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NEVERTHELESS SHE PERSISTED: AN ANALYSIS OF WHAT MOTIVATES WOMEN TO PERSIST IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY

STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of women who successfully navigated the trajectory to the upper levels of administration in the public K-12 school districts, and how they leveraged opportunities and barriers to achieve their goals. Following a review of the research literature, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed to interview participants, regarding their lived experiences to attain the leadership positions. Themes that emerged from the interviews drew attention to the qualities of an effective leader, the importance of mentors, challenges women face in leadership roles, the transferability of the skills obtained from the classroom teaching experiences and gender differences. The information in this study contributed to understanding the career path of those women who have successfully pursued and attained upper leadership positions. I hope this study will provide insight to inform more women about the internal and external barriers they are likely to encounter along their path to top administrative positions in education.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my father, John Smith Sr., my brother, John Smith Jr., my grandparents, Grady Smith, Thelma Smith, Matilda Moudy and W. E. Moudy. I wish you were all here to personally witness my accomplishments.

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become a product of which I am proud. Since this process has been much longer than anticipated due to my health, I would also like to thank all of the former committee members who have helped me along the way, Dr. Laird, Dr. Gutierrez, Dr. Mackey and Dr. Vaught. I would like to express my never-ending gratitude for all of your dedication, hard work, motivation, and support which you all have provided to make the finalization of this project transpire. It has been an honor to work with you on this project. Your kindness and patience are not only valued, but also very inspiring. The sharing of your experience has demonstrated pure dedication to the field of education and for helping others.

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Chapter 1

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples" Mother Teresa.

Introduction

On February 7, 2017, on the floor of the U.S. Senate, Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky used a procedural rule to silence the objections of Senator Elizabeth Warren during her objection to the confirmation of Senator Jeff Sessions for attorney general of the U.S. After the incident, McConnell said, "Senator Warren was giving a lengthy speech. She had appeared to violate the rule. She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted" (Daniel, 2017). Setting the partisan politics of this incident aside, the phrase, "Nevertheless, she persisted" came to inspire women to not let bias quiet their voices. The stories of the women who participated in this research are saturated with clear evidence of their persistence, determination, and courage in their pursuit of a role in education administration.

The purpose of this study is to discover and understand the experiences which influenced women to persist and obtain a leadership role in educational administration in Oklahoma public schools. These findings will enhance the understanding of what motivates women to pursue leadership positions and provide strategies for career advancement and leadership development. This study will help women who are seeking leadership positions as well as those who are recruiting women for leadership positions.

Statement of the problem

Education is a business dominated by women. In more than 14,000 local education agencies (LEA) in the United States, women were 75 percent of teachers, 52 percent and school principals (Bollinger & Grady, 2018; Glass et al., 2000; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). Yet only, 27 percent of the Superintendents in the United States were women (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Bollinger & Grady, 2018). Although the number of women hired as superintendents in the United States has doubled since the 1990's, the under representation of women as upper level district leaders endures (American Association of School Administrators, 2015; Glass, 2000; Superville, 2017).

In Midwestern states, the gender gap of men and women superintendents was even greater. Bollinger and Grady (2018) reported Ohio, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and Utah were five to ten percent below the national average of female superintendents. In 2018, 20 percent of all superintendents in Oklahoma were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018).

Approximately 10% of the superintendents employed full-time, or those not partially retired, sharing the position with another individual, or working as a principal and superintendent in a rural district, were women (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2018). Therefore, the problem identified was the under representation of women in upper leadership positions including, superintendent,

assistant superintendent, CEO/CFO, head principal and other similar positions, which may be referred to under different titles.

Achieving higher level leadership positions is more difficult for women. Cullen and Luna (1993) showed women leaders deal with barriers men do not even think exist. Exploring the life experiences of successful women in leadership is important to understand what assisted them to break through and overcome barriers which often limit or prevent women from advancing their careers. Bilen-Green, Froelich, and Jacobson (2008) suggested hearing the voices of women who lead in education is important because leaders' perspectives and experiences become more visible by listening to stories as lived and experienced by other individuals.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of empowerment, source of motivation and systems of support used by women who have obtained roles in upper educational leadership including present and former superintendents, assistant superintendents, chief financial or academic officer, and head principals in Oklahoma. Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined empowerment as the promotion of self-actualization. This researcher hopes to identify challenges facing these women and to determine what strategies they applied to overcome these problems and to perseverance. An understanding of what assisted and contributed to the perseverance of leaders is

important for future leaders. Understanding how educational training, aspirations, planning, goal setting, mentors, networking, and institutional structures influence and contribute to career development and success of women in leadership will help women seeking these careers.

The aim of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the empowerment process experienced by women who obtained upper leadership positions in Oklahoma. The qualitative phenomenological research design allowed for flexibility to uncover embedded networks, situations, and relationships, visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity, by exploring participant experiences.

Questions

To understand how women have become successful in their leadership roles, one must pose questions which will explore the different obstacles they have to face, as well as identify the factors they believe led to their success. Past research indicated factors contributing to career advancement include networking, mentoring, emotional intelligence, and organizational diversity. Robson (2002) suggested the element of research questions should concentrate on the research focal points, information needed to achieve the study, as well as the purpose and feasibility of the study.

The main question for this hermeneutic phenomenological study is; what are the lived experiences of women who are currently or formally in upper

leadership positions of public school districts in Oklahoma? The sub-questions which support the main question are as follows:

- What do women report as the process of empowerment which influenced their decision to seek and continue in the role of educational leadership?
- What specific experiences do women define as beneficial in their advancement to leadership roles? What do women report to be the specific personal and societal factors and conditions which contribute to their access to leadership positions?
- How has gender impacted their career path and the type of leader they have become?

Rationale for Methodology

A qualitative methodology was selected for this study to explore the motivational factors impacting women in educational leadership. A qualitative research method was chosen since it allows for the exploration of a central phenomenon of which a limited amount of information is known. Qualitative methods also enable the researcher to explore the lived experiences of a specific population as a means of gaining clarity and a better understanding of the target phenomenon (Creswell, 2009).

The qualitative method Hermeneutic phenomenology was selected to analyze the data and to study the connection between lived experiences as a reason to remain in education and to persist to the administrative level. Through

the use of Hermeneutic phenomenology the researcher will be able to gain both a better understanding and a memorable view of the lives of the women who persisted to the administrative role. This methodology create a means of keeping intact their stories as told from their perspectives and in their voice while other forms of analysis do not always allow (Riessman, 2008; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

A Hermeneutic phenomenological design was the most appropriate for this research study as the primary focus was upon the phenomenon of the lack of women in leadership positions in K-12 public education in the state of Oklahoma. The choice of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of an identified phenomenon through the participations' experiences. Merriam (2002) noted this approach works best when it occurs in its natural setting.

The Hermeneutic phenomenological design emphasizes a detailed lens through which the participant's understanding and experiences can be viewed by the researcher. The choice of this design was made to more fully understand their experiences and the meanings of human experiences (Moustakas, 1995, p. 105) for this specific population, of which little has been described in the research.

The rationale behind this study design was it provided a personal account from the participants' lived experiences which molded their perspective of the obstacles and advantages which guided their journey to progress in career advancement for this particular geographic location and study population.

Currently a pandemic is upon us. Furloughs, budget and job cuts, an unstable economy, and an uncertain future along with the usual government initiatives and unfunded mandates lead to an increased workload, program cuts, and a lack of financial support, resulting in overwhelmed educators who are uncertain of their futures, questioning whether or not they even want to continue in the field of education. Looking into the spirit of those who overcome obstacles and continue to teach with passion and commitment then persist in obtaining additional education and experiences to gain leadership positions, even during times of uncertainty may help inform us of the personal characteristics and qualities as well as intuitional support needed to help women persist in the attainment of leadership positions.

This research study may add to the ever-growing body of research of women in administrative roles in education. The findings of the research also provide more insight into career advancement and what steps need to be taken for corrections as well as provide women with greater clarity of barriers, which may impact their career advancement and what motivational strategies can be used to aid in their progression.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher which set boundaries for the study (Peoples, 2021). Roberts (2010) described delimitations as factors which affect the study within the control of the researcher. I only interviewed women

who are currently or have previously served in upper leadership positions in a public school district in Oklahoma.

I invited current women in upper leadership positions in Oklahoma to participate in this study. The participants have experienced the process of empowerment to obtain upper leadership positions. I did not invite the following: women who were qualified, but decided not to apply for upper leadership positions; nor women who were in the process of applying and interviewing for upper leadership positions, not yet hired. Therefore, the scope of the dissertation was bound to the experiences of women who have obtained upper leadership positions and are either currently employed or formally employed in an upper leadership positions. Further research of the experiences of women who chose not to obtain upper leadership positions, or have applied but not yet hired, may contribute to an expanded understanding of the motivational and empowerment process.

Limitations are methodological weakness. They are influences out of the researcher's control. The limitations in this study are small sample size and bias in the participant sample (Peoples, 2021). Roberts (2010) describes limitations as factors which affect a study not within the researcher's control. The Oklahoma State Department of Education employment data base (2018) facilitated the identification and invitation of women to interview. However, successfully enlisting the women to participate was a limitation. Two potential participants scheduled interviews but canceled last minute due to unexpected events related to

the global Covid-19 pandemic. The erratic demands of the superintendency constricted participation. Additionally the interviews took place during the spring and fall semesters of 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. District leaders had to quickly change everything about how they deliver instruction to the students in their community. This greatly impacted the availability of several potential candidates.

Personal Bias of the Researcher

My personal bias was my experience as a woman who has worked in public education for more than 27 years. I have taught all levels from pre-K to undergraduates. I have spent the majority of my time teaching science, math and gifted and talented students in Title 1 public schools of Oklahoma and Texas. I have also been a mentor, a curriculum specialist, a team leader and a department head. As I considered the future of my career, I developed a desire to explore the experiences of the empowerment and motivation of women who obtained upper leadership positions in Oklahoma. With these considerations in mind, the focus of my research, exploring the experiences of women in upper leadership positions of Oklahoma, developed. Creswell (2013) suggested practicing reflexivity to reduce the subjective influence of personal bias. My reflexive practices resolved from my current reality, as a woman who has reached a critical phase in decision-making related to career ascension in educational leadership.

Summary

The problem presented is the under representation of women in the upper levers of educational leadership in Oklahoma including superintendents, assistant superintendents, and head principals. The research question which framed this dissertation is: What are the lived experiences of women who are current or formally in upper leadership positions of public schools in Oklahoma? The sub-questions which help to frame this research are as follows:

- What do women report as the process of empowerment which influenced their decision to seek and continue in the role of educational leadership?
- What specific experiences do women define as beneficial in their advancement to leadership roles? What do women report to be the specific personal and societal factors and conditions which contributed to their access to leadership positions?
- How has gender impacted their career path and the type of leader they have become?

The purpose of using a qualitative Hermeneutic phenomenological design is to understand the process of empowerment experienced by women who have obtained roles in the upper ranks of educational leadership in Oklahoma. This methodology will allow for the exploration of a central phenomenon of which limited amount of information is known. The Qualitative method will allow the

researcher to explore the lived experiences of a specific population as a means of gaining clarity and a better understanding of the target phenomenon (Creswell, 2009).

Definition of Relevant Terms

Dasein: German word that means "being there" or "presence" (German: da "there"; sein "to be"), and is often translated into English with the word "existence". It is a fundamental concept in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger (Peoples, 2021).

Double-bind; a psychological predicament in which a person receives from a single source conflicting messages that allow no appropriate response to be made

Empowerment: to promote the self-actualization of women who aspire to obtain upper leadership positions (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Fore-sight/fore-conception; preconceived knowledge about a phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

Hermeneutic Circle: interpretation as revision, it is a description of the process of understanding and not a technique (Peoples, 2021).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology; stresses every event or encounter involves some type of interpretation from an individual's background, these experiences cannot be separate from an individual's development through life.

Mentor: A person with power or authority who intentionally supports improvement and professional growth of a peer (Johnson & Smith, 2016).

Mindset: a collection of beliefs and thoughts. Mind-sets are the collection of beliefs and thoughts that make up the mental attitude, inclination, habit or disposition that predetermines a person's interpretations and responses to events, circumstances and situations (Dweck, 2006).

Motivation: The desire, thoughts (cognitive processes), feelings, intentions, aspirations, and inspirations. The process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-orientated behaviors. (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Phenomenology: the essence of something as it is described and how the essence of something is described in terms of how it functions in the lived experience and how it shows itself in consciousness as an object of reflection (Peoples, 2021).

Rural: A small town in Oklahoma with a population less than 20,000 and more than a two-hour drive from a large city (United States Department of Education, 2019).

School District: An area of a city or county which includes multiple school sites under the same administration; may be urban, an area of a larger city or one large city, or rural, multiple school sites in one small town. A school district serves all students who live in the defined geographical area (United States Department of Education 2019).

Superintendent; A leader of a school district hired by a board of education or city management council or committee (United States Department of Education, 2019).

Urban: A metropolitan area with a population over 20,000 people within a two-hour drive to a large city (United States Department of Education 2019).

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry was to understand the process of empowerment experienced by women who obtained upper-level leadership positions in Oklahoma public K-12 schools. I framed data collection and analysis with the main research question: What are the lived experiences of women who are current or formally in upper leadership positions of public school districts in Oklahoma? The following sub-questions assisted in the framing of this research: What do women report as the process of empowerment which influenced their decision to seek and continue in the role of educational leadership? What specific experiences do women define as beneficial in their advancement to leadership roles? What do women report to be the specific personal and societal factors and conditions which contribute to their access to leadership positions? How has gender impacted their career path and the type of leader they have become? I scrutinized the data through the following lens of conceptual frameworks: gender and leadership, the underrepresentation of women as top-level leaders and empowerment.

History

Men outnumber women in educational leadership at all levels in spite of education being a predominantly female profession. Women in leadership are more often found at the elementary levels and working as assistant principals,

assistant superintendents or in other mid-level leadership positions like curriculum. To fully grasp the significance of the lack of women in school leadership, one should first understand the historical aspects of the superintendent and the context of women in educational leadership.

The history of women as superintendent dates as far back as 1909, before women's suffrage and the nineteenth amendment, when Ella Flagg Young became the first female superintendent of Chicago schools (Blout, 1998). While Young emerged as a symbol of progress for women in education, many before her fought the struggles for equality for women in education. Abigail Adams was one of the first women to speak out for the equal education of women. Adams' fight laid the foundation for others. Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Horace Mann were among those who supported educating women. The early nineteenth century saw the establishment of academies for women to pursue their education (Blount, 1998). When states passed compulsory education laws, the demand for teachers increased, and women filled this role. Teaching soon became a burgeoning profession for many women who sought financial, social, and intellectual independence. According to Blount (1998), the emergence of the school administrator in the early 19th century occurred as "…officials lauded the notion of paid male school administrators who could monitor female teachers and keep them from getting out of line" (p. 26). There were two schools of thought regarding how the idea of the superintendency began. First, because more and more small schools were opening in sparsely populated areas, a school

administrator was hired to oversee several different schools. He would travel from school to school to supervise teachers (mostly women) in their roles. Next, as more and more women entered the teaching profession, the administrator position was created to justify the man's higher salary and status (Blount, 1998). For men to remain in education, men demanded more prestige and money. According to the research of Tallerico and Blount (2004), "the bureaucratization of schooling...was built on separate spheres for women (teaching/private) and men (leadership/public)" (p. 64).

Tallerico and Blount (2004) explained the concept of educational leadership was based on competition and authority, which is a stereotypical male attribute. Other research found the superintendency has been institutionalized as a masculine position (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 2000; Skrla, 2000). Despite the superintendency being described as a masculine or male-dominated profession, women have found their way into the superintendency and other leadership roles in education. Women filled many administrator roles during the early 20th century, such as principal, heads of school, and superintendent. Women held what was considered "less desirable elementary school principalships" (Brunner & Grogan, 2007 p. 4). Elementary principal positions usually pay less that principal positions at the secondary level. As more men entered the field of education fewer women held positions as leaders. During the 1940s, an influx of men joined the education workforce which provided refuge from being drafted into the war, as education was a protected field (Blount, 1998). This practice continued until well

past the mid-century. Affirmative Action, Title IX, and the Women's Education Equity Act of 1974 were the results of the United States government's attempt to address inequities in the workforce.

