes well for you.’” Megan’s understanding of the importance of this study was clear to me.

She is a woman new to the state’s school system, recently retiring from a neighboring state where she was a high school principal. Megan is respected by her peers in her new position as assistant principal and is missed dearly by those she left behind when she retired in the neighboring state. Her friend and mentor, Marsha was not happy because Megan was hard to replace. “[It was not] great in my opinion because replacing [Megan] is challenging.... She’s committed to doing the right work and [to a belief] that there is...room at the table for all of our kids, not just some of our kids.... She’s great at that.”

Megan and her spouse raised two daughters. She taught social studies in both middle schools and high school for 10 years. While a teacher, Megan served as Academic

Achievement Administrator and Social Studies Content Facilitator. As a high school principal, she was Executive Principal for Secondary Schools. She began her work in administration working as an administrative intern at middle school for 3 years before serving as a middle school assistant principal for 5 years. She then worked as high school assistant principal for 3 years before becoming principal for 9 years. Megan switched districts and became high school principal for another 3 years. Having served as a high school principal for 12 years, she retired and moved to Utah where she now serves as an assistant high school principal. At the time of the study, Megan was in her second year as an assistant principal in her current high school.

When asked what wisdom she would like to pass on to others, she simply stated, “Do more than your fair share, don’t ask for special consideration.” Megan emphasized being a team player, “Be part of the team, be willing to give and take and understand that...if we all do it together it lightens the load for everybody.”

I learned about Megan’s career life history but also gleaned administrative insight from my conversations with her. For instance, listening to Megan’s story helped me to understand the importance of observing and assessing before making decisions.

## **Peg**

When I first met Peg, I was greeted with a friendly handshake. Her high school was in a remodeling phase and her office was relocated to a vacant area where she could oversee construction progress. I quickly saw her passion for public education. She came from an educated family, as her paternal grandparents were both college graduates of the 1930s, an unusual historical accomplishment. Education was always important in her

family. She had strong, educated examples. Peg's warmth, love, and energy was always present when she talked about her students and their high school experiences. Brent, Peg's long time coworker and her current assistant principal, explained her style, "Her leadership style is...she's the type who leads, and you think you're the one making the decisions." Brent's devotion to Peg was respectful as he told about her strengths.

She, to me, is the perfect example of somebody who has confidence because she doesn't have to be perfect. She's very knowledgeable. She's very comfortable with her knowledge, and she has confidence in herself, but she doesn't have to know everything...she doesn't have to give the appearance that she knows everything. And, I would think that that's one of her absolute strengths.

Peg is married with one son and was able to devote much of her time to her teaching career. Her son attended the same high school where Peg was first, a teacher, and then an administrator. He was a junior when she became assistant principal and a senior when she became principal.

Peg started her career as a reading specialist for one year and later was a teacher in an elementary school for another year. She then moved to middle school special education for 2 years, before she took 1 year off from teaching to have a baby. She returned as a part-time special education teacher in middle school for 2 years and then to a full-time high school position in special education for 15 years. Peg taught special education for 15 years in the same school where she eventually became principal. She began earning her administrative credentials while serving as assistant principal. She was then appointed as principal 1 year later, although she had not yet finished her administration classes. At the time of the study, Peg had been a principal for 6 years in a school for grades 10 through 12 with over 1,100 students.

Peg believed that it takes time to know what leadership is required at a particular high school. She suggested when “the right person [for] the high school principal [is found]...leave them there because there are so many things that you don’t discover or uncover good, bad, right or wrong for a long time.” She also believed leaders must have a love for the diverse high school dynamics.

You have to love it all... If you are a sports fanatic and all you care about is the football team, you’re not going to last very long as far as being supported by your staff. You have to love everything from FFA [Future Farmers of America] to the musicals to the math club to football to soccer to the cheerleaders. You’ve got to support, and you’ve got to love all of that. You have to remember how important all of that is to every stakeholder.

When Peg had time to think about her response, she added more of her thoughts in an email after the interview. She emphasized the importance of teaching experience before obtaining an administration position. “I would recommend 10-15 years teaching experience before getting an administrative position.” She continued to expound on her reasons.

Teach, teach, teach and keep teaching and get all of the experience in a school that you can. Learn a culture and know what you want from a school staff and faculty. Spend time doing what you are trained to do before you jump into the administration game. The more experience you have in the field, I believe, the better equipped you are to lead.

Peg then expressed her ideas of women in leadership positions and possible behavioral stereotyping.

Learn the difference between being the boss and being bossy. A bossy man is considered strong—a bossy woman is considered...well...something else. You can be strong and lead without being condescending, and that is important. Secondary teachers are strong willed and opinionated; in my experience they do not need, or want to be, lectured [to] or given directives. Although, sometimes it is necessary to make the executive decision, working as a team to develop an action plan is a good way to avoid unnecessary conflicts and the appearance of

top down leadership.

Her beliefs in the strength of the administrative team were clear when she advised “surrounding [your]self with strong people. Once you become a principal, get a good vice principal team and strong teacher leaders to make up a school leadership team.” Peg’s beliefs stem from her experiences and reflect the career life history she has lived. I felt her sincere devotion to her students and community.

### **Sandy**

Sandy was friendly and approachable as the high school leader. Once Sandy received the invitation to be a participant in the research, she eagerly accepted the challenge and set a time to meet.

Sarah, Sandy’s friend and mentor, told me that Sandy had stepchildren. She “has been in a unique place herself because she has stepchildren, but she does not have children of her own.” Sandy and I, however, did not discuss their ages, parenting-related concerns, or her marriage.

Sandy began her career as a marketing director in a large corporation. Her successes gave her experiences in federal government budgeting and “delivery of the B-2 Stealth Bomber to the United States Air Force.” She also “served as liaison between the Washington, D.C., office in maintaining and analyzing political and economic databases.” These experiences gave her a background in being able to work with high school communities, budgets, and coaches. Sandy taught marketing, advertising, and other subjects in the Applied Technology Education (ATE) classes in high school for 2 years, then, moved into the ATE Coordinator position for 4 years. Sandy interned at high

school for 3 years before obtaining her first high school assistant principal position. She then served for 9 years as assistant principal before securing her current high school principalship. Sandy was the only participant to mention femininity and convinced me of her capacity to remain stereotypically feminine in a leadership role. At the time of the study, Sandy was completing her second year of principalship. Her high school is a newer school in the district with the challenges of establishing its identity, traditions, and academics. It serves grades 10 through 12 with over 2,000 students.

When asked if she had advice to women aspiring to be administrators, Sandy simply stated, "Network and mentor." Listening to Sandy's career life history, I perceived her perseverance, strength, and integrity. After the initial interview, I emailed Sandy her transcriptions for clarifications and asked for additional thoughts she might add. I did not receive further information.

### **Summary**

Alice, Cindy, Georgette, Leslie, Megan, Peg, and Sandy were the principal participants. They freely gave of their time and were eager to share their stories. These women knew they were a unique group with shared experiences as high school principals with stories to tell that could benefit others. They took the time to express their advice for others pursuing high school administrative positions. Each of these women convinced me of their strong leadership capabilities.

### **About the External Participants**

For triangulation purposes, an external participant was interviewed to validate,

clarify, and add to participants' career life history. Participants were asked to give me contact information for their choice of an external participant who knew the journey they had taken in becoming high school principals. All but one participant supplied contact information. Each of the external participant interviews was enjoyable as I felt the passion, love, and respect they each had for the principal participants. Their appreciation for the accomplishments, dedication, and inspirational qualities of these women high school principals was evident in all of our conversations.

### **Alice**

Alice did not provide me with an external participant.

### **Daniel, Cindy's Spouse**

Daniel and Cindy have one daughter and he has been a good support to Cindy in her career steps. They made difficult adjustments as a family, enabling Cindy to pursue her career. He became the main caregiver of their young daughter during Cindy's time earning her administration credentials. Daniel also borrowed from his retirement funds to pay for her tuition. He has been a helpful companion as they reconfigured the family in support of Cindy's career transitions. There is great respect for Cindy's work as Daniel described, "I know she was well thought of when she was principal at [the] High School. She took over there mid-year when [the principal] retired." Daniel claimed that he "could go on and on about how outstanding [Cindy] has been." He was very clear about how proud he is of Cindy's leadership, "[Cindy's] always been a leader. She's done very well in everything she's done whether it's been a drill team advisor, debate coach, whatever."

Daniel's appreciation for Cindy and his understanding of her hard work and position as it has evolved beyond being a classroom teacher was made clear through his comments.

### **Randy, Georgette's Son**

Randy credited his mother's higher education example with influencing his own decisions. He was a student at the high school where Georgette was assistant principal and witnessed her tenacity, professionalism, and passion for student academic growth. He was graduating from college and ready to begin graduate studies at the time of our interview. Randy's love and respect for his mother were very apparent. He expressed his joy in watching her at work as a teacher.

She loved being in the classroom, and I enjoyed...visiting her at school while she was teaching because it was always very interesting.... She always had like a real passion for that...It was always interesting to see...the way that she would engage students and get them going.

He began the interview by saying he did not have much to say, but several minutes later, had passionately told me many great qualities he admired about his mother, Georgette, the principal. His perspective on Georgette's career life history broadened my understanding of her journey.

### **James, Leslie's Husband**

James married Leslie after her first husband passed away during her first 2 years as assistant principal. James brought new dimension to Leslie's life and family with support and understanding of her roles as parent and administrator. He proudly highlighted Leslie's national and local recognition earned while she was still a teacher. "She is well known. I think she is in the Hall of Fame here in the state." James expressed



that her recognition, leadership, and “her ability to work with people and mitigate the amount of conflict that comes from it,” was noticed by her leaders who invited Leslie to join the administration team.

Leslie and James made difficult decisions when it came time for Leslie to work at the high school, as his four young daughters were still at home. An educator himself, James was able to assist Leslie in her goals and aspirations. He brought a deeper understanding to Leslie’s life as a dedicated educator.

### **Brent, One of Peg’s Assistant Principals**

Brent and Peg had known each other for many years as teachers, as family friends, and now in a principal-assistant principal relationship. Brent seemed to understand Peg’s skills and rated her as one of the top three principals he has had, stating he will quit if they move her out of the school, saying she is that good. “If the board or the superintendents decided they were going to transfer her or move her, I would retire that day.” Brent and Peg have worked together for many years as teachers and administrators. Because of their families’ friendship, they support one another professionally and personally.

There was a great respect for one another. Listening to Brent’s description of his devotion to his longtime friend, colleague, and superior brought me to an appreciation of Peg’s skills as the school’s leader.

### **Marsha, Megan’s Mentor and Friend**

Currently an elementary principal in Megan’s former district, Marsha had great

respect and appreciation for Megan and her commitment and skillset as an educator.

Megan's longtime friend and supervisor, Marsha explained Megan's core educational

values and her ability to do what is right for the students. Marsha understood how

Megan's deeply held professional beliefs supported the students learning anytime Megan was involved in the educational arena.

There is just a core to her that makes her different than a whole lot of people her age and a whole lot of people in the profession...because she's committed to kids, and she dedicates herself and her life into [providing] resources. She is about creating systems that are healthy and whole and [that] have integrity and coherence so that kids can have access and do great work.

Marsha told me that she could "teach someone how to teach," but that there are "certain attributes that you have to bring to the table" to be a successful educator. "Megan brought a lot of that herself. She shares a deep core. She is very clear about who she is." At this time in our conversation, Marsha's words were muffled through her tears of appreciation for the strength and commitment she tried to express about her friend, Megan. Several times in our conversation, Marsha quietly showed her emotional connection to Megan with her tears. She told me she had been preparing for our interview and hoped she would not cry. They have worked together for many years in a small district in a well-connected community. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to learn about the close professional relationship these women have for each other. Listening to Marsha describing Megan's career life history gave me an emotional tie to both women as I learned about Megan's journey and developed an appreciation for women friends as mentors.

### **Sarah, Sandy's Mentor and Friend**

Sarah and Sandy had known each other for many years, teaching in the same

school, taking classes together while becoming administrators, and mentoring each other through their careers. Sarah was excited to talk to me about Sandy and her experiences with her in the educational arena. She told me that Sandy was very capable of handling the athletic coaches in her school but that others questioned her ability to do so, “‘Is she too feminine, can she really handle those football coaches?’ Oh yes, she can. In fact, she’s handled them better than any of the men that have been at that school.” Sarah explained the leadership style Sandy used with the coaches and said that she knows who “to align herself with for support...and now when other people in the school are negative about her or talking behind her back, those football coaches are coming to her defense.” Her enthusiasm and support for Sandy were impressive as she expressed her affection for Sandy and her great respect for Sandy’s career life history choices and her life now in the high school principal position. These women had a professional relationship that went beyond the classroom. Through the interview, I learned of their connection and commitment to education.

### **Summary**

The external participants were eager to talk about their friend, spouse, or parent. Pride was shown in their enthusiasm as each one told about the participant’s journey toward becoming a principal. Each of the external participants believed in the leadership skills of the participants and knew the schools were in good hands with these women high school principals.

### **Participant Called Me**

I discussed my positionality in Chapter II, including my ongoing reflexivity regarding my connection, and understanding of the participants' journeys. I now add to the information presented about my positionality by further explaining my own travels while conducting the research. To bring a clearer understanding to the limitations I encountered and the time constraints I experienced, I ground the telling of my journey with this explanation of my commitments during my dissertation journey.

I finished all doctoral classes and looked forward to completing the dissertation within the next year or, maybe, year and a half. However, within less than 2 weeks of successfully passing comprehensive exams, my husband was diagnosed with cancer that would require aggressive treatment and care. With over 1,300 hours of inpatient hospital chemotherapy spread over 10 months and a bone marrow transplant, my heart and soul were attached to my sweetheart. At the same time, I continued to work full time as an assistant high school principal and took over on the building of our retirement home 300 miles south. Not wanting to lose momentum toward our goal of dissertation completion, I reviewed an extensive amount of literature and attempted to write the proposal and literature review. I did not know any better and just pragmatically moved forward.

About a year and a half passed by, with many attempts to narrow my proposal from my broad appreciation of gender research. Little progress had been made. With patience, support, and careful guidance, my committee chair focused me on a more clear goal, a proposal for my dissertation was completed and accepted by committee, and the research could begin.

Our journey through cancer created new goals for our retirement and we sold both of our homes, combining them into one home, thus simplifying our lives with the possibility of early widow status for me. Collecting data began during the closings and moving of two homes. As a new school year started, I was transferred to a different high school as an assistant principal with unfamiliar operations, staff, and faculty, and the football season was underway. My husband retired and was in remission from his cancer. I sat at my home desk to work on my research early every morning before heading off to school and returned to it after games in the evenings. My focus was limited, yet it has evolved with the many revisions made as I have wallowed in the ocean of data. Discoveries were rich and enlightened my experiences as a researcher.

The data brought me to a better understanding of my own journey as a woman administrator in high school. I have yet to become a high school principal, and may choose to retire, teach at a university, or take a position in the district office. All of my future career aspirations are encumbered with my husband's health and his care. Perhaps, though, it may be best to dust off my bicycle, fill up the tires, and go for a long, long ride.

### **Summary**

Alice, Cindy, Georgette, Leslie, Megan, Peg, and Sandy were the principal participants of this study. External participants included Daniel, Randy, James, Marsha, Brent, and Sarah. Alice did not provide me with an external participant. All interviews and resumes contributed to the data collected. As I read and reread the data, I gained understanding of their journeys, allowing me to construct a narrative of the career life

histories of the seven women who had entered the male dominated career of high school administration. I included myself as a participant to explain the ways that my experiences ground my understandings of the seven women's journeys and to add that, I too, have a similar journey of gendered sociopolitical and psychological dynamics, coupled with encumbered career choices. I now present the data analysis in Chapter V.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The interviews brought me to a deeper understanding of how these women “accepted viewpoints, tasks, and changed relationships that they would not have dreamed of a mere decade ago” (Sherif, 1979, p. 126). Each of them demonstrated strong leadership skills in their classes as teachers and in taking on extracurricular responsibilities or district assignments. They were involved in the schools, enjoyed the students, and were teacher leaders. The participants’ teaching and school involvement grounded them in the educational arena, which lead them to become high school principals. Despite these leadership skills, their willingness to expand their responsibilities, and their solid relationships with students and other teachers, none planned to become principals (Harris, Arnold, Lowery, & Crocker, 2002). Their lack of a focused career strategy parallels the women in Young and McLeod (2001), whose careers “just sort of evolved” or who would wait for the day “the situation [was] right” (Pankake, 1995). In Eckman’s (2004) study, women participants confirmed this dynamic with additional statements such as, “I just developed into it” and saying that “zigging and zagging” through teaching positions eventually lead them to the high school principalship.

Data gathered revealed that the women in this study gained leadership skills early in their careers, possessed persistence, and had strong mentors. Families were supportive

and were often involved in conversations about career choices. Some experienced systemic roadblocks within their districts and personal lives, complicating their choices, whereas others had opportunities opened for them. At first read, I did not find encumbered or constrained choices as these women's careers evolved, however, after further analysis, I discovered the interviews were full of subtle phrases and experiences that demonstrated the encumbered nature of their choices.

In this chapter, I present the themes that arose from the data: (a) an unintentional journey (b) support (c) barriers, and (d) encumbered choices. The data for the first three themes is organized across the three chronological stages of the career life histories: preadministration, then transition to administration, and finally the administration career. The final section of this chapter examines the fourth themes, the encumbered nature of the participant's choices, and connects that information to the literature that informs this work. Taken together, the themes highlight the unintentional nature of the participants' career life histories, the support they received, barriers they encountered, and the encumbered nature of the choices made. Once these women took the opportunity to become principals, they became enlightened leaders with confidence and vision for their schools. Eager to share their experiences, participants understood that their career life histories could provide other women educators, encouragement, support, and hope in navigating the journey of becoming high school principals.



## **Characteristics of the Unintentional Career Life History Journey**

### **Introduction**

Although the participants followed diverse paths toward their teaching careers and had unique experiences, there were commonalities amongst the early careers of these future administrators. Their career life histories in becoming high school principals were serendipitous and lacked strategy until they were invited into the administrative arena. At that point, each participant found that new dimensions in their careers were fulfilling and life changing. These women were involved in their schools and filled leadership roles. All eventually accepted invitations to move toward administration as Eckman (2004) suggests “without direct encouragement” these women may never have “considered educational administration and in particular the high school principalship as career options” (p. 198). Participants navigated work and family responsibilities to maintain balance, gained new identities, and found themselves to be able leaders in the schools. When they became principals, several participants found their new positions challenging, yet I found that they approached their leadership responsibilities pragmatically and with determination.

Presented next are the characteristics of their unintentional career life histories, each stage leading toward a high school principalship. In the preadministration stage, I present how each participant became an educator and then a leader. During the transition to administration stage, I present how participants received an invitation to become administrators and then reluctantly accepted. Then I present how participants navigated work and family to keep these two competing domains balanced. Next, I discuss how the

women found new identities, and then how the participants suddenly realized their new identities as leaders. Last, I discuss participants' growing into the principalship position and their pragmatic approaches as leaders.

### **Preadministration**

During the preadministration stage, participants had diverse roads leading them to education. Cindy found her way into teaching via her love for English. Georgette, Megan, and Peg had clear plans to become teachers. Alice, Leslie, and Sandy's journeys toward teaching were less direct; however, early career strategies and goals to attend college and earn degrees led them to the field of education.

**Becoming an educator.** The women's diverse backgrounds brought them to college differently. Their college experiences helped draft the eventual outcome of becoming educators. Cindy explained that her early college years brought her to realize that she wanted to be a teacher, "I knew early on in college that I wanted to be an English teacher, and so I kind of just always geared myself to that." Georgette said she "always want[ed] to be a teacher," although she did not know which topic or age group to teach. Megan and Peg explained the vision, support, and experiences of their education minded families. They had college educated parents and discussed it freely as being a foundation of their passion for education. Megan's parents were "big on community service and activism" shown by their devotion to the community, "My dad was on the school city council, my mom was on the school board." Megan's siblings were all educated, "All eight of us are college educated, all eight of us [have] a minim[um] of master's degrees." It was natural for Megan to attend college and become an educator along with two sisters,

“I have a sister who is a principal...[and] I have a sister who’s a 5th grade teacher...in the inner city.” The foundation for a career in education was set for Megan within an educated family.

Peg asserted that she did not become a teacher, she is a teacher, “I’m a teacher. That’s what I am. I didn’t become one, I didn’t go to school to learn how to be one, I didn’t decide that’s what I’m going to do, it’s what I am.” Although teaching was a natural ability, her university experience provided an avenue for her to become a professionally certified teacher.

Alice, Leslie, and Sandy knew they wanted careers, but had different pathways leading them into education. Alice explains that once she acquired her double major in communications and political science, and having had great success in her debate teams, it seemed a natural fit to continue her education to become an attorney. She was accepted into law school but decided it would be not only too expensive, but too many more years of studies. She reflected on her experiences as a debate coach and working with students, and this led Alice to choose a fast track at the university to earn her teaching certificate.

Leslie was determined she would graduate from college because she “was not going to be a little town wife in [Small Town, USA].” Leslie’s ambition gave her the drive to be a first generation college graduate.

I was going to graduate from college. I was going to college, and I was going to graduate from college, and I would be the first person in my family to do that...that is pretty much what drove me.

She started in the medical field with science classes eventually leading her to education.

Leslie received her teaching certificate and started her educator career by teaching

science in middle school.

Sandy's traditional family encouraged her and her siblings to go to college. Sandy was the first person in her family to graduate from college "despite that [my grandparents] didn't feel women should go to college. I was the first female." Sandy was excited as she explained how her grandparents initially fought her college goals, but Sandy was able to change "their whole opinion of what—you know, women could do." Finally, after several years in marketing and corporate positions, Sandy wanted a change and reconnected with a former teacher who mentored Sandy into becoming an educator.

Although participants came from different backgrounds, all took the first step (albeit unknowingly for some) toward principalships by earning university degrees and becoming teachers. Four of the seven participants knew early in their education that they would be teachers and three came to that conclusion later in their education. None had any vision of becoming a principal.

**Becoming a leader.** Despite no participant having administration aspirations, all seven women moved easily into leadership responsibilities as an extension of their teaching careers. Throughout their teaching careers, the participants were involved in many types of leadership, within the school, with students' extracurricular activities, or fulfilling district assignments. Most were involved in school committees and leadership teams. All were extending their responsibilities beyond the required work of teaching. These experiences, not only built relationships with decision makers, but developed foundational leadership skills that would be used throughout their careers.

In the following section, I present participants' involvement beyond the

classroom and the leadership responsibilities they assumed while they were teachers. First, I provide information about their involvement with students in extra-curricular activities, teams, or clubs beyond the classroom and then their involvement as teacher-leaders as they accepted school or district assignments leading other teachers. These experiences built relationships with the administration and gave them another understanding of students' high school experiences.

*Beyond the classroom.* The roles as teachers extended beyond the classroom for the participants. Alice and Cindy were debate coaches. Cindy and Leslie worked with cheer and drill teams. Cindy led school newspaper and yearbook classes. Sandy was girl's tennis coach, cheer advisor, and Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) coadvisor. Leslie was a student government advisor.

Alice excelled as a debate coach for university and high school teams. She thrived on the competition and has ongoing friendships with former university and high school students. Frequently mentioning former debate team members as leaders in the greater community she serves, she described her years as the debate coach as "incredible!" Her coaching and debate leadership skills led the teams to national competitions and recognition, including winning an event at UCLA. Alice gained valuable leadership skills as the coach and teacher of this successful team not realizing that these skills would lead her to become a high school principal.

Cindy told me of her involvement at school as a coach or an advisor, "I don't remember any year, not one single year where I wasn't coaching or advising something in my career." Cindy smiled as she explained why she spent her time in extra-curricular

activities, “Most of that was that I liked kids, and I liked being involved with them in ways outside the classroom. I never minded the extra time or effort or anything. In fact, I really enjoyed it.”

Daniel, Cindy’s husband, explained his pride in Cindy’s involvement at the high school when she was a teacher.

[Cindy’s] always been a leader. She’s done very well in everything she’s done whether it’s been a drill team advisor, debate coach, whatever. She’s taken her teams to nationals...even when she was drill team coach in [another state], she did the best with her students taking them to championships in [another state]. They did so well they were invited to Japan and so on. You know, I could go on and on about how outstanding [Cindy] has been.

Cindy gained knowledge and understanding as she lead these teams to championships.

Her involvement and effective leadership brought championships to team members.

Despite these many successes, it never occurred to Cindy that her leadership skills were an indication that she was well-suited to take on an administrative position.

Leslie was an active teacher in charge of many student activities. This gave her exposure to the administrative teams, leadership responsibilities, and decision-making which, without her realizing it, were leading her toward a principalship. Leslie explained her involvement in the school, “I also was in charge of activities. I had cheerleaders for five years, drill team for four years, and student government for three years, and so I’m always involved in the activities.”

Peg was involved with students beyond her resource class, “I was involved, I was a class advisor chairperson, and so I still had those leadership roles....” Peg’s extra activities during her years as a teacher added to her skillset. Brent, an athletic director, coach, and teacher, has seen Peg through her years as a teacher, assistant principal, and

he is now serving as an assistant principal to Peg. They have a continual relationship of respect and trust. While he was head football coach and Peg was a teacher, Brent explained her willingness to participate in the football “coach for a week” program. Peg spent her week with the team, learning the program, and by the end of the week was “exhausted...and emotionally drained.” Brent saw Peg’s passion, not only for football, but its players, coaches, and fans. Despite these experience, Peg had no plans to add leadership in the form of administration to her resume.

*Teacher-leader.* Cindy, Georgette, and Megan were part of their school leadership teams, working closely with administration and other teachers in curriculum implementation and school improvement committees. Sandy and Cindy were grant specialists. Sandy was a program coordinator whereas Alice, Cindy, and Peg served as department chairs. Georgette was involved in district gifted and talented programs. Leslie was involved with national federations.

Cindy was part of a team of teachers and staff that was put together to help build a new school’s programs, “It was when we were doing all of the planning to go to the new school.” She participated in school committees catching the attention of her supervisor, who later, invited her to apply for an administration program.

Georgette explained how she began acquiring leadership positions as a teacher and enjoyed it.

At that time, I didn’t even really know, I was kind of innocent, I was a math teacher, and I was starting to pick up leadership positions inside the school as ... a team leader or a learning community leader or something like that, and I really enjoyed it.

She was the district coordinator for the Gifted and Talented program and led other school

teams. Georgette gained experience and knowledge in the leadership roles given to her while she taught in the classroom.

Megan was a “content facilitator/unit leader” in middle school working on “collaborative teams...from different content areas.” She lead a team of teachers whose responsibilities included writing curriculum and “creat[ing] the academic atmosphere” for students. While serving in this capacity, Megan’s leadership skills were noticed and her pathway to administration began.

Sandy and Cindy mentioned that they wrote grants for their schools. Cindy, Peg, and Alice said they were department chairs.

Peg’s years as a teacher added to her skillset as well as her expertise in special education.

I taught here for 16 years...the second year I was here I became the department head for special ed., and so that gave me a little bit of leadership responsibility and the paperwork and all of that kind of stuff that comes along with special ed.

Peg’s informal teacher-leadership and school involvement was noticed early on by her peers at the school and district. Brent, Peg’s colleague, friend, and now her assistant principal, explained that as a teacher when she spoke in faculty meetings, the faculty listened. “When she talked at...faculty meetings, when certain people talk, you listen to them, and when other people talk, you roll your eyes. She’s one that didn’t need to talk forever, but people listened.” The faculty’s respect for Peg seemed to be grounded in her vested devotion to the school and its educational mission. The superintendent that had hired Peg saw her decision-making abilities and she explained how he helped her to understand her talents.