Affirmative Action is a set of procedures designed to eliminate unlawful discrimination among applicants, remedy the results of such prior discrimination, and prevent such discrimination in the future. Title IX is a federal law that was passed in 1972 to ensure that male and female students and employees in educational settings are treated fair and equally. The women's education equality act was passed in 1974. The purpose of the law was to make education more equitable for girls and women.

These efforts at equality provided federal funds for research and development to address the lack of diversity in the workplace. Literature and research concerning issues of women's equality in education is found as early as the 1870s. Before then, feminist research dealt mostly with the woman's place in her own education and the availability of higher education for women. However, even the research characterized career or goal-oriented women as having more masculine traits (Baruch, 1967). Research in the 1980s finally asked the question, "Why are there so few women in education leadership positions?" Studies from this time period noted the lack of women in higher levels of leadership and discussed the challenges of women who held these positions. Issues such as gender discrimination among school board members, age discrimination, and lack of mobility were found as significant obstacles to women taking a superintendent

position during this decade (McDade & Drake, 1982; Revere, 1987; Wiggins & Coggins, 1986).

Over the past four decades, women's appearances in leadership roles increased except in the superintendency (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008).Part of the problem was many still saw the Superintendent as a male-defined role, which led to how the discourse of the superintendency was shaped. The superintendency being a male-defined role is evident in the selection processes put forth by school districts. The headhunters, school boards, or gatekeepers who searched for candidates often have a mindset on what the profile of a successful superintendent should look like. This profile is usually equated with the qualities of white, male, heteronormative and married (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Grogan, 2005; Tallerico, 2000). Gaining access to the superintendency seems to have roadblocks which other leadership roles in education may not have had because of these preconceived notions of who belongs in the superintendent position.

Motivational Theory

Teacher retention is an issue facing education, which is centered by the human resources frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This frame is relevant to this research because if teachers do not stay in the profession they will never be able to attain a leadership position. The human resource frame is a lens that enables a view into how organizations and their workers treat each other (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Motivation in Educational Leadership

Maslow's (1954) theory of hierarchy of basic needs is the beginning of motivation studies. Alderfer's (1969) ERG theory went further to expand Maslow's theory. ERG theory condenses Maslow's five human needs into three categories: existence, relatedness, and growth. Alderfer (1969) showed Maslow's concept eliminated people's needs for relatedness, and growth. Alderfer's (1969) theory presumed women are motivated to pursue leadership for personal growth. The relationship between Maslow's theory and Alderfer's concept is both theorists' attention is focused on human needs.

Maslow (1954) referred to psychological and safety needs, Alderfer (1969) termed as relatedness which includes all experiences a person encounters at the workplace. Alderfer used the term 'growth' to show how individuals engage in activities which lead to personal growth and career development. These activities may assist to increase esteem and satisfaction of leaders in different ways. McClelland (1966) argued the unmet needs of people provide the motivation to achieve their goals. According to McClellands (1966) human motivation theory, it is presumed, men and women are driven to achieve leadership roles to satisfy their need for power, the need to achieve, and the need to affiliate with others. Human motivation theory states every person has one of three main driving motivators, the need for achievement, affiliation, or power. Those with a strong need for affiliation do not like to stand out or take risks and they value relationships above anything else.

The literature shows effective leaders are concerned about influencing others toward the achievement of organizational goals. Leadership power is perceived as attaining a higher goal (Airini and Brooker, 1999). This research implied the structures which undermine women's aspirations prevent them from achieving their full potential. Individuals who have a strong sense of self-determination are intrinsically motivated and often persist and persevere through adversity (Filak and Pritchard, 2007). Exploring what motivated and assisted women to persevere in upper education administrative positions is important. By understanding what people really want is important for motivating, developing, nurturing, and sustaining excellent leaders.

There are many different things which have influenced women leaders' career choices and decisions in educational administrative roles. Harms and Knoblock (2005) reported female teachers' motivation and commitment to teach and help students depends on three main factors including self-esteem, autonomy and self-actualization. Self-actualization refers to a person's desire to achieve their full potential.

McGregor (1967) indicated being in an administrative or leadership position gives the person a greater degree of freedom, more opportunities for social satisfaction, opportunities for achievement, for acquiring more knowledge, for being creative, and above all, a sense of fulfilment for job satisfaction. Human needs can be satisfied in a variety of ways. However, the motivation theory under discussion asserts when people are given freedom, they can use most of their

energy to satisfy their higher-level needs (Maslow, 1954). These include needs for self-respect and esteem, for growth and responsibility, for achievement both in the sense of status and recognition and in the sense of personal development and effective problem solving (Herzberg, 1966).

Providing a work environment which permits and encourages individuals' involvement may help to increase women's aspirations in leadership. As Maslow (1954) theorized, people have the potential for development, the capacity for assuming more responsibilities, the readiness to learn and direct their behavior toward achievement of their capacity. When people are controlled by rules and are emotionally restricted, they lose a sense of meaning in leadership (Hein, 2020). Their values, enthusiasm, drive, acceptance of responsibility, and self-confidence, which contributes to success are diminished. Motivating people to meet and satisfy their physiological and safety needs is as equally important as recognizing their social, egoistic, and self-fulfillment needs.

The researcher believes given freedom or autonomy, people can achieve their own goals best by directing their own efforts toward an organizational objective. Attitudes and beliefs influence how people approach and engage in different tasks and activities. Job satisfaction is reinforced by self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2000). These researchers found competence and autonomy bring satisfaction to a certain extent, but the individuals' natural desire for fulfillment is what supports a person's ongoing feelings of job satisfaction and persistence in leadership.

According to the literature review transformational leaders do what they do in an effort to inspire, motivate, and assist team members to achieve their goal. Fennel (2005) studied women principals to explore the factors which influenced them to attain school leadership positions. The results revealed a large number of female school leaders desire to create a positive and open school environment, which would allow students, teachers, and parents to work together in a collaborative learning community (Fennel, 2005). The study also reported women believed being in positions of leadership would have given them power to influence others, expand their knowledge, and achieve capacity (Fennel, 2005). According to Maslow (1954), achieving one's capacity is viewed as high-level human needs.

Young and McLeod (2001) explained women's decision to attain leadership roles depends on a combination of individuals' aspirations, experiences, and responses to those experiences. This implied there are lessons in everything if a person is fully positioned and willing to learn, think, and reflect on the lessons learned and experiences lived. This is when personal growth and development will occur. Deci and Ryan (2000) indicated from birth onward, humans are active, inquisitive, curious, and ambitious to learn and explore new experiences. Self-motivation is a critical element which influences individuals to move forward for cognitive, social, and physical development reasons. It is through acting on one's inherent interest one grows in knowledge and skills (Ryan and Deci 2000).

This research study will attempt to discover the experiences of female leaders in educational administration. Madsen (2007) indicated understanding the experiences, aspirations, attitudes and career paths of women who have succeeded in attaining leadership positions within education is important not only for women but also for attracting, hiring and retaining excellent leaders. To better understand the factors which influenced and contributed to women leaders' decisions and success in education.

Gardella and Haunes (2004) examined the lived experiences of women leaders who began their academic careers in the 1970's. The results showed most of the women in Gardella and Haunes (2004) study aspired to academic leadership to improve their departments and individual schools. The study also reported making a difference, or a desire to be a change agent, to solve problems, to be of service, or to help others was significantly important to the women leaders Gardella and Haunes (2004) Most of the factors were consistent with the intrinsic motivation as explained by women in the previous study. However, the difference lies in the motive which underlies the reason behind the behavior (Bass and Avolio, 1994). To achieve and sustain a high level of intrinsic motivation people must experience satisfaction of the needs for both competence and autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1986)

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is a concept which refers to beliefs a person has about their ability to perform a job and achieve successful results. Understanding how efficacy beliefs influenced and contributed to perseverance and success of women in leadership is important. Self-efficacy determines individuals' career paths, choices, and decisions. In addition, the level of effort a person makes and the degree to which a person is motivated depends on each person's efficacy. Bandura (1986) argued self-efficacy when combined with skill sets determines how long a person's motivation can be sustained.

Betz and Hackett (1997) claimed efficacy is associated with "career-related behaviors, education disciplines/majors, career choices, performance and persistence in the implementation of those choices" (p. 383). Therefore, discovering how self-efficacy influenced and contributed to career advancement and perseverance of women in education administrative positions is important. The next section provides information about self-efficacy from the literature as it relates to motivation and perseverance of women in education leadership.

Self-Efficacy Development

There are four main strategies identified by Bandura (1997) which can be applied by leaders in learning and developing self-efficacy. The first strategy for developing self-efficacy is learning from experience. In real life, different

situations raise opportunities for people to learn and develop self-efficacy. The barriers facing women offer them opportunities to test their skills and confront situations they may perceive as limiting their successful achievement of a goal. Making efforts and confronting individual beliefs, attitudes, and external barriers, may help women to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy. Based on the existing literature, perceptions, skills, and beliefs women hold, play a vital role in the career choices and decisions.

Other strategies employed by leaders in the process of developing their self-efficacy were observations, self-evaluation, and seeking constructive feedback. Based on the existing literature, researchers believe students and young leaders should be given a chance to observe women currently in leadership positions and see how they perform and fulfill their jobs. Observing their experiences would help those aspiring to leadership increase their self-confidence, persistence, and success (Bandura, 1986). Observation is a process which allows a person to explore a phenomenon from real life experiences. Angrosino (2008) believed, “our human ability to observe the world around us forms the basis for our ability to make commonsense judgements about things” (p. 53).

The literature shows a person’s perceptions have a significant impact on individual self-efficacy, expectations, and actions. For example, in a classroom, if a student has a poor perception about their grades, the negative attitudes, poor self-judgement, and low esteem may have a significant impact on their performance. It implied negative assessments can lower student self-efficacy

beliefs. In the social environment, research has shown than job discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudices are also some of the barriers which affect individual self-efficacy and hinder some women's ability to perform well (Swanson and Woitke, 1997). Swanson and Woitke (1997) described career barriers as 'events or conditions, which are within the person or in the environment which make career progress difficult" (p. 434). Learning how to deal with stressful and challenging situations can assist women in overcoming challenges by facing them, which may prevent them from achieving their personal and professional goals.

Caine and Caine (1990) reminded us, "The brain learns optimally when appropriately changed, but downshifts when threats are perceived," (p. 68). Understanding how self-efficacy beliefs integrate with social context is important for personal growth and development. This study is important for understanding how to deal with and overcome challenges facing women which may prevent them from achieving their goals. Listening to the voices and success stories of existing women leaders is important for women looking for role models and mentors.

Maack and Passet (1994) explored the concept of mentoring; a process which allows leaders to empower their followers and found mentoring plays a crucial role in women's career advancement and development. Mentorship when combined with individual self-efficacy, leads to positive outcomes, greater job satisfaction, commitment, and high performance.

Self-Efficacy of Women in Leadership

As Bandura (1986) showed having a high-level of efficacy is important for those in leadership roles. Self-efficacy gives leaders the ability to generate ideas and come up with various solutions for complex and challenging dilemmas. Bandura (1986) argued, "People's perceptions of their efficacy influence the types of anticipatory scenarios they construct and reiterate. Those with a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios which provide positive guides for performance and they cognitively rehearse good solutions to potential problems" (p. 729). Previous studies done on leadership have shown efficacy is crucial in the regulations of one's motivation and motivation to lead, and in managerial role activities (Lord and Brown, 2004).

Previous researchers have tried to determine what constitutes effectiveness and perseverance of leaders but to date, there are few studies done on the efficacy of women administrators. Hoyt and Blascovich (2007) found a strong sense of efficacy gives leaders the ability to adapt, change, cope, persist, and endure challenges. Bandura (1986) showed the degree of personal self-efficacy varies according to each person's beliefs, skills, persistence, commitment and experiences. Leadership efficacy depends on the leader's ability to deal with each situation faced appropriately. Bandura (1997) stated, "Mastery experiences provide striking testimony to one's capacity to effect personal changes can also produce a transformational restructuring of efficacy beliefs which are manifested across diverse realms of functioning. Such personal triumphs serve as

transforming experiences." Additionally Bandura claimed, "What has been generalized are the beliefs which one can mobilize whatever effort it takes to succeed in different undertakings" (p. 53). This implies the more diverse one builds their efficacy beliefs, the more likely leaders will be able to activate their efficacy and will be more adaptable and effective within and across different situations. Leadership efficacy shows leaders with a strong self-efficacy were found to be more adaptable when facing diverse leadership challenges. It is also worth noting to be successful in leadership, one must assess all the available resources which can be used to perform a task.

Leaders make serious decisions which affect people in different ways in education institutions. Despite their academic qualifications, skills, or talents a lack of strong efficacy can have a serious negative impact on a leaders' performance and achievement. Men leaders and women leaders are perceived differently. Expectations for women are often based on gender rather than qualifications and competencies. Due to the impact negative stereotypes have on female leaders discovering women leaders' efficacy is important.

Previous researchers showed self-efficacy assists individuals in dealing with and coping with work related stressors appropriately (Brief and Hartman, 1987; Jex and Blies, 1999). Efficacy gives leaders the ability to set goals, assess oneself, take a stand, and do something about any situation one is facing. Leaders must have not only personal efficacy or confidence in their abilities, but they need to also have a collective efficacy to motivate and take action. To be successful in

leadership, leaders must have the ability to set goals, regulate their thoughts and self-motivational processes (Wood and Bandura, 1989). Research shows individuals with strong self-efficacy or leaders with strong efficacy adapt and adopt problem focused coping strategies. Individual leaders with a lower-level of self-efficacy may have a more difficult time making difficult decisions. Leadership efficacy is associated with coping strategies such as resilience and perseverance of women in education administration. High efficacy allows leaders to adapt and change their approach according to the situation faced.

According to Bandura's (1986) concepts, the leader's efficacy beliefs can be seen as the leader's dispositions. The National Center for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2002) report stated, dispositions are defined as values, professional ethics, and commitments which influence an individual's behavior. Dispositions reflect personal values, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors. The connection between personal efficacy and dispositions is dispositions do not only demonstrate what a person is able to do, but like efficacy, dispositions influence individuals' abilities, thoughts, and actions (Ritchhart, 2004).

Previous researchers found the person's internal resources, such as perceptions of such things as knowledge, experience, skills, and endurance are vital for developing one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Vroom (1964) indicated a person does not have the essential skills required for performing the job effectively, even with a high self-efficacy belief, one may fail to achieve successful results. Bandura (1986) strongly believed efficacy is vital for career

and leadership development. Kouzes and Posner (2007) also showed leaders who speak out and challenge the status quo have a strong self-efficacy. Developing a strong sense of self-efficacy can assist women in using their personal power to take action and achieve goals.

Review of the Literature about Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1986) believed individuals choose to engage in specific activities where they perceive themselves to be competent. Self-efficacy influences individual career choices, decisions, and development. According to Savickas and Lent (1994), career development is a person's ability to change jobs, seek new opportunities, and participate in other activities. Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) found individuals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy pursue and achieve more challenging tasks. Self-efficacy is intrinsically motivating. It was found individuals with a strong personal efficacy take risks, strive, persist, and endure in the midst of difficult times.

Herzberg's (1966) and McGregor's (1966) also showed things such as the sense of autonomy and accomplishment of one's task were intrinsically motivating. Vroom (1964) showed individuals who do not have the required skills for a position, even though they have high self-efficacy beliefs and motivation, may not be able to perform in the role. Bandura (1997) disagreed and claimed in any case, when one fails, this may occur because the person is lacking the necessary skills to perform the task, and if the person has the skills, failure to

accomplish successful results may happen due to a lack of personal-efficacy or confidence to use one's skills effectively.

The literature shows individual leaders with a strong sense of self-efficacy, set challenging goals and maintain a strong commitment to those goals. And persist and sustain their efforts in the midst of difficult situations. Self-efficacy is developed through various experiences such as internal beliefs, observation of the external environment, and interactive experiences. However, rather than putting more attention on personal-efficacy, leadership requires leaders to develop collective efficacy. Collective efficacy focuses on the beliefs and efforts of the group. Collective efficacy focuses on the amount of effort and persistence a person dedicates to a task and the perception of the success one may have about a specific task (Bandura, 1997). Rather than focusing on beliefs and efforts of the individual, collective efficacy focuses on the beliefs and efforts of the group.

Understanding how self-efficacy and collective efficacy contribute to perseverance and success of women in educational leadership is important. The previous scholars showed individuals who doubt their capabilities shy away from difficult and complex tasks, because they view those tasks as personal threats (Bandura, 1971; Harris, Arnold, Lowery, and Crocker, 2000). A strong self-efficacy motivates and increases one's commitment to the achievement of set goals.