The superintendent that hired me at the time made me think at one point. He said, "You know some people are just born to do this," and he said, "Think back about when you were a child." There are natural people in the group that would take leadership roles and say, "Okay, this is how we're going to play this game, these are the rules," and that's [you].

When asked if that child was her, she affirmed,

Ya, and so that's kind of...[I'm] not bossy about it, just somebody's gotta make a decision here, and so we're not going to sit here and twiddle our thumbs, let's get going, and so this is how we're going to do it. I'm still that way.

She dismissed the importance of her natural skills by claiming they were personality traits, "But that just is part of a personality that probably I would imagine you'd find fairly common in most people in a leadership role."

While still a teacher, Sandy was appointed as Career and Technical Education (CTE) Coordinator providing her with leadership opportunities in the school as she managed, developed, and implemented programs for students.

Because of Leslie's successes and involvement in student activities she became connected at national conferences, presenting information along with athletic directors and coaches. Her successes, leadership, and skills brought her experiences leading advisors, coaches, and athletic directors. She told me how her teacher-leadership experiences helped her career.

The teacher leader things probably were when I was on the National Federation Committee, and then, also I worked for [State] High School Activities Association and did all their rules writings for Drill Team and was a coordinator over their judges and helped with competition, etc.

James, Leslie's husband, confirmed her involvement in the schools, "She took assignments as an assistant with athletics and activities and cheerleaders and student government. And, from that, it just continued."

In summary, whether developing leadership as a teacher in advising clubs, coaching teams, leading curricular committees, or becoming school program coordinators, each participant was actively engaged with education programs. Participants extended themselves outside of the classroom and used their expertise to build better programs for the students. All of these women worked extensively beyond their classroom responsibilities, involving themselves to enhance the school experience for the students. Leadership skills were noticed by their peers, supervisors, and district administration. But despite these commonalities in their career life histories and their clear leadership tendencies, not one of them had plans to become principals.

### **Transition to Administration**

Becoming a secondary administrator, and being one takes a large quantity of management skills (Copland, 2001). After all, high school is a complex environment where the nation's sons and daughters are learning to become successful as adults in post-high school education programs and/or in the job/career work force. High school provides many activities and opportunities for students to explore, participate in, and enjoy after the academics of a high school day are completed. Communities expect administrative supervision beyond an academic school day, extending principals' responsibilities into extracurricular experiences in the evenings and weekends. Administrators and the teacher advisors and coaches they oversee, attend and lead all extracurricular activities. These schedules are full and can seem excessive. Yet, principals must see that such expectations are met at each high school by a dedicated force of educators. Researchers explain further, "On top of running the school, principals must

respond to ever increasing demands to interact with parent and community groups, participate in administration activities, facilitate staff involvement, and oversee student and social services” (Harris et al., 2002, p. 254). All of the participants had been involved in school activities as teachers and knew of some of the obligations necessary to be an administrator. Adjustments to their personal lives, however, became more substantial as they began to move toward the principalship.

The transition from a teaching career to administration began informally as teachers developed leadership skills through their beyond-the-classroom responsibilities gaining “sponsorships” (Adkison, 1981, p. 322) who would eventually invite the women into the ranks of administration. Although they had years of experiences in the schools, they did not see themselves as administrators until it was suggested to them and an invitation was extended. During these transitional years, once they had reluctantly accepted the invitation to prepare for administrative positions, participants navigated through the challenges of their work and family to maintain its balance (Cuddy et al., 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004; Grogan, 1999; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Young & McLeod, 2001). They were also going to school and gaining required credentials. When their career life histories had led them with increasing inertia toward administrative work, most of the participants identified a sudden realization of their new identity and the recognition that they, too, could be administrators. The following section documents the dynamics of these challenging, transitional years.

**Invitation and its reluctant acceptance.** Satisfied with teaching and their extra roles, the teachers were surprised by the invitation to move toward administration. They

had found ways to broaden their teaching experiences with school involvement and the acceptance of teacher-leader positions. They were reluctant to accept the invitation to become administrators. Although these suggestions came as a surprise to them, they opened ideas in their minds as they began considering the challenge (Adkison, 1981). Happy being teachers, in the “subordinate place” as discussed by Beauvoir (1976, p. 597) they had not considered administration a goal.

Alice, Cindy, Megan, and Peg were approached by their principals while they were teachers and invited to become administrators. Georgette, Leslie, and Sandy wanted to earn their master’s degree choosing the administration route, although they had no aspirations to become principals. All but one showed not only surprise, but reluctance and resistance when given the opportunity to move out of the classroom and into administrative duties.

Alice expressed that when her principal came to her to discuss her becoming an administrator, she responded, “Oh, I don’t want to do it, I’m happy with what I’m doing.” She was a debate coach, successfully winning state competitions and enjoying her career. The administrator accompanied her debate team on a competition trip and talked to Alice about administration. “On the whole entire trip, he was just at me 24/7....’ You need to at least give it a try, you need to be in administration.” Influenced by his persistence, Alice relented and began the process for admission into an administration program.

Cindy described the day her administrator approached her in class, placed an application on her desk and told her, “You need to consider this.” Thinking it was another item for school committees she on which she served, she waited until the end of class

before she looked closely at it. “It was an application for an administrative program, and I laughed out loud. I thought, ‘I don’t want to be an administrator’ and, until that point...I never thought about it. Not even, ‘Wouldn’t it be great?’” Cindy enjoyed teaching and knew she did that well, however, she admitted that the invitation “...kind of planted a seed.” Cindy talked to the administrator a few days later. He promised her he would support her decision and make it work for her at the school. Despite Cindy having taught for over 20 years, she told me that, although she never thought of becoming an administrator, once she received the invitation from her principal, she began to think, “Well, I’ve always been a person who said if I were an administrator I would \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).” Despite these experiences of noticing as a teacher that she might make particular decisions if she were the administrator, she did not think she would become the principal of a high school.

Megan was a teacher leader when an assistant principal was fired and she was approached, “They came down and said, ‘You’re not going to be in your classroom the rest of the year.’ They yanked me out of the classroom and threw me in the office. I had not a single administrative class.” Megan said she “...floundered through the end of the school year trying to be helpful...” and using her 10 years of teaching experiences to guide her.

She completed that year as an administrator and was looking forward to going back to her classroom; however, she was approached again by the principal. “I’ve looked through the list of applicants, I don’t like any of them, I need you to stay.” And, I said, “No, I’m going back to the classroom. I have no aspirations to do this,” and essentially it

was, “Well no, because this is what I need you to do.” So, I said, “Okay.” Once Megan accepted the administration invitation, she acknowledged her role in leadership and began her administration career.

Peg, too, was happy teaching in the high school where she had taught for 16 years when her interim principal extended the first invitation to become an administrator.

One year a vice principal was retiring, and the interim principal at the time approached me and said, “I think you’d be a good VP, why don’t you consider it?” I laughed at him, and I said, “I have absolutely no interest, ha, ha, go away.” I went back to my classroom and continued to teach. The following year, the same interim principal that had asked me to do that got transferred to the district office. At that time, then, I had had some time to have that thought in my head, and so I threw my hat in the ring for vice principal.... I’m not going to say they begged me to do it, but I was asked to do it, and here I am.

Peg began her navigation plans once she received an invitation the first time from the interim principal. Peg’s transitional mindset lasted for some time, but it changed quickly once she said yes. “The next day I was in a front office, and I really haven’t looked back, I really haven’t.”

When Georgette’s principal asked her to his office, the conversation was not what she anticipated. She remembered, “Going [to the administrator’s office with] a little bit [of] fear and trembling.” Georgette was ready to apply for her master’s degree and needed a letter of support from him. He asked her to “Pull up a chair and shut the door.” Georgette anticipated a discussion about her class when he said, “I think that you will make a fantastic administrator.” Georgette was surprised at her administrator’s vision for her and had not thought of herself as an administrator until he extended the invitation.

Leslie and Sandy were ready for more challenges and looked into master’s degree programs. Leslie examined a program for earning counseling credentials but when

invited by her principal to consider administration, “Because I had so much experience with, you know, the activities and running things,” Leslie found herself in the administration track. When Sandy was ready for more, she approached a friend to take administration classes together. “A friend of mine, the two of us looked into the [university] program and decided to enter their dual master’s and administrative program that they have. We went through that together.”

Georgette, and Leslie, once they were encouraged and invited to consider administration, sought master’s degrees in educational administration. Sandy, without an intention of becoming a principal, also was drawn to graduate school. All three were ready for new challenges. When Georgette and Leslie approached their administrators about their plans to earn administration credentials, both were invited to join the administrative teams. Sandy, on the other hand, earned her master’s degree in administration with a friend, not expecting to become an administrator.

Out of the seven participants, six, Alice, Cindy, Megan, Peg, Georgette, and Leslie’s acceptance to join administration was in response to their superiors’ suggestion or invitation. Eckman (2004) asserted when comparing men and women’s pathway to high school principals “females...considered educational administration and the high school principalship only when specifically encouraged by others” (p. 203). Their responsiveness to their administration suggestions/invitations may exemplify obedience. Returning to Beauvoir’s (1976) suggestion that “the lot of women is a respectful obedience. She has no grasp, even in thought, on the reality around her. It is opaque to her eyes” (p. 598). Although these women were successful and enjoyed teaching, the

reality that they could become principals was “opaque to [their] eyes,” until it was presented to them—all of them. Eventually accepting their administrators’ invitation to become principals, these women opened doors to participate in changing “the social order which marginalized women in the first place” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 324).

**Navigating work and family balance.** During their transition to administration, these women juggled their time between work and family with “tradeoffs and temporary sacrifices” (Powell & Mainiero, 1992, p. 231). Georgette, Cindy, Leslie, Megan, and Peg detailed the family navigations they made during this time of the double duty of employment including after school extracurricular supervision, and attending the evening classes required to become endorsed as an administrator.

One of Georgette’s sons, Randy, was a sophomore in high school the first year she was an assistant principal. He was a computer wizard and gamer during most of this time. While working as an assistant principal, she interrupted these activities. “I made him come with me to my high school because I was his mom.” Georgette also navigated her responsibilities as a parent when she chose to move Randy from his peer group to another school so she could carefully shepherd him. This was a difficult decision for Georgette and her son. She also described the personal sacrifice her husband made, allowing her transition to high school administration to be easier on her.

Seriously, we work 70 miles apart, and this winter we took an apartment in [\_\_\_\_\_ City] and lived in [it] for the school year, and he commuted to [his job]. It was to really show the district that we were committed and that I was in it to really, really do it.

Georgette and her husband navigated and organized their living conditions, enabling Georgette to have more suitable travel arrangement for her new job, while his travel



conditions became more cumbersome. Although these decisions were difficult for Georgette and her family, choices were made to make it work, not only for the good of the family dynamics, but for the good of Georgette's career.

Cindy and her husband, Daniel, tell how he increased his caregiving and arranged finances for her education during the time she took classes. Daniel explained to me how he "became the caregiver for their daughter who was quite young at the time" while Cindy was earning her administrator's credentials. Cindy was grateful for Daniel's new contributions to their family. These rearrangements were hard for all the family.

We talked about it, and we talked about the fact that for a little while this was going to be tough on the family but that my husband could step up and do a little more with our daughter and with the chores around the house.

This was a struggling time for them and as Daniel and Cindy worked together, they found ways to reorganize their family dynamics to navigate through Cindy's absence during her time away for administrative classes and internship hours. Cindy says that for her family "...things kind of fell into a nice little pattern."

Leslie's older children were already in college when Leslie began her administration classes, leaving her with one middle school aged daughter. Leslie said, "it was just [my daughter] and me, and so I would go to school, then go home and pick her up and bring her back to games. So, we juggled a lot." Leslie and her daughter navigated through their schedules and made it work for them.

Megan and her husband navigated their family dynamics by moving his office into their home enabling him to take on more parenting responsibilities. Household duties, daycare, and coaching sports were taken on by Megan's husband during her time

away from the family pursuing administration credentials. They made difficult decisions enabling Megan to complete her responsibilities.

Peg began her career in an elementary school and intended to stay as an elementary teacher, but “at one point...decided to take a year off and have a baby,” delaying her career in order to begin a family, as Eckman (2004) and Pankake (1995) suggested. Peg began to navigate her work/family conflicts early on by choosing to stay home for a year, and then returned to a full time position. Several years later in her career at a high school, Peg described her time away from family as a teacher and then as principal, “I guess I was probably more unavailable to my family, and I still am.” Peg had been involved in student activities, university administration classes, assistant principal supervisory duties, and later, principal obligations, and told me, “I was not at home.” Her husband and son made adjustments to accommodate Peg in her career. She had to navigate to maintain work and family balance. Peg made difficult choices that posed challenges for her family.

All five of these women’s families found patterns and obligation distribution that worked for them. Families adjusted as Cindy, Georgette, Megan, Leslie, and Peg navigated their roles as parent, teacher, and student while they continued teaching to complete administrative classes.

In summary, the career life history journeys of each of the participants demonstrate how the women and their families progressed in answering the “Woman Question” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 323) by navigating their family lives and reorganizing its dynamics. Georgette’s son and husband rearranging their lives, Cindy

and Daniel's family's new patterns and financial expenditures, Leslie's daughter's adjustments, Megan's spouse reconfiguring his family responsibilities, and Peg's family accommodating many late nights, are examples of the commitments these families had to the women in the family. The "Woman Question" was navigated and responsibilities were reorganized. Although, these families supported and adjusted family life, most participants felt they were "responsible for maintaining smooth, or preferably imperceptible, transitions between the worlds of home and work life" (Emslie & Hunt, 2009, p. 166; see also Connell, 2005). Peg explained she was lucky not to have "little children that [she] was leaving at home and a husband to worry about." She clearly felt the responsibility of maintaining work and home transitions. Cindy said she "thought about [the] family" and they talked about it being "tough on the family" but her husband "could step up and do a little more with [their] daughter and with the chores around the house, which he never did" implying Cindy was in charge of household duties until this time in her career life history. James suggested that Leslie's responsibilities lay with mothering his daughters when he explained, "she never would have taken that [high school] job if she would have had children at home who needed her."

These family reconfigurations, negotiations, and adjustments were not easy for participants. However, their approach to the challenges, careful time management, and steady commitment to their goals, exemplify skills that are required for managing a high school. Participants learned how to navigate work and family to continue the journey towards becoming high school principals.

**Navigating a new identity.** Participants found that as they began their training

and gained experience as assistant principals, they began understanding their positions, recognized their abilities to make decisions, and enjoyed being leaders. They gained direction, vision, and passion for their schools, taking the helm of the ship, and they excelled in their roles as leaders. Their navigation into a new identity as an administrator had begun.

Their experiences took them to a new understanding of their roles as administrators. They were able to describe when they came to a sudden realization that they were no longer teachers in the classroom, but administrators.

*Exploring new territory.* Although Alice did not begin her career aspiring to become a principal, once she became an administrator, gaining experience and confidence, she found, in retrospect, that she "...always wanted to be a high school principal." She told me that district personnel asked her if she wanted to take on a principalship in another school or wait for a position in high school where a new program had been added and new leadership was needed. When that high school position opened in her school, Alice accepted it and is in her 10<sup>th</sup> year as its principal. Her principal identity was acquired.

When Cindy received her invitation to join administration, she recalled it "planted a seed," and remembered times when she thought of the principal's decisions she would make differently had she been the decision administrator. Cindy explained as a teacher she often thought that "sometimes administrative decisions were convenience" and she declared, "I vowed I would say yes, and [when I was encouraged to become a principal,] I thought, 'Maybe this is an opportunity to put my money where my mouth is.'" Cindy

had begun her new identity as a principal decision-maker while she was a teacher although at that time, she did not know it.

As Georgette gained leadership experience, she, like Cindy, found she wanted to be in the place to make decisions. “After about 4 or 5 years, I was like, ‘Hey I would be making some different decisions here if I were the leader, I think I want a chance to sit in that seat.’” Georgette began thinking of how she would do things differently. This is when her transitional state of mind started, “It was really a process of developing those dispositions for me.” Randy, Georgette’s adult son, explained that her career change from teaching to administration was gradual, as she loved the classroom. “But at the same time, she wanted to keep stretching herself and wanted to keep pushing and learning new things and tackling bigger and bigger projects that eventually she just kind of took a step.” Randy explained further, “She felt that she could do more good and use her higher education in a bigger way in those positions.” Her teacher-leader responsibilities helped Georgette in understanding the roles of administration and as Randy concluded, “She’s enjoyed it.” Georgette’s disposition gradually changed as she found she could be more influential in an administrative position. Her new identity was developing.

Leslie said that her transition from teacher to administrator came easily as she had felt respected as a teacher. “I felt like I was respected for the job that I did as a teacher... so as being pushed forward to do this [administration], I felt like I would be accepted for that if I did a good job.” She did not have the luxury of several months to learn assistant principal duties in elementary and middle schools, as the district had an opening for her to intern only at high school, skipping the typical elementary and secondary intern hours.

Leslie acquired her new identity on the job as she learned how to be an administrator.

Peg was working on her administration credentials and while she was an assistant principal, she again was approached by district personnel and asked if she would take on the principalship. The current principal was moved to another position and Peg's high school needed new leadership. She explains her acceptance of the challenge and her understanding that it was time for her to lead the school she had served in for many years.

Here I am, this special ed. teacher who never.... I don't have my degree yet. I am still working on that, never, ever having an aspiration to be an administrator, and now they're asking me to be the administrator in the building. I did not even hesitate. I didn't even talk to my husband about it. I just said, "Ya, I can do that. I will do that," and I was very willing to do it because at the time the principal that we had, there are many things I respect about him, but his leadership style was causing a rift in this building. People were not happy. People were unhappy, and so it was easy for me to say, "Yes, I think I can help mend some [broken administration trust]."

Peg began her administration classes, worked as an assistant principal, and then within that year, became principal. Her passion for leadership at the high school increased as soon as she accepted the invitation and embraced her new identity.

Megan interned at the same school where she had taught and described it as a positive experience because of the solid relationships she had established as a teacher.

In that school, I had been a teacher there, and so I could do whatever I wanted to do. You see, I was one of them. So, I had sort of the run of whatever.... I could move things pretty quickly because they trusted me.

Megan's foundational relationships as a teacher fostered a new identity with the teachers when her role changed from peer to leader. Megan knew she was a leader as she described her definition of leadership and her acceptance of her leadership identity.

I think, you know, a big part of leadership is being a person who you make a promise to people, and then you follow through on it. You know, you're

responsible and you demonstrate responsibility. So, because I was always that kind of a person, it didn't matter all through high school or all through college or all through whatever my whole life. Um...that's just been who I am. If people give me something to do, they know it's done.

Although Megan had no aspirations to become a principal, she had leadership skills that were evidenced by her work ethic and her pattern of accepting responsibility with alacrity, especially as her new identity developed.

After 6 years as teacher and filling teacher-leader positions, Sandy earned her administrative endorsement and “was fortunate enough to get a full-time internship.” Although Sandy did not intend to become an administrator, once she experienced it, her new identity developed. “When I got to the part of an internship I decided it might be kind of fun to look into a full time one for the second portion of my hours.”

Although participants may have been reluctant to become administrators, each of them expressed the way their newly acquired passion as a leader emerged in the schools. Participants navigated through the transitioning experiences, balancing work and family, gaining confidence, and developing skills. The women quickly accepted their responsibilities as administrators, decision makers, and problem solvers at the helm of a school. A new identity was discovered and accepted as another step in their career life histories.

***Sudden realization.*** Once participants began their careers as assistant principals and developed their administration identity, Sandy, Georgette, Megan, Cindy, and Peg noted a particular moment or transition when they recognized that they had made the right decision in leaving the classroom and accepting the challenges of administration.

When Sandy suddenly recognized her skills as an administrator, she became eager

for more challenges, “At first I didn’t think I’d ever want to be a principal, but the more I was in it, I thought, I’ve never been kind of the “top dog” or whatever you want to call it.” Sandy had expressed no ambition to become a principal but began to want another challenge. She did not want the principal position for the “power but more the challenge for myself because, in the past, I could always say, ‘Oh, you need to talk to the manager or you need to talk to the principal.’” She found herself wanting to be that person. Sandy’s disposition suddenly changed to include her new identity as principal as she gained experience in her role as an assistant administrator.

Georgette’s new identity helped her to recognize early in her assistant principal years that she might make different decisions if she were the leader, “I think I want a chance to sit in that seat.” Georgette suddenly realized she could make decisions to lead a school.

Megan suddenly realized her transition into principalship when she described how she liked the things she was doing. “The following fall when this new principal came in, he was very charismatic, very much a leader.... I decided that I kind of like some of the things I was being asked to do.” Megan described her discussion with her husband when the administration told her they needed her to stay in the administrative role in which she had been placed. He told her that she “should try it until the end of year, and if [she didn’t, she could] go back.” As Megan reflected on that experience, she added, “Little did he know that no, I couldn’t really go back,” implying her leadership experiences would shape her career.

Cindy compared her sudden realization that she was an administrator with the



growing awareness of a first year teacher, “When you were a first year teacher and you kind of played school for three months, and then it started to feel natural.” Cindy was able to describe the moment she knew she was an administrator when she stated, “Okay, I’m alright. I know where I’m going.” Cindy explained her first few months as an assistant principal, “I played administration for a few months until one day I thought, ‘I’m not sure of the answers to all the questions, but I kind of know how to find them.’” She was ready. She knew she made the right choice to leave the classroom and become an administrator.

Peg suddenly realized her new identity in her career as high school principal when she accepted the second invitation and simply stated, “The next day I was in a front office, and I really haven’t looked back, I really haven’t.” She knew she had the skills to make the school better than it was and was ready to take on the challenge the “next day.”

Participants reluctantly accepted invitations to join the administrative track and began to navigate work and family balances to reach their goals. They explored new territories as administrators. Most had moments of sudden recognition that they had developed new identities, and all realized their capacities as effective administrators.

### **Administrative Career**

As participants gained experience, knowledge and confidence were gained. They began to recognize their visions for the schools, came to understand their responsibilities as principal, and sharpened their leadership skills. They grew into their leadership roles and developed pragmatic approaches to their work.

**Growing into the position.** Sandy, Leslie and Georgette expressed their

recognition of developing their confidence and disposition as the leader in charge. They needed to make the decisions and be able to stand up for those decisions while they learned their responsibilities as principal. Peg explained the late nights she spent at the school fixing her mistakes before the next day. Megan discovered her connection to high school's "big kids" and knew all the families.

During Sandy's early experiences as the principal, she said on several occasions that she thought, "Oh, you need to talk to the principal...oh no, I am the principal, I have to be that person." Sandy knew she could handle the paperwork along with her position, "I knew I could handle...the paperwork and all those kind of aspects, but it was really that ultimate responsibility aspect because I'd always had somebody else [during] my career that I could talk to." As Sandy gained experience and knowledge, she was able to make decisions without first consulting with superiors. "I want to be able to resolve the issues if I can here."

Managing the finances of a high school was challenging for Leslie. Although her "financial secretary...was very, very competent" Leslie needed to deeply understand school finances. Her secretary, "Was kind of put out that I said, 'I have to see every single thing.'" Leslie wanted to read and "sign every single thing [her]self because...it's that I have to learn this." She found she had to make difficult decisions as a principal and described how her "finesse" helped. "You have an old staff, they've trained six principals before you, and then that's what they believe, is they're training you, you're the one that's going to come and go, and they're the ones that are stable." To get them to move in a different direction, Leslie says was a "very difficult thing, and there's a lot of finesse

that goes with that.” She summarized her growing into the position, “You just have to think those things through before you walk in and say, ‘We’re changing this, this, and this.’”

Georgette had similar recognition of her growth in her responsibilities. “I finally started saying to myself, ‘Okay, if you don’t know what is the right thing to do here, then figure out someone you would admire, predict what they would do and then do that.’” She began to realize that she needed to “coach” herself and make some decisions, “I’m having to coach myself a little, ‘Go for it, there is no leader above, you are responsible, step up and take that leadership.’” She had to remind herself to “call the shot in this crisis situation. I own it, and I still have moments as a high school principal where I’m like, ‘Oh wait, that’s me.’” Georgette’s confidence and skills have developed as she grows into her position as principal.

As a leader I have realized it wasn’t that I was super timid, and I don’t think that people would say that I’m timid, but inside my heart I still have that “I’m timid,” and I think that is coming from a place of being a woman. I don’t know why that’s there, I’m competent, I can make big mistakes just as well as the next guy, so go for it.

Although Georgette’s confidence needed growth, she proudly told me of her students’ success in her first year as principal, “We kept 100 more seniors in school. It’s like a 25% increase in the class. Our test scores have gone up...” Georgette’s growing into her leadership is evident in the growth of her students’ progress.

Peg became the acting principal for a season as she earned her credentials.

Although it required many late hours, Peg persisted, learning along the way, how to be a principal.

It was inconvenient, and I spent a lot of long nights here [at the school] because I'd be doing the job that I didn't really know how to do, and so I'd have to stay after to clean up the messes that I had made for myself, putting out fires the next day, and then you had all of the school work to do. So, that was, that was difficult at the time.

Peg did not have long to learn her administration job. One year she was moved out of the classroom and into the assistant principal position with no formal training, and the next year she became acting principal as she continued her university classes gaining the administration endorsement. She grew into the principalship quickly, and although she took the administration classes at the same time she was the acting principal, she affirmed that "Working on that administrative certificate while doing the job was very beneficial." Class assignments had immediate application. "A lot of those projects are...pick a policy, and...I'd pick one that we were dealing with at the time, and so it was a very practical application." In this way, she learned how to become a principal while simultaneously filling that role.

While Megan was assistant principal at middle school, she "started reaching up to the high school." She recalled, "I fostered a positive relationship with the junior high and high school, and whenever we did articulation and those kinds of things, I was always the go-to person." Megan began to think, "High school, high school.... Those are big kids." Megan knew all of the students entering the high school.

That particular group of kids I had in middle school because I moved with them, junior high, and now I move to high school. I had them for six years. So, I knew all the kids coming in. I knew all the families. I had had all of the brothers and sisters, some of their parents I grew up with.

This was Megan's community and when a bond passed to build another high school, the principalship position opened and Megan became principal.

**Confident pragmatic approaches.** Participants faced challenges in their career life histories with confident pragmatism. At this point in their careers they had developed confidence. When problems or opportunities arose they did what was necessary to accomplish their goal. They did not focus on the difficulties but met challenges in a matter of fact way. Their pragmatism was supported by their strength, courage, and determination.

Peg's comments exemplify this characteristic. Peg told me about her transitions from classroom teacher to assistant principal, as she described how there "was never a nice break" in moving from teacher to assistant principal. She described how she "slid into a VP job" as she "went ahead and just transferred into that position." One year later, her transfer to a principal position exemplifies her pragmatic approach to change, "I just said, 'Ya, I can do that. I will do that.'"

Peg's approach to completing her administration certificate classes was pragmatic and clear, "I had 3 years to complete that, and I did it in...two and a half or something," She had a job to get done, and she did it, while she was also a parent, a wife, and learning to be an assistant principal.

Leslie's pragmatic approach to her family's readjustment when her husband passed away, demonstrates her determination, "The second year I was in administration my husband passed away." Leslie continued to describe how she and her daughter juggled activities and adjusted school and schedules. She also described her approach in making difficult decisions as a principal, "I just had to stick with it and not fold." Leslie's decisions were made for the betterment of the whole school and she told me how she

dealt with some hard staffing decisions.

I also think that it's important that you don't feel bad when everybody doesn't like what you're doing because you always have to remember what you're doing is for the kids...it's something that is better for them.

Leslie was able to make necessary changes for the school, and keep the integrity of her staff with her pragmatic approach.