Glass's (2000) analysis of the AASA (The School Superintendents Association) survey proposed the primary reason 13 percent of superintendents in the United States were women was because women did not apply for the position. Glass (2000) reported women did not apply for superintendent positions because they had limited support, immobility, and were not prepared for the position due to less experience and less access to formal mentor networks. Brunner and Kim (2010) responded to the Glass (2000) analysis by conducting quantitative research and found women were adequately prepared to be superintendents in experience related to curriculum and instruction and student academic achievement. More women attended administrative preparation programs than men (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Connell et al., 2015). However, women reported fewer professional opportunities to practice leadership skills, such as extra-curricular management and financial decision-making (Brunner & Kim, 2010). The limited access to leadership practice, mentor networks, and social capital were also related to women's career path to upper leadership positions and a lack of self-efficacy.

Harris et al., (2000) suggested what motivates teachers to achieve a principal's position is the opportunity to help children, other educators, their families and the community. Harris (2000) also showed the respondents indicated other areas motivating teachers to attain principals' position is to support families, students, faculty, and enable them to increase their commitment. Equally important, perceptions of personal effectiveness, organizational support, and strong efficacy were also identified by participants as important.

When an individual feels confident the task at hand can be performed successfully, positive self-efficacy is observed. When one feels unable to perform the task at hand successfully, negative self-efficacy is observed. The literature has shown individuals who exhibit positive self-efficacy often tend to persist and complete their tasks effectively. However, those who exhibit negative self-efficacy have a propensity to give up when the task becomes too challenging (Bandura and Locke, 2003). Self-efficacy is associated with individuals' ability to learn, which is referred to as cognitive motivation.

Other researchers have looked at individual self-perception to see how they impact what type of challenges individuals were willing to undertake, and to what degree those tasks are performed. They found individual feelings, needs, and expectations impact self-perceptions. Individuals who have a high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided (Bandura, 1986; Kane, Marks, Zaccaro, and Blair, 1996; Pajares, 1996, Stajkovis and Luthas, 1998). These results were associated with higher levels of academic performance.

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, states people choose to engage in specific activities where they perceive themselves to be competent. Self-efficacy is based on one's confidence to be successful in a particular field or career choice. It is believed women administrators have a strong sense of self-efficacy. Several studies have shown a strong sense of self-efficacy enhances individual career

decisions, persistence, accomplishment, and personal well-being. Self-efficacy may be developed throughout a career development process.

Summarizing Research Findings about Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's ability to judge their skills to perform the job. Efficacy plays a critical role in career advancement and leadership development. Individual efficacy beliefs influence a person's ability to learn and master skills. Self-efficacy also influences a persons' motivation, aspirations, and persistence in achieving objectives and goals. Developing high personal efficacy beliefs is vital for those aspiring to leadership.

Several empirical studies have consistently indicated self-efficacy influences what people choose to do, their persistence in the face of difficulty, how much effort they put forth, and performance (Avolio, 2002; Bass, 1985). Singer (1991) found efficacy beliefs go beyond motivation, to seek leadership aspirations for both men and women. Self-efficacy increases leaders' confidence and ability to embrace challenges rather than looking at difficult situations as threats. It is a person's belief in their ability to learn new skills, master their tasks, and achieve their goals, what is referred to as leadership-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

Maslow (1954) noted self-efficacy is part of the ability which moves people to seek further learning to realize their potential. Developing a strong sense of self-efficacy can help those struggling to achieve their objectives and

goals. Self-efficacy can be developed by setting challenging goals, maintaining a strong commitment to set goals, and persisting and maintaining a positive attitude, rather than doubting and shying away from challenging activities (Bandura, 1986; Harris et al., 2000).

If people like their jobs, self-efficacy motivates them to make more effort to learn new things, master the skills and succeed (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is a concept which can be applied by any person to any business organization to achieve objectives and goals. Self-efficacy influences career choices, decisions, personal growth and professional development. There is a strong connection between individuals' efficacy and determination to persist and achieve their goals.

Self-Determination Theory

Field and Hoffman (1994) define self-determination as "one's ability to achieve goals, based on conviction, knowing, and valuing the task" (p. 164). Filak and Pritchard (2007) defined self-determination as a need to feel effective within one's own environment. It is a person's ability to feel competent in a certain field. Self-determination goes beyond career choices to job satisfaction. Self-determination motivates individuals to act positively. Self-determination gives a person energy, maintains and directs their behavior. Deci and Ryan (2000) indicated self-determination is built on individual curiosity, self-efficacy, control, cooperation, and involvement in challenging activities. These researchers believed when given autonomy, women will develop a sense of belonging.

Self-determination, which refers to a person's ability to feel effective in a certain field, is important (Filak and Pritchard, 2007). Self-determination gives leaders the power to feel a deep sense of being in control of their own life. A person who has a strong sense of self-determination has the power to act with confidence and meet any challenge which may be put before them. Leadership increases a person's sense of self-determination, self-confidence, and personal effectiveness and success.

According to Barah et al. (2008), the key dimensions which assisted women administrators included: Meaning: this meant finding your inner strengths and putting them to work in the service of an inspiring purpose. Managing energy: this category referred to knowing where your energy comes from, where it goes, and what you can do to manage it. Positive framing: this theme meant adopting a more constructive way to view your world, expand your horizons, and gain the resilience to move ahead even when bad things happen. Connecting: this theme referred to identifying people who can help you grow, building stronger relationships, and increasing your sense of belonging. Engaging: this category meant finding your voice, becoming self-reliant and confident by accepting opportunities and the inherent risks they bring, and collaborating with others (Barah et. al., 2008).

Barah et.al (2008) concluded the women administrators have a strong sense of self-efficacy, determination, and job satisfaction. Based on their leadership behaviors, researchers believed in order to lead and be successful in

leadership positions, women administrators had to apply different strategies to different situations. Barah et al. (2008) believed the women's leadership is centered. As the name implies, centered leadership emphasizes the role of positive emotions. The leaders who are centered put more attention on balancing their physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual strengths (Barah et al., 2008). Researchers believed self-efficacy and determination can assist leaders to make such a balance.

This revealed individuals who have a strong sense of self-efficacy and determination increase their chances of receiving positive outcomes. This is because a person believes in their ability to perform the task and achieve successful results. Despite the challenges facing women, this information should encourage women to change their attitudes and approach difficult situations with confidence. Researchers believe self-assurance can assist a person to gain interest in learning and mastering the necessary skills. Bandura (1986) indicated self-efficacy when combined with self-determination enhances accomplishment and personal well-being. This information is important for all those interested in life balance and development.

If people were to experience only the easy things, then there would be no need for innovations and challenges. Oakley (2000) suggested women need to learn to be resilient, confident, assertive, and determined. Bandura (1986) showed once a person overcomes a particular problem, the experience gained from the first situation becomes a lesson for addressing and solving future problems.

Women should be encouraged not to shy away from challenging situations. Lent, Hackett, and Brown (1996) suggested leaders use their self-efficacy and determination in facilitating career advancement. Bandura (1986) believed when persons perform successfully, their self-efficacy grows. As a result, they consider assuming more responsibilities and career options. They also show greater interest in their career options, perform better educationally, and have greater power to persevere in their chosen pursuits.

Goal Achievement

Exploring ways which influence individuals and motivate them to achieve high goals is important for educators and school leaders in education. Northhouse (2007) indicated leaders influence others to achieve a common goal. This implied leaders need to have the ability to influence and assist team members to achieve their goals. Individuals with a high need for achievement will act in ways which assist them to meet outstanding standards. Understanding what motivates and assists women leaders achieve their goal in education administration positions is important.

McCollum and Kajas (2009) examined school principals' attributes to discover the extent to which goal achievement contributes to principals' motivation and effectiveness at their jobs. McCollum and Kajas (2009) study looked at the relationship between goal orientation and achievement of school principals. The main goal was to understand why some people pursue leadership

and succeed, while other individuals fail is important. Researchers used mastery goals and performance goals as an instrument and explored characteristics and attributes of school principals. It was found such attributes, which refer to knowledge, skills, and dispositions influence how people approach and engage in leadership (McCollum and Kajs, 2009). Based on their findings McCollum and Kajas (2009) concluded a person's beliefs determine how important a goal is and how much effort one is willing to put in to achieve certain goals.

Carol Dweck and her colleagues examined what occurs when individuals are faced with task failure. Past work by Dweck and her colleagues (Diener & Dweck, 1978, 1980; Dweck, 1975; Dweck & Reppucci, 1973) led them to identify two responses to task failure, a maladaptive helpless response and a more adaptive mastery-oriented response (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Participants exhibiting the maladaptive response were referred to as having a performance goal orientation and participants exhibiting the adaptive mastery-oriented response were referred to as having a mastery or learning goal orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Career Planning

Hirsch (1994) indicated career planning is a goal or a plan for how to achieve a specific objective. Career choices or commitments are what people hope to accomplish during their careers. Career planning plays a vital role in the advancement of women to administrative positions. Holland (1997) showed the

main problems preventing women from advancing in their careers arise from the plans and career choices which women make, and positions they choose within their professions. Researchers believe characteristics such as occupational knowledge, skills, expectation, and experience contribute to women's career choices and decisions in educational administration (Holland, 1997).

Harrow (1993) indicated, "Women administrators take every opportunity to practice and reflect upon leadership skills of communication, negotiation, analytical thinking, decision making, conflict resolution, political posturing, and analysis (p. 156). The implication is the leadership in educational institutions requires those aspiring to be well prepared and equipped with essential leadership skills. Those aspiring to academic leadership need to seek opportunities for leadership training, mentoring and networking. The key is career planning plays a vital role in career advancement and development (Hirsch, 1994). Therefore, education institutions should provide students with programs for career support and assistance from the beginning. For example mentoring, networking and the opportunity to be in the field.

Job enrichment, which refers to the nature of the work, is what motivates and influences the career choices of women (Tang and Talpade, 1999). Herzberg (1966) asserted the satisfaction and joy people get from doing the job determines individual career choices and commitment to the organization. Job satisfaction does not necessarily lead to high levels of motivation, but it can help leaders to measure and determine employee job fulfillment. This information supports the

literature which showed attitudes, values, needs and motives influence leadership aspirations.

Aspirations of Women in Leadership

According to Lepkowski (2009), career aspirations refer to the goals which people make and want to achieve. Gutek and Garwood (1987) defined career as “a series of related jobs within an organization or different jobs within various companies” (p. 9). Goals refer to values, beliefs, and desires which people hold motivate them to work hard and achieve their needs. The career aspirations of women administrators may have been influenced by socioeconomic status, race, education level, and other individual interests.

Gardella and Haunes (2004) examined men and women leaders, to determine men’s and women’s characteristics, the information was grouped into two categories. The first category focused on leadership traits and the second group was about critical skills and the last on solving problems. Based on the findings Gardella and Haunes (2004) study revealed more men than women were attracted to leadership for three main reasons: power, salary, and family. Women were found to be motivated by other values such as relationships, respect, growth, and helping others Gardella and Haunes (2004). Gardella and Haunes (2004) study results supported what Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated in their book, *Leadership Challenges.* Kouzes and Posner reported:

> Values are empowering. We are much more in control of our own lives...when values are clear employees do not have to rely on direction

> from someone in authority. Values motivate. They keep us focused on why we're doing what we're doing. Values influence every aspect of our lives: our moral judgements, our responses to others, and our commitment to personal and organizational goals. Values serve as a guide to actions; they influence, and set the parameters (p. 52).

Honesty and integrity are some of the values which allow successful women administrators to enjoy their field and earn trust from subordinates. To be successful, leaders need to have strong values and principles to guide them. Researchers believed knowing what a person really wants and does is vitally important. Leaders use their values to set an example, to motivate, to energize, and to change individual attitudes. Gardella and Haunes (2004) indicated making a difference, helping others, and nurturing were the most important values which motivated women to pursue and attain leadership.

Organizational and Environmental Support

Most of the activities done by women administrators are not externally exciting, discovering factors which help to motivate and sustain women in education administration is important. Institutional structures, society, and external environment play a vital role in career choices and decisions people often make. Exploring the external environment may help to enhance understanding of the factors which hindered or facilitated career advancement, development, and perseverance of women in education administration.

McGregor (1968) argued unless people believe their needs will be satisfied from the job to a reasonable degree, they are not going to be willing to

work for an organization. People spend about a third of their lives on the job. Regarding this, Maslow (1954) indicated unless faculty's needs are satisfied, they will not be motivated to reach out and assist students to achieve their goals. The implication is providing a pleasing workplace environment can encourage people to work hard and exceed organizational goals and expectations.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) indicated personal values drive and increase commitment. They believed to become a credible leader, "you have to comprehend fully the deeply held beliefs, values, principles, standards, ethics and ideas which drive you" (p. 48). Unfortunately, McGregor (1968) indicated institutions tend to focus on rules and regulations as a norm of managing and motivating employees. Researchers believed humans are social beings. Therefore, values are believed to influence women's' decisions in education.

McGregor (1968) also suggested people need to work in structures and with conditions which allow them to utilize their skills and talents freely. He believed creating opportunities, releasing potential, removing obstacles, encouraging growth, and providing guidance may assist to increase individual motivation, commitment, and satisfaction (McGregor, 1968). Kouzes and Posner (2007) believed recognizing individual value is important to leadership success. Scholars showed usually people need to know what ideas are important to a leader, to trust and follow. To be motivated, leaders must be prepared, plan, and set clear goals.

Leadership Training and Professional Development

The programs higher education provide to students play a vital role in preparing men and women for leadership positions. There must be a strong relationship between the career advancement and leadership development of women administrators. Parker and Carroll (2009) believed leadership development occurs in a nonlinear fashion and emerges from a dynamic among aspects of self, relationships, and context. A peer partnering process was designed to foster collaboration, trust, reflection, and self-awareness which would foster leadership learning on both an individual and collective level (Parker and Carroll, 2009).

There is a strong relationship among these three dimensions of career development. Knowing education and leadership training impact on career advancement and leadership development is important for those involved in designing and implementing school programs. Parker and Carroll (2009) explored the extent to which leadership training influenced the career aspirations of people in leadership. It was concluded when given opportunities, women can develop leadership skills through sponsorship, research, and mentorship (Parker and Carroll, 2009). Setting goals plays a vital role in leadership and career advancement. Based on the data collected, there were four main themes which are believed to influence individuals' aspirations to leadership roles. These themes included the need for a challenge, autonomy, balancing work and life, and sponsorship to gain expanded knowledge (Parker and Carroll, 2009).

Summarizing Literature Findings about Factors Influencing Women to Leadership

To attract more women to leadership positions, higher education institutions need to change traditional structures to encourage women to apply and practice their own leadership styles freely. Several researchers showed enhanced experience plays a vital role in increasing employee commitment to the organization (Herzberg, 1966; McClelland, 1966; Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, to understand how personal efficacy or judgement influenced and contributed career advancement and perseverance of women in education administration the researcher revisited the literature and reviewed previous studies about self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) as it relates to women in education administration.

Barriers Preventing Women's Advance to Administrative Positions

Traditionally, leadership has been socially constructed with a gender identity. Leadership pushes men into positions of power and women into subjugation (Brunner, 2005; Butler, 2011; Hartstock, 1998; Lorber, 1994; Shakeshaft and Nowell, 1984). Many barriers are embedded in the gendered organization, including the "second shift" where women have to juggle between professional responsibilities and responsibilities at home. The glass ceiling is a term often used to refer to many invisible barriers created by individuals' negative attitudes, societal beliefs, and organizational prejudices (Oakley, 2000). Airini, Lindsey, McPherson, Brenda, and Cheryl (2011) identified three main factors

from the literature they believed would either help or hinder women's advancement and leadership development potential. The three main factors are personal, professional, and organizational factors.

Personal Factors

According to Airine et al. (2011), personal factors refer to individuals' lifestyles. Researchers believed women's lifestyles play a vital role in women's decision-making and career planning. According to the researchers, some women consider raising a family, and taking care of their physical and mental health as a priority rather than career advancement (Airini et al. 2011). White et al. (1997) found successful women give priority to academic careers try to align their home responsibilities with their work. However, this may require women to make a lot of sacrifices.