Cindy learned to make decisions for what she considered the right reasons and continues to do so in her leadership, "Once you do things for the right agenda with the right reasons, everything else falls into place." She sometimes found it necessary to rely on this pragmatic approach when she encountered stereotypical gender perceptions while she was assistant principal. "Mostly, I deal with it. Well, you can deal with it with kind of a sense of humor, but sometimes it requires the same kind of [direct] attitude and response [they are using with you]."

Megan was able to learn from others to make herself a better leader. She talked about how she was able to build relationships with her staff that initially did not welcome her as principal.

I went into it with a perspective that they've been around for a long time, and they're the way they are for a reason. So, instead of being [in conflict] with them, I tried to decide that I was going to learn what I could from them, and then eventually I got to the point where I understood a lot of their thinking processes.

Megan's pragmatic approach worked as she concluded, "I never became one of them, but I think I was regarded [well] by them by the time I left."

To summarize, participants grew into their positions with their pragmatic approaches to their new leadership identity. Peg "slid into a VP job," Leslie had to "stick to it," Cindy just dealt with difficult situations, and Megan determined to "learn...from

[the staff].” They gained confidences and skills as they grew from experiences and faced challenges. As Peg described, “We are educators. That’s who we are.”

## **Summary**

In this section, I have described the common characteristics of the participants’ unintentional career life history journey that emerged as they discussed their college years and the process of shifting from teacher to administrator. As teachers, they were involved in extracurricular activities, not only with students but as teacher leaders in school and district committees. Once participants were invited to become administrators, they reluctantly accepted and began to navigate their work and family balance. Eventually, despite the unintentional nature of their journeys, these women’s new identities were realized and they suddenly recognized that they, too, could be principals. The women grew into the principalship, recognizing that they were responsible for decisions and the leadership of the school and they approached it sensibly, confidently, and pragmatically.

Next, support is presented as a critical part in participants’ career life histories.

## **Support**

### **Introduction**

Support that led to careers in education and their eventual positions as high school administrators was an important aspect of the women’s career life histories. For some, the support began in the home with education minded parents and families, while others noted teachers in high school assisting them to make college and career decisions. As

teachers, the women became supporters to students and schools as they served beyond the classroom in many capacities. Interestingly, these supportive contributions of the participants provided an avenue for receiving various kinds of support. Participants' contributions gave them exposure and recognition by supervisors, who, later, extended an invitation to become an administrator (Adkison, 1981; Eckman, 2004). These experiences also developed the women's leadership skills and a working knowledge of another dimension in student education.

As the women progressed in their teaching careers, supervisors became their next line of support (Adkison, 1981; Grogan, 1999; Smith, 2011). Peer educators and families were important support systems as decisions were made to become administrators. Working conditions were adjusted enabling the teachers to gain experiences as leaders and making it possible for them to take administration classes. Coworkers' support continued and was recognized and accepted. Families were reconfigured allowing the women time in their new identities in the transition to administration. When the women became high school principals, families were part of their high school culture and attended many high school events with their mom-principal or wife-principal. As the children of the participants graduated and were less dependent, spouses were able to attend many events as the principal's "date" and sat with other parents while the principal was on the floor with teams or performers.

Presented next are the supporting experiences participants found important to their career life histories. In each stage, preadministration, transition to administration, and the administration career, there were many involved in supporting the principal-in-



the-making.

### **Preadministration**

Participants had early career goals to attend college and earn degrees that led them to the field of education. For some, the help they received in getting to the university became the first supportive step towards the principalship. Peg and Megan's families were educators, fostering in their children the desire to graduate from university and instilling in them the desire to become educators. Alice's high school teacher/guidance counselor mentored her in the process of becoming a college student. Sandy moved beyond her family's expectations with university graduation and later reconnected with a former high school teacher whose encouragement was part of her decision to become an educator. Leslie, Georgette, and Cindy did not discuss family or teacher support. They referenced their own motivations that led to eventual college graduation.

Peg's family had an extended history in the field of education. "I'm going to start with my paternal grandparents who, for the time that they were living, it was unusual that both of them were college graduates and educators and were lifetime educators." She continued to explain her parents' roles as educators. "I was raised by parents then who were raised...by college-educated people. My mother was a teacher for 37 years, and that also influenced my decision to become a teacher, which is what I did." Peg graduated from high school, attended college and majored in special education and elementary education. Her education began with her family's examples and vocations as educators.

Megan's educational foundation came from her family's involvement in

education. All of her seven siblings have a minimum of a master's degree. Megan gained her education in her childhood home where the whole family was supported in educational pursuits.

Alice's support came from her high school teacher. Alice's English and debate teacher, who later became her guidance counselor, persistently encouraging Alice to go to college.

He would kind of watch over me and let me know that, "You know, you need to go to college. You need to do the ACT. Come down, let's get you registered for the ACT. Now remember, you have the ACT on Saturday. And now's the time you'll apply for scholarships. Let me help you apply for scholarships. Let me write your recommendation."

Alice acknowledged his influence on her entrance to college. "You know, he guided me through the whole process. I believe that he was one of the people that was very influential at getting me into thinking about education after high school." Alice chose a school she was familiar with and had earned support with a scholarship she used to complete college. "I was on an academic scholarship, which I ended up trading into a debate scholarship." Without the support from her high school teacher and the scholarship, Alice may not have gone to college where her journey to become a high school principal began.

Sandy's traditional family encouraged her and her siblings to go to college. Although her grandparents did not believe women should go to college, Sandy's parents were supportive, "My parents actually encouraged me." Sandy graduated and worked several years in marketing and corporate positions, but found she needed a change. She reconnected with a former teacher who mentored Sandy into becoming an educator.

She was a teacher of mine when I was in high school who I kept in contact with. When I kind of was done with my first two careers, she is the one that actually brought it up that maybe I should consider teaching, which I had never thought of. She was able to get me a job, and then she mentored me along the way.

Support from within the teaching profession continued during Sandy's first few weeks of teaching. Her principal found her eating lunch in the faculty room and immediately, "grabbed her." The principal, one of Sandy's lifelong mentors, took her to another room and introduced her to a group of teachers. Sarah, one of these teachers, expounded on that experience.

She [the principal] said, "You will never eat lunch in the faculty room." She brought her down to us, and we had quite a little lunch group. She brought her down to us and said, "[Sandy] needs to eat lunch in a place where there are fun, uplifting, positive people," and we're like, "Well, we think that we're all of those things, and so welcome [Sandy]."

Supported by these women, Sandy was mentored for several years while she gained the aspirations to want more.

Leslie, Georgette, and Cindy seemed more self-motivated to graduate. Leslie wanted to break traditions and was a first generation university graduate. Georgette was a mother before becoming a teacher, "I...always want to be a teacher, but it took me a long time to graduate from college. I was a mom first and did a lot of other things." Cindy said she always "wanted to be an English teacher," and "geared" herself to that goal.

In summary, four of the seven participants were explicit about the support they received in gaining an educational degree in college. Support of family or teachers was acknowledged by Peg, Megan, Alice, and Sandy, whereas, Leslie, Georgette, and Cindy discussed their own motivations to graduate from college.

### **Transition to Administration**

While support was important for some of participants during their post-secondary education years, all of them were influenced extensively by support they received during their transition to the principalship. Mentors, spouses, family, former teachers, and friends supported participants through their transition toward becoming principals. Principals created working conditions allowing participants' flexibility in their teaching position or assisted them in the application processes, ensuring admission into an administration training program.

Participants' families gave support to these women during their career changes which required many hours away from home and a reconfiguration of the traditional woman's role as main caregiver in the family. The responsibilities each participant managed during the transition were extensive. One became an assistant principal while earning administration endorsements. Cindy, Georgette, Leslie, Megan, and Peg had young or school-aged children while taking administration classes.

Support took many forms. Some spouses shared in the childcare or domestic household chores, while another provided financial support. Two, in particular were described by the participants as being significantly engaged in domestic and childcare responsibilities, contributing more than is stereotypically expected of husbands/fathers. Families made sacrifices and adjustments to accommodate these administrators' new roles at the high school. Family support made it easier for the women to manage the "second shift" (Connell, 2005; Hochschild & Machung, 2003). Still, with child caring "at the heart of the female gender schema" (Valian, 1998, p. 269), most of the participants

bore substantial responsibility for the work of home with “role overload” (Adkison, 1981, p. 316), maintaining the integrity of professionalism side by side with the domestic labor and being a mom. Both Cindy and Leslie told how they would run home and pick up their young daughters and bring to games with Mom. It was not mentioned if Cindy’s husband attended games or was available at home while Cindy supervised high school activities. Leslie was widowed for a season during her first years as an administrator and did it all herself. Georgette and Peg had sons who attended high school, however, Georgette’s elementary aged daughter was taken care of by her dad who had “figured out how to play mom.” Megan’s husband became “Mr. Mom,” taking over on their daughter’s after-school activities.

Presented next are examples of the support participants received with adjustments to their working conditions and necessary family reconfigurations during the transitional stage in their career life histories.

**Adjusted working conditions.** While earning an endorsement in administration, four of the seven participants received unusual support from their principals and districts. Georgette’s teaching responsibilities were adjusted and she was given administrative duties while she earned her credentials. Peg became assistant principal immediately when she accepted the invitation to become an administrator. A university and district partnership provided Cindy and Leslie sponsorships while they were earning their administration endorsement. Alice and Sandy took the necessary classes while still maintaining their teaching assignments and later were placed in internship positions. Megan was taken from the classroom temporarily and into an assistant principal position

before she accepted the invitation to become an administrator. She began taking endorsement classes once she realized that she has a new identity as an administrator and no longer wanted to go back to the classroom.

Georgette's principal was able to give her increased leadership responsibilities as a teacher leader. "He said, 'I will do everything I can to put opportunities in your way, and I will support you while you go on this journey,' and he put words to actions." Georgette's administrator not only wrote a letter of reference for her master's degree application, but also created favorable working conditions for Georgette to earn her administrative credentials.

We were a GEAR UP [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs] school, you know, and it was back in the old one where the GEAR UP grant went straight to the school, not to a university or to a district.... We needed a GEAR UP grant coordinator in our school.... We put an intern in my classroom, and I became the GEAR UP grant coordinator for the school during the coming year. He started using me as kind of an assistant principal.

Georgette's principal provided her with the opportunities she needed to gain not only experience in leadership decision making but also confidence. Georgette joined the principal at his newly assigned high school when she graduated. "It was the year that I graduated that he went back to the high school where he had been an assistant principal before." Because of her background and skillset, Georgette was transferred with him. "He said that he took me because of the bilingual [program] and because they needed a lot of support for the performing arts, and I had that in my background." Georgette's experiences in the gifted and talented programs, as English as a Second Language coordinator, and the GEAR UP grant coordinator gave her opportunities in building her

leadership skills. Her supervisor mentored her, adjusted her schedule, and created opportunities for her to gain confidence, and gave her leadership experiences.

Peg left her classroom mid-year when the school was in need of an assistant principal. She took the opportunity, applied for the necessary endorsement classes, and began the next step of her career life history. Peg's district and school provided support by making the necessary adjustments enabling her to leave her special education class and become an assistant principal and later, acting principal, while earning the endorsements.

Cindy's supervisor supported her in getting into the administration certification program and gave her the necessary adjustments in her teacher responsibilities enabling her to do so. "I owe...a lot to him. I got in and enjoyed the program... 'cause I couldn't have done it without that sponsorship." In the university and district sponsorships, teachers took classes at the university one day each week. Districts provided substitutes each week while the teacher was at the university attending administration classes. While Cindy was an intern assistant principal, she described the support she received from one of her mentors and his use of reflective questioning.

[He] was assigned to mentor me when I was an administrative intern and he was an assistant principal. He had such a smooth, calm way of mentoring. It was the kind where he asked reflective questions rather than gave me answers.... [He] was a really good influence.

Cindy said his style is "magical" and she relies on what she has learned from him when she catches herself correcting her approach. "Then I think, 'Wait a minute, wait a minute, that isn't how I learned.'"

Leslie had an adjusted version of the university and district partnership wherein

she was given a full-time assistant principalship position at a high school while taking classes instead of the typical three-month internship at elementary, middle and high schools. “They had a need for somebody at [\_\_\_\_\_] High School, and so I was there the whole time.... I was gone every Wednesday [for classes], and I had to make up that work on Thursday and Friday...when I got back.” Leslie’s administration program was adjusted to meet the needs of the district, as well as her placement as assistant principal while her credentials were earned.

Alice had received her master’s degree while she worked as adjunct instructor at a university. She needed administrative endorsement classes and was able to do so during the year she was an intern assistant principal. “I forget how many classes, but it wasn’t overwhelming.” “They appointed me as an intern, and I spent that year...as an intern, you do the full job and tak[e] classes at night.” At the end of her internship year, Alice was appointed “interim principal” at the school where she was previously a teacher and an intern assistant principal. Her schedules, responsibilities, and positions were adjusted for this step of her career life history.

Sandy described three women that supported her along the way, one, currently a district board president, another a principal at a sister high school in Sandy’s district, and a teacher friend that Sandy took classes with who is currently in a district office position. Each of these women, who Sandy introduced as her mentors and friends, supported her through her career life history, “Those three women have probably had more influence on me than anybody else as far as encouraging and supporting me along the way.” Sandy talked about the importance of the support of one of the women. “At the time she hired



me she was principal at [\_\_\_\_\_ High], and she is currently our district school board president, and so she has been a very strong influence on me along the way.” Another woman high school principal and Sandy worked together for several years, “I had the fortunate experience to work with [\_\_\_\_\_] who became principal at [\_\_\_\_\_ High School], and I worked with her there about seven years.” These women were influential in providing Sandy with administrative opportunities and positions as an assistant principal that eventually led her to become a high school principal. Sandy began as a part-time intern, applied and received a full-time intern position and her administration aspirations began to change. The support Sandy received from her mentors and supervisors helped her gain confidence and experience as an assistant principal. Her working conditions were changed from teacher, to ATE (Applied Technology Education) coordinator, to part-time intern, full-time intern, assistant principal, and later principal.

While making adjustments in the school where Megan was a teacher, an assistant principal was fired in February and she said, “They yanked me out of the classroom and threw me in the office.” She did not plan to stay longer than the end of the school year, however, was asked to stay for the next year under the direction of a new principal, “He was very charismatic, very much a leader.” Megan decided she would stay. She began to take administrative classes and interned for 3 years. Megan was then assigned to junior high (ninth graders) as assistant principal. This move helped her get to high school as she “started reaching up to the high school” students. She not only knew the schools and teachers, but she had taught many of the students in their earlier grades. Megan’s roles had changed, advancing her experiences to correlate with the students in her classes when

she began this step in her career life history. The retiring principal's goal, she explained, "was to get me to the high school because I had been the link." Megan had "...fostered a positive relationship with the junior high and high school, and whenever we did articulation and those kinds of things, I was always the go-to person." When Megan was "yanked" from her class, served as assistant principal, and interned while earning her administrative credential, the school and district adjusted so she could fulfill the school's needs.

Each of the women received necessary support, responsibility opportunities, and adjustments as they transitioned into administration. Coworkers, schools, and districts provided working condition adjustments. Some participants' transitions were immediate adjustments while others were more gradual. Each received appropriate support that facilitated their complex transition.

**Family reconfiguration.** Families had a variety of needs and some required significant reconfigurations as the participants navigated this step of their career life histories. Sandy and Alice did not speak of any family reconfigurations, although Sandy was married and had stepchildren. Alice was single. Both Cindy and Peg spoke of the ways they and their spouses had reconfigured responsibilities. Cindy had one daughter and Peg had one son still in school. Georgette was married, had raised some of her children but still had an elementary aged daughter and another son in middle school. Leslie had two sons attending college, one daughter in school, and later, she acquired four step-daughters. Megan and her spouse had two young daughters and reconfigured their responsibilities. Family adjustments began during the transitional stage of

participants' journey in their career life histories.

Cindy and Daniel had one young daughter at the time Cindy began her transition to administration, "We just have one daughter. She was 10 at the time I went into this." Cindy said her daughter was "a good girl, but she would not have wanted her mother to be an assistant principal at her school." Daniel increased his participation in domestic chores and "[did] a little more with our daughter." These were difficult choices for Cindy's family. Her spouse explained how he supported Cindy with tuition costs, "I even helped her financially. I borrowed money from one of my retirement accounts to help fund her tuition costs." Cindy's busy schedule of classes and administration supervisory duties posed challenges for the family.

Peg explained her experience with family support by telling how her son, a junior in her high school, handled it and understood her role.

You know, in my situation I have one son. He was a junior in this high school the year I started, and so he was old enough. His reaction was, "Cool," and then it was "Ohh..." and so he was here [at the high school] for a year with me. His senior year I started out as VP, and then, I became the principal during his senior year, and so he lived through all that. He was so good... 'cause his friends might say, "Your mom gave me a Saturday school today," and he'd say, "Did you sluff school?" "Yeah." "Well, duh."

Peg and her son found the balance needed while he attended the high school where she was not only an assistant principal for a time but eventually became the principal.

Georgette explained the support she received from her husband during her schooling and now as principal as she currently has to travel over 70 miles to her high school. Georgette defined her husband as highly supportive. "On a supportive husband scale of 0 to 10, I have one that's like a 12, a 13, or a 14." She said that without his

support, she would not have her master's degree as she, "would have been too chicken to try, honestly.... I wish I were that strong, but I honestly don't think I would have even tried to take that step without that." She commented, "[His support] has been a big influence in my journey." She then describes the personal sacrifice he made, enabling her transition to high school administration to be easier for her.

He has been very encouraging. Seriously, we work 70 miles apart, and this winter we took an apartment in [\_\_\_\_\_ City] and lived in [it] for the school year, and he commuted to [his job]. It was to really show the district that we were committed and that I was in it to really, really do it.

Georgette and her husband reconfigured their living conditions, enabling Georgette to have more suitable travel arrangement for her new job, while his travel conditions became more cumbersome. Georgette took advantage of free tuition she had through her husband's employment at \_\_\_\_\_ University. She found that educational administration was "the right master's degree" for her. She may not have done so without the support of free tuition.

Not only did Randy understand his mother's role as an educator, he understood her role as his mother and the family adjustments. He described the family's supportive dynamics.

As a support system, it's been kind of interesting because we as a family really supported her in getting to the goal that she wanted, and it was kind of a challenge to balance supporting her while at the same time she was supporting us, and we created kind of a system where it just was assumed that this was the norm.

Creating the new norms in Georgette and Randy's family was a difficult task, but they did so, and the new systems they created worked for them.

Leslie's older boys were in college when she began her transition into

administration and her husband passed away the second year she was in administration. This made it more difficult for Leslie, however, she and her younger daughter were able to adjust schedules, “juggling” what they needed to and spending many evenings together at the high school while Leslie supervised events. Leslie explained how hard it was for her daughter.

It was really hard on her, you know, cause she just said, “I hate that you have to study. I hate that you have to do that.” And when I got done, I said, “I am never going back to school ever, ever, ever.”

Leslie believed that her family reconfiguration was a sacrifice she had to make in maintaining her role as mother-father for a season.

Megan had young children at home when she was approached to become an administrator. Megan received strong support from her husband. “I’m married to Mr. Supportive Human of the Universe and Mr. Mom, and so at the same time, I was thinking I was going to go halftime [so that I could] manage these children.” Gilbert and Rader (2001) explained that as a woman “reduce[s] her hours, or move[s] to part-time work to ease the family situation” she perpetuates the belief that women bring in a “second income and do most of the caretaking and men progress in careers and control most of the power over social policy and legislation.” Instead of perpetuating this social norm, Megan increased her workload with administrative classes and school responsibilities. She explained her husband’s reaction when told she was asked to leave the classroom to become a fulltime administrator. “Then, all of a sudden I get thrown into this, and he was very clear that I should try....’ This is your 10th year of teaching, don’t you think you want to think about something new?’” Megan responded to her spouse by trying to

convince him she wanted to go back to the classroom, “No, actually you know, I really love the kids, and they’ve cried every day since I’ve left the classroom, and so why on earth would I want to do that?” Mr. Supportive Human of the Universe disagreed and told her to try it, “I think you should try it until the end of the year, and if you don’t like it, you can go back.” As Megan reflected on those years, she added, “Little did he know that no, I couldn’t really go back,” implying her leadership experiences would shape her career.

Sandy did not speak of any family adjustments nor did Alice, who was single until recently.

To summarize, during the transition from teacher to principal, work conditions were adjusted by districts and supervisors, creating leadership opportunities and flexible work schedules. Placements into internships during training provided participants on-the-job training and experiences. Families were reconfigured, which in most cases required accepting Mom’s extended work schedules and finding ways to adjust schedules and share the workload.

### **Administrative Career**

As the participants began their administrative careers as principals, support continued to sustain them during this new stage of their career life histories. Examples of this support were clear in the comments of external participants, who described their experiences with and support for these women. Sandy described the community support she received when she became principal in her current position.

Families were rearranged and scheduled around participants’ busy schedule as

they participated in in her career duties. Some participants required parenting responsibility adjustments while children were still in school.

**External participants' and community support.** External participants continued to support and believe in the principal participants' leadership capabilities. Brent said he will quit and "retire that day," if Peg is ever transferred. Marsha was not happy with Megan's retirement and relocation to Utah, "[It was not] great in my opinion because replacing [Megan] is challenging." Marsha knew Megan would continue in education, "I knew...that she was moving to Utah but she would not retire...because she wasn't done with the work that goes with educating kids." Daniel and James described their principal spouses' successes with pride. Daniel said he "could go on and on about how outstanding [Cindy] has been," and James claims that Leslie "is well known" in the community. Sarah tells of Sandy's effective leadership with coaches. Randy explained Georgette's qualities as a leader, "She is incredibly passionate, incredibly smart, and just will not drop it if there's a better way to do something." The external participants continue to believe these women are leaders in the high school communities and their support for these principals was clear.

Sandy was able to secure a high school principal position after several years serving as an assistant principal when her work-family gave the necessary support. This community supported her persistence in becoming principal. Sandy explained their contributions to her success during the selection process for her current position.

I know for a fact that there was some promotion of someone who was out of the school...a male that they were trying to get in, but the committee was absolutely 100% in my favor, which really made me feel good.... I had [something similar] happen at [\_\_\_\_\_ High School] when I was trying to become an intern, and

they kind of knew that the first time around, from an intern to an assistant, they knew the first time around that it was pretty much safe for this other individual. But, the second time around they were bringing other people in, and I had a teacher down there who actually had a petition drawn up and had everybody, the custodians, our cafeteria staff, and all the teachers sign it and say, “we want Sandy to be our assistant principal.” And, I still have a copy of that.

Sandy had built strong relationships with the community who knew her skills and appreciated their support in the petition. “And it was just very...I was so humbled by that, that those people would fight for me.”

In summary, as participants began their administration careers, external participants and one community supported them continually. Support was crucial to participants’ growth and confidence as they became high school principals.

**Family rearranged.** While the participants’ career demanded more time supervising student and school events as assistant principals and later principals, families rearranged time together by attending events with their working mom/spouse. They also adjusted parenting needs so that dads took responsibility for some of the household chores and childcare expectations.

*Family participation in career.* Brent and Peg’s families have spent many Friday nights together at high school athletic events supporting not only the careers as high school leaders, but as friends and families sustaining each other. Georgette’s husband attends many activities with her and knows the students. “He gets to know my kids, we get to connect about my work.” He has had several date nights with her at Friday night games,

But for a long time that was like our date. I’ll be standing in front of the crowd, and [he’ll] be sitting with the parents, and I’ll wave at [him] while we’re playing basketball cause, you know, during January and February that’s what we do.



Georgette and her husband spent many evenings together with the ballroom dance team because he would ask her to schedule herself to supervise ballroom dance, “He just fell in love with all of those ballroom dance kids, and he would say, ‘Make sure you sign up to supervise the ballroom dance concert, cause I’ll go to that one.’”

While they still had children at home, Leslie, Cindy, Peg, and Georgette’s children spent time at the high school with their moms as assistant principals. Alice does not have children and was not married until recently. Megan’s spouse currently attends events with her.

*Parenting responsibilities adjusted.* Megan, Cindy, and Leslie’s spouses, took on more parenting responsibilities as they adjusted to participants’ career. Megan’s spouse took children to daycare and sporting events, “He took them to every soccer practice, every basketball practice, and every baseball practice. He coached both of them in all of their sports.” Megan said they shared in the domestic chores. “Otherwise,” she added, “it would not have been doable.”

Daniel did more around the house and helped with their daughter while Cindy needed to be away from home. Many times, though, Cindy included her in the high school experience, “I brought her to a lot of games.”

James, Leslie’s new husband, commented that they determined she could apply for a high school principalship since he could stay home with his young daughters, “She chose to go to the high school because my job didn’t have nighttime activities so I could be home after school.”

To summarize, while participants entered their administrative career as principals

in a high school, continual support and belief in their leadership abilities was given by external participants and one community. Family support continued to assist participants in their roles as principals. Families were rearranged, while some of them attended school events supervised by Mom, and dads increased their workload around the house and were more involved with caregiving.

### **Summary**

These women received support from former teachers, families, spouses, children, friends, coworkers, supervisors, and districts along their way to principalship. Once the decision was made and administrative classes began, schedules intensified, participant's working conditions were adjusted, and families were reconfigured. External participants' support continues to be an important piece of participants' network. The women principals' families were rearranged accommodating the demands of their schedules. Children and spouses participated in high school activities and events and these opportunities became family outings.

Participants were not alone in their successes while becoming administrators. They depended on others to sustain them in their transitional stages of their career life histories. Support and encouragement was integral for these women in their new identities as high school principals, a position to which none of them had aspired.

Although there were many supportive experiences, participants also navigated and overcame barriers in each stage of their career life histories.

## Overcoming Barriers

### Introduction

The participants did not travel through their career life histories without roadblocks or barriers (Eckman, 2004; Pankake, 1995; Young & McLeod, 2001). There were barriers at each stage that the women valiantly forged through and overcame. They discussed different aspects of their career histories that contributed to the roadblocks in achieving their goals. Participants navigated through the barriers in a pragmatic matter-of-fact manner, without realizing the impressive nature of their strength and determination.

### Preadministration

The participants had different barriers on their pathway to becoming educators first and then administrators. As first-generation university graduates, Alice, Leslie, and Sandy lacked guidance in shaping their college careers. Alice, Leslie, and Georgette each talked about their college years being directionless until they decided on education. The women moved ahead not realizing where their university degree would take them. None of the women had strategic plans to move from teaching and into administration. Peg and Georgette's parenting plans delayed their careers.

**Educational perseverance.** Participants struggled through their college years, but had the desire to graduate in spite of their circumstances. Early on, they showed tenaciousness and perseverance in getting the degrees and moving into a career. Although there were barriers to overcome, participants' persevered in reaching their goals during

this early stage in their career life histories.

Despite Alice's parents' support during her high school education, they did not know how to lead Alice or her siblings toward college educations.

But as far as having any background about why you go to college or why it's important to go to college, or what careers, or how you get into college or what you do, they have no idea.

Alice overcame the barriers of being a first generation university graduate by beginning her education hesitantly but with persistence and tenacity. Many of her friends in college did not have the same persistence or tenacity as Alice as she explained how "one by one they started...washing out and being finished with school." Alice recognized the difficulties she had at the university, when she could have dropped out. "[In] the middle of my second year that...could have been a big reality, and I don't know what kept me in." Alice told me of her "stubborn" personality trait, "I have no idea what kept me going other than I tend to be very stubborn if I start something I won't wash out just because I don't want people to think that I couldn't do something." She "loved living away from home" and found independence and success as a student. Her debate team experiences led Alice into finding her career as an educator first at university then finally at high school.

Alice's goals in becoming educated developed over time as she persisted in her education. Her extracurricular high school experiences and her stubbornness pushed her beyond the choices of her friends who were dropping out. Alice's career life history has a strong foundation of advancing past barriers and moving forward in reaching her potential.

Leslie claimed “high aspirations” as a young university student. “I started in the medical field. I started in bio and chemistry, and when I got through those chemistry classes I [thought I didn’t] want to have a minor in this, I’m going to change my field.” Leslie changed directions, “And so I changed my field to teaching.” Leslie’s unclear college goals could have been a barrier for her but instead, because she persisted, her new choices opened opportunities later in the education arena.

Sandy’s grandparents challenged her desires to graduate from a university. She was the first person in her family to graduate from college “despite [the fact] that [my grandparents] didn’t feel women should go to college. I was the first female.” Sandy was excited as she explained how her grandparents initially fought her college goals, but Sandy was able to change “their whole opinion of what, you know, women could do.” Sandy’s perseverance in overcoming the barrier of her family’s beliefs was a starting point in her career life history as she continued to navigate toward becoming a high school principal.

Georgette’s years in college were challenging, as she did not know what course her life would take. “I got derailed quite a bit when I went to college, I didn’t know what I wanted to do.” Georgette “kind of wandered around in college.” She explained her dilemma in finding her major, “I really liked music. So, the four things that really interested me would have been music, English (because of the reading), math, and probably something [like] computer science.” While she and her husband were “starving students” she began tutoring math and “really fell in love with [teaching math] and became a math teacher.” Had Georgette not tutored, she may not have found her

appreciation for teaching and would have chosen another major, “I think I would have probably gone into computer science in college if I [hadn’t] gone into education.”

Georgette’s unclear directions in college resulted in it taking time to realize that teaching would be the beginning of her career life history.

**No aspirations.** Intention to become an administrator was emphatically not a goal for these women. Cindy told me, “Okay, first of all, I never intended to go into administration.” Peg, too, expressed how she had no desires to become a principal, “I had never, never had an aspiration to become a principal, ever.” Megan stated several times in the first few minutes of our conversation that she “had no aspirations” to become a principal. Both Sandy and Georgette described that they wanted the masters degrees in administration, but did not want to become administrators. After six years as both a teacher and teacher leader, Sandy earned her administrative endorsement, with no aspirations to become an administrator, “I was actually not planning on going into administration.” Georgette said, “I’m not here to be a principal...which I look back now and I’m like, ‘Well that was kind of dumb to say that.’” Alice and Leslie did not plan to become administrators but accepted the invitation and navigated through the transition to eventual principalship. With no desire or directions to become administrators, these women remained in the classroom, teaching, until someone made a suggestion inviting them to take another course, changing the directions of their career life histories.

Young and McLeod’s (2001) study of the factors affecting women’s decisions to become school administrator, found that “Not one of our female interviewees reported entering their field of education thinking that she would eventually go into

administration. Not one” (p. 469). This was the same for the participants I interviewed who expressed their surprise when approached to consider administration. Young and McLeod (2001) observed that women taking administration classes “were not certain whether they would pursue an administrative position” and said that they “wanted to keep their options open” (p. 471). When participants received their administration master’s degrees, options opened for them.

**Becoming a parent.** Peg and Georgette overcame particular barriers related to becoming a parent during their career life histories. Becoming and being a parent interrupted these women’s already unintended journeys (Cuddy et al., 2004; Correll et al., 2007; Eckman, 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004). Peg and Georgette’s mothering commitments posed barriers to overcome until they determined they could go to work.

Peg intended to stay as an elementary teacher, but “at one point...decided to take a year off and have a baby.” Peg’s career options and choices changed when she took the year off from her career. She overcame barriers related to being a young mother by staying out of the workforce for one year. When Peg decided to go back to work, there were no elementary teacher positions available so she was unable to secure one. She overcame the unemployment barrier by taking a part-time junior high position instead. Peg transferred two years later for a full-time position at high school. Becoming a parent delayed and altered Peg’s original plans to be an elementary teacher. Her unplanned career choices led her to a part-time junior high position before she moved into a full-time high school position. Her unintentional transition to high school led to a passion for the high school, and later, acceptance of the invitation to become principal. Peg’s

mothering desires delayed and altered her unintentional career choices.

Georgette's wish to be a stay-at-home mother delayed her career. She stayed home for several years until she felt her family could make the necessary adjustments in order for her to work outside of the home. She fulfilled her desires to be a teacher while she was a stay-at-home mother by tutoring students in her home as she raised a young family. "So, when I did finally start teaching at the junior high, I knew all of the textbooks inside out and backwards," and she included it was an "advantage to me getting out of the gate...." Delaying her career decisions when her children were young was a barrier for Georgette, at first. "I thought I was really too old to make [administration]...a career choice, but then as I got into the profession, I realized that was completely not true at all. I didn't know that when I started." Age was a barrier to Georgette, "I was older, you know, and I never thought that I could do something else other than a classroom teacher." Once Georgette became a teacher, she found she was not too old to teach and explained her transition to her newfound career, "'Wow, you are really old to start teaching', you know, and then I was like, 'Wow, look at that, it's cool.' So, that was exciting." Georgette's belief about ageing out of her opportunity to have a career beyond motherhood was a barrier to her until she entered the career force. Her unintentional career choices and her mothering desires had been barriers to her until she entered the teaching profession. Georgette overcame her perception of being too old for anything beyond teaching after her stay-at-home mothering years were completed, which eventually led her toward becoming a high school principal.

In summary, navigating these barriers in their college and early career years may



have delayed participant's entrance into the high school principalship, but the barriers were overcome by the women's tenacity and perseverance in pursuing their careers as their experiences unfolded. Although some of their education may have been directionless, participants found their way into teaching. Others delayed career options to accommodate parenting desires (Cuddy et al., 2004; Correll et al., 2007; Eckman, 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004). None of the participants had desires to be administrators, so that the outcome of their career journeys remained unclear. These barriers or roadblocks did not discourage participants in this stage of their career life histories.

### **Transition to Administration**

When participants made the decision to accept the administration challenge, they continued to navigate their obligations as wives, mothers, teachers, and leaders to make it work. Adding university classes to those obligations created time management struggles, tradeoffs, and juggling of responsibilities (Adkison, 1981; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Hochschild & Machung, 2003; Loder, 2005; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Milkie & Peltola, 1999). The barriers participants experienced during this time manifested themselves in the home and workplace. Nevertheless, when participants received an invitation to join the administrative team, they accepted reluctantly, began navigating their increasingly complex lives, and obediently (Beauvoir, 1976) earned appropriate administration credentials. These women started to develop new aspirations for leadership, although at first they did not recognize it.

Cindy, Georgette, Megan, and Leslie described difficult family dynamics during this time in their transition, but were able to overcome them with support.

Georgette and Sandy passionately described systemic barriers interfering with their goals to become high school principals. Districts have hiring and promotion policies, but they believed their experiences ran counter to these policies. Although Georgette and Sandy serve in different districts, they had similar experiences with what might be considered modern day iterations of the “forcible rule of men over women” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 315). They experienced several failures before securing a principalship, which could have reinforced stereotypical notions about their femininity as Valian (1998) asserted, “Women are expected to fail and potentially have something to salvage from failure, namely, reinforcement of their femininity. A woman who fails is more of a woman than one who succeeds” (p. 20). Instead, they viewed the experiences as systemic rather than personal and persevered toward their goals.

Finally, there were other barriers that presented themselves as roadblocks but the participants confronted them and overcame such things as disagreeing with professor’s claims that you can’t be friends to those you supervise; having limited educational access because of rural locations; experiencing lack of peer respect for being “just a classroom teacher;” and interning on a teacher’s salary. But the participants remained steadily persistent, facing each challenge with determination.

**Developing new aspirations.** As the participants accepted invitations to administration, they gradually developed new aspirations for their careers. Alice applied to two programs before acceptance, Georgette, Sandy, and Leslie wanted master’s degrees but did not believe that would lead them to administration. Peg and Megan were taken from their classrooms as assistant principals before deciding to be administrators.

They gradually developed new aspirations while they earned master's degrees and gained administrative experiences.

When she accepted the invitation, Alice began to have an identity shift to that of an administrator, but when she did not get accepted to the first program, she regressed, thinking it was just not meant to be. "See? It's not meant to be. I'm d-o-n-e, done...I'm not meant to be an administrator." Her mentor assisted her in the second application, which was accepted. Alice's aspirations were again realigned and she gradually developed a new identity while completing an administrative internship position.

Georgette, Sandy, and Leslie's decisions to continue their education led them to choose the master's degrees in education administration. Not one aspired to apply for administration positions once the degree was earned. Gradually, the three women's experiences in internship positions for the master's program, gave them a desire to be administrators. Their transition from teacher to administrator was gradual, but it did develop.

Peg and Megan were taken from their classes, mid-school year to assist in administrative positions before formal training. Peg was asked one year to consider administration, denied the opportunity, asked again the next year and then accepted the challenge. She had already begun to navigate her family obligations and explained, "I threw my hat in the ring for vice principal." Megan thought she would return to her class for the next school year, however, her supervisor had different plans for her. She was approached again at the end of the school year to continue in her new role as assistant principal. Megan said "Okay" once again when told by her supervisor, "This is what I

need you to do.” Both Peg and Megan obediently accepted challenges presented to them but it took time for them to adapt to their new roles and recognize their emerging aspirations to become principals. Their personal need to accommodate these new directions gradually posed barriers that delayed their progress toward the principalship.

**Difficult family dynamics.** As explained in the section on the support that sustained the women’s progress toward their goals, participant’s families gave support to these women during their career changes that resulted in many hours away from home and a shift in the family’s traditional gender norms. Still, with child caring “at the heart of the female gender schema” (Valian, 1998, p. 269), and women managing the “transitions between the worlds of home and work life” (Emslie & Hunt, 2009, p. 166) the participants remained substantially responsible for parenting and the domestic work of home side by side with maintaining the integrity of professionalism. Until this time, the participants had filled the expected woman’s role as main caregiver in the family. Although families supported participants in their roles in administration, it did not come without difficult family decisions. Cindy’s comment exemplified the challenges experienced by the women who were still parenting children at home. She discussed the way she blended her work and home to accommodate her 10 year-old daughter’s needs. “A 10-year-old girl needs her mom a little more.” Cindy compensated and “brought her to a lot of games.”

Georgette enrolled her son where she was working, a different high school than his peers. She explained that “making him go to the high school with me, because I felt like he was right at that stage in his life” was a difficult but necessary decision to make

but she did so, “because I was his mom.”

One of Leslie’s barriers was that when she became a single mother, she had to do it alone. Leslie arranged to spend as much time as possible with her daughter. Choices Leslie made to be an administrator were both financially necessary and encumbered with responsibility.

It was a lot of juggling at that time, and then um, and then the second year I was in administration my husband passed away, and so it was just [my daughter] and me, and so I would go to school, then go home and pick her up and bring her back to games. So, we juggled a lot.

Leslie did not share any regrets during the interview nor did she indicate she wished it had been any different. She had a job to do, both in her career and as a mother, and she just did it.

It wasn’t only parenting that required difficult choices. Asking spouses to adapt in other ways was also a challenge. When Georgette secured a principalship, she and her husband relocated to a place closer to her work, yet 70 miles away from his work.

Megan’s husband took over many of the domestic duties because “he moved his office into our house” and was able to take over on many of the childcare responsibilities. Megan’s family reconfigured to overcome the barriers as the person expected to be the main caregiver, Mom, pursued her unintentional career.

Cindy, Georgette, and Megan’s families addressed barriers and found ways that worked for them. Leslie persisted in her goals, although difficult. Family dynamics were burdensome for participants, however, they persisted and overcame the barriers.

**Systemic roadblocks.** Both Georgette and Sandy told me of district practices that interfered with their promotions. They are employed in two different districts, however,

seemed to have similar experiences. When Georgette and Sandy began to apply for principalships, they explained that they were not given fair opportunities.

Georgette lamented being passed over a few times for less experienced candidates.

Then, it was really difficult to get the principalship... I started applying in my own small district year six or so, and the superintendent would call me and say, "You are our runner up, and we have chosen another candidate." Almost always they were someone with less experience than I had, and they often were someone from out of district.

After several denied attempts, Georgette secured her high school principalship once she applied outside of her current district. Georgette was frustrated that she felt forced to move out of the district where she spent so much time as a teacher and assistant principal. She felt the networking, support systems, and institutional knowledge she had was "stripped" from her when the district moved her from one school to another and did not grant a promotion into principalship.

If I would have still been in [former high school position] and that [current principalship] job would have popped up, I wouldn't have gone for it, but because they had already moved me out of the building and basically stripped me away [from all things familiar], then the handwriting was really on the wall there. I went, and I started August 5<sup>th</sup>. It was quite the shock.

Although Georgette did not explicitly state that her gender got in the way of promotion, her continued description demonstrates her frustration toward her former employer.

I mean, it worked out fine, but it still feels weird... I had worked very closely with the district staff because I had quite a lot of responsibility in my school... The assistant superintendent and I had been working on projects together for years and years, and so he knew me well. I never felt like anyone in [\_\_\_\_\_ District] was out to get me or that they didn't recognize what I could do or anything, and that's what made it hard that I couldn't get to be a principal in that district. It was really weird, and [when] they needed a middle school principal during all of that transition, and I was like, "Seriously, I am sitting right here, I am

bilingual, I've worked in a middle school, I am really good at ninth-grade transition. Hello! I'm sitting right here. What's the deal?"

Sandy, too, applied for numerous administration positions while she was an intern assistant principal and felt the sting of not getting the position. "Initially, when I was an intern at [\_\_\_\_ High School], they did have an assistant job open during my first three years, but it had been reserved for a person who was on a [church] mission." She also expressed her dismay on another hire when the district, "brought someone in from out of the district, and that's a whole other story." Sandy told me:

Overall, it was frustrating.... I mean, I don't want to sound like it was easy because I was very frustrated, 10 years as an assistant, and it was frustrating to me because they would say, "you have to go to a junior high first," but then there would be these other people that would get bumped up to principal without ever having been in a junior high. But, that was the message I had for a long time, or I would go into interviews and be told they already have someone selected.

Sandy expressed frustration as she reflected on the missed opportunities and self-exposure and eventual rejection. She explained that her job search eventually worked out positively, "Fortunately, I didn't get those jobs," which left Sandy in the position to accept her current principalship. Sandy overcame systemic barriers of what may have been biased district practices when she recently became a high school principal.

Barriers, whether perceived or actual, were met with strength and fortitude by participants. Systemic barriers expressed by Georgette and Sandy did not keep them from moving forward and breaking the ranks in becoming high school principals.

**Other barriers.** Participants overcame other barriers, not letting the roadblocks interfere with their initially unintentional careers as they transitioned into their new identities. Peg disagreed with professors' views on administration and had to travel a long

distance to her administration classes. Cindy and Georgette faced their stereotypical age perceptions. Georgette confronted peer disrespect. Megan discussed interning on a teacher's salary.

Peg had built good relationships with the school community where she had been a teacher for 16 years before she was approached to enter the administration program. "I think the main thing that has contributed to me being the high school principal that I am is the fact that I taught for as long as I did." Despite this assertion, she discussed a conflict between her own views of leadership and common perceptions among colleagues and a professor in her administration program. She was warned "it might be difficult because I had been teaching with these people for 16 years, and I was their peer, not their supervisor." Peg told me how this barrier persisted in her administration classes. "One of the professors said too, in one of the classes is, "If you're an administrator, you can't be friends with the people you work with." Peg disagreed.

These people are my friends. They are my family. I mean, I have my own real family, you know, but I have best friends in this building because it's who we are. We are [like-minded] people, we think the same way. We are educators. It's who we are. So, I don't really buy into that.

Peg maintained her views that were grounded in her own experiences, overcoming the professor's ideas that she had been taught in her administration classes. She kept her staff as her educator friends.

Peg also experienced barriers related to her geographic location. Living in the outskirts of rural cities with limited educational opportunities, Peg's administrative training was not easily accessible. The challenge of travelling to distant learning, she described "wasn't insurmountable, but it's probably, you know, it was inconvenient." Peg



was taking administration classes while she was becoming an assistant principal and one year later, while she was a principal. She described that “Working on that administrative certificate while doing the job was very beneficial. A lot of the assignments [had direct application].” However, Peg found it difficult to juggle all these responsibilities at the same time.

Cindy and Georgette discussed age as a barrier to their administration career strategies. Cindy had taught for 20 years before being asked to look into an administration program. She observed that, “Many administrators I know teach five or six [years], and then they start looking to administration.” Cindy confronted her age perception by embracing her invitation to join the administration team.

Georgette noted the same “too old” perception when she began to make a shift from classroom teacher to administration. “I was older...and I never thought that I could do something else other than [be] a classroom teacher.” Georgette continued to explain her lack of planning beyond the classroom, “I thought I was really too old to make that as a career choice.” However, when Georgette noticed she needed different credentials to gain the respect necessary to make changes in educational programs, she decided to get her master’s degree.

Because I didn’t get into the classroom until my mid-30s, I think I went pretty quickly [into administration].... I loved being in the classroom. [But] [t]hen I realized that I could be more influential in the lives of my students’ families if I had that master’s degree.

Georgette recognized there was a lack of respect roadblock while she was a teacher. Although she had leadership roles, she “realized that the principals of the other schools didn’t pay any attention to me because I was ‘just’ a classroom teacher.” This gave

Georgette the motivation to go back to school, “That was why I really went back to school to get an admin credential, and I had no idea what doors it would open for me.” Lack of respect for her teacher-leader position was a barrier to Georgette but because of her determination, it led her to earn administration credentials.

While participants were intern assistant principals, they typically earned teacher’s salaries and perhaps a dollar amount to supplement extra night duties. Alice, Georgette, and Leslie completed 1-year internships and did not mention salary compensation. Cindy said she received \$1,000 for the extra duties in her 1-year internship. Sandy and Megan were intern assistant principals for 3 years. Megan interned as she acquired her credentials before receiving a position as an assistant principal. It took her “3 school years and two summers,” before becoming an assistant principal. Although a good practice time to learn the administration position, interning was a barrier in transitioning from teacher to administration because she “had to do it all.” Megan explained the way the district benefits from this practice. “It was good for the district because you were paid as an administrative intern as a teacher plus \$1,500.” The barriers of doing it all included taking university endorsement classes, reconfiguration of family, and learning a new position. Managing all of the extra work and time while receiving a teacher’s salary was a 3-year barrier for Megan and Sandy and at least a 1-year barrier for Alice, Cindy, Georgette, and Leslie.

Not all of the participants discussed barriers they experienced during their transition to administration. Alice explained her year of transition as “an incredible year” as she taught university classes, traveled with debate teams, and took master’s degree

classes, keeping busy in all of her roles. Although the complexity of Alice's life was full, she maintained the freedom to do what she wanted, whereas, the participant-parents did not have Alice's freedoms.

Peg now laughs at her transitional barriers. Cindy and Georgette addressed their ages as a barrier. Georgette earned peer respect. Alice, Cindy, Leslie, Georgette Megan, and Sandy worked through the years of internship on teacher salaries.

In summary, the participants' years of transition into administration at a high school came about differently for each one. They taught from 5 to 21 years before beginning their administration careers. One served as long as 12 years in assistant principal positions before obtaining high school principalships; however, one became principal after 1 year as an assistant principal while she was still earning her administration endorsement. Alice, Cindy, and Leslie held district office positions before becoming high school principals. New aspirations were developed. Systemic barriers were exasperating for Georgette and Sandy; however, both of them look back and accept their history as a step towards their current positions. Other barriers were faced, yet they determined to achieve their goal to become an administrator. They navigated barriers with the appreciated support noted in the previous section of the chapter and by drawing on their own determination with persistence. They built confidence in their experiences as assistant principals.

### **Administrative Careers**

Participants viewed their entrance into a high school principalship as requiring determination. Peg, Alice, Leslie, and Megan told of having to prove their leadership

capacities. Working harder for longer hours (Harris et al., 2002; Rusch & Marshall, 2006) to be recognized, overperforming, and proving (Coleman, 2005) they had the leadership skills necessary to lead a high school, these women broke barriers and became successful high school principals (Meier, 2002; Ridgeway, 2001; Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Towards the end of interviews, several began to talk of their high schools' accomplishments and lessons learned as they looked back at their career life histories and the ways they had overcome barriers and they reflected on the ways they continue to do so.

**Proving themselves.** Although the women had always been hard workers in their teacher positions, working in extracurricular activities, and serving on district committees, they told me of the persistence and long hours they felt must be spent in order to prove themselves as high school principals. This is reminiscent the literature explaining that to be “considered highly able in the workplace, a women must display a higher level of recognized competence than a similar man” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 647). Biases in perceptions of ability and performance have implications in the hiring and promotion of women (Meier, 2002).

Peg became the acting principal for a season as she earned her credentials.

Although it required many late hours and was inconvenient, Peg persisted, learning along the way how to be a principal.

It was inconvenient, and I spent a lot of long nights [at the school] because I'd be doing the job that I didn't really know how to do, and so I'd have to stay after to clean up the messes that I had made for myself, putting out fires the next day, and then you had all of the school work to do.... That was difficult at the time.

Peg's persistence and long hours at the school may have been difficult, but she knew she

owed it to herself and the students.

Alice was one of the first women high school principals in her district. She told me she had to work hard to be recognized. “I think you had to...really almost do a better job than the guys to be recognized.” She explained the difficulty women leaders had receiving recognition for their work, “but yet it was hard to get what you did recognized because [the men] had a social network that women did not have.” Breaking into that social network was hard to do (Criswell & Betz, 1995; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Adkison (1981) explained women’s limited access to an informal system of training opportunities and that the “informal organization provides opportunities for learning administrative behaviors and attitudes and that women are less likely than men to have access to informal networks of administration” (p. 324). Adkison continued to explain the barrier women have when they are not part of the informal networks, “When women who have not experienced anticipatory socialization for administrating, whether self-directed or guided by sponsors, are promoted, they appear to have initial problems and frustrations” (p. 324). Alice recognized her difficulty of navigating against the informal sponsorship barrier.

Leslie added, “I do feel that women have to over-perform. And, whether they have to or not, they do. They over-perform.” Leslie explained how she spent extra time making sure she carried her part of the administrative duties while she was an assistant principal. “I felt that at [\_\_\_\_\_ High School] that I was doing tons of work that other people weren’t doing, but that’s my personality, and you know, so it’s my own fault.” When Leslie became principal, her work ethic continued.

When I was principal at [\_\_\_\_\_ High School] I felt that same thing. I always felt like I had to prove to myself that I knew what I was doing and that I was organized and that I was ready for the next day. So, I would stay there forever and get it done just to make sure that no one thought that I was incompetent.

Megan did not have a receptive welcome when she became principal, when she was greeted with black carnations. She accepted it as part of the position. “But I didn’t mind that because I figured if I could earn credibility a little bit at a time, it would be fine.” She discussed the way this actually happened. “They became my biggest advocates, and they became people who, when I needed to do difficult work several years later, were the guys that were [there].” Megan’s understanding of her staff’s initial rejection of her leadership, demonstrates her ability to move beyond perceptions. “I think they just wanted to know, ‘Are you really here just because of who you are in the community and your mother [who was a respected school board member], or do you really have the stuff?’” Megan admitted that she had to prove herself to a community she had known for many years. “There was a little bit of having to prove myself, which I don’t think is unhealthy, and I think teachers...sometimes there are skeptics.”

**Reflecting on barriers.** Before the interviews, knowing the focus of the study, the participants had the opportunity to reflect on their career life histories. They answered questions succinctly yet wanted to tell me more about their journeys. They recognized that for women to become high school principals, it was necessary for them to overcome many barriers. The following examples illustrate their thoughts.

Cindy recognizes that not every woman teacher can make the sacrifices necessary to be a high school administrator (Correll et al., 2007; Patterson, 1994; Powell & Mainiero, 1992). She described how women’s choices have evolved through her years as

an educator and the way gendered social and psychological norms continue to shape that evolution.

For so many years women didn't apply, and then women weren't seen as maybe high school principal material...for a lot of reasons. I think women came into their own in the 60s, and until then I don't know that women really sought that kind of a role.... I don't know that it's society's fault. I think it's simply a matter of we're finally growing into our species.

As one of the few women high school principals in the state, Cindy's elaboration of the conflicts women face in becoming high school administrators, presents her understanding of why few women educators are willing to take that risk and challenge not only the sociopolitical dilemmas, but the psychological dilemmas also.

I think, you know, traditionally we've worked in the home, and teaching was a job to help support the home. So, the home was the focus. Well, we both know that when you work in a high school your job takes over the focus sometimes over the home, and that's something we give up, and not everybody can do it.

Peg agreed with Cindy's thoughts and expressed her beliefs of why more women do not try the administration route in their careers. "If I would have had younger children, I probably wouldn't have even taken the position. You can't do this job with family, and that may be a big reason...." Thus, the women expressed that their choices they made on their journey to becoming a high school principal were encumbered by not only by typical circumstances that accompany any challenging career decision, but social and psychological norms.

As the principal of the high school, a mom, and understanding her roles, Peg knows the importance of the time commitment high school administration takes. She describes her administrative team as a cohesive group that have made decisions and choices to support their students.

We attend every activity we can possibly attend. Our goal is to be visible. Our goal is to be supporting kids in every way. It means way more to them if they see me at their basketball game than if I walk in and observe their teacher while they're taking a math test or whatever the case may be, and so it's kind of an expectation that we have. And, we are all at a point right now where our kids are grown, even the one with six kids...her baby is in seventh grade or something, and so that helps, but I think that's gotta play a part in why women aren't doing this secondary craziness.

Peg's description of the "secondary craziness" tells what the participants are expected to do with many evening activities and responsibilities with the school family, yet away from their family. Her comment also suggests her acceptance of the social norms for women.

Sarah, Sandy's friend and mentor, explained why she did not continue in the high school administrative tract while raising her children. "The nighttime activities were killing us, because, you know, the reality of a high school. You have nighttime activities five nights out of seven, and sometimes you have them six out of seven." Sarah described her thoughts on why women do not choose to become high school principals.

But where you're at in your life as a woman, I think plays a huge role on whether you're going to be a high school principal or not. If you have small children, but you have a family life situation that can support you in that, I think you can do that. But, I don't think you're going to see a lot of [women] high school principals who have a young family. Their children are going to be grown, and it's going to be something that they can do in their schedule.

Interestingly, Sarah, one of the external participants, made the choice not to continue in high school administration, staying in a district position, enabling her to have more time being mother to her child, but believes, "That there are women, who regardless of where they're at with their family, they want to be a high school principal, but there are a lot of us who are like, 'I can't do that right now.'"



In summary, participants felt they had to prove themselves as women high school principals. They worked hard, long hours in order to be recognized, and over-performed in proving their competence. They also expressed their understanding of encumbered choices women may encounter and the excessive expectations high school administration demands.

### **Summary**

Directionless university studies, no aspirations, and parenting decisions, posed barriers to the women's preadministration stage. They developed new aspirations hesitantly in the transition stage, while making difficult family dynamics decisions. Some women had systemic barriers to break through, while others felt they had to prove themselves as competent leaders. When given the opportunity to look back and answer why there are fewer women in high school administration, the participants reflected about the way gendered social and psychological norms interface in problematic ways with the time commitments expected of high school principals. Taken together, the barriers across the stages of their career life history were numerous and complex. They met these challenges with impressive determination and persistence.

Presented next is an analysis of the encumbered choices participants faced in their career life histories.