White et al. (1997), believed leadership success depends on a person's ability to work hard, self-efficacy, tenacity, and willingness to take up more responsibilities. Researchers believed successful women leaders have a strong self-efficacy. Women leaders' self-efficacy is associated with their ability to make decisions to move forward, to control the direction of their careers, and be able to succeed. Women administrators' motivation to achieve and persistence toward the achievement of their goal should be viewed as a higher level of self-determination.

Professional Development

Vanderslice (1998) argues by closing the gender gap, “institutions would become more centered on process and persons rather than focused on tasks and outcomes” (p. 6). Women who have taken both formal and informal measures for developing their career professions managed to attain higher-level positions. Some of the experiences which have assisted women in advancing their careers included learning from mentors, team work, self-awareness, and willingness to take risks, readiness to take immediate opportunities and completion of advanced studies (Airini et al., 2011). Researchers believed in order to attain and achieve professional development, women need to prioritize and seek opportunities to advance their careers. Learning how to deal with and solve problems may increase a woman’s chances to attain and succeed in an administrative position.

What helps or hinders women’s advancement as leaders in educational institutions depends on many different areas. These may include things such as, institutional structures, work relationships, school environment, invisible barriers and rules, and personal circumstances. There is no single factor which can fully help career advancement and development of women in leadership. Women need to identify strategies and develop necessary capabilities for them to attain and succeed in higher level positions.

Brown concluded professional development can assist women to enhance professional skills, access social networking opportunities, enhance one’s self-esteem, and increase women’s career aspirations and desire to seek and attain

administrative positions. Brown (2005) believed career planning played a serious role in women's advancement.

Resilience

If we want to increase the participation and maintenance of women leaders in education, investigating the experiences of current successful women administrators who have managed to reach the top of their organization in the complex world is important. Previous studies showed how women leaders have struggled for a long time to improve their status (Butler, 2011; Brunner, 2005; Lorbor, 1994; Shakeshaft and Norwell, 1984). Oakley (2000) showed when women leaders behave like men, they find themselves in a "double bind, this behavioral norm creates a no win situation no matter what one does" (p. 324). Even though women have made progress in attaining leadership positions in education, women are still underrepresented at the top of organizations and educational institutions. This research study attempted to discover what helps women succeed in administrative positions.

Barsh et al. (2008) conducted a four year pilot study to discover factors which influenced executive women to attain administrative roles. Based on the data collected from interviewed participants and other sources, five dimensions were found to contribute to perseverance and success of women leaders. These five dimensions are as follows: Having a strong sense of meaning, this was found to inspire and motivate women to achieve high goals. Managing energy, this is

about knowing where your energy comes from, where it goes, and what you can do to remain motivated. Positive framing, this is maintaining a positive attitude and being open to other perspectives, which the author referred to as adopting a more constructive way of viewing the world around you. Making connections, identifying people who can help you grow and build stronger relationships which can also help women to persevere. Participation in other activities is the final element, which helps women to attain a balance between professional and personal responsibilities (Barsh et al., 2008). Based on these findings, there are various things contributing to the success of women leaders. Passion, collaboration, self-confidence, and adaptation were crucial to the success of women leaders in this particular study (Barsh et al 2008).

Passion is about doing something which one values, this is what brings meaning and satisfaction to women in leadership. Having meaning is what motivates a person to change jobs or to advance their career to a higher level. Many researchers believe those leaders who find joy and meaning in their jobs make changes, which leads to greater development. As a result, the job becomes a calling to a person (Barch, Cranston, and Craske, 2008).

Apart from the joy which some leaders get in making a difference, educational institutions also need to provide an environment which supports women and encourages them to achieve their goals. Leaders can internalize their own problems and effectively deal with various challenges facing them in their

daily activities, but this strategy can only be achieved when women leaders work in an environment which encourages and supports them (Madne, 2007).

In continuing with resilience and perseverance of women administrators, researchers examined the experiences of women administrators in educational leadership programs to discover how they came to their positions as leaders and what helps them persist and overcome barriers. McClellan and Christman (2008) found resilient women administrators developed effective leadership behaviors through patience, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, determination, and risk taking. Resiliency is a person's ability to adapt, persist, and endure in the midst of hardships.

Several studies have acknowledged resilience plays a vital role in assisting leaders to overcome their barriers (Janas, 2002; Richardon, 2002). Some women may be asking whether resiliency is a characteristic which a person is born with or whether it is a quality which is developed over time. In a sample of 12 participants, Gardella and Haunes (2004) interviewed women about their career choices within education and found, "intense self-reflection assisted these women to transform pain into growth and achieve fulfillment in personal and professional domains" (p. 4). Self-reflection is a strategy used by leaders to identify ways to address and deal with problems affecting them. Leaders assess themselves to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

According to Gardella and Haunes (2004), self-reflection is developed in a long learning process. It requires constant assessment, practice and seeking

constructive feedback. Its success depends on a person's ability to adapt, transcend, and persist despite hardship. In order to be transformed and achieve their goals, women must be willing to adapt and change.

Perseverance

Experiences may offer great insights for aspiring educational leaders. Gardella and Haunes (2004) indicated there has been improved acceptance of women in education leadership, but there are still some invisible problems forcing women to leave or change their professions. Based on existing literature, the major sources of stress for women administrators include time management, workload pressures, and responsibility to and for others, others' expectations, work and family conflicts, lack of resources, financial problems, and high expectations for the constituents Gardella and Haunes (2004).

Pounder and Merrill (2001) indicated women who are not interested in leadership positions may need stronger incentives or encouragement to be attracted and retained in education administration. According to a 2000 report published by the Institute for Education Leadership, there are five main challenges and reasons forcing women to leave administrative positions. The report showed the top five reasons given by women who choose to leave the field were; changing demands of the job, compensation, time commitment, lack of community support, negative media attention, and lack of respect (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000).

Fullen (2005) reported individuals' sustainability in education leadership is based on their ability to balance work, family, and life. He believes doing what one wants and going on without burning out, is important. Fullan (2005) suggested women administrators need to find a way to find balance. He argued, "The key is not an all-out marathon, but rather a cyclical energizing" (p. 35). This implies seeking opportunities to participate in other activities outside the official job may help to increase women administrators' energy and sustenance in administrative roles. Engaging in family activities, social events, and other celebrations was found to give leaders a break which leads to gaining energy and exploring ideas for a new direction (Fullan, 2005).

Other scholars contend job satisfaction and organizational support were the most important factors contributing to women administrators' decisions to leave their jobs (Mortimenr, 1979; Tang, Kim and Tang, 2000). Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience" (p. 1300). The previous researchers indicated when the stresses and pressures of a job becomes too great, or there is a poor fit between employee needs and the conditions in the work environment, people experience burnout which results in low job satisfaction and high rates of turnover (Cooley and Shen, 2000; Olsen, Maple, and Stage, 1995).

Huttunen and Heikkinen (2004) believed creating a climate where people feel recognized and their ideas are appreciated, may help institutions increase employee satisfaction. In this case, institutions should recognize women

administrators' talents, knowledge, skills, ideas, and creativity as important and significant contributions of education development. Researchers believed recognizing individual contribution helps to increase their sense of belongingness to the organization as well as trust and job satisfaction (Huttunen and Heikkinen, 2004).

What makes women aspire to a leadership position may be very different from the reasons which attract men to apply for the same positions. Pounder and Merrill (2001) indicated most individuals sought such a position to meet their social and psychological needs. In a study of school district administrators, many women leaders were intrinsically motivated to help students succeed. Others were interested in achieving a higher and new level of position to satisfy their higher level needs as Maslow (1954) theorized. Cooley and Shen (2000) believed job satisfaction played a vital role in their decisions to move forward and attain higher level positions.

Harms and Knobloch (2005) indicated prior fulfilling experiences and career preparations are important for increasing motivation to enter a new career field. Pounder and Merrill (2001) noted only those who find the position highly desirable are most likely to actively pursue attainment of education administration positions because these women may see leadership as part of their career plan. Increasing women's participation and involvement in education leadership requires educational institutions to create motivating environments, in which everyone involved is eager to participate and cooperate. Previous researchers

believed a motivating environment allowed and encouraged a wide spectrum of expressions, success, and achievement but without losing sight of such moral and ethical values as honesty, respect, kindness, and compassion (Herzberg, 1966).

In summary, women administrators encourage those aspiring to leadership to set goals, find a mentor, and be prepared and willing to assume more responsibilities. In order to be effective and succeed in leadership positions, women need to develop the ability to plan, organize, manage and control organizations' resources.

Mindset

Dweck (2006) studied why it is not always the people who start out the smarted who end up being the smartest. Growth mindset theory suggest it is often the mindset people adopt for themselves that make the difference with how they lead their lives. A person’s mindset can be shaped from a very early stage and can continue to change and be molded throughout their life. Dweck defined a growth mindset as the belief that someone, with effort, can cultivate the basic qualities to continue to grow. Commitment to focus on a growth mindset is seen by individuals with a fixed mindset as only needed for people with deficiencies (Dweck, 2006). People with a fixed mindset believe qualities as individual possesses are carved in stone from birth, and perspectives cannot change and develop through one’s life. The two mindsets can create a very different outlook when it comes to achievement. People with a fixed mindset may shut down

prematurely because they do not see the importance in applying effort because of past failures or preconceived notions about potential. Dweck referred to this as the low=effort syndrome, and it is a way individuals with a fixed mindset can protect themselves from possible failure. People who have developed a growth mindset are not discouraged by the fear of not knowing; they see learning as a journey filled with challenges. Dweck explained that people with a fixed mindset greatly underestimate their ability , and those with a growth mindset are more accurate in identifying their ability, are open minded about being a work in progress, and believe they can develop themselves.

Niles and Wolverton (2003) indicated, “Women view power as a means of achieving change through people” (p. 36). Henning and Jardim (1997) indicated, “Women see a career as personal growth, as self-fulfillment, as satisfaction, as making a contribution to others, as doing what one wants to do” (p. 14). Understanding what it takes to survive and thrive in an educational environment is important for both women and the students who they serve. Women are constantly striving to survive and thrive in a male dominated leadership society. Gupton and Slick (1996) noted in order to succeed in a complex environment, women must be able to adapt to change and maintain a positive attitude.

Resilience is about being persistent, determined, and optimistic. Resilient women know what energizes them. The literature shows people who are resilient exhibit seven leadership characteristics, including insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality (Wolin and Wolin, 1993.

Institutional Support

If we want to increase participation of women in educational leadership, change must begin with institutional structures. Tedrow and Rhoads (1998) argued leadership in educational institutions is in crisis because women's leadership is not fully recognized as a significant contribution to education development. Vanderslice (1998) argued if education institutions are willing to close the gender gap, "institutions would become more centered on the process and qualities of women leaders, rather than focused on tasks and outcomes attributed to masculine styles of leadership" (p. 6).

Tedrow and Rhodes (1998) suggested to make positive change, "institutions of education must be more willing to recruit and hire women in leadership. This strategy will enable educational institutions to shift and become more inclusive structures, incorporating relational styles of leadership" (p. 6). Young, M., & McLeod, S. (2001) noted, "Leadership styles necessary for educational change are more often adopted by women who also more frequently display transformational leadership" (p. 102). Rather than scrutinizing women and preventing them from attaining leadership positions, institutions need to change their structures and begin to take advantage of the unique characteristics and qualities which women hold (Niles and Wolverton, 2002).

Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship between two people, a mentor and a mentee. A person with more experience is referred to as a mentor. The mentor's role is to provide guidance, assistance and support to a mentee in the form of information and experience sharing. The relationship between a mentor and a mentee is what is referred to as mentorship. Researchers have shown mentoring plays a role in the advancement of women in leadership positions across various disciplines (Brown, 2005).

In spite of the progress women have made in attaining higher education, they are still underrepresented in administrative positions. Lepkowski (2009) believed even women with outstanding credentials find it difficult to rise to the top of the organization without having a coach or a mentor. Shamir and Eilam (2005) showed mentoring is essential for exploring and learning about processes and procedures involved in career advancement. Psychologically, mentoring was found to play a vital role in enhancing individuals' sense of confidence, competence, and effectiveness in various ways. Shamir and Eilam (2005) concluded mentoring is a process which involves counseling, role-modeling, emotional support, information sharing, and relationship building.

Moore-Brown (2006) indicated training and development programs assist leaders to enhance their skills and networking opportunities, but mentoring is

crucial for career transition, intellectual assistance and psychological support Gardella and Haynes (2004) studied female leaders in human services agencies to explore strategies which helped them succeed. The results showed women who had no access to mentoring services used their own families as a source of strength and support in career development. Currently many women may be encountering problems in finding mentors because there are few programs for professional development, mentoring and networks which help women climb the career ladder.

Brown (2005) showed throughout history, the leadership in educational institutions has been dominated by the male population. This is because men often know how to connect with the right people. They also seem to have more access to mentoring support and promotional opportunities. To increase the participation of women in educational leadership. Researchers believe women need support and encouragement from existing female leaders to show them how to persevere.

Educational institutions have a responsibility to train and prepare future leaders. Providing students with mentoring and professional development programs, may help them address and solve some of the problems facing women today. Haynes and Haynes (2004) believed by sharing their lived experiences, executive women leaders can help young leaders better understand obstacles. Leaders can also encourage those struggling to persist and to achieve their professional goals.

Developing potential future leaders through mentorship is important because institutions cannot succeed without sustaining excellent leadership. Current leaders can inspire future leaders, nurture, and empower them through mentoring, support, and career guidance. If current leaders take the responsibility to assist and mentor female graduates and those seeking administrative positions, the pool of female administrators will increase. Based on the current literature, mentoring and being mentored are critical to career development opportunities.

Researchers believe women are more likely to seek and utilize female mentors. In a national survey of female executive mentors found women are mentoring both men and women. Moore and Salimbebe (1980) urged women not to rely on male mentors alone. Hansman (1998) showed diverse mentoring plays a vital role in addressing women's social, career and personal development needs.

Still other researchers showed mentors are crucial in providing career advice, recommendations, and emotional support (Hansman, 1998; Johnson and Huwe, 2003). Although mentees tend to select mentors with whom they may have the same characteristics and or interest, those aspiring to become leaders are encouraged to have a diverse group of mentors.

Benefits of Mentoring

Usually, women have to compete with male candidates interested in taking the same career positions. Mentoring is crucial for personal growth and development. Mentoring gives both mentor and mentee an opportunity to develop

a strong relationship through interactions and information sharing. Mentoring is essential for self-discovery and development. It also plays a vital role in career advancement and gaining constructive feedback. Mentorship is crucial for recruiting and helps those who are being mentored to prepare to be future mentors themselves. Mentorship and multiple mentoring relationships play a vital role in the career advancement of women in educational institutions. Women should take initiatives to identify and seek mentors (More and Salimbene, 1980).

Networking

Traditionally, the administration in education has been a male-dominated field. This situation prevented women from having the opportunities for mentorship and networking (Nies and Wolverton 2000). Networking is a term which refers to developing and maintaining contacts and personal connections with a number of people who may be of help for career advancement and development. Nies and Wolverton (2000) describe networking as a relationship developed for the purpose of sharing information. Networking can be viewed as an art. It can be utilized to meet various needs. Knowing whom to contact and involve in a networking system is crucial to career advancement and professional development. Heim and Golant (1993) concluded a majority of jobs held by women in education administration are obtained through networking. Networking is important for exploring ideas and opportunities. Networking may allow those aspiring to leadership to tap into the expertise of those involved in the recruiting

and hiring process. Heim and Golant (1993) noted career advancement often depends on personal networks.

Networking can also be used to solve problems or to expand a personal knowledge base. Nies and Wolverton (2000) found female leaders use networks as a tool to seek information for personal support and professional development whereas men use networking as a means for making tough decisions. Whatever the reason may be, women are encouraged to develop strong networks. Keeping in touch with those in higher positions can be very helpful to those aspiring to leadership.

Networking can also be a good source of continuous learning and development. Educational institutions provide students opportunities for networking. Researchers urge institutions to provide more programs for career advice and guidance for students. Establishing programs such as mentoring in universities may help to increase student motivation. A 2007 report published by the American Council on Education indicated women continue to be underrepresented at the highest levels of education administration because of a lack of social networks.

Networking is a skill which is learned and developed in a long learning process. This process may involve training, practicing, attending events, reading books, and keeping in contact with people who have experience in the field. Keeping in touch with experienced leaders is extremely important for building and gaining personal power (Niles et al., 2000). Researchers believed through

social networking leaders can explore ideas for making change and decisions leading to development. In support of other scholars, Taylor (2008) showed social networks play a critical role in gathering information, accessing diverse skills, building coalitions of support, and building contextual knowledge which helps leaders develop influential techniques and tactics.