## **Encumbered Choices**

### **Introduction**

For this study, encumbered or constrained choices were defined as choices and

decisions made by women that were burdened or made more complicated by gendered sociopolitical or psychological dynamics. The literature reviewed for this study makes clear that such choices are encumbered, restricted, or limited, for women because of sociopolitical structures and psychological processes that perpetuate gendered schemas and stereotypes. As I listened to, read, reread, and coded each interview, I searched for encumbered or constrained choices participants may have made in their career life histories. Most clearly, it seemed matter of fact to them without a hint of hesitation, that their choices were complicated by the family needing to make adjustments to accommodate their decisions. The encumbered nature of their choices were not obvious to me in the beginnings of the analysis. However, as I carefully assessed the interviews, I was certain, encumbered choices had been made.

I now present the encumbered or constrained choices participants made throughout their career life histories. I begin with a discussion of the choices that were encumbered by gendered sociopolitical dynamics. Participants navigated against these dynamics as they (a) restructured families (Petroski & Edley, 2006; Starrels, 1994) (b) struggled with mothering-related conflicts (Harris et al., 2002; Loder, 2005; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Pankake, 1995; Powell & Mainiero, 1992), and (c) faced subtle resistance (Grogan, 1999; Young & McLeod, 2001). I then discuss the ways their choices were encumbered by gendered psychological dynamics as participants navigated against subtle gendered expectations, moving into newly traveled territory. They (a) coped with gender stereotypes (Adkison, 1981; Cohen, 2013; Gerlicher, 2002; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Young, 2005) (b) experienced loneliness (Eckman, 2004) (c)

characterized the support they received as “lucky” (Swim & Sanna, 1996; Valian, 1998) (d) sought self-actualization as they made significant shifts in their daily routines (Marshall, 1985), and (e) developed new identities as they assumed roles typically occupied by men (Christman & McClellan, 2008). Encumbered choices shadowed women’s lives throughout their careers.

### **Navigating Against Sociopolitical Dynamics**

Participants fought against the sociopolitical norms of their environment, yet refused to “remain on the margins of society,” and refused “to enter that society on its terms” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 324). These women rearranged traditional family structures, reconfigured mothering (Petroski & Edley, 2006), and made necessary adjustments throughout their transitions from teachers to administrators. When participants accepted the invitation to become administrators, they began to change social gendered roles (Beauvoir, 1976; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Sherif, 1979) in order to accommodate the excessively busy schedule of teaching, taking classes, completing homework, and evening supervision responsibilities. Typical parts of the mothering roles of the participants were sometimes sacrificed (Harris et al., 2002; Pankake, 1995; Powell & Mainiero, 1992). The women described family conflicts, especially as they were taking classes, as well as continuing in their current school position, being moms and wives, and becoming principals. There was subtle resistance within families mentioned by participants (Grogan, 1999; Young & McLeod, 2001). Domestic obligations were reluctantly rearranged, increased childcare was added to Dad’s list of responsibility, “his” financial resources were “sacrificed for her needs,” and

spouses sometimes needed convincing that their wife needed support and understanding to accomplish her career's expectations. Participants reported their roles as wife, parent, and principal, led to their choices being encumbered by the need to manage the many responsibilities associated with these roles. Eckman (2004) described the difficult encumbered choices principals have in "maintain[ing] a balance between their commitments to both work and family" (p. 193) and discusses women being "constantly torn between the job and...family" (p. 199) and "trying to confront the extensive time demands of their positions by trying to provide a balance between their professional and personal roles" (p. 200). Milkie and Peltola (1999) reported tradeoffs women often make by reducing household tasks or "finding substitutes for their labor such as premade meals and cleaning services" (p. 480). Their concerns for family aspirations, relationships, and personal achievements (Powell & Mainiero, 1992) were constrained and required "tradeoffs and temporary sacrifices" (p. 231).

**Restructuring a nontraditional family.** During Georgette's transitional time in her career life history, she still had one young daughter in elementary school and one son entering high school. Her other children were young adults. When asked if she had any conflicts as a mother during her administration transition, Georgette reported how her many roles were conflicted once she left the classroom to become an administrator.

Every single thing, once I left the classroom, conflicted with my role as a mother, as a wife, that has been extremely challenging and difficult, and I feel like other people [in my life] have had to pay a pretty high price.

Georgette stayed home until the youngest daughter was in kindergarten. Georgette entered the workforce. Describing her daughter's situation and her husband's

participation in caregiving, she commented that by then, “Her dad had figured out how to play mom, and so I don’t think she really lost anything.” The other children have memories of Georgette being at home while the youngest child’s memories are mostly of a working mom. Georgette and her husband “passed that baton” of sharing parenting and family responsibilities.

We shared responsibilities back and forth, and we passed that baton pretty seamlessly and figured out how to work our schedules and stuff like that, and my husband even worked swing shift for several years there so that he could be on deck and she always had somebody that was available.

The sacrifices made by the parents ensured family stability. Georgette and her husband spent many evenings together at the high school while she was supervising activities.

“[That] sacrifice [meant] that my husband and I saw each other on weekends, and people at my school think that it’s odd that my husband comes to so many school activities.”

Georgette became principal in a district 70 miles from their home. Georgette described how they restructured living conditions to accommodate her new position. “We work 70 miles apart, and this winter we took an apartment in [\_\_\_\_\_ City] and lived in [it] for the school year, and he commuted to [his job].” Georgette’s family made necessary decisions and adjustments that were encumbered by the need to accommodate Mom’s schooling and administrative responsibilities. Dad “played mom,” parents “passed that baton” to adjust parenting obligations, and he attended high school events to spend time with Georgette, the high school administrator. Georgette’s role as mother and primary caregiver switched and the family restructured as her career evolved. Navigating through the sociopolitical dynamics to make it happen was defined by Georgette as a “sacrifice.” Her husband adjusting working shifts to be more involved in caregiving, she passed the

domestic duties baton “seamlessly” with him to work out schedules of parenting and caregiving. The traditional mom as main caregiver and supporter of dad’s career was adjusted at this time in Georgette’s family as she became principal. Georgette and her spouse’s choices were encumbered as they made adjustments and shifted responsibilities to work together against the sociopolitical gender division of their traditional parenting roles (Connell, 2005; Petroski & Edley, 2006).

Cindy described restructuring her family with Daniel. He agreed to do more around the house and to increase his caretaking of their one daughter. This arrangement did not materialize exactly as planned, as Cindy made a point to describe his behavior as falling short of his commitment. There were some things he had agreed to do “which he never did.” This restructuring during Cindy’s transitions indicates that her family struggled to adjust from the traditional sociopolitical dynamics of their family. Despite Daniel’s failure to follow through on some responsibilities, “things kind of fell into a nice little pattern.”

Leslie told of her dilemma as she was getting her master’s degree, “My boys were in high school and one was a graduate, one was in college, and [my daughter] was in middle school.” Leslie explained the difficult family dynamics she had while earning her master’s degree. “It was really hard on [my daughter]...’cause she just said, ‘I hate that you have to study. I hate that you have to do that.’...When I got done I said, ‘I am never going back to school ever, ever, ever.’” When Leslie was in her second year of administration, her husband passed away and Leslie stated, “it was just [my daughter] and [me].” They spent many evenings together watching high school games supervised

by Mom. Leslie and her daughter restructured and became a non-traditional family with Leslie as the only caregiver and breadwinner.

After taking time off to have a baby, Peg went back to work. Her career had been delayed for a short time in order to mother her newborn son (Loder, 2005). When she returned to work, she began as a part-time middle school special education teacher and later a full-time special education teacher at the high school where she currently is principal. Peg knew her choices were encumbered with family needs when she discussed the time away from family she spent not only as a teacher but later, as principal.

I guess I was probably more unavailable to my family, and I still am, but I don't know that that's any different than how I was as a teacher because I was really involved in the school as a teacher as well, as far as taking care of my extracurricular activities.

Peg further explained the conflict she had as a wife, "I was not at home. And my husband was having a hard time because he's in a position, a job, that's all it is to him...but it's not his passion." Peg reflected on times when she was not at home, "I'm remembering a specific time when I was very, very unavailable. It was prom going on, and all of this stuff." Peg's spouse and son had to reconfigure their needs to accommodate Peg's transition as wife and mother to wife, mother, teacher and then administrator.

Although Peg understood the stress she put on her family, she described the timeliness for her career development, "Luckily, again, I didn't have little children that I was leaving at home with my husband having to worry about that, and so that was okay." She knew her choices to build her career affected her family. These decisions were encumbered with her sense of responsibility for her family's needs. Peg knew, although she studied and worked long hours, she still had the responsibilities necessary to organize

her home-related roles. These ideas are reminiscent of the literature that contrasts the experiences of women and men who are both busy in the work place, yet women face a “second shift” (Hochschild & Machung, 2003) when they return home. Women “are seen as being responsible for maintaining smooth, or preferably imperceptible, transitions between the worlds of home and work life” (Emslie & Hunt, 2009, p. 166). Peg’s traditional family experienced traditional sociopolitical constraints that required adjustments to accommodate her time away from home.

Megan did not want more responsibilities than a teacher would have. “I had a 3- and 5-year-old. I had no aspirations to add to my plate,” Megan expressed, confirming the encumbered nature of her choices as a young mother. Megan’s husband moved his office into their home enabling him to take on more parenting responsibilities. The household duties were divided, however, Megan described the division of chores as leaving her with cooking and the “really awful things, cleaning bathrooms and all of that, but he did the dusting, the vacuuming, all the laundry, and cleaned the whole outside of the house.” The household chores were divided, but maintained, for the most part, typical his and her duties (Eckman, 2004; Milkie & Petola, 1999; Starrels, 1994). Regarding splitting household duties “50-50,” Megan added, “It would have never happened.” To help balance the parenting needs, he provided the daily care of their two young children.

[He] worked [from] the house and set his watch. The kids go to daycare, the kids go to wherever they went while he was working, and he took them to every soccer practice, every basketball practice, and every baseball practice. He coached both of them in all of their sports, and so I was a very fortunate person. And, I was married to Mr. Mom.

Megan and “Mr. Mom” worked together finding the balance their family needed in each



stage of their daughters' lives. Her encumbered decisions led to a reconfiguration of the family as they shared domestic chores and shifted more of the caregiving to the father of their children. Their encumbered decisions in reconfiguring their gendered family roles (Connell, 2005; Petroski & Edley, 2006) is another example of participants' strength as they "accepted viewpoints, tasks, and changed relationships that they would not have dreamed of a mere decade ago" (Sherif, 1979, p. 126). Adkison (1981) pointed out that women have begun to "redefine themselves and change the social relationships which maintained stereotypic self-definitions" (p. 328).

**Mothering-related conflicts.** When asked to describe decisions she made in her career towards the principalship that conflicted with her other roles as a woman, Georgette responded passionately about her encumbered and conflicted choices with the following example. One of her sons, Randy, would have been a sophomore in high school the first year Georgette was an assistant principal. He was a computer wizard and gamer most of the time. "I made him come with me to my high school because I was his mom." Although Randy participated in student government and the gifted and talented magnet school in junior high, he did not do so in his mother's high school. She believed her best choice was to

...[make] him go to the high school with me, because I felt like he was right at that stage in his life where he would have been home on the computer with no adult supervision a lot with Mom working 12-hour days, and that would have been dangerous.

Georgette observed Randy's group of friends and their poor influences, and moved him to her high school for one year. "He would have been with a certain group of friends, you know, so I jerked him out of his friend group, his peer group, his social group and put

him in [the high school] with me for that year.” As Georgette relayed this part of the interview, she tenderly discussed the burden a mother feels when she tries to do what she feels is best for her son, yet, later, noted some pains for that decision. “I think it was a good bonding experience for us a mother and a son, you know, although it was really hard on him to see me during that first year.” Georgette used her son as a sounding board in processing her day, “I would drive home with him, and I didn’t realize that it was painful for him to hear me talking about my day or things like that, you know, it just wasn’t perfectly appropriate, and that was tough.”

Georgette created opportunities to maximize her mother role as she felt Randy needed her attentions. She continued to explain the encumbered choices she made justifying the decisions of having her son accompany her to the school where she worked.

Now, it [wouldn’t have been] as high a price we would have paid if he would have stayed here and I would have been in more like a teacher role where I would have been around because I switched to the 12 hour a day thing. Because if I had just been in the classroom and I had been a mom and I had been home by 3:30 or 4:00 most days because I was a junior high math teacher, he could have merrily gone there, and I could have watched and tended because he ended up with friends that were addicted to gaming, addicted to drugs, who died from...that group of friends ended up with a lot of problems. Those weren’t his only group of friends, but I think that he wouldn’t have had someone to shepherd him, and that’s why I made him go with me.... So, there were some upsides, but I think there was a price that we paid.

Randy’s perception was that these years of his mother attending classes, mentoring, and supervising students instilled goals for higher education.

It was interesting growing up. I have [thought] many times [about] the impact it has had on my life that she has been pursuing her career so much. It has impacted me in good ways and in ways that I didn’t foresee that it would...in good ways in that it’s always pushed me to kind of see where she’s gone and, you know, attain a higher education. I’m graduating from [University] soon and I’m looking at pursuing a master’s degree, and so kind of that has been a great thing.

As I spoke with Randy about his understanding of his mother's career life history, I wished that the two of them could sit together and hear each other's point of view regarding Georgette's encumbered choices as a mother to Randy during her career building experiences and his teenage years. The changing norms in Georgette and Randy's family included conflicted and encumbered choices, yet, instilled an appreciation for continuous education for at least one son, who may not have made that choice without his mother's example.

By the time Peg gained a principalship, her son attended the high school where she was working. He believed she sometimes confused her roles. "I got accused by my son one time, 'Quit treating me like I'm one of your students at school, you know, I'm your son, remember?'" This could be a difficult task for women to separate the nature of their parental relationships with their children from those they maintain as school principal for the community's children. Peg smiled as she reflected on those times she and her son needed to be reminded they were mother and son within the school system.

Cindy describes the encumbered nature of her choices when her daughter was young and the trade-off Cindy made by being away as an assistant principal. Cindy and Daniel had one ten year old daughter who expressed her apprehension about her mom becoming a principal, "She was a little leery about, 'My mom's going to be what?' because she was just reaching the stage where she was thinking, 'Well, not at my school, I hope.'" Acknowledging her daughter's position, Cindy expressed the encumbered choices she made as a trade-off. "I thought about my family.... You know, a 10-year-old girl needs her mom a little more, and I brought her to a lot of games, but...there are trade-

offs for everything, and that was a trade-off for me.” Powell and Mainiero (1992) recognized the complexity of women’s career pathways with the accompanying “tradeoffs and temporary sacrifices” (p. 231) and Goodwin and Fiske (2001) documented the “data allud[ing] to the socialization processes that encourage women to adopt traditional caregiving roles” (p. 362). Cindy navigated against sociopolitical traditions and reconfigured her family, yet her encumbered choices in doing so were noted with sadness in her words.

**Subtle resistance.** Families made adjustments, changed patterns, passed the baton, divided household duties, and made trade-offs in support of Mom’s career. This did not happen without resistance. Cindy described how Daniel agreed to do more chores around the house and emphasized, “Which he never did.” I sensed there must have been some resistance from Daniel during Cindy’s transitional times when she added, “I would like that in the report!” Daniel said, “I even helped her financially. I borrowed money from one of my retirement accounts to help fund her tuition costs.” At my first read, I did not notice the subtleness of the sociopolitical theme of Daniel’s heroic financial statement. I *even* helped her financially. His words were telling as he described using *his* retirement for *her* tuition, rather than noting that they used existing retirement funds to build Cindy’s capacity to earn a greater retirement adding to the family resources. Support was there, yet there was resistance to changing the subordinate place from which women are learning to break away.

When Georgette told how “seamlessly” she and her husband “passed that baton” I first thought of the support he was giving her to *help out* with domestic duties with

children and housework. Then I recognized the gendered theme of her duties and his duties as the research addresses in Kroska (2003), Milkie and Peltola (1999), and Starrels (1994). Rather than viewing domestic labor and childcare as work to be divided, men's contributions are still frequently considered to be *helping* their spouse do what is assumed to be her responsibility.

By the time Leslie became assistant principal and later principal, she had remarried and had an additional four young daughters to mother. James, her husband, described how they chose to work through what were perceived to be Leslie's many responsibilities.

I also think that when she became a principal, in our family, the reason she took the job in the district [later on] was because [at first] we had a daughter who was just coming over to high school with four daughters still to raise. And, so it was a point where we needed to have someone home after school. But, once that daughter had moved through high school, we had a little bit of a gap, and she chose to go to the high school. So, I think a lot of it has to do with the balancing of what was important 'cause she never would have taken that job if she would have had children at home who needed her.

Although supportive, James' comments made me question the conflicts and encumbered choices Leslie made in leaving her assistant high school principal position and to take a district position. The subtle resistance constraining whether Leslie would continue in her role as assistant principal or stay at home to raise his four daughters is an indicator of another decision shaped by sociopolitical dynamics. She did not take the high school principal position until "that daughter had moved through high school, [and] we had a little bit of a gap." I noticed contradicting statements, "we needed to have someone home after school" keeping Leslie at a district office position, yet when there was a gap, she could go back to high school, "because my job [at the district] didn't have nighttime

activities so I could be home after school.” Decisions were made around Leslie’s role as mother until her daughter was out of high school, then they shifted slightly for his daughters’ care. Apparently, both James and Leslie agreed with Emslie and Hunt (2009) that the woman is responsible in maintaining “transitions between the worlds of home and work life” (p. 166; see also Connell, 2005).

It took some time for Peg’s husband to figure out that her passions had just begun with her newly acquired administration position. “Once he understood that my passion just happened to be my career and I could help him understand that, then it was okay, and it has been ever since then. He knows...this is my life.” Peg, her son, and husband eventually found the balance needed, challenging the “dominant gendered discourse” (Eckman, 2004, p. 205; Grogan, 1996) that expects Peg to adjust her career around the needs of her family. Peg’s husband resisted until she was able to “help him understand” that high school is her life. Encumbered with her commitment to her family and career, once Peg “could help him understand that,” her husband was “okay” with Peg’s commitment to her career. The sociopolitical influences of gendered role definitions that led to resistance in Peg’s home were subtle but were there, nonetheless.

To summarize, participants’ multiple roles were encumbered with choices about family restructuring and adjustments in the changes in sociopolitical role as they acquired more responsibilities as career women. Language was telling as expressions such as “Dad played mom,” and he was “Mr. Mom,” continued to suggest that caretaking and household duties rightfully belong to women. Responsibilities were shared, but roles remained conflicted for mothers. Subtle resistance followed necessary changes in some

families. *His* retirement funds were used to supply *her* tuition, *mothers* were not home, and it *took time for spouses to accept* wife's new identity.

### **Navigating Against Gendered Psychological Dynamics**

While participants gained confidence and experience in their new roles as administrators, they recognized new identities and skills they did not know they had. Gendered psychological dynamics, however, remained a part of their experiences. Several noted loneliness that accompanied being at the top and realized they needed others to network with or bounce ideas with beyond their male counterparts. Some attributed their successes to their luck or chance. Others told of their growing recognition of their leadership skills as they worked toward becoming principals and experienced a transition and embraced personal successes. Choices made by women are often encumbered with society's expectations, schemas, and stereotypes about their gendered identity (Blount, 1999; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Gerlicher, 2002; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Valian, 1998; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). The participants met these challenges with fortitude. They chose to cope and deal with the stereotypes in positive ways as they gained positions beyond former roles that had conformed to gendered schemas.

**Gender stereotypes.** Participants described situations where they felt the sting of being a woman in a perceived man's place. The women expressed perceptions of gender-based discrimination, such as rejection as a new leader, being patronized by parents and coaches, instances of not being listened to, being bullied, and being excluded from

processes in athletic region meetings. These incidents interfered with, but did not stop participant's progress as leaders. Participants described the gender related conflicts as occurring at various stages in their career life histories.

Once Megan was promoted to the high school as principal, she was invited to the end-of-school-year party to meet the teachers. She had been a student to many of the retiring teachers that year, one of which welcomed her with black carnations. “[He] brought me a dozen black carnations with orange ribbons and said, ‘I’m leaving just in time, I hope this goes well for you.’” She also described how the English department members of “smart men” welcomed her by saying, “‘Well, the last woman they hired in these offices at [\_\_\_\_\_ High School] ran off with someone from [the District] office, I certainly hope you last longer than she did.’ And, I’m thinking, ‘Holy cow!’” Megan explained that in the first year, “It was them trying to figure out if I was smart enough to do the job.” The reception Megan received demonstrates the difficulty they had accepting her successes as a leader (Valian, 1998) perpetuating the marginalization of women.

The Athletic Director (AD) at Megan's school described the quarterly athletic meetings with the region schools, letting her know he was concerned about her attending the meetings, “All those guys do is micromanage the ADs and try to take apart the stuff that the ADs agree to do.” He said, “I...don't like those guys, they're condescending, they're micromanagers....” Megan responded by staying away from the meetings and consulted with her AD to stay informed; however, when it was her school's year to host the meetings, she spoke with another principal about her commitment. He questioned her practice of nonattendance in previous years.



“Well, I’m sure you don’t want any part of this because you don’t come to our meetings....” And, I said,

“You know, I don’t come to the meetings ‘cause this is what my AD is telling me.”... Dead silence on the phone.

“Well ya, that is kind of what we do but, you know, if you don’t want to be a part of that...”

Megan took her turn at hosting and was eventually president of the region’s athletic meetings, earning the respect of her peers, “By the time I was done...I mean, when I left, they gave me plaques and stuff, and they gave hugs and gave me all their addresses.”

Given the opportunity to lead, Megan quickly earned the trust of her constituents.

You have to show them, and once you get the chance to do that, then they get that...you have a brain and you’re not there because you’re connected to anybody, you’re there because you have the stuff to do the job.

Megan explained how she tried to find out “what makes them tick” and that she “was going to learn what I could from them.” She told me she got to the “point where I understood a lot of their thinking processes.” Megan concluded that, “There was a little bit of having to prove myself” in earning the respect for her position.

Georgette had similar experiences with the athletic region meetings as she described the first year attending the meetings. She was disappointed in the men’s behaviors.

I thought that that would be a road block if I wasn’t able to get along with these folks and try to kind of figure out where they are coming from, and they were very kind to me, but it was really awkward the first few months in region meeting...They would say, “Hey gentleman and lady.”...They were really worried that I would be very edgy or touchy or something like that because, you know how heated those discussions get in region meeting when it is about important stuff, and you know the language can get a little colorful and stuff like that, and they are testing you a little to see what is it that is your boundary. It is like, “Oh, my gosh, seriously, it is 2013.”... That is a barrier for women, the

gender thing, I think, is a deal.

She was able to find common ground with the region principals, although she was the lone female principal in the meetings. Georgette's efforts in the athletic region meetings boosted her high school to a more competitive level region in team sports. She acknowledged the difficulty of the change, yet understood the challenge her ambitions would create for her school. "It is going to be nice if we don't get our lunch eaten. It's my goal to get us ready...I am ambitious...I didn't know that I was ambitious, but clearly I am." Georgette's ambitious negotiations with the athletic region committee members is an example of moving past the schemas and stereotypes these men had before they worked with Georgette.

Alice described a male principal's misunderstanding of his two women assistant principals at the high school, "He really didn't have a sense for women administrators. He thought that anything that had to do with athletic activity, he would say, 'You little women [don't need to] worry about this. Us men will take care of it.'" Clearly, Alice's principal at that time, embraced the stereotype of women as the weaker sex and this affected his interactions with his women high school leaders.

Sandy noted that many administrators selected for high schools in her district have a background in coaching. "If you look at our district, quite a few of our admins have been...coaches." Sandy stated twice that not being a coach was a roadblock in her district, although in her previous career, she worked with personnel in the US Air Force B-2 Stealth Bomber Division and has the commendations indicating her skills. "I find it interesting that one of the comments made to me by someone in a higher position than

myself, [was that] their biggest concern about me being here at my school was whether or not I could handle the coaches.”

Sandy experienced conflicts with the behavior of others she felt was related to their stereotypical views of femininity as she aspired to be a leader in the schools. Sarah said that Sandy was very capable of handling the coaches while keeping her femininity. Sandy told me how she felt insulted when she was introduced as “professionally dressed” as though her appearance defined her abilities. This was not only insulting, but patronizing to Sandy.

Both times I was introduced as someone who was always very professionally dressed, and I found that quite insulting in a way because I am much more than the way I dress. I dress professionally because I feel I am a professional and, you know, that just is part of my job and that should be nothing unusual, but to make that the main focus of my ability was really insulting to me.

Valian (1998) found attractiveness a disadvantage to women. Stereotypical attractiveness hurts *her* professionalism but enhances *his* professionalism. “The heightened awareness of an attractive man’s maleness leads to impressions of competence and ability. Awareness of an attractive woman’s femaleness, by contrast, leads one to see her as lacking in competence and ability” (pp. 137-138). Sandy’s reaction to comments about her appearance may be warranted. Valian asserted that although Sandy may be perceived as looking professional, her ideas may be taken less seriously if her appearance is more noted than her contributions (p. 5).

Not all of the participants perceived gender discrimination in the workplace. Cindy felt she had very good support from the district she worked in when her administration career began. She was in a different district than Peg, Sandy, Megan, and

Georgette. When asked if Cindy had experienced barriers or roadblocks keeping her from becoming an administrator, she emphatically answered, “Not one. In fact, I felt total support from the district administration.” However, she described situations that clearly demonstrate her frustrations. Cindy told about coaches trying to push papers for signature without allowing her to review its details. Their behavior seemed to be saying “After all, what does she know about football or basketball?”

I have dealt with a couple of mindsets like that or boys who will come in and see that their assistant principal is a female and think they can charm you, you know, bat the eyelashes, smile at ya, call ya honey, that kind of thing. The worst is coaches who will assume I know nothing about football, or basketball, or whatever and patronize me. “Well, you really don’t understand this, but just sign this okay?” [It’s] that kind of thing, and so, [yes], I’ve had my share of that. Mostly, I deal with it. Well, you can deal with it with kind of a sense of humor, but sometimes it requires the same kind of attitude and response [they are using]. So, sometimes it requires being just as obstinate as they are.

“No, I’m not going to sign it ‘til I have a chance to read it.”

“Oh seriously, well, I’ll just take it to some other VP.”

“Okay.”

And they go, “I’m supposed to get your signature.”

I’d said, “Well, let me read it first.”

“I’ve just told you what it says.”

Okay, I’m sure they wouldn’t do that to a male.

Cindy also told of parents who, looking for an assistant principal and finding that their child’s assistant principal was female, asked for a man.

I’d pick up the phone, and I’d say, “This is [Cindy],” and they would say,

“Oh, I wanted an assistant principal.”

I said, "You've got one."

"Oh, are there any men assistant principals?"

I go, "Yes, absolutely, I'll send you to \_\_\_\_\_" And, I would send them to \_\_\_\_\_.

Inevitably... they would call me back and say,

"Um, I think you're my daughter's assistant principal, can I work with you?"

"Well, yes, I think we can arrange that even though I'm a female."

Cindy's reflection on such behavior brought a smile to her face, yet I observed that a sting was remembered.

Sandy's experiences were similar when she stated, "A lot of times they see that you're a woman, and they want to bully." Sandy explained the more experience she has, the easier it is to deal with bullies, "But with each passing year and the more experiences I feel, 'You know what? You're not going to bully me, you're not going to.'" She described a situation with an aggressive parent in her office not too long ago, "I have had a man in my office this year that intimidated my entire front office staff." Sandy took control of the conversation confronting the man's behavior and calmly had a conversation with him.

Peg experienced conflicts with gender stereotypes in working with one of her leaders. She explained a time when she made a suggestion to the principal who ignored her several times, yet when her counterpart, Brent brought up the same idea, he was immediately listened to, verifying Valian's (1998) suggestion that women need to "worry about being ignored" (p. 5).

There was a time when we were trying to make a decision on something. I don't even remember what it was, and I had suggested something a couple of times, and

I'm not even sure that it was heard. Then, when [Brent] the other administrator I was talking about earlier, joined our crew, we were at a meeting, and he brought the same exact thing up. The principal said, "That's a great idea, let's do that." Oh, I came unglued, not in front of everybody, but I told [Brent] because we were friends, I said, "I have said that three times, and now you say it and..." so then we laughed about it for a long time, but that was pretty typical of that relationship there.

Peg felt she was bypassed as an idea creator because of her gender. Brent agreed. He brought up the same scenario when Peg's ideas were ignored and added another time when she walked out of the principal's office, exclaiming: "I'm not his secretary!"

When participants described a gender conflicted barrier they experienced, they shrugged their shoulders as though in unbelief that others still had stereotypical gender perceptions. Participants rolled onward without hesitation through the gendered conflicts as Georgette claimed, "Oh my gosh, seriously, it is 2013!" Although they have an understanding of the weak grounds the perceived perceptions stood on, a sting was felt. "Black carnations," "smart enough to do the job," "prove myself," "coaches," "Hey, gentleman and lady," "You really don't understand this, but just sign this, okay?" "You little women," "Professional dress," "I'm not his secretary!" But Alice noted a shift in gender presumptions when she asked her principal his view on having two women assistant principals, "He says, 'I'll get twice as much work done.'" However, working harder to get twice as much done is a barrier these women felt they had to do to prove themselves competent.

**Lonely at the top.** Although participants felt success and support as principals, several explained the loneliness in the position. Breaking into the "independent society" described by Beauvoir (1976, p. 597) has taken time, showing that the "individuals

change themselves as they change their practices, and their practices as they change themselves” (Sherif, 1979, p. 127), thus, changing society’s schema for women leadership in high schools.

Alice recognized an unofficial network that she did not belong to and told me the difficulty she had in being noticed for her leadership, “But yet it was hard to get what you did recognized because [the men] had a social network that women did not have.” Alice said there was “an unwritten conversation that happens” that she was not able to join.

Georgette added, “There are moments when it feels a little lonely.” Georgette and a woman friend, who heads an “improvement” school (a specialized school targeting at-risk high school students to help them achieve graduation), get together occasionally, but Georgette explained, “Her problems will be different than my problems, but it will be really nice to have that shared thing.” Although Georgette feels comfortable with the men administrators, she expressed the loneliness of being a woman among the men. “The men that surround me up there, they are great, but you feel like you have to do a lot of backtracking and explaining if you have any kind of problem that relates to gender.” Georgette did not expound on what these gender problems might be but her comment was an acknowledgement that such problems still do exist.

Leslie made sure she shared her experiences with the importance of networking. She told of the “Hard decisions [she had to make as principal], and you just have to say the same thing over, be committed to what you’re doing, and not get your feelings hurt that people don’t like it.” Building a support system was important to Leslie.

Make sure you have a support system with either the people you go through the program with, the assistant principals that you’ve worked with, [or] the principals

that you've worked with so that you can bounce ideas off of them, get input, and don't feel like you're alone.

Leslie wanted her administrative team to work together. "As a principal, I felt very strong about using my team and keeping them included in everything. Some principals don't do that. They keep everything to themselves, and that makes their stress level much higher." In this way, Leslie was not alone in decisions and found support within her administration team.

Sandy suggested networking and mentoring one another. "Network and mentor... because it's very lonely." She added, "That's the one thing that I would say I've found this year is the guys are very well interconnected, the men are, and we joke and we say that it's the golfing." Sandy said that, "One of our female administrators in our district, she's pretty connected into that group." But for Sandy and others that are not connected, "It can be very lonely even though they've assigned a mentor to me, you know, I'd call [the mentor] once in a great while."

Alice, Georgette, Leslie, and Sandy noted the loneliness of being at the top as a woman. None of them suggested they needed the network of the men at the top but did suggest creating personal networks and support systems beyond their men peers. Sandy suggested that women high school principals are more on their own when she said, "I think we tend to be more solo creatures, kind of do our thing" and are not dependent on others.

**Perception of support as lucky.** Although the participants acknowledged support in their career life histories, many discussed the support as though they did not deserve it or thought was very lucky. Valian (1998) discussed the psychological backlash that



women experience when her abilities are attributed to something other than ability, "... an amplification of the importance of causes other than ability" such as being a "hard worker," an "over-achiever," or an "extremely lucky person" does not "especially rebound to her credit" (p. 170; see also Swim & Sanna, 1996). These women self-assessed themselves as lucky, not acknowledging their competency, ability, or worthiness which certainly contributed to their "luck."

When reflecting on her high school guidance counselor's support, Alice simply said, "He took some interest to me." She described her luck at being a middle school principal before becoming a high school principal with the emphasis of several "really's," "I am really, really, really, really fortunate that I had the opportunity of becoming a middle school principal before becoming a high school principal." Alice's fortune gave her necessary experiences as an administrator, yet when she over-emphasized it, I observed her extreme appreciation reflected her view of her opportunity as occurring because of luck rather than as a result of her skills and experience.

Cindy showed her surprise that she received admissions into the administration program.

I [am] still amazed when I think about it.... There were more than 100 applicants in my year and I thought...well, you know I'm really not who they're looking for...I'm a little older, I'm in my early 40s, and they're probably looking for younger people who can spend more time at administration...that year, my year, they only picked one person.

Cindy was that one person. Although older and in competition with over 100 other applicants, Cindy did not think of her experience as an advantage and was "amazed" at her luck.

Georgette and Megan described their lucky support from husbands. Georgette's husband was a "14." "On a supportive husband scale of 0 to 10, I have one that's like a 12, a 13, or a 14." Megan's husband was "Mr. Supportive Human of the Universe." Such comments suggest that it must be unusual to have husbands who are supportive of women's careers. Both Grogan (1999) and Young and McLeod (2001) found infrequent husband support reinforcing the gendered dynamics these women's families navigated against. Loder (2005) summarized the importance of spousal and family support, "Notably, support or lack of support from family members, especially from spouses or partners, can make or break a woman's decisions to become an administrator" (p. 743). Being married to a "14" or "Mr. Supportive Human of the Universe" is not only unusual, but was perceived as exceptionally commendable by Georgette and Megan.

Although she prepared for and interviewed for the principalship, Georgette was shocked when she received it, "It was quite the shock." Could it have been luck? Peg attributed the stars for her administration position, "The stars were aligned, it all fell into place, and it was at the right place at the right time." Sandy said she was "fortunate" in much of her career life history, "I was fortunate enough to get a full-time internship.... I really feel fortunate that I had some very strong women that were in my life.... I was really fortunate because the committee knew me."

Whether attributing their success to fortune, luck, or alignment of the stars, participants expressed their surprise that they, too, could be leaders of a high school. This is reminiscent of the literature indicating women's tendency to be reluctant to consider themselves and their skills worthy of recognition, as Valian (1998) discussed.

**Embracing personal success.** As I listened to interviews with participants, I noticed an uplifting spike in our conversations when they began to talk about their schools. Successful progress scores were noted and pride was evident. Georgette commented that she was not only competitive and ambitious for her school, but grateful for their successes, “I am competitive, I am ambitious, and I’m grateful for this time. And, I’m really proud of my school. Our graduation rate [went] from 78% to 89%.” Alice was noticed when her school’s achievement scores doubled, “I think I got some attention...I think they noticed...’Oh my gosh...the test scores have doubled!’” Megan explained the years she spent building programs for the students, “I had spent 12 years of my life building a pretty comprehensive academic program, and AP classes.” These women knew their work was successfully increasing students’ learning and they recognized their roles as educational leaders.

Cindy, Megan, Peg, and Georgette let me know of their transitions into administration and the understanding they have for their new roles. Successfully implementing choices that had been encumbered with the responsibilities of their traditional roles as woman, wife, parent, and teacher brought them to this place in their career life histories. They pushed through personal psychological dynamics as they gained understanding in their roles as high school principals. It was my perception that all seven of the participants have come to a better understanding of their roles as women leaders breaking into a traditionally male position and, moving beyond tendencies to attribute their success to good luck, they have embraced their personal and professional success and appreciate all that they had been able to accomplish.

**Developing new identity.** Cindy, Megan, Peg, and Georgette recognized a transition in themselves when they knew they were educators who had moved beyond teaching to become principals. Cindy spoke of returning to the principalship during a difficult time in her life and wanted to express what she had learned to others by giving her thoughts. Peg acknowledged that she was now where she is supposed to be. Georgette spoke of her leadership dispositions.

Cindy's second high school principalship has come at a different time in life. Her daughter is grown; however, her husband struggles with depression and she feels she needs to deal with that also. Cindy took a district position to have evenings available, yet came to a personal understanding that she needed to "start reflecting inward" about the encumbered nature of her choices. When she did so, she was ready to accept another high school principal position.

This most recent [decision] to go back out to a high school was a big conflict. It was a tough time in my husband's life. He was struggling with depression. My daughter was grown and on her own, and so it wasn't [difficult] with her, but when you get to be a little older...you'll kind of see that there is a point you reach where you know that instead of projecting outward you need to start reflecting inward.

Cindy continued to explain the conflicts that influenced her choices as she found that she had a tough road to walk, but needed to do so for her own well-being.

I had actually reached that point..., and that's one of the reasons I took the job at the district office...is to say, "that's going to keep me out of the night activities for a while, that'll give me a time to still serve and to still work with principals and teachers but not necessarily give my life away," Right. So, to make the decision to go back out to a high school was really a tough one, but it also may be saved my life in some respects.

Her strength to overcome obstacles was informed by the wisdom she achieved by

learning from the lessons she had learned navigating her encumbered choices.

It took forcing me to quit identifying with my role.... My whole life I was identified with—I am a mother, I am a teacher, I am an administrator, I am a wife—Okay, but that isn't who I am.... Those are a little bit like if you have an umbrella of who you are, those are the spines, the attachments—I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I'm a teacher, I drive a car—those are all just attachments, but I was focusing on those as my identity. See, my identity really is just I'm a person seeking enlightenment, and so if I make decisions based on that, of course using all my experience, okay because you can't ever make a decision without [considering what you've learned], then the right things happen and you make it for the right reasons.... So, I had to let go and say, "I am not the...schools, I am not this, I am just a person seeking enlightenment," and then it's really easy if you think about it from that point of view, then all of the decisions from then on became easy, even the decision to go back out to a school, which is, you know going back into all those nights.

Cindy's reflection on this stage in her career life history shows her understanding of her growth, confidence, and assurance of the strength of her abilities.

Megan described her first years of principalship as difficult, "My first 3 years as a high school principal I cried a lot because I really thought people were going to appreciate how much I was trying to help them." These were the people who welcomed her with black carnations. Megan realized she needed an adjustment in her approaches to her teachers.

Once you get to the point where you realize that people are in it for what's in it for them, they need you to tell them how does this make my life better or easier, and this is my whole worry with advisement.... That a big part of what we have to do is help teachers understand that this is not only going to help the kids, it's going to help you, and once you realize that...you depersonalize [the incidents] when they come after you with whatever they [think].

Megan recognized her growth as she added, "I have grown up a lot.... You learn to reason." By developing her new identity, Megan found that her faith is a foundation of her leadership. "I think my faith is a big piece of who I am, and it's all around service

leadership, and so for me it really is about service to kids and families.” She reflected on the many teachers expressing their appreciation to her after leaving her school.

It really is about service to the teachers that I lead, and those values, I think, is why, you know, when my teachers retired they called me or they let me know from other places. And, I hear all the time how much they miss my leadership kind of thing, and I don’t think that’s because of anything but that I always tried to look out for them and nurture them, and so that’s a character. I guess it’s a mothering kind of thing.

This association of caring with mothering is another example of the gendered nature of our view of “mother” and “father,” with mothering associated strongly with caring.

Megan’s first 3 years of principalship may have been difficult, however, as her new identity as a service leader developed, she was appreciated. She summarized her passion by saying, “It matters to me. You know, it just matters to me.”

Peg verified her confidence in her career as high school principal, “The stars were aligned, it all fell into place, and it was at the right place at the right time. I really feel I am doing what I am supposed to be doing.” She recognized her new identity in her career life history as principal.

Georgette explained the dispositions it takes to be an effective high school principal, “It’s hard for me to tell because there are a lot of dispositions that I have that are more what would be considered typically male.” Georgette recognizes her own disposition, “I thank heavens, thank heavens, because I think there are a lot of things in the role of the high school principal that are a little more of that typically male.” She describes her careful approach in holding staff accountable.

I have to really watch out that I’m not shrewish. It could be interpreted as nagging or shrewish when really nagging is that accountability. You know, if I hold you accountable, am I nagging you or am I holding you accountable?

While working with her administration team, Georgette claims they are strategic about gender roles. “I’ll say I don’t want to look like I’m being a nag here...let’s make the accountability piece for this come from all three of us instead of just from me.” Even as Georgette embraces her new identity, she carries the persistent gendered language, “nagging,” “shrewish,” and “just from me,” which influenced her personal identity. Georgette found there are times or situations that she must be the deliverer of information in order to take ownership of decisions and actions.

On the other hand, there are other times when I don’t want to look like I’m not assertive or aggressive and [want to be viewed as] really leading the school, and so things that my APs [Assistant Principals] could have easily done and gotten people to do or made happen, we will purposely have me do it as the figure head, and so I am the person that is owning that.

Developing her new identity as principal at high school, Georgette recognized the need to stand as a leader strategically making and implementing administrative decisions as a team, yet she used gendered language describing her identity.

## **Summary**

Participants’ career life histories were peppered with encumbered choices and conflicts. These women navigated against the sociopolitical dynamics of traditional families, mothering-related conflicts, and experiencing subtle resistance from spouses or children. Fathers took on more caregiving responsibilities, children attended schools with Mom as assistant principals, and spouses learned to accept a participant’s passions for her educational roles. These women broke through the psychological dynamics navigating against the gender stereotypes, loneliness, and perceptions that their success was based on luck. New identities were developed as the women accepted the responsibilities and

owned the identity of the principalship.

### **Summary**

The themes of an unintended journey, support, overcoming barriers, and encumbered choices were discussed. Participants' unintended journey began during the preadministration stage when their love of teaching coupled with leadership opportunities, were noticed by supervisors. An invitation to join the administrative team was extended and reluctantly accepted by these women. They began to navigate to maintain a work and family balance as they gained new identities as administrators. Several of the women suddenly realized their identity during their transitional period between teaching and administration. Participants noted personal growth as they assumed the role of the principalship and met challenges pragmatically and with integrity.

These women recognized the support they received during each stage of their career life histories. Participants had support helping them gain entrance to college studies. When they began administration endorsement classes, they received work and family support enabling them to complete programs. Working conditions were adjusted and families reconfigured to accommodate participants' busy schedule. When they gained administration positions, families participated in Mom's career by attending school events supervised by her, and families' responsibilities were adjusted.

Participants overcame barriers and roadblocks during each stage of their career life histories. Some had clear college goals and direction and others stumbled into education as their majors. No one aspired to become a principal. Parenting caused



roadblocks for some participants. As they made transitions into administration, new aspirations needed to be developed, family dynamics needed attention, and some participants' faced what they perceived as systemic roadblocks preventing wanted promotions. The women felt they needed to prove themselves as worthy leaders at high school. Some reflected on the barriers in their growth and wanted to share their thoughts on what they learned.

Encumbered choices and conflicts pepper the career life histories of these women. They learned to navigate against the sociopolitical dynamics by restructuring traditional families, managing mothering-related conflicts, and turning around subtle family resistance. Participants fought gendered psychological dynamics, navigating against others' perceptions as they confronted gender stereotypes and thwarted loneliness by creating networks. Although initially they perceived their successes as lucky, these women gradually recognized the strength of their experiences and skills and began to thrive in their new identities as high school principals.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

As I listened to interviews and analyzed the contents, I was convinced that these women are competent, passionate leaders. Although their careers tended to be directionless and unintentional, they were principals-in-the-making early in their career life histories. Supported by family, friends, and supervisors, participants were buoyed up enabling them to manage their responsibilities as they filled multiple roles. These women navigated family obligations, most of them raising their children with a reconfigured family with Dad increasing his part in the caregiving and household chores. Not considering barriers as a stoppage to their advancement, participants confronted them in a matter-of-fact, pragmatic manner and steered through career life history transitions. These women fought against sociopolitical dynamics by becoming high school principals in a male-dominated field. Encumbered choices peppered their careers while they negotiated psychological barriers. They have grown into their new identities as principals in several large high schools, influencing many with their leadership and vigor. Peg declared, “We are educators. It’s who we are.” illustrating the pragmatic strength and spirit the participants have in leading their students. Their career life histories presented a rich understanding of the complexities of the participants’ journeys from their preadministration career, transition to administration, and finally, as high school principals.

This chapter includes (a) the importance of the study, (b) the implications of the study, and (c) suggestions for future research. Presented first is the importance of the study and how it brings an understanding through a feminist sociopolitical perspective within participant's career life histories (Beauvoir, 1976; Eckman, 2004; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Sherif, 1979; Stone, 2007; Sandberg, 2013). Then the psychological dynamics that continue to marginalize women are addressed (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Valian, 1998; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). Next, I discuss the importance of understanding the gendered nature of the encumbered choices women make throughout their careers (Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Smith, 2011; Young & McLeod, 2001).

After that, I discuss the implications of the sociopolitical dynamics that maintain gender inequity, the gendered psychological challenges of the participants' career life histories, the nature of their encumbered choices, and finally, the successes of the seven participants (Adkison, 1981; Grogan, 1999; Ridgeway, 2001; Smith, 2011). Finally, I suggest future studies to expand current understanding of gendered dynamics in the field of education leadership particularly as they relate to educators' career life histories.

### **Importance of the Study**

The career life histories of these women brought me an understanding of the importance of recognizing the gendered sociopolitical and psychological dynamics in school leadership and the difficulties of the encumbered choices that led these seven women to successfully secure high school positions traditionally held by men. I

continually go back to Ehrenreich and English's (1978) "Woman Question" as a grounding concept: "...how shall we all—women and children and men—organize our lives together?" (p. 323) that remains relevant today. The seven women in this study navigated the "Women Question" by challenging sociopolitical and psychological norms, finding new identities, and becoming high school principals. Their family and supervisor's support led to reconfigured families, provided leadership opportunities, and adjusted working conditions. In the process, the participants have moved out of sociopolitical norms pushing against an "archaic feminine ideal" (p. 323). Yet the question remains unanswered as demonstrated by the barriers and encumbered choices that were a steady part of these women's career life histories. This research had confirmed the importance of Ehrenreich and English's summary of the Woman Question, "The Woman Question in the end is not the question of *women*. It is not we who are the problem and it is not our needs which are the mystery" (p. 323, italics in original). These women's career life histories add to the literature that explores women in education's advancement into administration but also in answering the Woman Question (Adkison, 1981; Arnot et al., 1988; Barnett, 2004; Baxter, 2009; Blount, 1998, 1999; Cohen, 2013; Coleman, 2005; Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Fuegen et al., 2004; Grogan, 1996, 1999, 2000; Harris et al. 2002; Patterson, 1994; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Shakeshaft, 1989; Skinner, 2009; Smith, 2011).

### **Understanding Gendered Sociopolitical Dynamics in School Leadership**

The sociopolitical dynamics in the participant's career life histories were

navigated and families were reconfigured in support of mom's new identity as an administrator. Although their career paths were relatively unintentional, each participant faced and successfully navigated social changes and transitioned into administration. Their aspirations developed as they left their typically female roles in classroom settings and assumed administrative positions in a typically male occupation.

Statistics presented in the literature established the gender imbalance in the high school principalship, nationally, and in the state where this study was conducted. The prevalence of men in these positions has its roots in the continual history of discrimination against women in leadership roles and which keeps them out of leadership positions. Because of these practices women typically remain in the "subordinate place" (Beauvoir, 1976, p. 597) as a teacher. Shaped by sociopolitical myths and systemic barriers such practices not only limit women's opportunities but deny students, school communities, and society the benefits of having qualified, passionate secondary women administrators.

**Historical gendered construction of school administration.** Blount's (1999) research discussed the historical perceptions that men are administrators and women are teachers which support practices that maintain a sociopolitical hierarchy in education. Examples of this dynamic from the career life histories of this study's participants that expose the continuation of this pattern include Cindy's experiences with community members wanting a male assistant principal, Peg's principal treating her as his secretary, the questioning of Sandy's femininity and her ability in handling coaches, Alice's principal not wanting the "little women" to worry about athletics, black carnations given

to Megan, and Georgette and Sandy's experiences with district's systemic practices, thus, perpetuating marginalization of these women as they shifted into roles typically reserved for men. Returning to Sherif (1979), the experiences of these women suggested it will take time for changes in society to change its practices. The women of this study changed themselves and their practices while they made the transition from teacher to administrator, acknowledging their roles as women in leadership. The families and the supervisors who extended invitations to join administration, recognized the need for social changes and accepted what Sherif said several years ago, "the rest of the world changes more slowly than the new awareness of self, and parts of both resist change or simply stay the same. Social power is not equitably distributed" (Sherif, 1979, p. 126). Subtle resistance of spouses in the women's career life histories exemplifies Sherif's understanding of social power unequally distributed. The career life histories demonstrate both resistance to change and a small shift in a part of the educational world that is changing through the eventual acceptance of the participants in a male dominated career.

**Understanding education myths.** It is important to understand how sociopolitical perceptions, beliefs, and practices affect the gendered composition of school communities. Whitaker and Lane (1990) claimed, "Men are socialized to persevere and seek professional success while women are not. Women are socialized to nurture and support others as they assume the traditional familial role of mother and caretaker of the home" (p. 9). Without role models, mentoring, and opportunities to break the socialized beliefs, it is difficult to increase the limited number of women in school leadership. Although Whitaker and Lane described their observations nearly 25 years

ago, communities and decision-makers in educational organizations still perpetuate these beliefs. To change the ongoing marginalizing of women in school administration, several myths must be broken: (a) men manage the schools and women nurture the learning, (b) females cannot discipline older students, particularly males, (c) females are too emotional, (d) females are too weak physically, and (e) males resent working for females (p. 9). The career life histories of the seven women demonstrated that women (a) cannot only nurture learning, but can also manage schools, (ab) disciplining students was not a barrier for these women, (c) these women were pragmatic and determined, not overly emotional, (d) not one participant mentioned “being too tired” to do their job, and (e) those who supported the black carnations became Megan’s supporters. The participants’ career life histories show how myths are being broken. Ehrenreich and English’s declared that women cannot “retreat into domestic isolation, clinging to an archaic feminine ideal” (p. 323). The seven women navigated against these myths and add to a force of women administrators creating updated norms in educational leadership.

**Understanding and facing systemic barriers.** Sociopolitical barriers are systemic. Blount (1999) noted that “male educators who moved into administration managed to find other males by rising above the sphere of women [teachers]” (p. 55) and maintaining their masculinity in a feminine career. As well, Sanchez and Thornton (2010) discussed the causes of inequality in educational leadership, “Perhaps part of the reason persistent inequities in educational leadership exist is because male leaders tend to dominate the field and tend to make employment decisions” (p. 3). The systemic barriers both Georgette and Sandy shared in their career life histories may well have been part of

the historically “gendered construction of school administration” (Blount, 1999, p. 1). Such examples of continued systemic barriers indicate the impact of the sociopolitical dynamics are slow to change. The two women were not deterred by the slowness as they continued to pursue their new identity as administrators and achieved their goals of becoming high school principals. Their persistence helped them to stand up to the archaic practices and they moved into administration.

**Benefits of having women administrators.** Although this study did not collect data on effectiveness or leadership styles of participants, external participants provided their observations. Marsha cried as she explained her appreciation for Megan’s leadership and how difficult it was to replace her. James shared examples of Leslie’s inclusive and collaborative leadership style. Sarah shared Sandy’s skilled ability to handle coaches where others have not been successful. Daniel boasted that he could talk all day long about Cindy’s leadership. Brent said he would retire the day Peg was transferred, “She [is] that good,” and Georgette and Alice’s test scores increased under their leadership. The literature adds to the observation external participants presented. Women principals (a) have greater knowledge of and concern for the instructional supervision (Whitaker & Lane, 1990), (b) seek community involvement (Adkison, 1981), (c) are problem solvers and task-oriented (Grogan, 1999), and (d) have an average of 10 more years of teaching experience than men administrators (Young & McLeod, 2001). The benefits of women administrators in high schools include providing a balance in methods of decision-making support of student learning.

**Summary.** Data from this study revealed that historical sociopolitical beliefs and



practices continue to perpetuate the imbalance of women in high school administration positions. Evidence that myths have been challenged by the career life histories of the study's participants was presented. Systemic barriers continue to plague aspiring women administrators, persist, but successes in the schools where these women were principals as reported by the women themselves and the external participants, confirm assertions of research that claim women in secondary administration benefit student learning with their tendency to be involved in instructional supervision.

### **Understanding Gendered Psychological Dynamics in School Leadership**

The seven women found a new identity as the transition from teacher to administrator took place. As the participants accepted the invitations to move into administration, their gendered psychological dynamics unintentionally shifted. Eventually, and sometimes suddenly, they recognized these personal shifts in their identity.

**Psychological shifts in identity.** Participants were successful teachers, traveled through a transitional stage, and found new identity and self-actualization as principals of high schools. It is important to realize that the experiences of the participants in this study reflect Marshall's (1985) findings of decades ago, suggesting cultural constraints are still hindering women's career aspirations in the field of education administration.

First, these women were teachers, busy with extra-curricular activities and school or district committees. Using Marshall's (1985) language, they remained in the culturally defined stage until an invitation was extended to them to consider administration.

Participants made a psychological shift when they accepted the invitation and began earning the necessary credentials. Their acknowledgement of a psychological shift came at different times in their career life histories. Next, they moved into a Transitional stage while they navigated work/family balance. Finally, once participants had developed a new identity as an administrator, they moved into the Self-Defined stage. Their experiences with community members', coaches', and parents' expectations that administrators would be male, was a "difficult socialization process" (Marshall, 1985, p. 137). However, these women's persistence and pragmatic approach in challenging difficult situations indicates their understanding of the psychological shift and "new awareness of self" (Sherif, 1979, p. 126). They learned to "change themselves as they change[d] their practices, and their practices as they change[d] themselves" (p. 127). Their psychological awareness of who they were becoming was recognized in their transitional stage. Moving from the first level of Culturally Defined into Transition required determination, tenacity, and patience. Marshall (1985) explained the "internal warfare" women fight in finding feminine ways to gain access to the administrative group, is a difficult psychological shift.

If they maintain the attitudes and behaviors that identify them with other women, they avoid the Transition anxiety but they are not seen as committed professionals. During Transition, women search for workable balance of feminine identity and professionalism. They learn to live with being marginal women. (p. 139)

Each of the seven participants' transitional stages developed differently, but they successfully have found balance as high school principals. These women function as marginal women in their high school principalships, balancing a psychological shift of

self while giving the opportunity to those around them to develop a psychological shift in their views of women in leadership positions.

**Self-defined.** Participants' sudden realization that they, too, could be effective administrators was discussed in Chapter V. The seven women suddenly realized a psychological change in themselves from teacher to administrator and moved into the Self-Defined stage defined by Marshall (1985). They became "comfortable, competent" (p. 137) high school principals and experienced a psychological shift. Peg's decision to take on the principalship is clearly an example of her psychological shift at this stage in her career life history. When she was asked to become principal within her first year as assistant principal, she quickly accepted, "I did not even hesitate. I didn't even talk to my husband about it." Peg's decision shows her acceptance of her new identity as a career vested woman who happens to be a mother and wife at the same time. She "didn't *even* talk" with her husband before accepting the challenge. Peg had transitioned into the "self-defined" stage described almost 30 years ago and made her own career decision. She had made a revision in her earlier ideas shaped by gendered psychological dynamics that suggested she should remain a special education teacher with no aspirations to be an administrator.