Networking is crucial for exploring new opportunities for change and development (Portugal and Yukl, 1994). Those aspiring to leadership need to set goals, and identify channels for developing their networking systems. Networking not only creates opportunities for development, but it also provides leaders a chance to build relationships, explore new ideas, and share information and experiences with others in the form of coaching and mentoring.

Summarizing Literature about Motivation in Leadership

Although all of these theories are helpful in understanding leadership in education and motivation from a conceptual perspective, it is also important to recognize most leaders draw upon a combination of needs, extrinsic factors, and intrinsic factors in an effort to achieve their goals. To be effective, leaders need to take into account most of the aspects upon which these theories focus, which is expectancy, goal-setting, feedback, satisfaction, commitment and other characteristics considered in the process of motivating others interested in educational leadership. Motivation is a complex phenomenon. People have not only different amounts, but different kinds of motivation.

Although intrinsic motivation is not the only form of motivation which influences women to achieve higher positions in education leadership, it is considered to be important because it provides individuals with a sense of self-fulfillment. Ryan and Deci (2000) argued when a person is intrinsically motivated to act, one can succeed in any environment because by nature people are active, inquisitive, curious, ready to learn and explore new knowledge and skills for personal gains (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The goal orientation assists individuals aspiring to leadership to understand their motivational tendencies and how these dispositions influence their career aspirations, performances, and professional goals (McGregor and Gable, 1999).

Women's reliance on exercising power through others, as opposed to over others, is evident in the strategies they use to acquire power. Based on the research, statistical modeling revealed women acquire power by: building relationships, focusing on empowering their teams, supporting coworkers and subordinates, and building networks of allies, achieving results, identifying new opportunities, taking risks, and expanding access to resources.

One of the most striking findings is women's goals for exercising power, like their goals for leadership, are focused externally on changing their organizations and society more broadly. Women's primary goals were strategic in which they wanted to chart the direction of and influence the priorities in their organizations, including ensuring diversity goals are set and met. Women leaders are socially minded meaning they want to ensure their organizations fulfilled their

responsibilities to their communities and their businesses were socially responsible.

Summary

Daresh (2002) indicated school leadership is essential for improvement and effectiveness worldwide. In order to be competitive in a rapid changing global educational system, schools must be prepared and committed to identify and develop future leaders. Researchers believed developing school leadership should be viewed as a complex system, which involves human resources management, recruitment, selection, retention, supervision, and evaluation (Smylie and Bennet, 2005). Leadership development is concerned with developing the capacity of individuals, through initial pre-service, professional training, and development.

There are several tools and resources women can use to learn and develop leadership abilities and skills. Smylie and Bennet (2005) indicated the first stage for leadership development is acquiring knowledge skills, and dispositions school leaders must have to perform their jobs effectively. Identifying tools and resources for leadership development may help institutions understand how to design and implement training programs for the preparation of future leaders in education.

Resilience is a mental model of looking at certain situations. It has to do with how people view problems and difficult situations and change of attitudes.

Throughout history, women have struggled to overcome barriers preventing them from achieving their objectives and goals. Resilience is a skill, learned and developed through practice, assessment, and extended experience. Kouzes and Posner (2007) suggested to develop resilience, first, a person needs to maintain a positive attitude. This means instead of dwelling on barriers and obstacles, a person needs to explore ways to look at life situations in a positive way. Transforming challenges into opportunities helps a person change and improve her situation (Kouzes and Posner, 2007).

Setting career goals, being optimistic, and making an effort help leaders gain confidence. Self-confidence is what gives successful leaders control over a certain situation. Career planning provides a person with a clear direction and identification of goals one may want to achieve in the short and long term. Women are encouraged to seek help from mentors. Leaders who ask others to assist them with specific problems or in certain situations, find better ways to deal with and solve problems (Kouzes and Posner, 2007). Theoretically, leaders do not necessarily need to know or have all the answers to the problem. In order to make effective decisions, researchers believe leaders must consult and engage other members in the process of decision making (Kouzes and Posner, 2007).

Getting additional help through coaching and mentoring is critical for career advancement and leadership development. Researchers believe gaining higher education qualifications is not enough for a person to lead and be successful in education administration. This means without mentoring, support,

self-confidence, networking, and professional development, leaders may lack the ability to make tough decisions (Kouzes and Posner, 2007; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1986).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) indicated, “Feeling confident so we can adequately cope with events, situations, and people we confront puts us in a position to exercise leadership” (p. 265). These scholars believed leaders take action and create conditions which strengthen their constituents' self-esteem and internal sense of effectiveness (Kouzes and Posner, 2007). The information from this current research should encourage those aspiring leaders to take risks and be determined. Based on the literature reviewed, self-determination and self-confidence can affect individual performance in many different ways (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1986).

Researchers believe the more one works at a certain activity, the more competent a person becomes. For example, in a study of group managers, Kouzes and Posner (2007) found managers with a high sense of self-confidence set high standards and focus most of their attention on developing skills and motivation. Managers who doubted their abilities indicated when faced with difficulties or poor performance outcomes, they lost confidence in themselves and in the organizational productivity.

Administration requires leaders to develop and have a strong sense of self-confidence. Although educational training allows women to learn skills and gain high qualifications, researchers believe practice and experience is critical to self-

confidence, resilience, and determination development (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Madsen, 2007; Kouzes and Posner, 2007). Career choices and decisions leaders usually make are influenced by their beliefs and assurance. Therefore, developing competence and building confidence are critical to leadership success.

To be effective and influence others to achieve organizational goals, school leaders and administrators need to support and help other members, such as staff and faculty develop their competencies. The literature reviewed indicated providing staff and faculty more opportunities for professional development, mentoring, networking, training, and involvement in other activities may help to increase the faculty motivation, satisfaction, and commitment to their jobs.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discover and understand the experiences which influenced and contributed to the career advancement and success of women in educational leadership in Oklahoma. In this study, I acknowledge barriers, inequalities, and underrepresentation facing women in leadership positions. What has been missing from previous research in this area is an understanding of the mechanisms which support women while they persist in leadership positions. Providing an understanding of what supports women in leadership positions will help to break down the barriers and contribute to an understanding of the ways women have persisted and are successful in their positions. Examining the life experiences of these women is important because it will help to explain what helped them overcome barriers facing women and what strategies these women used to overcome and persist to attain their current positions. The information gathered from this research study may assist other women in achieving their personal and professional goals. There may be ways others can use the findings from this research to create a more positive work environment and allow employers to support and attract more women leaders. This will lead to a more diverse and inclusive work environment.

This research focuses on ways in which women have experienced positive support which contributed to deconstruct the barriers to advancement. I employ an appreciative framework in order to focus on what worked well for these women as they navigate the challenges inherent in leadership which pose a gender bias. Self-efficacy is a model which is useful for considering how female leaders employed their internal resources to achieve success. Psychological capital is another resource which could help women persist. Psychological capital was developed as an application of positive psychology to individuals in the workplace. It is a core construct which consists of hope, efficacy, optimism, and resiliency (Luthans, Avery, Clapp-Smith and Li, 2008, p. 820). It is also described as a state of being in which one is open to personal development.

Research Questions

The main research question of this dissertation is: What are the lived experiences of women who are current or formally in upper leadership positions of public school districts in Oklahoma? The following sub-questions help to further frame this research:

- What do women report as the process of empowerment which influenced their decision to seek and continue in the role of educational leadership?
- What specific experiences do women define as beneficial in their advancement to leadership roles? What do women report to be the specific

personal and societal factors and conditions which contribute to their access to leadership positions?

- How has gender impacted their career path and the type of leader they have become?

Research Design

Qualitative research methods are the best fit for this research. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research;

> Begins with assumptions and the use of interpretative theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researchers, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

According to Merriam (2002), "The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with the world" (p. 3). This study of women leaders in education was best studied using qualitative research to understand how meaning is constructed from the standpoint of the women themselves. The goal of qualitative inquiry is to discover and interpret findings. As suggested by Creswell (2013), data will be collected through interviewing participants, examining documents, and observing behavior. I will design an interview protocol using open-ended questions to allow

the participant's perspective to emerge rather than predetermining the direction of their response.

Sprague (2016) suggested, "Understanding how things work is not enough-we need to take action to make the social world more equitable. The call to progressive social change is a central commitment of feminism (p. 3).

Creswell (2013) indicated a phenomenological inquiry or qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach which seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. Bentz and Shapiro (1988) indicated a phenomenological study allows the researcher to understand phenomena from participants' experiences and describe it as lived by the participants researched. The purpose of this research study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of women leaders in education, the phenomenological approach is most suitable. This approach allowed for the identification of the structural meanings of experiences while uncovering the themes and context which account for the lived experiences of the participants at the same time. Research shows "Phenomenology is a valuable approach to explore the phenomenon of leadership rather than continuing to positivistic, mechanistic, or statistical explanations of interactions" (Bass, 1990, p. 893). A phenomenological approach seeks to describe rather than explain. This approach allowed the researcher to provide detailed information, which emphasized the importance of meanings received directly from participants' experiences, stories, voices, and perceptions. The qualitative

phenomenological methodology was found to be the most appropriate for conducting and completing this research study.

Phenomenology: Conceptual Framework

According to van Manen, research from a phenomenological point of view "Questions the way we experience the world, and understand the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5). Therefore, the act of researching, questioning, theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better to become the world (van Manen, 1990, p. 5).

According to Kerry and Armour (2000), phenomenology arose as a specific philosophical approach out of the works of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1935). Husserl based this new philosophy on his belief humans should be characterized as "open and engaged beings capable of developing personal meaning in the process of actively manifesting themselves" (Meier, 1988, p. 92). Kerry and Armour (2000) stated "phenomenologist advocated a presupposition less approach, whereby nothing is taken for granted, and going back to the beginning is essential" (p. 3). Koch (1995) further describes phenomenology as "the study of phenomena as they appear through the consciousness" (p. 828). This immediate conscious of things is not based on the intervening suppositions of pre-establish formal theories. Phenomenological studies do not attempt to validate formal theories but rather seek to explore experience.

The phrase “lived experience” was coined by Husserl. He believed one must revisit previously taken-for-granted experiences, reevaluate them, and illuminate the structures of the consciousness (essences), ultimately critically evaluating the purposes the structures hold in making sense of it all (Koch, 1995, p. 828).

According to Koch (1995), Heidegger, a pupil of Husserl, reacted against the transcendental nature of the essence of phenomena. He believed the essence of phenomena could not and should not completely transcend the context of the phenomena or the observers’ subjective biases. He did not think the process of bracketing or suspending initial biases was possible or desirable. Rather than trying to transcend one’s personal biases and the context of the phenomena, he proposed we interpret the essence of the phenomena in light of the context of the phenomena and our personal bias are a part of the context (Koch, 1995).

He added hermeneutics to phenomenology and created hermeneutical phenomenology also called existential phenomenology. By adding hermeneutics to phenomenology he changed the meaning of hermeneutics. Originally, hermeneutics was a process of interpreting the hidden meaning of a text (van Manen, 1990). This was an epistemological process of coming to know or uncover the hidden meaning to the text. Heidegger expanded the meaning of the interpreted text to include the phenomenal world or the whole world of subjective experience. The phenomenal world of experience is a text in need of interpretation. Hermeneutics is more than an epistemological or knowledge

process of knowing the essence of a phenomena, it is an ontological process of encountering and constructing the phenomenal world. When we interpret a text of the phenomenal world, we reconstruct our identity and our way of being in the world (van Manen, 1995).

Interpretation is more than a way of knowing it is a mode of being. Interpretation of our personal stories are more than conscious knowledge, they constitute our beings, or our identities. We are who we interpret ourselves to be, we are defined by our personal stories. The interpretations of our stories open up new possibilities for being in the world because they redefine our identities. The social historical context plays an essential part in the interpretation or construction of our identities.

Hermeneutics

According to van Manen (1990), "hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation," (p. 179). Abrams (1993) stated "the aim of hermeneutics is to establish a general theory of understanding as opposed to explanation," (p. 91). Heidegger (1962) the notion of hermeneutic understanding was the ability to understand one's own possibilities for existence in the world. Eger (1993) stressed understanding the meaning of a text is not a fixed target, rather it "emerges from the interpretation" is a constructed path (p. 7). The importance of identifying the fore structures of preunderstandings belonging to the interpreter of a text. Eger

states for structures "cannot just be cleared away but must themselves become a focus of inquiry, not so much to purge them as to understand their effect," (p. 7).

The process of interpretation and understanding is a hermeneutic circle according to Heidegger (1962). Heidegger states, "any interpretation which is to contribute to understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted," (p. 194). You cannot understand the parts of the text without understanding the whole. You cannot understand the whole of the context without understanding the parts of the text. To interpret the essence of a text, one must examine the context and history of the text and to understand the historical context, one must understand the meaning of the present text. The process of understanding is circular and continuous.

The Hermeneutical Circle

Eger (1993) provided an excellent description of the hermeneutic circle when he stated

> Start with some original projection or preconception for the text as a whole – a guess, a hunch, a prejudice carried over from previous readings – use that to make sense of the smaller parts of the text, and then see whether all these partial meaning, taken together, reinforce the original projection in a consistent way. It is important to note that although preconceptions may be deliberate, often they are unconsciously or tacitly adopted. This is likely to be so especially when it seems that the individual parts are clear enough, and no special assumptions need to be made. In any case, one usually finds that the parts so interpreted do not in fact add up harmoniously; some discrepancy remains. Using this remainder to correct the original projection, we start the cycle over again, and then again, and continue in this way, in a series of back and forth movements between the part and the whole. (p. 6).

Eger (1993) further elaborates with each reiteration of the cycle, convergence increases. The changes should be decreasing and the circle should be shrinking as they cycle repeats itself time and time again. Eventually according to Eger (1993), “in the classic view, the true meaning of the text is being approached as, step by step we purge our interpretations of all spurious and subjective factors,” (p. 6). It is important to stress the hermeneutic circle may not shrink to the same point for different interpreters. Various interpreters may arrive at decidedly different points as they interpret an identical text. According to Eger (1993), it is possible multiple interpretations can coexist, and no test can really decide among them, because in the process, the interpreter becomes a part of the interpretation (p. 10).

Type of Interview

I used Patton’s (2015) interview guide approach with open-ended questions. “Skillful interviewing requires much more than just asking questions” (p. 15). Patton described qualitative research as “Generating meaningful and useful qualitative findings through observation, interviewing, and content analysis, requires discipline, knowledge, training, practice, creativity, and hard-work” (p. 15). This helped guide my research and interviewing of participants. Brooks (2007) offered a feminist approach to conducting interviews and suggested during the interview process the researcher must pay attention and be able to adapt changes for the interview if needed. One way to do this is to

probe for further data, Brooks explained how probing offers encouragement and support without pushing an agenda into the interview.

The research questions which guided this research applied to the women who held leadership positions in education who were interviewed. Unlike much of the current literature, my study focused on the factors which help women succeed in educational leadership. I used semi-structured interviews and asked questions of positive experiences in their positions while in leadership roles. I asked participants to reflect on ways they overcame challenges.

The questions I asked helped guide the women to tell their stories. I examined the ways in which women persist in their positions. Research on the positive aspects for women in leadership positions is almost non-existent; much is focused on the barriers which exist (AAUW Barriers and Bias, 2016 Bain and Cummings, 2000). The interview questions were organized into three areas including gender, systems of support and leadership. These three areas encouraged the women to discuss their own experiences.

Data collection

Choosing participants is important in qualitative research. Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this research. Patton (2015) stated purposeful sampling are rich in information. I aligned with Patton's idea selection of participants being purposeful is to "focus case selection strategically in alignment with the inquiry's purpose, primary questions, and data being

collected" (p. 264). Patton also explained purposeful sampling as, "Strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases which by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated" (p. 265). The selection of the participants was important to make sure I gathered participants who provided interviews rich with data.

Potential participants' criteria

1. Women in leadership positions in Oklahoma public schools.
2. Principal, superintendent, assistant superintendent, chief academic officer, chief financial officer, head principal, currently employed or recently retired.
3. Participants from rural, suburban and urban areas of the state.
4. Participants representing a variety of ethnic backgrounds and serving students from a variety of socioeconomic levels.