Cindy reflected on her realization that her identity was not connected to her roles as wife, mother, or teacher, "...my identity really is just I'm a person seeking enlightenment...." This explained her acceptance in being self-defined, and breaking earlier psychological perceptions during her culturally defined stage as a teacher.

When Megan added, "I have grown up a lot," she recognized her competency and

confidence. Her earlier ideas about remaining mostly responsible for the daytime care of her young children subsided as she stepped through the three stages, changing her gendered psychological point of view of her roles as mother, wife, teacher, and then, administrator. She worked to reorganize domestic and caregiving responsibilities within her family. The narrative of her career life history may reassure other women educators who might be considering the shift into administration roles.

While the participants journeyed through Marshall's stages as women administrators at different rates, they all transited from teacher (culturally defined), to principal-in-the-making (transitional), and finally to embracing personal successes (self-defined). They navigated against psychological dynamics of gender stereotypes, being lonely at the top, and believed they had lucky support. These women are strong examples of courage, integrity, and persistence as they lead a school of high school students heading into the big world. Perhaps, students will remember the gender diversity in teachers and leadership and change their sociopolitically shaped perception of high school leadership in the greater community. These women can provide examples of someone who has changed their stereotypical psychological ideas and became self-defined.

**Community psychological shifts.** As the seven women were able to lead their schools and build relationships with the staff and community, they recognized shifts in psychological perceptions of others in the context where they worked. Sandy's community's letter supporting her selection as their principal, Cindy, Georgette, and Megan's descriptions of athletic staff's adjustments in accepting the women's leadership,

and Peg, Leslie, and Alice's successfully adding diverse leadership in school contexts rich in traditions and practice are examples from these women's career life histories' community contexts, taking one step towards the revision of historical psychological dynamics of gender expectations.

**Summary.** Understanding the benefits of shifting psychological beliefs in gendered practices is important to a school community. In my experiences students observe favorite teachers and leaders and find role models with admired attributes. A diverse school environment provides a foundation beyond former practices of hierarchal systems oppressing women and girls. These career life histories describe how seven women navigated against psychological norms, adding to their students' balanced and diverse education before entering the adult world.

Participants of this study shifted personal psychological dynamics in their new identity from culturally defined, through a transitional stage, and finally became self-defined (Marshall, 1985). They not only embraced the changes in themselves, but helped their communities and schools to do the same, demonstrating both the challenges and possibilities of moving toward greater gender balance in the high school principalship.

### **Understanding the Gendered Nature of Women's Encumbered Career Choices**

Decisions made throughout their career life histories were encumbered or burdened by sociopolitical and psychological dynamics. Returning to Ehrenreich and English's (1978) description of how women "cannot assimilate into a masculinist society without doing violence to [women's] own nature, which is, or course, *human* nature" (p.

323, italics in original) brings an understanding of their gendered, encumbered career choices. They continued to explain women's conflicted choices, "Nor can we deny that the dilemma is a social issue, and abandon each other to our own "free choices" when the choices are not of our making and we are not "free" (p. 323). Reflecting on the career life histories has given me a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of women's choices that are not "free" but are encumbered. The encumbered choices these women made as they navigated into the masculinist society of high school principals, altered personal and family sociopolitically shaped roles and gendered psychological stereotypes.

Discussed next are the conflicts the mothers in the study expressed related to their choices about parental caregiving and the way these changes influenced the sociopolitically constructed roles in their family contexts. Then the effect that sociopolitical systems of "good old boy" networks, high school athletic culture, and unclear hiring practices had on the women's encumbered choices is examined. Finally, the way gendered psychological practices in conversations and interactions affected the women's encumbered choices is discussed.

**Understanding mothering-related conflicts.** The five mothers in this study reflected with acceptance yet sadness on their adjusted mothering roles. Cindy said, "If I could do it over again I'm not sure I'd do it the same time, you know, a 10-year-old girl needs her mom a little more." Georgette said, "I realized recently my youngest only remembers me as a working mom...it was a little bit of a cost." Georgette's husband "played mom" making Georgette feel that the youngest daughter had not "really lost anything." Leslie reflected on her daughter's thoughts on her mother's transitional

encumbered choices to earn her master's degree, "It was really hard on her, you know, cause she just said, 'I hate that you have to study.'" Megan wondered how she would be able to "manage [caring for] these children and teaching fulltime," until Mr. Supportive Human of the Universe, stepped up and a family's sociopolitically shaped roles were reconfigured. Peg's son attended the high school where she worked for two years with her as she transitioned into administration and she recognized that her administration career, "didn't really affect him a whole lot." However, Peg realized the impact of her encumbered parenting choices may have been different if her son had been younger, "I didn't have small children. If I would have had younger children, I probably wouldn't have even taken the position. You can't do this job with family." Perhaps the mothering sacrifices these women made in order to "assimilate into a masculinist society" are related to the violence to human nature Ehrenreich and English suggest is the result of an inflexible social structures and workplace norms.

But was this sacrifice violent or beneficial to each family? Randy, Georgette's son, viewed it as beneficial. His summation of his family's reconfiguration is an example of how one family answered the "Woman Question," reconfiguring the traditionally sociopolitical family structure. "We created kind of a system where it just was assumed that this was the norm." With Georgette's family supporting both Mom and Dad in their career aspirations, a reorganization of the social-political dynamics were accepted as "the norm." This new norm is important for the future family perceptions of Georgette and Randy and others within that context who witness the changes. Both the women and the men family members benefit from the example of navigating against the gendered

sociopolitical norms and creating their own family configuration.

Georgette's adjusted family norms enabled her to become a high school principal. At least one of her sons benefited from the reconfiguration of the sociopolitical traditional family by being inspired to continue his education and at the time of the study, is entering graduate school. Understanding these benefits of Georgette's family's encumbered choices is important to the sociopolitical changes necessary for future generations. Additionally, under Georgette's direction, more of her high school students are graduating and test scores are rising, benefiting many.

**Understanding women's exclusion from men's networks.** Examples from the participants' career life histories that confirm the existence of sociopolitical systems that marginalize women include exclusions from men's networks, beliefs that women don't need to worry about athletics, exclusion from discussions, and questionable district hiring practices. Alice, Leslie, Cindy, Georgette, Peg, Sandy and Megan's exclusion from the "good old boys" network was recognized but not easily modified. They made choices in navigating working relationships with them but none reported becoming part of the good old boys network. Megan summarized by explaining her approach to the challenge. "I went into it with a perspective that they've been around for a long time, and they're the way they are for a reason." She did not "become one of them" but "tried to decide that [she] was going to learn what [she] could from them, and then eventually [she] got to the point where [she] understood a lot of their thinking processes." Megan also chose to host the regional athletic meetings, defying the belief that she would not want to be a part of the meetings. Megan told the region representative, "If it's my school's turn, then it's my



school's turn.”

Georgette described her encumbered choices in relationship to her school's needs. She explained why she attended the regional athletic meetings, “because I was really worried that [my nonattendance] would hurt my school.” She hoped to be able to “get along with these folks and try to kind of figure out where they are coming from.”

The social-politically shaped views of others and the perceptions and practices that contrasted with these women's views did not stop them from building relationships and advocating for their schools. The approach they used was pragmatic and caring at the same time. Megan began to understand the thinking processes of her colleagues and Georgette hoped to get along with them, as they built relationships with regional athletic representatives. Men in “good old boy's” networks, the gender stereotypical conversations encountered, and the systemic dynamics that these women overcame in their career life histories are examples that may be slow in changing practices (Sherif, 1979) but erode gendered barriers as these women became self-defined administrators (Marshall, 1985) and recognized a new awareness of self (Sherif, 1979).

**Understanding encumbered *gendered* systemic practices.** Hiring experiences varied in the different districts where participants were employed. Alice, Cindy, and Leslie obtained high school principalship positions in timely manners according to practices at the time in their career life histories. Megan was promoted when a new school was built and a position opened. Peg became principal while she was earning her administration credentials. Sandy and Georgette, however, perceived their choices to be encumbered by unclear and puzzling hiring practices. They eventually secured

principalship positions, but they were frustrated by barriers they encountered which led Georgette to secure a job outside of her district and left Sandy waiting for an opportunity that finally came when she was promoted mid-year to the principalship when the principal took a district position.

Sandy was told after 10 years as a high school assistant principal, she had to go to junior high first; however, others with less experience than her were “bumped up to principal without ever having been in a junior high.” She then explained going through interviews and being told “they already had someone selected” or they “brought someone in from out of the district.” District practices were difficult for Sandy to navigate and seemed to her to have inconsistencies and biases. District practices led to choices they had not intended to make. These decisions were encumbered by uncertainty and a sense of loss.

The district’s practices where Georgette began her teaching and administration career were unsettling to her. After an interview when her principal was promoted, Georgette thought it was a mistake when she did not get the position. She was told, “The superintendent has decided that you’re not in the pool.” Encumbered with the sociopolitical, systemic practices, Georgette recognized that “the handwriting was pretty clear at that point that I was not considered principal material in that district for whatever reason.” She applied for a school principalship 70 miles from her home. Georgette’s decision became more difficult and was encumbered by these unexpected dynamics and she accepted her first principalship, 70 miles away.

**Understanding encumbered psychological dynamics.** Encumbered with

psychological dynamics throughout their career life histories, participants described situations shaped by gendered stereotypes. Peg's description of being used as a secretary and her experiences of having her ideas ignored and then enthusiastically accepted when they were brought up by a man are examples of the way gender stereotypes pervade workplace interactions. Daniel's description of his retirement funds being used for Cindy's tuition is a comment shaped by gendered norms. Georgette commented that she did not want to be seen as "shrewish" or "nagging" demonstrate that women themselves use language that maintains gendered psychological norms. Although these women successfully navigated sociopolitically and psychologically shaped situations, it is important to understand these phenomena preserve women's marginalization. The awareness that the women themselves, to some extent, and others with whom they spend their days, and systems within which they work continue to be shaped by gendered sociopolitical or psychological perceptions confirms the importance of increasing understanding of these dynamics by examining the implications of their career life histories.

Several examples of the perpetual subtle/silent ways in which women are marginalized were discussed (Blount, 1999; Gerlicher, 2002; Gilbert & Rader, 2001; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001; Valian, 1998; Woollett & Marshall, 2001) in the literature review. Further examination needs to be completed for an increased attention to the power of these silent but persistent dynamics.

It is important to recognize both the resistance, and later, the acceptance the seven women experienced as personal gendered psychological shifts were made. Through their

pragmatic matter-of-fact approaches, these women were able to successfully navigate and move beyond choices encumbered by sociopolitical and psychological practices and norms and manage their schools and students with alacrity. Not one of the participants expressed serious concerns for any parts of their career life histories that were gendered or difficult. They understand the dynamics of the society they live and work in and accept their roles in changing perceptions of women in high school administration. Peg just said, “Ya, I can do that. I will do that.” Leslie had to “stick to it,” Cindy just dealt with difficult situations, Megan and Georgette determined to learn how they (athletic directors, region representatives, and veteran teachers) think. Sandy and Alice stepped into their principalships with confidence. These women did not stop at barriers, pushing against the greater perceptions of society’s gendered construction of school administration. Georgette exclaimed for all participants, “Seriously! It’s 2013!”

In summary, understanding the way women’s choices were encumbered by the sociopolitical aspects that conflict with mothering roles and keep women from social networks, were presented. Then, the ways their choices were encumbered by psychological dynamics that preserve marginalization of women were discussed, and lastly, the pragmatic, matter-of-fact approaches participants used to make and address their encumbered decisions within these gendered phenomena were discussed.

### **Summary**

Understanding the sociopolitical dynamics that impact current schools is important. Gendered school administration construction (Blount, 1999) was discussed, explaining the hierarchical nature of school leadership and the persistent dynamic of men

as administrators and women as teachers (Blount, 1999; Marshall, 1985). The myths keeping women out of school administration were confronted, and systemic hierarchical practices were addressed. Finally, the benefits of including women in school administration was presented.

Stages in the careers of women administration were discussed as they navigated against sociopolitical and psychological dynamic shifts. While the women navigated against the sociopolitical dynamics in the earlier stages of the career life histories, they had transitional identity shifts, changed the way they believed in their roles, and revised personal psychological dynamics. Examples of community members and resistant staff's acceptance of participants' leadership were described, and the process of revising psychological differences was addressed. Finally, the importance in understanding the need to expand diversity in school leadership was emphasized.

The importance of understanding the encumbered sociopolitical and psychological choices in school leadership was discussed next. Mothering-related conflicts, exclusion from the men's networks, the possibility of systemically gendered hiring practices, and understanding and navigating gendered psychological dynamics were presented. And last, the women's pragmatic approaches and acceptance of community's current perceptions of women in school leadership without acquiescing to these limitations was presented.

Next, I present the implications of this study of the career life histories of the seven women high school administrators.

### **Implications of the Study**

The career life histories demonstrated the importance of support from family, coworkers/supervisors, and communities. The support during participants' transitional period was crucial as they reconfigured work, family and study time. The seven participants' successes have implications for communities, educators, and students. However, I have come to different conclusions than I anticipated during the analysis of the data. Yes, support was crucial for the women especially during their transition from teacher to administrator. Yes, the seven women high school principals' career life histories have implications for other educators, whether they are teachers, supervisors, or coworkers. Yes, the career life histories demonstrate the difficulties women have in navigating their roles as wife, mother, teacher, and administrator. Yes, these women's hard won success has yielded positive outcomes for students. Yes, the implications of the encumbered choices made throughout their career life histories brought me to a deeper understanding of the complexity of these choices.

While I sorted my thoughts about the understanding of the data, I consistently sought the answer of the Woman Question, "...how shall we all—women and children and men—organize our lives together...?" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 323). Alice, Cindy, Georgette, Leslie, Megan, Peg, and Sandy organized their lives, one single, five with children, and one with step-children, enabling them to be administrators. Children and spouses reorganized family in support of participants. To me, the answer to the "woman question" is another question, *Why is there* a Woman Question? Why is it that women (and their families, schools, and communities) must reorganize and make

encumbered adjustments in order to fulfill career aspirations?

Marshall (1985) stated that women must redefine themselves to be an administrator, “When supports are sufficient and incentives are strong, the women found ways to redefine their cultural conceptions of feminine roles in order to fill essential administrator and women’s roles and to gain access to the administrator group” (p. 139). The sociopolitically *right* thing for a woman high school administrator to do is “find ways to redefine [her] cultural conceptions of feminine roles.” The women in Marshall’s study reported that they “[found] ways to buffer the guilt feelings for spending less time with their children, for entertaining less, for ‘selfishly’ working on the career and not devoting energies to supporting their husband’s careers” (p. 139). In redefining roles, these “women [found] ways to balance, integrate, and disregard roles” (p. 139). I now question the definition of the sociopolitical roles that must be redefined.

Peg declared, “You can’t do this job with family.” Sarah, Sandy’s external participant shared her thoughts, “I think...there are women who regardless of where they’re at with their family, they want to be a high school principal, but there are a lot of us who [say], ‘I can’t do that right now.’” Peg and Sarah’s thoughts suggest the difficulty mothers face as they “assimilate into a masculinist society” as a high school principal, balancing and integrating their roles as mother, wife, and principal. Redefining roles outside of the traditional sociopolitical roles is a difficult task that many women/mothers/teachers do not choose. As members of a larger society, the seven participants’ sociopolitical roles were realigned when they became administrators. At home, they shared caregiving and household chores. At work, they became the supervisors. In the

community, they became the leaders. They have, in fact, assimilated into the masculinist society.

I now discuss persistence of the expectation that men will fill leadership roles in society, psychological impacts of participants' development of a new identity, the implications of encumbered choices, and finally, the implications of understanding the successes of the seven participants.

### **Persistence of the Gendered Nature of Sociopolitical Roles**

The persistence of the contemporary versions of the historic “forcible rule of men over women” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 315) within career structures in education, keeping women as subordinate teachers, is a complex phenomenon (Blount, 1999; Christman & McClellan, 2008; Coleman, 2005; Harris et al., 2002; Shakeshaft, 1989). It has taken many strong women leaders, such as the seven participants, and considerable suffering to build an acceptance of feminist ideals in educational settings today, but we are not there, yet. This study has exposed the ways that men's traditional oversight of women is perpetuated by sociopolitical beliefs and myths. In describing the Woman Question, Ehrenreich and English (1978) asserted that women are not the mystery, “It is not *we* who are the problem and it is not *our needs* which are the mystery” (p. 323, italics added). Women's needs are human needs and shouldn't require encumbered navigation because of limiting, gendered sociopolitical and psychological deficits in perceptions of others.

The seven participants successfully navigated against socially shaped role



expectations, challenging the masculinist social order. These women insisted that the “human values that women were assigned to preserve expand out of the confines of private life and become the organizing principles of society” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 324). Communities benefit from the diversity of leadership women bring to the workplace. Participants’ membership in high school administration can bring necessary changes in sociopolitical perceptions in school leadership.

Ridgeway (2001) explained the complex challenge women experience when they fill leadership positions, contradicting the dominant social order.

When women do assert themselves to exercise authority outside traditionally female domains, as they must do to be high-status leaders in our society, gender status beliefs create legitimacy reactions that impose negative sanctions on them for violating the expected status order and reduce their ability to gain compliance with directives. As this suggests, the performance expectations and legitimacy reactions created by gender status beliefs create multiple, nearly invisible nets of comparative devaluation that catch women as they push forward to achieve positions of leadership and authority and slow them down compared to similar men. (p. 652)

Participants’ career life histories explain how they pushed against barriers, navigated through gender perceptions, and reconfigured their roles while achieving a position of power in high school leadership. The complexity the women face for “violating the expected status order” can be difficult to perceive and understand. Ridgeway (2001) presented a summary of the difficulties that continue to plague women’s career successes.

In my view, this unacknowledged network of constraining expectations and interpersonal reactions is the principle cause of the “glass ceiling.” The cumulative effect of its multiple, often small effects, repeated over many contexts throughout a career, is to substantially reduce the number of women who successfully attain positions of high authority in the work world, especially in occupations and contexts not culturally linked with women. (p. 652)

Men’s traditional rule over women prolongs the delay of creating “a society that is

organized around human needs” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 324).

In summary, powerful sociopolitical gender expectations perpetuate the marginalization of women. Women’s needs are not a mystery but are human needs. The glass ceiling created by these norms reduces the number of women in authority positions. The sociopolitical beliefs and practices preclude women’s success in “a society that is organized around [*men’s*] needs” (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 324).

### **Psychological Aspects of Participant’s New Identity**

The implications of the challenges women faced when they navigated toward becoming one of the few high school women principals in the state, is important to understand. Participants’ transitions from a teacher’s role into an administrator’s role in schools began with their first leadership experiences outside of the classroom. They began to see solutions and answers from an administration point of view and as Georgette said, “I want a chance to sit in that seat.” When the women were able to recognize their new identities as high school principals, their awareness of self as leaders in a community of students, faculty, and staff, a psychological shift was made. They no longer existed under the male dominated social order; they had to learn how to colead with them. Christman and McClellan (2008) studied the resiliency of women administrators in educational leadership programs and found, “Scholars indicate that resiliency rests on one’s ability to transcend and persist despite adversity.... Seemingly, these women leaders would have to adapt in the face of adversity and so resiliently transform their identities as leaders” (p. 8). The seven participants faced adversity while they gained

awareness of a new identity in high school principalship. Woolf's (1929/1957) understanding of the psychological dynamics of women's power with man provides vital insight for forwarding progress and it needs to be understood. She describes traditional gender roles as mandating that women, rather than taking their rightful place in social arrangements, remain satisfied reflecting men's persona back to them at twice its actual size. "The looking-glass vision is of supreme importance because it charges the vitality; it stimulates the nervous system. Take it away and man may die, like the drug fiend deprived of his cocaine" (Woolf, 1929/1957, p. 36). Not accepting their roles in a "looking-glass vision," these women's psychological identity shifts demonstrate their resilient transformation as leaders. Participant's shift in self-identity allowed these women to collaborate, direct, and work within the traditional social order of a high school and shift beliefs in her competency.

Woolf (1929/1957) described her own psychological shift when she found that her aunt left her with a substantial sum of money to sustain Woolf throughout her life. "A solicitor's letter fell into the post-box and when I opened it I found that she had left me five hundred pounds a year for ever" (p. 37). This, she said, came at about the same time as women were gaining the vote. "Of the two—the vote and the money—the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important" (p. 37). I believe Woolf and the seven women in this study made similar psychological shifts as the freedom from being dependent on society's order (and men) changed for them.

No force in the world can take from me my five hundred pounds. Food, house and clothing are mine forever. Therefore not merely do effort and labour cease, but also hatred and bitterness. I need not hate any man; he cannot hurt me. I need not flatter any man; he has nothing to give me. So imperceptibly I found myself

adopting a new attitude towards the other half of the human race. (p. 38)

The “new attitude towards the other half of the human race” became apparent to me as I listened to participant’s career life histories once they found themselves in a new identity of self. Cindy and Megan, the participants with the most years of educational experiences recognized their psychological shifts. Cindy concluded that “...my identity really is just I’m a person seeking enlightenment....” Megan added, “I have grown up a lot.” Both of these women represent the implications their careers as high school administrators had on them. They seemingly joined Woolf in “adopting a new attitude towards the other half of the human race.”

To summarize, breaking away from the persistent gendered hierarchy in education, these women’s new identity brought the participants to a deeper understanding of self.

### **Implications of Encumbered Choices**

I do not want to belabor the discussion on the encumbered choices participants experienced throughout their career life histories. However, the seven women’s career life histories were shadowed with encumbered choices as they traveled through each stage of their careers. I also do not want to suggest that men do not have encumbered choices. In fact, I suggest the opposite. One example is the different encumbered choices women and men have with the choice in having a family. Careers were delayed for women because of family yet, Eckman (2004) found that some men were inspired to take on more work when children were joining the family, “Having young children at home delayed the careers of five females, while having young children at home inspired four

males to seek administrative positions” (p. 195). Men’s choices in Eckman’s study were encumbered with a traditional sociopolitical factor that *he* is the family’s main provider and *she* will need to stay at home with the children.

Choices are encumbered by many things. A limited number of encumbered choices were addressed in this study. Women should have information, role models, and exposure to possible career options in order to make career choices. They also need to have an understanding of the sociopolitical and psychological constraints they will typically face if they choose to pursue and occupy careers not traditionally held by women. Career options and education choices need a deeper examination for girls and women to be able to make informed choices. With more information and understanding, encumbered choices may become informed choices.

It is important to understand the implications these choices have for both genders. However, not all career choices are encumbered with the burden of genders. Some are ethnically or economically encumbered. Other encumbering dynamics may be ability or geographic location. My study addressed the gendered encumbered choices that women high school principals faced in their career life histories and raises the question of what society should do to ensure equitable opportunity in education leadership so that it can accrue the many benefits of broadening the demographic of people leading our students’ educational experiences.

It also must be understood that everyone along the way in education, from school volunteers, staff, and teacher’s aides, to kindergarten teachers and high school physics teachers, to preservice teacher educators, shape our sociopolitical and psychological ideas

and ideals. Students will experience greater understanding of the opportunities and complexities of their career related decisions if those who influence their lives are well informed and aware of those opportunities and complexities, and understand the subtle ways they are shaped by gender norms.

In summary, understanding the implications of the gendered nature of women's encumbered choices within the field of education and their importance in considering the many facets connected to career mobility for women were presented. Consideration of men's encumbered choices was introduced and additional encumbered choices influencing men and women were listed. Women and girls should have extensive career information in order to make informed career choices. They should also be helped to understand that are many subtle sociopolitical and psychological components that influence their career option.

### **Understanding the Implications of the Seven Study Participants' Successes**

The seven participants' career life histories give a deeper understanding of the support received, the battles won, and the encumbered choices made, giving the women new identities as high school principals. The implications for other educators is discussed next, then observations about the implications of diversity on the high school student is presented, and then next, unfortunate district practices limiting women's opportunities in leadership is discussed. Next, the contagious nature of encouragement and support of educators is presented. Finally, the pioneer nature of the seven participants as a role model for future careers is discussed.

While I selected only seven women who had broken through the barriers, there are many teachers whose career life histories could add to the understanding of women's careers. There may be (a) educators who sought but were never selected for a high school principalship; (b) those that aspired to be high school administrators, became discouraged and made or accepted other career choices; (c) teachers who were disappointed and changed vocations; and finally (d) other men and women who successfully become high school principals. In my career, I have worked with a number of men and women, who have the credentials for administration positions, however, choose to stay in the classroom or choose not to apply for high school administration. Their career life histories would add to the literature on careers in education.

With over 15 years of high school experiences, I have noticed that because high school students are on the cusp of adulthood, they are grasping for examples, role models, and understanding of the big world they are about to enter. They begin to discover attributes in themselves and others who they admire or despise. Students notice how the adults around them interact and deal with a variety of situations as they observe their surroundings and learn how to socialize. In spite of the hope that all students come from stable, functional families, this is not the case. Students need exposure to appropriate interactions and relationships. Observing a variety of men and women staff, coaches, counselors, teachers, and administrators in high schools, students determine expected gendered norms and socialization. It is important for them to notice a balance of men and women in the staff, coaches, counselors, teachers, and administrators. This will inform students' aspirations as they become adults. The sociopolitical dynamics of high

school administration, with men and women working together leading the education of students, can lead students to understand appropriate socialization and norms as they enter the big world.

Unfortunately, diverse leadership in schools is not the norm. Young (2005) describes the imbalance and discrimination that exists in districts (see also Cohen, 2013).

Moreover, discrimination still exists in terms of salary, benefits, recruitment, hiring, and promotion. Furthermore, women principals tend to be hired more frequently at the elementary level, while women superintendents are relegated to less desirable districts that are either small and rural or urban and troubled. (p. 36)

The unfortunate set of circumstances precluding women's influence within a greater community is discriminatory. There are programs that target recruitment of women to administration programs, although "there is ample evidence of discriminatory hiring practices that negatively affect women's opportunities in gaining entry to educational leadership positions" (Young, 2005, p. 37).

Young (2005) gathered hiring practices of districts in Iowa and interviewed search consultants about their work. One search consultant explained, "Essentially you recommend candidates you believe the districts will find desirable" (p. 38). Although "leadership qualities and styles traditionally associated with women (e.g., facilitating, collaborating) are commonly listed among desirable candidate qualities on job descriptions" (p. 38) the gender typically linked to those qualities is not accepted. "It appears that while the leadership characteristics commonly associated with the female gender are becoming more accepted and valued, the actual gender is not" (p. 38).

Young's conclusion, "The notion of having women in key leadership positions within these districts, according to several search consultants, is simply too difficult to stomach"



(p. 38), described the unfortunate, traditional sociopolitical foundation of the districts studied. “The fact is women are not finding it easy to obtain leadership positions” (p. 38).

The women in this study found support to be crucial to their successes in each stage of their career transitions. Young and McLeod (2001) stated the importance of support in their study also, “For female administrative candidates and practicing administrators, professional endorsements and personal and professional support were important” (p. 485). The implication of support and encouragement is contagious, “Many of the practicing female administrators involved in this study placed so much importance on the endorsements and support they received from their administrators that they, in turn, felt an obligation to mentor and endorse other women” (p. 486). Such patterns could lead to increasing numbers of women administrators, if other barriers can be overcome.

The women who have become leaders, who have traveled through sociopolitical adjustments, and found their new psychological identities may have an obligation to other women educators.

Effective female leaders should make efforts to support new and aspiring leaders—they should share successful experiences. Such supportive activities have many benefits; negative perceptions and stereotypes can be challenged, a wide pool of successful women leaders can be developed, and would-be leaders can be encouraged to move forward. (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010, p. 10)

Encouragement, endorsement, and support for women in leadership positions is not only contagious but one important implication of this study is that educational leaders should intentionally provide such assistance to women wanting to enter positions of leadership.

The women of this study became high school principals in five different districts. Although the seven women successfully lead or (have led) high schools, they still are

able to speak of gender discriminations and setbacks. They recognize their roles in building a stronger foundation for women of the future. Megan described her part in building the foundations for other women, “I have been on the [beginning] end of being a pioneer in this field.” These women have the strength of pioneers in a new land, building its foundations with bricks of perseverance, courage, and a vision of a better future. Their examples and leadership in their high schools bring their diverse strengths to their students and communities. Both girls and boys will have opportunities to expand their developing ideas of the sociopolitical and psychological environments in a high school and beyond, as they establish a foundation for their own future career choices.

In summary, the implications of the successes of the study’s participants were discussed by acknowledging the challenges and accomplishments of the educators’ until now untold career life histories. The possible impact diverse adults in schools can have on the high school student and the importance of diversity that sets the sociopolitical and psychological foundation of students’ futures were considered. I then presented an example of hiring practices that can prevent women from filling leadership positions and concluded by noting the pioneering strength participants bring to their schools.

### **Summary**

I first discussed the implications of the persistent sociopolitical norms that keep men over women in the hierarchical structures of education, the psychological aspects of participant’s new identity, and the implications of encumbered choices. Finally, I discussed the implications in understanding the seven participant’s successes in obtaining high school leadership positions.

This study added information to the literature on women in school administration, their sometimes unintentional approach to answering the “Woman Question,” and their encumbered choices while traveling through their career life histories. I looked at the way their journeys brought them through sociopolitical realignment and psychological shifts. Although the seven participants work in a male dominated career, they recognize their roles in leaving behind gendered role expectations that keep men positioned over women in the education hierarchy. I used an innovative method of life history research by focusing on the *career* life histories of the participants. I now have a deeper understanding of their journeys and hope the reader will appreciate the implications of participants’ career life histories.

Finally, I present suggestions for future research and reflect on my research journey of navigating through the data and creating a narrative of the participants’ career life histories.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study focused on the career life histories of women in school administration. Carefully delimiting the project, I did not venture into their leadership styles or the details of their communities’ response to a women in leadership. I do not claim this study to be transferable to other women high school principals in any other context. However, I do hope the reader ponders the career life histories of women high school principals in other settings. It is not an exhaustive study concluding with answers for bringing gender equity to high school leadership. The work here suggests possible additional studies that would

yield greater understanding and progress in achieving gender equity and balance in the high school principalship and in other career positions. Presented next are suggestions for future studies. I then conclude with my journey exploring the career life histories of participants.

### **Career Life History**

Using the focus of a *career* life history, many other careers could be studied. I studied the women in high school administration, whereas an important study could be the career life history of men in high school administration. I learned important aspects of the women's journeys that could be compared to men's journey. A career life history of men and women teachers may be an important future study to understand the evolving career in education. The career life history of men administrators and teachers in elementary schools would also add important information to the literature on men in traditionally feminine careers.

Using my original *career* life history method could have implications for future life history studies on other groups. Women attorneys' career life histories, politicians' career life histories, police officers' career life histories, medical doctors' career life histories, librarians' career life history, musicians' career life histories, are samples of potential career life histories research projects. The possibilities of career life histories are infinite as they become the focus in future studies. Thinking in particularly innovative ways about the potential uses of this new method, although not considered a legal career, the *career* life history of criminals could bring important societal understanding for future studies that could potentially provide preventive social changes.

### **Sociopolitical and Psychological Shifts**

The sociopolitical adjustments in the school athletic arena with women principals could be a future study. Faculty and staff's sociopolitical reconfigurations with women in leadership is another topic for future study. Another could involve the psychological shifts of the husbands and family members of these women. Such a study could bring better understanding of the dynamics at work when there is a break in the traditional sociopolitical family dynamics.

Randy was the only external participant that is a child of a participant who could express his admiration about his mother's example as she persevered as a mother transitioning into a high school principal. Future studies might examine the way women's career choices influence their children's educational and career decisions and could deepen current understanding of these parent/child dynamics.

### **My Journey in Exploring the Career Life Histories of Seven High School Principals**

I began this project thinking I would find a plethora of barriers, roadblocks, and systemic problems the participants battled in securing their positions of power in the high schools. I anticipated rejection from their coaches and athletic functions, meeting women with a tired, hardened attitude, and feelings who might be pessimistic about women finding their way to the top. Instead, I found women of passion, spirit, tenacity, and strength, who had a clear understanding of their roles in being the examples to educators, students, and communities. None expressed regret for taking the journey to obtain the principalship. Each thought their career life history would be different from others since

their journey was unintentional and haphazard. I listened to them tell me of their surprise that they were once a teacher not long ago and suddenly they had become a principal.

My contacts with participants were positive and uplifting. Arrangements were made over a 3-month period for each interview. Additional interview arrangements were made for the external participants in the same time span. They communicated their career life histories freely, laughing at memories, and sharing thoughts.

I was able to find a transcriber in a neighboring state and with technology, was able to send her large data files over the Internet. She quickly transcribed the recorded data, sent me the written documents, and I began coding each interview.

The more transcriptions I read the more I began finding important comments and patterns contributing to the career life histories. As I read the interviews, I began to find several similar themes. I set up a chart of color coding the themes to be consistent in my readings, read each interview and highlighted statements in the determined color. Next, I created topical documents with participants' comments put together in one document, thinking I was well on my way to completing the dissertation. I gathered the colored-coded statements into themed documents: (a) barrier/roadblocks, (b) roles conflict, (c) leadership, (d) encumbered choices, (e) involvement, (f) mentors, (g) persistence, (h) external supporter, (i) family support, (j) systemic problems, and (k) advice. I created transitional statements within the color-coded statements and thought I was well on the way to completion. I look back at my first "draft" and thank my committee chair for not throwing me out of the doctoral program. She continued to accept my organization skills, yet questioned what each theme was telling me as a researcher.

I arranged, rearranged, arranged again, and finally found the best arrangement for the data. I proceeded to find the data for each category and worked to write transitional paragraphs blending the data into a narrative format. I then added additional data thinking I was enhancing each section with more details.

This round of organization was a beginning of several reconfigurations, themes clustering, and analyses of data. I then re-read the literature review and determined to adjust themes according to the literature review headings. In the *Social Political Analysis of Gender Systems* section, I clustered barriers/roadblocks, systemic problems, involvement, roles conflict, family support, and mentors. Persistence, external supporters and advice were clustered under the *Psychological Processes that Perpetuate Gender Inequality* section. The final sections were clearly organized correctly, *Women in Educational Leadership* with themed statements of participants' leadership skills, and *Women's Encumbered Choices* section with themed statements of participants' encumbered choices. I rewrote the document section with this *final* organization. This draft was then sent to the cutting table to develop a clearer focus on the intent of each section of the paper.

At this point, I thought I had found the emerging themes from reading and writing, and rearranging the data as many times as I had already. Each of the participants had mentors, leadership experiences, involvement, and persistence. I arranged my writings in that order thinking once again, I was making progress, yet there were many statements that seemed to be repeated throughout the sections. My organization needed adjustments again. My committee chair and I discussed the underlying themes of the

subsections and suggested there were three phases of the career life histories: (a) Early Career, Preadministration, Principals in the Making; (c) transitional career into administration; transformation into principalship; (d) career as an administrator; participants as principals; and (e) encumbered choices made by participants throughout their career life histories. She suggested using an outline format in assisting me in the reorganizations.

One of my last edits came back to me with a sigh from my committee chair, who told me to wait, sit down, and it was not that bad; however,... I then listened to a suggestion for one more rearrangement of data focusing on the emergent themes and clustering them in such a way that the reader would have a better understanding. I reluctantly accepted the new arrangement, tired from feeling as if I was drowning under the ocean of data and committed to several hours rewriting the findings. My mind previously worked in an ocean of disconnected floating islands. Each island became one phase of becoming an administrator (pre administration, transition to administration, and administration career). As I leaped from island to island, rowboats of support, stepping stones of barriers, and bridges of encumbered choices appeared. The islands connected with rowboats, stepping stones, and finally bridges. My writing followed this structure until it was ready for another discussion with my committee chair. With a few minor edits, rewording, and parallel sentence structures, I knew this was the final organization—it wasn't.

Each rowboat, stepping stone, and bridge turned into an island and an additional island was added. Previous islands were turned into the rowboats, stepping stones, and



bridges as the connecting flow of data fell into the final organization pattern. With four islands, the three phases of the participants' career life histories connect islands into a paralleled structure. The following outline illustrates the final organization.

1. Characteristics of the Unintentional Career Life History Journey
  - a. Preadministration
  - b. Transition to Administration
  - c. Administrative Career
2. Support
  - d. Preadministration
  - e. Transition to Administration
  - f. Administrative Career
3. Barriers
  - g. Preadministration
  - h. Transition to Administration
  - i. Administrative Career
4. Encumbered Choices
  - j. Preadministration
  - k. Transition to Administration
  - l. Administrative Career

With minor adjustments to section titles, the final organization had been found. When I finished this new draft, I decided I would reread the literature review to refresh the focus of the study once again. With minimal edits forthcoming, I read chapters one, two, and three and felt thrilled that my findings were now arranged in such a way that the data analysis was well supported by the literature review. I now understand the many steps I had to take in building the analysis of the career life histories and hope the reader will appreciate the journeys of the seven participants.

Most importantly, I hope this work contributes to the appreciation of the support aspiring women administrator's need and an understanding of the barriers they face in career decisions and promotions. I hope this work clarifies the gendered nature of the encumbered choices made by women during their career life histories. These choices

may, in fact, be part of an unintentional journey that could lead to important achievements and contributions. I hope men and women administrators extend invitations to high school teachers that have leadership qualities and mentor them along their journeys towards administration in high schools. I hope this study brings an understanding that men and women can adjust stereotypical beliefs and successfully create a work and family balance in support of both parents' career aspirations.

I hope readers reflect on personal career life histories and find that this research project demonstrates that "A good [career] life history illustrates the uniqueness, dilemmas, and complexities of a person in such a way that it causes readers to reflect upon themselves and to bring their own situations and questions to the story" (Glesne, 2006, p. 11). I hope the reader recognizes the need of social-political and psychological shifts, questions personal beliefs and practices, and analyzes their encumbered choices.

Finally, I hope this work is read by researchers, school leaders, and practitioners striving to understand why there are too few women in high school principalships.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A

Introduction Email to Potential Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jan Bradshaw Hansen. I am a doctoral student at Utah State University under the direction of Dr. Martha Whitaker, in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. I am also an assistant principal in the Canyons School District. I am conducting a research study to explore the Career Life History of women in leadership positions in high schools. I have found there are few women administrators in high schools, although there are many women teachers. I am interested in your journeys of becoming high school principals and discover what you feel is important for others. The purpose of this study is to explore this phenomenon through a Career Life History of women high school principals.

This study is important because changing this gender imbalance in the principalship has ramifications for not only women who wish to be administrators, but also for students and community members who benefit from diverse leadership.

I have received your school contact information from the 2012-2013 Utah State Office of Education Educational Directory published on their website. I then followed up with telephone calls to districts verifying current positions. All communication is kept confidential. If you are interesting in participating in this study, the following will be necessary.

- Schedule one hour for a personal interview
- Follow-up communication for clarification of questions, via phone calls, emails or subsequent interviews
- Provide current resume or VITA
- Provide an external career history summary from a colleague, friend, significant other, or relative describing your career life history as they see it progressing or forming

The interview should take approximately one to 1 ½ hours. There are no known risks to the study. At any time during the interview, you may choose to discontinue participation or not answer questions. Anything you share will be confidential. Interviews will be recorded so I can be as accurate as possible. The recordings will be transcribed and your name and any identifying information will be coded and not disclosed. I will analyze the data for common themes and patterns. All information will be kept in my home office in a locked filing cabinet and destroyed in three years after the study's completion. If you want results of the study, I will share them with you. The results will be published, although neither your name nor identifying information will be used.

Your participation is voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts. If you decide you would like to participate, please notify me via email ([jan.hansen@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:jan.hansen@aggiemail.usu.edu)), home phone (801-253-7834), or cell phone (801-635-6618) within two weeks.

Sincerely,

Jan Hansen

Appendix B

IRB Informed Consent



School of Teacher Education and Leadership  
 2805 Old Main Hill  
 Logan UT 84322-2805  
 Telephone: (435) 797-0372



## INFORMED CONSENT

### *Career Life History Investigation of Women High School Principals*

**\*Introduction/ Purpose** Jan Hansen and Dr. Martha Whitaker in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University are conducting a research study to find out more about the gender gap in educational leadership. You have been asked to take part because you currently hold the position of high school principal in Utah. There will be approximately 3 - 8 total participants in this research.

**\*Procedures** If you agree to be in this research study, you will be asked to participate in a one to two hour personal interview with the researcher describing your career journey in becoming a high school principal. Then, answer follow-up or clarifying questions, via phone calls, emails or subsequent interviews. Next, provide a current resume or VITA, and finally, provide an external career history summary from a colleague, friend, significant other, or relative describing your career history as they see it progressing or forming.

**Alternative Procedures** Instead of participating in this research, an alternative for you to consider would be: refer the researchers to other possible women high school candidates who may have recently retired, or placed in other educational leadership positions after serving as high school principals.

**\*Risks** Participation in this research study has no known or foreseen risks. Participant's identity will be coded and not disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used in the research (which participants may choose) for quotes and references.

**\*Benefits** This study is important because changing the gender imbalance in the principalship has ramifications for not only women who wish to be administrators, but also for students and community members who benefit from diverse leadership. In order to foster that transition, greater understanding of the dynamics that influence the existing gender imbalance is needed. Documenting the career life histories of women will provide information about both positive and negative influences that have supported or deterred their progress toward the goal of an administrative career in a high school setting.

**Explanation & offer to answer questions** Jan Hansen has explained this research study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach (PI) Dr. Martha Whitaker at (435) 797- 0384, or martha.whitaker@usu.edu.



## INFORMED CONSENT

### *Career Life History Investigation of Women High School Principals*

**\*Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence** Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, contact Dr. Martha Whitaker ([Martha.whitaker@usu.edu](mailto:Martha.whitaker@usu.edu)). You may be withdrawn from this study without your consent by the investigator if there is a conflict of interest, disclosure of confidential information, or unforeseen risks to researcher or participant.

**\*Confidentiality** Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigator and Dr. Whitaker will have access to the data which will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer in a locked room. To protect your privacy, personal, identifiable information will be removed from study documents and replaced with a study identifier. Identifying information, including audio recordings, will be stored separately from data and will be kept for three years after research and dissertation is completed, defended, and published.

**\*IRB Approval Statement** The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at Utah State University has approved this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury and would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email [irb@usu.edu](mailto:irb@usu.edu) to obtain information or to offer input.

**\*Copy of consent** You have been given two copies of this Informed Consent. Please sign both copies and keep one copy for your files.

**\*Investigator Statement** “I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered.”

**\*Signature of Researcher(s)**

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*Dr. Martha Whitaker*  
Principal Investigator

---

*Jan Hansen*  
Student Researcher (or Co-PI)





School of Teacher Education and Leadership  
2805 Old Main Hill  
Logan UT 84322-2805  
Telephone: (435) 797-0372



**INFORMED CONSENT**

*Career Life History Investigation of Women High School Principals*

(435-797-0384)  
(*martha.whitaker@usu.edu*)

(801-635-6618)  
(*jan.hansen@aggiemail.usu.edu*)

**Signature of Participant** By signing below, I agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Follow-Up Email to Voluntary Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for choosing to participate in my study. I hope you will find this experience as an interesting topic to explore, and an experience to remember. Please find attached, IRB information for your signature and approval. Please note all information is confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in the research (which you may choose) for quotes and references. I look forward to meeting with you on our first interview.

Appendix D  
Interview Questions

## Interview Questions

To begin an interview, I will ask the following questions and lead into the next question as the interview proceeds. If necessary, I will ask clarifying questions (examples are shown) but will be a listener and not a participant, as I do not want to interject my experiences and biases into the interviews.

- Tell me how you have come to be a high school principal. Begin where you feel there were influences in your life that led to this position.
  - Explain how personal/family/community experiences contributed to becoming high school principal.
  - As a young woman, explain experiences that helped you to recognize personal leadership abilities.
  - If you were a teacher first, explain transitional experiences leading to high school principalship.
  - Tell me about the decisions you made in becoming principal.
  - Discuss steps you took leading you to become a high school principal.
- Share any mentors, supports, and encouragement you may have experienced on your journey in becoming a principal.
  - If you were a teacher-leader before becoming a principal, explain how that may have led you to become a principal.
  - Describe family influences that directed you towards leadership.
  - Tell about the people who gave you support, confidence, or encouragement in your life leading you to leadership experiences.

- Explain any barriers, hurdles, or roadblocks that you had to deal with before assuming the principalship or during the process of becoming a principal.
  - Describe incidents you feel may have hindered your progress toward principalship.
  - Tell how you have been able to avoid roadblocks of becoming a high school principal.
  - At any time in your career towards principalship, describe decisions you made that were conflicted with your other roles as a woman.
  - Explain any stereotyping or gendered conflicts you may have experienced in gaining the position of principalship of high school.

Appendix E

External Participant Interview Questions

### External Participant Interview Questions

External participants were selected by individual participants and asked to participate and tell of their observations, experiences, or mentoring of their friend, spouse, or colleague. The following questions were adapted from the participant questions and reworded for the external participant interviews. They were used as interview starters with clarifying questions as the interview proceeded.

- Tell me how \_\_\_\_\_ became a high school principal.
  - Describe the steps she made in her career pathway in becoming a leader.
  - What leadership experiences/skills did she have before becoming principal?
  - Tell me about the decisions she made in becoming principal.
  - Discuss the steps she took leading her in becoming a principal.
- Share any mentors, supports, and encouragement she may have experienced on her journey in becoming a principal.
  - If she was a teacher-leader before becoming a principal, explain how that may have helped her in becoming a principal.
  - Describe family influences you may know of that directed her towards leadership.
  - Tell me about the people who gave her support, confidence or encouragement in her life leading her to leadership experiences.
- Explain any barriers, hurdles, or roadblocks that she may have dealt with before assuming the principalship or during the process of becoming a principal.



- Describe incidents you feel may have hindered her progress toward principalship.
- Tell how she was able to avoid roadblocks of becoming high school principal
- At any time in her career towards principalship, describe decisions she may have made that were conflicted with her other roles as a woman.
- Explain any stereotyping or gendered conflicts she may have experienced in gaining the position of principalship of high school.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### JAN BRADSHAW HANSEN

**Professional Address:**  
Canyons School District  
9351 S. 300 E.  
Sandy, Utah 84070

**School Address:**  
Hillcrest High School  
7350 S. 900 E  
Midvale, Utah 84047

**Home Address:**  
10416 S Vermillion Drive  
South Jordan, Utah 84095

Email: [jan.hansen@canyonsdistrict.org](mailto:jan.hansen@canyonsdistrict.org)    801-826-6013    Academic email:  
[jan.hansen@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:jan.hansen@aggiemail.usu.edu)

### EDUCATION

- Ed.D.**            **May 2014**  
Curriculum & Instructional Leadership, Utah State University  
Hansen, J.B. (2014). *A Qualitative Study of Women High School Principals' Career Life Histories*. Utah State University, Logan, Utah.
- M.S.**            **June 1990**  
Special Education, University of Utah  
Bradshaw, J. (1990). *Cooperative Learning in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade American History Class*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- B.S.**            **June, 1981**  
Leisure Studies, University of Utah
- Administrative/Supervisory (K-12) Certificate Level 2, 2007**  
Utah State University
- Special Education (K-12+) Mild/Moderate Disability Certification, Level 2, 1988**  
Utah State Office of Education
- Continued Education**  
**August 2002—June 2003**  
65 Semester hours in Computer Information Systems  
Salt Lake Community College  
**1993—1994**  
Two Semesters graduate classes in Drug and Alcohol prevention in Social Work  
University Of Utah  
**1974-1977**  
Business Administration Major  
Arizona State University

### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

**Assistant Principal**  
**Hillcrest High School (2013-Currently)**

**Jordan High School (2007-2013)****Canyons School District, Utah**

- Involved with restructuring grade configuration transitioning freshman into the high school buildings with multiple teacher and staff interviews, scheduling, and assignments involved with the grade configurations
- Directed and implemented Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) national program to the school
- School LEA directing special education department's curriculum, scheduling, and assisting in IEP implementation
- Arrange professional development in alignment with Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, collect and evaluate data, design and instigate professional development
- Arrange faculty overnight travels to conferences and presentations
- Smaller Learning Community Federal and District Grants Coordinator
  - Design, plan, and implement budgets for Smaller Learning Community Programs
  - Planned Career Week hosting over 35 community business members linking post-high school education and career development
- Schedule facilities and personnel for high school functions, district, state, national, and community sponsored events
- Accreditation School leader developing second-round visit
  - Visiting team member: Snow Canyon and Mountain View High Schools
- School Community Council member assisting and facilitate chair and principal in agenda and Land Trust money expenditures
- Restructure, design and encourage Special Education team curriculum and collaborative efforts
- Master Schedule including teacher subject/course scheduling, class changes, concurrent enrollment, Ed net, and room assignments
- School Publications Editor
- Student Body Officers Administrator
  - Advise and direct student body activities and Student Body Officer Leadership training
  - Program and arrange assemblies
- Testing administrator for school-wide state and NCLB testing
- PTSA Administrator Liaison

**Goalview Manager/Technology Specialist (2004-2007)****Special Education District Office****Jordan School District, Utah**

- Organized & trained over 600 Special Education teachers, psychologist, itinerant support teams a web-based Special Education Individual Education Program process internet program
- Continuing education of district special education teams' training, updates, and support services with weekly trainings of over 300 educators annually
- Member of USOE committee working collaboratively with state and district personnel to evaluate and reform assessment accommodations/modifications for standardized state testing
- District special education technology specialist
- Created updated, maintained district special education department web pages
- Budgeted, inventoried, and purchased special education team technology needs for district

**Consulting Educator (1999-2007)****Jordan Professional Appraisal System****Jordan School District, Utah**

- Provided evaluations, instituted coaching, encourage and supported educational professionals in district teacher evaluation system

**Special Education Resource Teacher (1998-2004)****Bingham High School****Jordan School District, Utah**

- Classes taught included Language Arts, U. S. History, Study Skills, Algebra, Computer Science, and Web Page Design
- Administration and interpretation of special education testing requirements, collected appropriate qualifying data, wrote and implemented Individual Education Plans (IEP)
- Responsible for athletic event ticket sales and dance/stomp supervision
- School Webmaster

**Master Teacher Intel Teach to the Future**

- Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation Grant participant
- Planned, developed, coordinated, implemented, and facilitated instruction of over 180 school professionals in computer based programs

**Mohave County Probation Department GED Specialist**

- Planned, organized and taught GED classes
- Procured curricular enhancements
- Implemented national application leading to success of probationer's obtaining additional advanced education

**Special Education Resource Teacher (1994-1998)****Fort Mohave Elementary School****Camp Mohave Elementary School****Mohave Valley School District, Fort Mohave, Arizona**

- Special Education teacher leader, testing, collecting data, build individualize curriculum for each student, assisted mainstream teachers in adapting curriculum, inclusion program realized with 100% of K-6 grade students

**Special Education Resource Teacher (1988-1994)****Riverview Jr. High****Teacher's Aide (1985-1987)****Longview Elementary****Murray School District, Murray, Utah**

- Classes taught included Language Arts, Math, History, and Study Skills. Assisted teachers with curriculum and began team teaching program.
- Assisted certified teacher with self-contained behavior unit with dally individual educational plans and behavior intervention plans.

**First Offenders, Murray City**

- Arranged, organized and developed progressive programs for Murray City's youth at-risk program
- Conductor of "Rope" courses developing self-confidence, leadership, and team building with conduct disordered adolescents, youth leadership teams, adult and corporate groups

**Substitute teacher (1984-1985) Salt Lake County Districts****Recreational Positions**

National Institute of Fitness (1983-1984) Kauai, Hawaii; Park City, Utah

- Directed a Hawaiian based residential weight loss facility developing specialized exercise programs for clients by creating exciting aerobic and aquatic exercise classes. Designed and implemented nutritional habits for healthful cooking skills through educational weight loss theories and maintenance plans. Directed group recreational activities and lecture series.

Recreation Leader (1982-1983) Copperview, Midvale, Utah

Program Coordinator (1980-1981) Copperview, Midvale, Utah

- Program coordinator for community center recreational facilities scheduling league and recreational tournaments. Spearheaded satellite day camp for children from the ages of five through 14 years. Camp included, field trips, indoor and outdoor games, arts and crafts, and cooking lessons. Developed recreational brochure for services to the community organization and its programs

Marketing Manager, Spa Lady (1981-1982) Spa Fitness Centers, Irving, Texas.

- Marketing director for a pilot program designed to assist the modern, professional woman in health and fitness needs.

## **RESEARCH**

### **Research Interests:**

- Women leadership in secondary public education
- Cultural diversity in student achievement
- Low economic status of low achieving students

## **GRANTS**

Directed, implemented, collected data, reported, and adapted three years of a Smaller Learning Communities five-year Federal Grant (\$1.5 million), Jordan High School.

## **RELEVANT SKILLS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Accomplishments in Teaching Positions**

- Cooperative Learning team leader, Murray District
- Faculty leader developing problem solving through curriculum adaptation
- Member District Technology Committee to exploring, planning and implementing district technology purchasing and training for teacher and student usage
- Past Member of the Murray Education Association Executive Board
- Member of Professional Staff Development Committee providing in-service and guidance to school wide restructuring
- Guest lecturer at statewide conferences on School Restructuring
- Department Head, Special Education, Murray School District—Riverview Jr. High
- Developed full inclusion program of resource students into mainstream classes
- Conducted, organized and taught both an advanced and basic cooperative learning strategies during statewide conferences

### **Teacher Recognition**

- Who's Who Among America's Teachers
- "Outstanding Teacher of the Year" finalist for Learning Disabilities Association

### **Conference Attendance and Workshop Training**

- AVID Summer Institute, San Diego, CA 2011, 2012
- AERA Annual Meeting, Denver, CO 2010
- NASSP Conference, Phoenix, AZ 2010
- UASSP Conferences, St. George, UT 2008
- Accreditation Visiting Team Member Training 2007, 2008
- Differentiated Instruction Conferences, San Antonio, TX 2008
- Smaller Learning Communities, 2007, 2008
- High Functioning Autism and Asperger Training
- Behavior Interventions: Train the Trainers
- Annual Leadership Conferences
- Instructional Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conferences, Salt Lake, UT 2003, 2004

- Utah Institute on Special Education Law Conferences, UT 2004, 2005, 2006
- UPDC Tiered Instruction Conference, UT 2005
- UPDC Mentor Teacher Conferences, UT 1992, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005
- Active member of Utah Mentor Teacher Academy, 1992-2007
- The Struggling Student: Prevention & Intervention Workshop, SLC, UT 2003
- CEC Conferences, Provo, UT
- Connected Classroom National Convention, CA
- CEC National Convention, UT
- Reading Recovery & CLIP Strategies, Mohave, AZ
- Visualizing & Verbalization for Language Comprehension seminar, San Luis Obispo, CA
- Auditory Discrimination reading workshop, San Luis Obispo, CA
- ADHD/ADD workshop, Kingman, AZ
- Cooperative Learning for trainers and facilitators, Newport Beach, CA
- Healthy Lifestyles, Park City, UT
- Tribes workshop, Murray, UT
- Convention for National Child Abuse Prevention, Salt Lake City, UT
- Leadership Effectiveness Action Program, L.E.A.P., Salt Lake City, UT