Data Recording

Approved IRB procedures were used for the interview process to help ensure confidentiality. The interviews took place in a location selected by the interviewee. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed with identifiers removed. Interviews will take less than two hours. The potential risks were minimal. All interviews were clearly informed of their right to refuse to answer any questions.

Data Analysis

"Data analysis is simultaneous with data collection" (Merriam, 2002, p. 14). Data analysis is a process which starts immediately with the first interview. It involved listening and transcribing the data, which is tape-recorded. To gain a holistic view of the width and depth of raw data the first step in data analysis requires the researcher to read through all the pages of the transcribed interviews. The next step will be to read through the transcripts a second time with the research questions in mind and identify codes which will align to the questions asked. This process is also referred to as open coding. Open coding is the identification and naming of conceptual categories of the phenomena and putting them into related groups. Open coding allows the researcher to create descriptive, multidimensional categories which provide a preliminary framework for data analysis. Developing themes allowed me to draw out the true essence of my research. Themes helped me to reduce the data to the key parts.

Summary

Chapter three outlined my methods and analysis for my research. I described my basic research methodology and the process of analysis of my study. I explained how I found participants to participate in my study. I discussed my interview protocol, how I interviewed, collected data and what I did after data collection. I described how I coded the data and analyzed codes forming themes.

Chapter 4 Results and Findings

Introduction

The problem presented in Chapter one of this dissertation was the underrepresentation of women in upper leadership positions in Oklahoma. The purpose of this qualitative Hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the motivation of these women to persist in attaining an upper leadership position. The aim of this Hermeneutic phenomenological study was to develop a tentative, theoretical framework or visual model, of the empowerment and motivational process experienced by these women. The multiple, complex realities of the participants were the foundation of the findings (Charmaz, 2008; 2014).

The findings resulted from constant comparative analysis and coding. As suggested by Charmaz (2014), the following research questions framed the study: What do women report as the process of empowerment which influenced their decision to seek and continue in the role of educational leadership? What specific experiences do women define as beneficial in their advancement to leadership roles? What do women report to be the specific personal and societal factors and conditions which contribute to their access to leadership positions? How has gender impacted their career path and the type of leader they have become?

The findings arose from emergent codes and categories during data collection and constant comparative analysis. I presented the context, concepts, causal conditions, central phenomenon, and consequences in an objective, narrative, and format, derived inductively from data analysis by Babbie (2017). Findings included quotes from the participants as evidence of shared and individual experiences.

Setting

These interviews took place during the summer and fall of 2000, during which were in the early stages of a global pandemic. Educational leaders were consumed with how to deal with a whole new set of problems they had never encountered. This situation impacted their answers and their availability. The participants chose to be interviewed in their offices via Zoom. Using Zoom was the best option during this time to keep everyone safe from the spread of Covid-19. The interview time average was 45 minutes. The pandemic forced schools to make major changes in the way they deliver instruction. Entire school districts had to pivot on a dime and come up with unique ways to not only deliver instruction, but also how to deliver meals, and keep everyone safe. This greatly impacted the availability of the participants for interviews and caused several cancelations and disruptions.

Participants

This study included ten participants. The participants were 8 women who were superintendents or former superintendents, one was a Chief Financial officer, one was a superintendent outside of Oklahoma, and the last one was a principal who aspires to become a superintendent. The sample was homogenous and heterogeneous, as participants were women in educational leadership, yet were from different geographical regions of Oklahoma, diverse school district sizes, and earned various advanced degrees. Four participants reported two or more years of experience in secondary school leadership, and five reported experiences only in elementary school leadership prior to becoming superintendent. Seven reported other central office administrative roles prior to becoming a superintendent. I did not report race and age, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. However, the women were older than 40 and ethnically diverse.

Table 1: Participant characteristics

Participant pseudonym	Region of Oklahoma	Size of district
P1 – Amy	Central	Urban
P2 – Beth	South	Rural
P3 – Carol	East	Rural
P4 – Dawn	East	Suburban
P5 – Eve	South	Suburban
P6 – Fay	Central	Rural
P7 – Gale	North	Rural
P8 – Hazel	Central	Suburban
P9 – Ivy	West	Suburban
P10 – June	North	Rural

Data collection

Initially I contacted two women in leadership which I knew. I sent emails and requested a time for me to talk with them. At the end of each interview, I asked if they knew of other women I might contact. I then sent emails to those women and mentioned the person who recommended I contact them. Each email I sent was personalized for each person. After the interviews I sent a handwritten thank you card. Several women I contacted did not get back with me and many others did not have time for an interview due to the current situation with Covid-19. Four interviews were canceled and not able to be rescheduled. The interviews were recorded on the Zoom software and stored on a flash drive with a password.

This section contains the data resulting from the interview questions listed in the previous chapter. The results were then transcribed, and vignettes were created using the basic information about each woman including reasons for selecting profession, education, general school information, and career path. The remaining portion explores the experiences of each woman allowing the researcher to provide analysis based on the interpretations of the participant's narratives. The women who were interviewed had vastly different personalities but shared a passion for improving student achievement.

Phenomenological Narratives: Presentation of Findings

Amy

Amy began her career as a teacher in Texas where she taught 4th grade. She then moved to Oklahoma where she spent the next 30 years teaching in an elementary school. She spent one year as an assistant principal and then the next 15 years as the head principal. Amy has superintendent certification but has no desire to work in the central office. She has had multiple opportunities to move into a central office position but has remained committed to her school. Amy describes her leadership style as a servant leader and she attributes her success to a close staff and strong relationships with her co-workers. Amy stated her best days are when she gets to spend time in the classrooms with students and teachers.

Amy stated all leaders were male when she first started. She had several excellent mentors over the years both male and female. Amy feels like the

opportunities for women have gotten better over the years, but she would not advise anyone to go into educational leadership today. Amy said the additional pay is not worth it. “There are a lot of students and parents with mental illness and the schools just do not have the resources to adequately address these problems” Amy expressed how hard this year and last year have been with the Covid-19 pandemic. She said, “no matter what happens in August (2020), people will be mad. If we open, they will be mad. If we are virtual, they will be mad, if we have a hybrid model, they will be mad.”

Beth

Beth began her career as a special education teacher in Texas. She was quite upset when she had to relocate to Oklahoma for her husband’s job. She has worked with the state department and as well as various school districts. Beth has served as a director of budget, principal, assistant superintendent, and a superintendent. She has since retired and works with a professional organization helping school leaders to improve their practice. She attributes her success to her asking for and seeking positions where she could grow and learn more skills. Beth confessed her best days are when she gets to be among teachers and students in a classroom.

Beth revealed having grown up with a physical handicap which helped to shape her into the kind of teachers and leader she became. Having this experience, she learned to build strong relationships with people she could depend on. Beth expressed issues of gender come up every day, when you are in a leadership

position. She stated most superintendents are male, from small towns and former coaches. Beth feels like being in the coaches' club provides men with a social network which will help to advance their careers. She sighed a man will call another man first to discuss an issue or for support regardless of the position of a man or the women.

Carol

Carol began her educational career as a home pre-school teacher. Carol served as a house parent for a boy's home and has taught nearly every grade level. She has served as an elementary and secondary principal and now serves as the district superintendent. All her teaching and leadership experience has been with the same rural high poverty school district. Carol describes her leadership style as "the shepherd of the flock." Carol attributes a lot of her success to her faith, and support from her family and the community. Carol reports her best days are when she gets to engage with students. Being with the students reminds her why she does what she does.

Carol feels teaching and leading in a poor rural community is very much like being in a mission field. Carol relies heavily on her faith and attributes her leadership abilities to God. Her reliance on her faith has increased during the pandemic. She reports this year as the hardest of her career. Carol is very concerned about the health of her staff and the student's needs in such a poor community. She as well as many other administrators in the state have been forced out of their comfort zone to come up with creative ways to meet the needs

of students and community members during this time. For example, finding ways to get food and school supplies to students so they can learn from home.

Dawn

Dawn began her career as a first grade teacher. She has served as a principal, communication director, human relations, assistant and deputy superintendent and superintendent. Dawn describes her leadership style as collaborative. Dawn's mother and grandmother were both teachers. She reported her best days are when she gets to hear about the success stories which are taking place in the classrooms. Dawn said it makes her heart feel better to hear these stories and it reminds her of the importance of the work she does.

Dawn feels like we need more women, and representation from all ethnic groups at the table to help to make the best decisions for students. Dawn spends time on self-reflection. She disclosed this has been the hardest time to be an educator, but she has realized more than ever how much the kids and the community need us.

Eve

Eve began her career as a high school English and journalism teacher. She has served as an assistant principal, principal, chief academic officer, assistant and interim superintendent and superintendent. Eve describes her leadership as consistent and fair. Eve said her best days are when she has a productive meeting which she knows will result in great things for the students. She attributes her success to persistence not perfection.

Eve disclosed leadership comes at a personal cost. Yet she continues to "come back to the work she loves in spite of the job which she does not always like." Eve agrees this has been the most stressful year so far. Eve lamented society has laid a big expectation on the schools to create equity when everything around the school perpetuates inequality; housing, food scarcity, income and health. Covid did not create the inequity it exposed it.

Fay

Fay came from a family of teachers and initially did not want to go into education. She wanted to be a writer but took a job as a teacher to support her writing ambitions. Fay fell in love with the students and teaching. She has served as a principal, curriculum director, assistant, and superintendent. Fay reported others spotted her leadership abilities and encouraged her to pursue leadership. She reported her best days are when she has an opportunity to be among students and teachers.

Fay is the first female superintendent in her district and the only female superintendent among the surrounding districts. She reported a school board member confessed he did not think a woman could do the job and he was opposed to hiring her. But she has since won him over and he now feels like God brought her to the district to address some of the problems they have not been able to overcome. Fay attributes her strong relationship with her father who was an educator for her ability to stand up and confront men who second guess her

decisions and go quiet when she approaches. She is not afraid to call them out and point out their unequal treatment.

Gale

Gale came into education as a second career. She has served as a teacher, assistant principal and principal and chief financial officer before becoming a superintendent. Gale describes her leadership as direct and kind. She attributes her success to her faith and her supportive friends and family. Gale is energized by spending time among the staff and students. She recounted a story about a time she was on the playground with a group of students playing hopscotch.

Gale feels like her first responsibility is to keep the staff and students safe. This has been a big challenge this year with Covid. She has had to depend on health experts to make the best possible decisions for the safety of everyone with the current information and information is constantly changing. “One of the biggest struggles of this year has been caused by the political divide in the community over safety issues like the wearing of masks.” Her biggest challenge came just three weeks into her new job as superintendent when a student committed suicide at a football game. She was frightened when she first received the news. Not only was she the superintendent but she was also the parent of two high school students who were at the game. She struggled to stay calm and direct parents and students to safety all while not knowing if her own children were safe.

Hazel

Hazel began her career as a science teacher. She has served as an assistant principal, principal, superintendent of human resources assistant and head

superintendent. She attributes her success to her faith and her desire to serve others in the community. Her father was an entrepreneur and she had the opportunity to go to conferences and hear business leaders like Zig Ziggler speak when she was a teen. This experience taught her how to be a salesman and build strong working relationships. Hazel describes her leadership style as a transformational leader. Hazel's best days are when she can create new exciting opportunities for the students. She is energized by doing what "God has called her to do".

Hazel waited until her children were grown before going into educational leadership. She feels she was fortunate to work with numerous strong women leaders early in her career. Hazel feels it is important to elevate any organization or group she is a part of to perform better. She deals with challenges by talking through the problems with trusted colleagues and leaning on her faith. She said the kids always come first, employees second in all her decisions.

Ivy

Ivy began her career as a banker and in public relations. She then taught journalism and English language learners. She has served as an assistant principal, principal, interim superintendent, and superintendent. Currently she is both a principal and the superintendent of a rural school district. Ivy describes her leadership style as collaborative. She attributed her success to being stubborn and the support she receives from her family of educators. Ivy's best days are when she has an opportunity to see kids all working together and engaged in learning.

Ivy worked with a very challenging principal in her early career. She said, “He ran off more good teachers than he hired.” She then adopted the motto it is not who you work for it is about who you work with. Ivy developed strong working relationships with the other teachers on her team to help them get through this hard time. Ivy attributes much of her success to being “bull headed.” She spent several years working as an assistant principal. When the head principal left, she felt like she would be hired for the positon, but she was passed over and a man from outside of the district was hired. He did a poor job and she spent a lot of that year cleaning up his messes. When he was dismissed, she thought this is my year, but again she was passed over and a man, a friend of the superintendent was hired for the position. Ivy said the writing was on the wall and she accepted the fact, she would not move beyond the assistant principal position in the district. She moved to another district where she was able to advance her career. Ivy reported the prior district now has no women in leadership above the position of assistant principal.

June

June spent several years as an elementary teacher working with English language learners. She has served as an assistant principal, principal, curriculum director, assistant superintendent, interim superintendent, and superintendent. June describes her leadership style as a servant leader. June attributes her success to the support she receives from her family of educators, her faith, and her co-

workers. June loves to have the opportunity to go into the schools and be among the students and teachers.

June reports this as being the hardest year to be in education. She feels Covid-19 poses a serious risk to her staff, many who are elderly and with multiple health conditions. June discussed her struggles in finding ways to bring food to students whose parents do not have transportation by delivering meals in neighborhoods on school buses and providing educational materials for the students. She is worried about the long-term impact this disrupted school year will have on her students not only in their education but also socially and emotionally. She attributes her success to the support from her family of educators, her faith, and her community.

Summary

This chapter focused on the participants' career pathways and the interconnections between the participants' career decisions and personal situations. Although most of the participants did not initially strive to go into administration; these women had strong professional goals with a desire to do meaningful work, and they sought greater challenges and responsibilities in all their professional positions. Most of the women received encouragement to attend college, and pursue careers from their parents, family members, teachers, work supervisors or communities, when they were just starting out. After, graduating from college, the participants spoke of obtaining advancement due to their

circumstances, by chance, or the encouragement of their supervisors or colleagues. Most of the participants did not plan or map out their careers, but rather, they based their decisions on opportunities at the time and the needs of their families. Several participants made the decision to not seek advancement while their children were young.

With all of the participants, their career decisions were life decisions, and their personal circumstances were instrumental in the pace and direction of their career progression. The participants spoke of the important role their partners and families contributed to their growth or delays in their careers. Many of the participants expressed they felt a calling to work with students, and they believed that education was a natural fit. Gale summed up this passion the best when she explains, "I love it, and I do what I enjoy. I get to help. The best part is we are making a difference in the lives of the students. This is one of the best things you can do with your life."

Carol described her career progression like this:

> I think when you look back, its different then when you are living your job day-to-day. I think the day-to-day, in terms of being able to keep going, you just must keep a very strong focus on what your goals are and what you are accomplishing and not get side-tracked, depressed, or whatever above everything else. There are days that you just say, "What in the world am I doing?" If you can see your way out of it and focus and achieve what you want, then you have a very different feeling of accomplishment.

As reflected in the participants' reaction to the obstacles they experienced in their careers, these challenges often represented turning points in the

participants' lives which propelled them toward educational leadership. Eight of the participants related explicitly that the obstacles they had experienced caused them to take actions which eventually contributed to different career opportunities and future successes. Participants discussed how obstacles resulted in their becoming stronger as individuals and leaders. This is evidence that these women had high self-efficacy, they remained confident, and they had a lot to offer despite challenges. The participants' stories showcase extremely high levels of resiliency as they turned obstacles into opportunities.

Chapter 5

Findings

The problem presented in chapter one of this dissertation was the underrepresentation of women in the upper ranks of educational leadership. The purpose of this Hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the motivation, systems of support, and the process of empowerment which helped women who have succeeded in climbing the ranks to upper administration. The multiple, complex, realities of the participants were the foundation of this research.

The participants discussed obstacles they faced in their careers which pertained to their work environments, work-family issues, and confronting gender discrimination. Yet they all displayed the strong ability to confront these challenges and move forward in their careers through remaining resilient in their endeavors. This chapter will focus on the combination of the participant's general outlooks, relationships, and leadership approached which enabled them to remain resilient despite numerous barriers. Through an examination of the key resiliency pertaining to their mindset, personal and professional mentors, and networking relationships, and approaches to leadership, it becomes apparent how the participants managed to advance in their careers.

Mindset

The mindset of the participants in their confronting obstacles and handling stress greatly contributed to their resiliency. Through their experiences, they

displayed determination, persistence, perseverance, confidence, a drive to succeed, and a stubbornness to prove their abilities, even when criticized or marginalized. The participants demonstrated the ability to not take criticism personally, the capacity to disregard negativity from others, and the belief they were in control of their destinies. The participants communicated or displayed a strength which had served them in overcoming many personal and professional obstacles throughout their lives. Many spoke of learning to develop their resolve and perseverance at an early age from their parents, teachers, or communities, while others attributed their mindset to their early desire for achievement and success.

Several participants spoke of occasionally feeling a lack of confidence in their abilities to lead. One described her struggles with imposter syndrome. All did admit to having bad days and certain events caused them to doubt their ability to lead a school district. Participants discussed the importance of having a person outside of the job to confide in. One participant told a story of an event when she made an unfavorable decision. She then drove to the sonic to order a drink and talk to her husband on the phone while thinking through the situation. In the end the decision she made was the best for the district and her coworkers realized the next day she was right.

Eve said,

> Leadership definitely comes at a cost in terms of personal sacrifice and a lot of professional risk taking which can result in some permanent or semi-permanent scars. I make a very clear distinction between the job and the work. When people ask, do you love your job, I say most days, but the

> job is the politics and the toxicity and the nastiness and the hypocrisy and the **** and just the day-to-day crap you have to deal with. But the work of serving children and their families that's a gift even on the hard days for me. If I can make that distinction between the job and the work that allows me to get through those hard days and you really realize on those hard days you endured the job for the sake of the work. For me the distinction helps, I keep coming back to the work I love versus the job I don't always like.

Dawn explained her philosophy in the following way:

> "I think it's an attitude of resiliency and an attitude of grit no doubt, and a willingness to be self-reflective. What can I do differently that could produce better outcomes, more favorable outcomes. So, I think it is really that willingness to self-reflect an attitude of resiliency, grit, and continuous improvement, if we ever think we have arrived then we're selling ourselves short whether that is a career in banking, education, or the medical field, we just have to always keep looking for the next chapter, the next opportunity, and how we can do it better."

The participants worked in education and reported practicing determination, or passion and perseverance for long term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007), throughout the shared experiences. Often other words were used to describe tenacity such as persistence, being stubborn, or bull-headed. Therefore, working in education and practicing determination emerged as a theme. Participants began their educational careers in the classroom. The participants described themselves as women who were and still are passionate about education and children and persevered to become a leader. The participants advised women who may be seeking leadership roles to work hard, gain experience in a variety of roles, take care of themselves, and encourage other women to grow.

Table 2: Participants Responses: Determination and Working in Education

Context	Example quote
Determination	"Stay the course." Hazel
	"Ask for positions to grow and learn more." Beth
	"Be progressive in all positions given. Really put yourself out there to get noticed. Be known, be involved, get to know others, join in, met and network." Carol
	"Persistence not perfection." Eve
	"Admit when you are wrong and apologize, I set goal for myself, I clap for my own damn self, don't let up, lean in, persist, be at the table, and keep your hand over the flame." Ivy
Working in Education	"Build your resume." Amy
	"Work harder." Carol
	"Take advantage of every educational leadership experience you can." Kim

Within the context of working in education and practicing determination, two concepts emerged from the shared experiences of the women: 1) building self-efficacy; and 2) balancing family and work roles. The influence of an encouraging mentor emerged as a causal condition, throughout the women's descriptions of experiences related to building self-efficacy and balancing work and family roles.

Building Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as a psychological and physiological state of confidence, or self-assurance. Bandura (1977) reported self-efficacy was

based upon the development of a mastery of experiences, vicarious experiences, and persuasion. In interviews, as participants described their journey to educational leadership, they shared thoughts, feelings, and actions which included desiring a leadership role as a site principal or district assistant. The women said they felt confident as teachers, and then felt a desire to practice mastering experiences, improving self-awareness, and building social capital through interpersonal relationships.

Mentoring, Networking, and Relationships

The participants spoke of their personal and professional relationships as significantly contributing to their capacity to maintain resiliency in times of difficulty and crisis. Most often, the women relied on a combination of personal or professional mentors and networks for encouragement and advice. Several themes pertaining to mentoring and networking became evident throughout the participants' stories. These themes were categorized as: (1) the influence of early mentors on career choices or the pursuit of higher degrees and positions; (2) the role of mentors as motivators and resources for career growth; (3) the use of mentors and networking for advise and problem solving; (4) the need for the participants to initiate their own mentor relationships; (5) the influence of personal relationships, including partners, parents, friends, and faith, in building resiliency; and (6) the importance of observing other professionals as a way to gain insight and learn about leadership.

All of the participants reflected on people who had helped them on their road to success. Participants described their mentors as both male and female. Many of the participants had informal mentors early in their lives. These mentors encouraged them to pursue their education and contributed to building their confidence and resiliency at a young age. Early mentors included parents, teachers, and faith based organization leaders. These early mentors were prevalent often in discussions with the first-generation women.

The participants talked about where they went for support during challenging times. Many relied on their faith, prayer and reading of their Bibles. Four participants had various religious artifacts on their desk or shelves close by, inspirational photos, with Bible verses, crosses, reference to faith and jewelry with crosses. One talked specifically about her church family and the support she gets from them. Eight of the ten described the families they were raised in as full of educators. They had parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents all in the education field.

I asked what energizes them to persist. Participants again mentioned family, faith and mentors help to energize them to reach their goals. Others reported being energized by working with students and staff. A few re-counted family time spent at the lake and quiet time spent reading, exercising, and reflecting on the events of the past.

Several participants spoke of mentors who had been instrumental in recognizing their potential before they understood their own abilities. These

mentors encouraged them to apply for higher-level positions. The participants' mentors fostered their resiliency by providing them the encouragement and belief in their own potential.

Several of the participants relied upon mentors or professional networks when they needed advice regarding work situations or careers. Regardless of the difficulties they were experiencing, these women remained resilient by reaching out to their mentors or other professionals for assistance.

The necessity to seek out mentors was evident in some of the participants' stories. These participants discussed, as women they were not a part of the "boy's network" and they sometimes had to seek out mentors on their own. They displayed resiliency by actively initiating relationships with mentors for support. The participants spoke of their personal relationships as sustaining them and strengthening their resiliency throughout their careers. In their stories, personal relationships included partners, parents, friends, and faith. Due to a lack of available mentors, several of the participants mentioned observing other leaders as a method of learning about leadership. These participants were not dissuaded by not having readily available mentors and, instead, displayed their resiliency by being resourceful and purposefully using observation of others as a way to learn and advance their careers.

The women reported the influence of at least one encouraging mentor while they were building self-efficacy and balancing family and work roles. Prior to the moment when the women felt empowered to engage in the risk taking

necessary to move to a new position. The influence of a mentor emerged as a causal condition, from within the shared experiences related to building self-efficacy and balancing work and family roles. The women described respected, powerful mentors, mostly male, who provided opportunity to gain leadership experience in a variety of roles, recommended them for promotions, and verbally persuaded them to apply for various positions. The women described the encouragement of a mentor on a regular basis, as well as in times of need. The women's responses indicated without the verbal persuasion of the one or more mentors, they would not have engaged in risk-taking to become educational leaders.

Table 3: Participant responses related gender

Context	Example quotes
The realities of gender in organizational life	"Women really have to prove themselves to get noticed." Carol
	"You always see more women as teachers and fewer women as you move up in the administrative ranks." Fay
	"It's hard not to be looked at as a "gritch" when making unpopular decisions where a man in the same position would be called a great leader." Hazel
	"It happened every single day." Eve
How has gender shaped the kind of leader you have become?	"I waited until my children were grown before moving into administration." Hazel
	"I think I am more caring because I am a mother and grandmother." Gale
	"I think women tend to be more collaborative and inclusive when it comes to decision making." June
Has this changed over your career?	Participants agreed, it has gotten better over there career but it is still very much an issue.

Most of the women reported one consequence was sacrificing time with their own children and families. Two women specifically stated they waited until their children were grown before seeking an administrative position due to the time commitment of the job. One woman did not have children, but she did feel like if she had children it would be harder to follow her dream. Each participant who described the concern of "missing time" with her children also related decision making in career ascension to the ages and needs of her children and spouse, or family role. The women made decisions in career ascension, such as

attending graduate school and applying for promotion, with consideration to the responsibilities as a wife or mother.

Eve described an incident she encountered regarding gender.

> I had a school board member who ran for reelection on the fact that I was overpaid and underqualified. I have a doctorate from Harvard from the urban superintendents program, I had experience in the district and another larger district and two other districts that were comparable in size. They hired someone with only K-8 experience not K-12 no doctorate and had not been in a larger school district. They paid him almost $100,000 more than they paid me.

In summary, most of the participants discussed mentors early in their lives. These early relationships included family, friends, or teachers who provided a form of mentoring by encouraging the pursuit of higher education and career advancement. Through their encouragement and support, the participants were able to foster a resiliency which became increasingly important during their careers. A majority of the participants benefited from both personal and professional mentorship and networking throughout their careers. These mentors and networks included partners, supervisors, graduate professors, professional association members, colleagues, parents, friends, and a higher spiritual power. By offering advice, problem solving, and encouragement, as well as providing overall support, these mentors and networks contributed to the participants' ability to persevere and remain resilient in difficult times. In many instances, the participants discussed mentors who opened their minds to career possibilities and saw their potential for greater opportunities. Some of the participants spoke of not

having access to mentors. They displayed resiliency by actively seeking out mentors or using observation as primary way to learn about leadership.

Leadership Approach

The participants' leadership approaches and philosophies contributed to their resiliency by allowing them to use their leadership to pursue their passion and dedication to improving education. First, many of the participants spoke of their authenticity in leading as critical to their work and success. Authentic leadership is a management style in which leaders are genuine, self-aware, and transparent. An authentic leader is able to inspire loyalty and trust in her staff by consistently displaying who she really is as a person, and how she feels about her employees' performance (George, 2003). By remaining authentic as leaders, they were able to stay true to their values, tap into their personal strengths, and promote fairness and decisiveness among their employees. Second, the women spoke of collaboration with their staffs as key to their leadership styles. Through collaboration and teamwork, these participants persevered and remained resilient in the handling of problems or criticism by empowering others with the capacity to jointly solve problems and move the districts or campuses forward. Third, the participants were resilient in leading on different campuses by understanding the necessity to sometimes alter their approach depending on the situation. Fourth, trust was a critical aspect in their leadership and resiliency. In spite of the challenges they encountered, most of the participants were able to build trust and

get their staff to believe in them and follow their vision. Fifth, some of the participants discussed the importance of understanding the internal politics and culture of a district and knowing when to make concessions to their desired outcomes. Even when confronted with disagreements, they remained resilient by understanding when and how to negotiate with others to keep moving forward towards goals.

Many of the participants spoke of being authentic in their leadership approach and not changing how they led to meet the expectations of others. They knew how they wanted to lead and rarely altered their styles, regardless of criticism. In some instances, the participants were criticized for not appearing as strong as men; however, they understood the significance of doing what was right for themselves. Several described their authentic leadership as student-centered or student-focused. By being authentic they discussed being able to tap into their own personal strengths and be brave and courageous; these outcomes directly contributed to their perseverance and strong resiliency.

The women were candid in reporting they began a career in teaching with no goal to become a superintendent. The absence of a specific goal to become a superintendent was noted in the first interview and continued to emerge in each interview which followed. I noted the women laughing, some heartily, and some softly, as the first response when asked to describe the journey to become a superintendent, as they worked to build self-efficacy, rather than intention.

Table 4: Participant responses: building self-efficacy

Context	Example quote
Building Self-efficacy	"A lack of confidence is what holds a lot of women back". Beth
	"I struggle with imposter syndrome often." Eve
	"I constantly question my own decisions and struggle with a lack of confidence, I just hide it." Ivy
Desiring a site, assistant or district leadership role	"Leadership found me." Hazel
	"You need to be at the right place at the right time." Amy
	"Well, that's the funny thing, I feel into it backwards. I never, never intended to be a superintendent. I actually wanted to be an assistant." June
Mastering experiences	"When I became board with a position I asked for more challenge to expand my knowledge of all aspect of running the school for example budgeting and managing athletics." Gale
Building social capital through Interpersonal relationships	"Do not be afraid to ask for help." Fay
	"Build your inner circle, use the fact that you are female to build strong relationships and partnerships." Eve
Encouraging mentor	"I have benefited from people who have been open to maybe helping me move into better opportunities and keeping networks intact." Eve
	"I worked closely with my former superintendent as an assistant. He recommended me for this position I have now." Ivy
	"After my first year, my principal sat me down and said, I really don't want to lose you as a teacher, but you really should consider getting your masters and becoming an administrator." Carol

The women described beginning careers as teachers, the women reported feeling confident as teachers and began desiring experience in a leadership role. The women's goals after graduate school were to gain experience in a variety of roles to become a site principal or a district assistant leader. All participants had experience as an assistant superintendent, in positions related to leadership of curriculum and instruction, prior to becoming superintendents. The participants listed their prior experiences in their interviews. One woman, Ivy, recounted her experience in trying to get her first head principal position. She said, she had been the assistant for two years and the prior principal left. She felt confident in her abilities and felt like she would be a shoe in for the position. She knew the school, teachers and community and was ready to take the lead. She did not get the position. A man from outside of the district was hired, a friend of the male superintendent. The principal did not do any teacher evaluations, and the school floundered. She and another assistant principal were sent in to clean up his mess. He left and she thought this is my year and I am ready. Again another man from outside the district was hired. She then saw the writing on the wall and realized she would not be able to move up in the district. She has since gone to another district and been able to succeed.

Another example was told to me by Dawn.

> I was new to the role as assistant superintendent of human resources I was the youngest one in the room and the only female on the district leadership team at that time. There was a gentleman who was a colleague of mine but much more experienced, leading the meeting. My predecessor in human resources had supervised athletics and so with my

> coming in we were sitting in a room, five or six of us and they were putting up on the wall the different job responsibilities that each of us had at the time and trying to determine if we needed to restructure and reorganize these duties. So, as they came to athletics he said I will take athletics and Dawn's now assistant superintendent, I want to take athletics. I said, no wait a minute here why are you volunteering to take athletics? First, I had to find the courage to speak up against a longtime administrator, male administrator, but I said you know because it was clear the way he said it in the words he used or because he was the male and I was the female and it was athletics and he said, well I know you know it's something so and so supervised and your predecessor had supervised I just figured it would be easier for me to go ahead and take this. I said, why take it, are you saying that because I'm female and the athletic directors are male and the athletes are typically male? And he just stopped and he went silent and he just stared at me and he said well, I hadn't thought about it in those terms. You are making a very valid point and if it's something you would rather keep I'm fine with that. I said well let's continue with where it is. It is something I want to keep. While I have not played sports I enjoy athletics and I was a cheerleader in high school. Although I don't think it's necessary to have that kind of experience to be able to lead a group of people and set the direction to set the goals. He said, I agree with you and you've made a very good point. He said let's continue where it is for now. I said I would like to leave it under my responsibilities for now and let's go ahead and look at all the other responsibilities we may decide it makes more sense to move somewhere else but not just because I'm a female. Ultimately I kept athletics and supervised athletics for several years.

Amy recounted her experiences as a new principal.

> There was a combination of different reasons that I decided after 30 years of teaching I needed to do something different. I happened to know the principal at a school and she saw that I was interested in getting out of teaching, she hired me to become an assistant principal and I was only assistant for one year when she decided to make a career change. It was frightening beyond belief for me to become a principal after only one year of being an assistant. It felt like I bit off more than I could chew but it was fine, I had support so that's good and I'm still here.

Eve gave an example of her struggle with imposter syndrome.

> I went to Berkeley, Stanford and Harvard. If I had met someone who went to Berkeley, Stanford and Harvard I'd be really impressed, but the fact that

> I did it makes it completely unimpressive and I think that's a very female thing whereas a man would have it tattooed on him.

The women emphasized improving self-confidence, gaining experiences in a variety of roles, developing social capital, and continuing education as they were building self-efficacy. As the women described their journey they told stories of the struggles to enter a male dominated role.

Collaboration in Leadership

Most of the participants discussed collaboration in their interactions in their careers, four stressed collaboration as key to their leadership styles and resiliency. These participants achieved collaboration in different ways, including empowering their staff to make decisions, soliciting advice from their staff, and team building. They were able to remain resilient in achieving their goals by enacting change through collaborative decision-making processes and leadership. Getting the advice and opinions of their staff before making final decisions was critical to some's collaborative leadership styles. Others displayed their authenticity and resiliency in terms of understanding and having a strong commitment to the purpose of their leadership and ensuring their decisions were aligned to a mission which they strongly support. They discussed a focus on students as a key component of their leadership.

June described her leadership as situational in the sense, she evaluated each situation. She understood it was sometimes necessary to alter her original

plans based on who and what she was encountering contributed to her resiliency. As she discussed:

> The other strategy is I've always learned that in many cases it's good to learn your lane, which eliminates challenges and frustrations. It's good to know your sphere of influence. Many people get into trouble when they get out of that and think they can control things that aren't in their wheel house. Maybe what I can do is try to influence things not under your purview and then with your experience you know how far to take that. You know when to back down, move aside, take another road, because if you're going to do this type of job successfully, you can't do the same thing that you always do. For example when I was in the K-12 classroom as a teacher, I would constantly adapt to the needs of my students in determining how to deliver a particular lesson. Similarly as a leader, you have constant values but you need to adapt to those you are leading. You've got to think on your feet and go with the flow.

Trust

Kim described trust as a key component in their leadership. Trust involved allowing their staff to challenge them and make mistakes. Building trust contributed to her resiliency by allowing her to form relationships with the staff who believed they could take chances without repercussions and who were willing to follow her lead. As Kim described:

> I came to understand you've got to have people you can one hundred percent trust. You can't do this alone and that it's debilitation to do it alone. There's a sense of…I said this in the interview, and I say it probably ad nauseam for most people. My dad used to say to me, 'my pencil has an eraser. How about yours?' I'm not perfect. I can make mistakes, and I need people to be honest with me and say it's not working, or we have got to do it differently or we employ that eraser and start all over again. I think I would give everybody that advice. The worst part is … You've got to imagine yourself working for yourself and who wants to work for an autocrat who never makes a mistake and is always right and doesn't care what you think.

Like Kim, June also saw trust in terms of allowing others to know they should try their best; and if they make mistakes, they would not be supported. She stated:

> What I learned is in leadership positions is, I need to think about all the people who aren't like me and give them the space to take chances. I don't mind taking the chance. I have a very healthy ego. I don't worry about it for good or bad. In order to gain respect in any leadership situation it is necessary to first build trust. If no one trusts you, then no one will respect you. If no one respects you, then no one will follow your leadership. I define leadership as a relationship that is based on mutual respect. You cannot use your positional power to demand trust. You have to earn it, in order to earn it, you have to first give the respect and trust to the person you wish to receive the respect, and trust first.

The Covid Connection

All of the participants reported, this year has been the hardest in their career due to the covid 19 pandemic. The interviews took place during the spring of 2020, just as schools across the state decided to close to reduce the spread of what was then a virtually unknown disease. During the summer many of the participants were involved in plans to completely change everything we have done in education. For many students, school serves as far more than a place to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic and to socialize with friends. School might be their only stable environment, the place where they receive wraparound services such as free meals and health care. These women recognized students who are at a disadvantage to begin with, those who are struggling academically,

who lack access to technology needed to learn remotely, and food insecurity, will be at an even larger disadvantage.

Table 5: The Covid connection

Context	Example quotes
Plans for reopening	"No matter what happens in August, people will be mad. They will be mad if we open, they will be mad if we are virtual and they will be mad if it's a combined program." Amy
	"I don't see all of the students returning this year (20-21) with the 6-feet of separation requirement. Students will at best have to rotate coming to school." Eve
Politics	"The wearing of masks has created a political split in the community." Hazel
	"We have revised, and re-vised our plans for reopening over and over again." Gale

The women agree the health and safety of their students and staff is their top priority. In this current crisis, educational leaders are no longer just administrators of routine-following organizations. They need to navigate a shifting environment where new demands are emerging all the time. Districts have formed new alliances with social service agencies, mobilized their central offices to do unfamiliar tasks, and cope with conflicting political pressures about whether to open schools or to maintain remote learning. These challenges will last long after the pandemic. Students facing major gaps in learning and unaddressed trauma will require new investments in services just as declining enrollment and revenues will necessitate painful budget cuts.

My study supports and expands upon previous literature connected to the experiences of women on their pathway to educational leadership. It also introduces new knowledge related to successful outcomes as the participants overcame barriers to becoming leaders. My study uncovered new information pertaining to how the participants remained resilient in spite of numerous challenges. Through my findings, it became apparent it was the participants' mind sets, decisions, actions, relationships, and approaches to leadership which collectively strengthened their resiliency.

Connecting to Theoretical Framework

Approaching this study from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective allowed the researcher to find meaning in the human experience shared by these women leaders. This interpretation of their stories began the moment they shared them. This is consistent with Willis (1991), who stated once lived experiences are considered, they immediately begin to be interpreted. While listening to the women speak and taking notes, I was also interpreting their stories. As the women were sharing their stories, they were simultaneously developing understandings of the historical steps they took which led to who they are today, women leaders. They reconstructed early career related motivational experiences, social interactions, and gender perceptions and determined if their meanings had changed from the time of the occurrences until now. As the research process continued, as transcripts were made and reread and coded it became clear those

early motivational experiences were more important in their persisting in obtaining a leadership position. As the researcher checked back with participants to verify some details, the participants reinterpreted their current identities as educational leaders in light of their past motivational experiences and in turn they began to reinterpret their past motivational experiences in light of who they had become. Therefore, they traveled the hermeneutic circle, in which according to Heidegger is "hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing" (p.195).

My goal as a researcher, in the analysis of the lived experiences shared by the women was first to provide a "thick description which accurately captured and communicated the meaning of the lived experienced for the informants being studied" (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). According to Denzin (1989) and Geertz (1973), a thick description is one which expresses the shared experiences of informants in their fullest and richest complexity. The hermeneutic circle guided the process of inquiry on several levels. I first provided a realistic context and background information for holistically understanding each interview. The holistic contextualization of individualized interviews set the stage for the thematic analysis of interviews across participants. In accordance with Cohen, Kahn, and Steeves (2000), I then began analysis as I attempted to understand parts of the text in relation to the entire text and vice versa. According to Cohen, Kahn and Steeves (2000), once the whole of the data is better understood, re-examination of the same data at a deeper level or examination of different data

allows for even further analysis. This is the hermeneutic circle, which is described by Geertz (1988) as a process in which individually detailed storied are explored, followed by the examination of the holistic data. Over and over, I alternately examined and re-examined the smallest details of the individual stories of the women participants and holistic patterns across the motivational stories of all the women until I could view both simultaneously. To make this process easier, I constructed an outline of themes which appeared in the stories of each woman in the three categories of leadership, systems of support and persistence and gender. Making use of the hermeneutic circle in the data interpretation of this study meant I considered every statement shared by the women in terms of the largest cultural contexts. Within individual statements and large cultural context were other contexts which were also considered including the individual women, their family relations, friends and co-workers. Finally, by making my fore structures known before conducting the interviews, and by adding my insights regarding some of the stories shared by the women participants, a portion of my experience was incorporated into the women's stories. This is known as the fusion of horizons Kahn, and Steeves (2000).

Implications

The findings and conclusion of my study has the potential to inform the policies and practices of school boards, institutions of higher education, and women seeking upper administrative positions. While there is no single

implication which would solve the problem of underrepresentation of women in the upper levels of educational leadership, a combination of targeted policies and practices could help enact change while supporting the major components in my study which contributed to building resiliency throughout the full careers of women in education. The following discussion presents implications for policy and practices at the structural and individual levels.

The research literature and my findings confirm there continue to be many challenges for women in the upper levels of educational administration. Therefore, in order to solve this problem, school boards and district human resource departments must believe this is a critical problem and directly address the lack of women in leadership. Within a school district, human resource practices and succession planning must be evaluated to support the hiring of women at the upper levels of leadership. Districts could develop a qualified pool of women applicants through the professional development and mentorship of women within the district. Search committees should be diverse and include women to allow for different perspectives when evaluating applicants. To support more women in leadership the school boards should be educated in the advantages of having more women in upper leadership positions and believe it is a strategic priority.

Most of the participants did not consider seeking upper administrative positions until they had been in the classroom as a teacher for several years; and most often they were encouraged by others to think about going into leadership.

In order to get more women to consider seeking leadership positions earlier in their careers, it is necessary to build formalized programs for future leaders which target young women as they begin their teaching careers. School districts must encourage and recognize future leaders through programs which discuss career advancement and how women can plan and obtain the skills and certification necessary for the upper ranks of educational leadership. These types of programs would require committed resources and could be centralized through professional development departments.

The findings show professional relationships were important to the participants throughout their careers, since these relationships provided the participants with work and career advice. The participants did not always have access to mentors, yet instead developed mentor relationships through a network of friends, coworkers and associates. In order to address this, school districts should recognize women frequently do not have access to mentors, and they should purposefully develop mentorship or networking opportunities for women. Mentorship could become a part of an employee's professional development program so women are assigned mentors early in their careers. Districts could also encourage and support structures where women can congregate and network with other professionals to discuss workplace issues and their careers.

Several participants discussed leadership perception as an issue and the belief they were not strong enough to lead. The study showed a majority of the participants saw themselves as authentic leaders and did not prescribe to a specific

leadership style, although most emphasized collaborative practices. Districts should develop leadership training programs for all staff which emphasize the development of authentic leadership and allow individuals to self-reflect and create an awareness of their authentic style. These programs should facilitate discussions pertaining to authentic leadership and its application in creating congruity between the values of the leader and those being led.

Individual women can take many steps based on the findings of this study. Women can see they do not need to follow a linear path to leadership. Women should always be looking for networking and presentation opportunities to keep them visible and connected. Women should seek out professional organizations dedicated to women's success. These types of programs would offer networking opportunities so women can stay connected and assist each other. Most of the participants did not consider leadership until after they had taught for many years. My findings suggest if women consider leadership earlier in their careers, they can map out their career trajectories, anticipate potential obstacles, and develop responsive strategies, and potentially assume these leadership positions earlier in their careers.

Future Research

My study focused on women who have attained a top administrative position in public schools. Future studies could look at women who want to move up in the ranks but have not yet achieved that goal. This study could replicate the

methodology to consider all their experiences to better understand what factors may have prevented their advancement. Future studies could include women of color. I did invite several women of color to participate, but we were not able to get interviews scheduled. Mainly due to the increased workload on these women during the summer and fall of 2020, while districts were still trying to decide how to handle the covid-19 global pandemic.

Summary

This chapter focused on the concept of resiliency as it related to the participants' ability to persist and achieve higher level positions in education. The findings showed three major factors contributing to the participant's resiliency, which included being focused on a growth mindset, the influence of mentors, networking, and relationships, and finally their leadership philosophies and approaches. These factors were prevalent in different ways for each of the participants in contributing to their strength, resolve, and ability to persevere when confronted with challenges.

All of the participants displayed a growth mindset which could be defined as determined, persistence, perseverance, confident, a drive to succeed, or a stubbornness to prove their abilities regardless of marginalization or criticism. Some of the participants spoke of early influences in their lives which fostered their determination, including parents, friends, teachers, community, and faith based leaders. Many participants additionally discussed being ambitious,

dedicated to a professional career, not taking difficulties too personally, and enjoying challenges as contributing to their mind set.

A majority of the participants had benefited from both personal and professional mentorship and networking throughout their careers. These mentors and networks included partners, supervisors, graduate professors, professional association members and colleagues, parents, friends, and a higher spiritual power.

The participants' leadership approaches furthered their resiliency throughout their careers. A majority of the participants identified themselves as authentic leaders in which they stayed true to their values while leading. Some called this servant leadership or transformational leadership. The participants were able to tap into their inner strengths and lead in a way which was most comfortable to them. Many of the women discussed collaboration and teamwork as important in gaining staff consensus as well as contributing to better decision making.

Last, a few of the participants spoke of the importance of building trust with staff and understanding how to navigate the politics of a community while providing them ways to more effectively lead and ultimately persevere. Through collaborative processes, these participants remained resilient by empowering their staff and gaining their trust. Several of the participants additionally spoke of their leadership as dependent on the community in which they were serving or the circumstances. This was evident in the constant changing safety protocols for

dealing with the covid 19 pandemic. These participants remained resilient by adapting their leadership to each particular situation. While they stayed true to their values as leaders, they understood, at times, they needed to modify how they led based on the needs of those they were leading or the culture and practices of the community.

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Appendix

Appendix A – IRB approval

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: May 19, 2020 **IRB#:** 12078

Principal Investigator: Regina Ann Hein **Approval Date:** 05/19/2020

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Nevertheless she persisted: an analysis of what motivates women to persist in academic leadership

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Fred Beard, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B – Sample recruiting email

Dear (Participant name),

I am a Ph.D. student in Educational Studies at the University of Oklahoma and I am writing in hopes of enlisting your participation in and support for my doctoral research. I have interviewed (participant name who recommended this contact) and she suggested that I contact you.

For the past twenty-six years I have worked in K-12 education in a variety of settings and held positions at several school districts in both Texas and Oklahoma. This experience has spurred my interest in research related to women who hold administrative positions in K-12 education.

For my dissertation research I have chosen to explore motivational factors that encourage women to seek and persist in obtaining leadership positions in K-12 settings. In particular, I am interested in examining the positive lens by which women continue to persist in their positions.
Participating includes sitting for a 60-minute face to face or an online via Zoom interview. I would like to complete these interviews during the summer and fall of 2020.

By helping to expand the understanding of women and their persistence in leadership positions, positive changes in discussions regarding gender, recruitment, and policy can happen which will contribute to the diversity of the organization as a vibrant and inclusive school settings.

I would be pleased to enlist you as a participant and would be equally glad to speak with any of your colleagues who hold leadership positions. I will follow up with you soon to discuss my proposal.

Sincerely,
Regina Hein
Doctoral Student
University of Oklahoma

Appendix C – Interview consent form

Oral Consent Script to Participate in Research

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Would you be interested in participating in a research project I am conducting at the University of Oklahoma? I would like you to participate because you are a female school administrator in the state of Oklahoma.

I am conducting this research project because I am hoping to learn and better understand the mechanisms that help women advance into leadership and what motivates them to persist. About 30 people will participate. If you agree to participate, I will be asking you to participate in an individual interview, which will be conducted either in-person at a location of your choice, or via Zoom. This should take about one hour.

Your participation in this research does not involve any direct risks or benefits to you.

All the information I am collecting will be kept secure and confidential, and only I or the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board will be able to look at it.

After removing all identifiers, we might share your data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant or any concerns or complaints regarding your participation, you can contact me at regina.a.hein-1@ou.edu, 405-534-0111 or the advisor Dr. John Jones, jrjones@ou.edu, or OU's IRB at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

In order to preserve your responses, they will be recorded on an audio recording device.

Do you agree for your interview to be to audio recorded?

_____ (note response)

Before you agree to participate, remember that your participation is completely voluntary, you don't have to answer any question, and you can stop at any time. If you do choose to participate and then change your mind, you won't be penalized in any way. Finally, if you would like a printed copy of the information I've just read to you, you are welcome to have this one.

Appendix D – Interview Outline

Interview questions

Leadership

1. Describe your current position and responsibilities including how others see your leadership style.
2. Many times, we talk about barriers women have to face when moving up in positions, what were the things which helped you be successful? (personal and environmental support)
3. What does your best day at work look like? Tell me about a time when you felt most alive in your work?
4. Have you attended any type of leadership training and if so, how have you used the experience?
5. Tell me about your thoughts and beliefs in yourself and your confidence in performing your job?

Systems of support: Persistence

6. Who or what has helped you become successful?
7. As a young professional looking back, who or what helped you through challenges?
8. Sometimes people rely on systems, themselves, or other people, what do you remember about your experiences?
9. How do you move through challenging times, how have you persisted?
10. Can you talk about a time where you were resilient even when faced with adversity?
11. Can you talk about your systems of support?
12. Please tell me about a time when you implemented an alternative pathway to help you achieve a goal?
13. What helps energize you to reach your goals?

Gender

14. Tell me about a time when you recognized or experienced the realities of how gender plays a role in organizational life?
15. How did you experience and make meaning of gender (what did you do)?
16. How did you experience gender early in your career? (were there things you did to help yourself)
17. In regards to acknowledging differences in gender within organizations, have your experiences changed over your career?
18. How do you think gender has shaped or influenced what type of leader you are?
19. Do you have any words of advice to others who may be thinking about educational leadership?