Experiences of Female Educational Leaders as Examined Through Interpretive Inquiry

by

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Abstract

This study explored the following question: How do female educational leaders experience educational leadership? The research focused on the practices of three female educational leaders and explored their perspectives over a period of single school year. I gathered data using one-on-one semistructured interviews. I then analyzed the data through the use of interpretive thematic analysis. The themes I created related to barriers women educational leaders face. Women are experiencing success within the field of educational leadership but require support and mentorship. In spite of the availability of numerous preparation programs, female educational leaders are nonetheless often feeling unprepared and overwhelmed in their positions. These women also continue to live in gendered and socialized educational environments that impact their practice, experience, and personal growth, and while these barriers exist, women are developing ideologies and ways of leading that circumvent these barriers and allow for success in their leadership roles. This study found that in spite of the gains made by women towards equality, inequality is persistent and ongoing. I discussed these themes in relation to the shared experiences of the participants. Further research is needed to understand how gendered roles affect this inequality and how to alleviate ongoing barriers to success for all women in educational leadership.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Colleen D. Alpern. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Dedication

To: Sam, Al and Nick: my motivation,

Joan, Jeane and Keith: my inspiration.

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Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature has shown that men and women experience educational leadership in different ways, in part because of ongoing gender inequality (Acker, 1992; Bascia & Young, 2001; Bierema, 2016; Blackmore, 2006; Jull, 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 1982; Wallace, 1998). This can add to the challenges of an already highly complex job (Crow, 2006; Daresh & Male, 2000; Garcia-Garduño, Slater, Charles, & Lópes-Gorosave, 2011; MacBeath, 2006; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996), requiring ongoing support and training for educational leaders (Bhindi, Hammersley-Fletcher, Notman, & Simon, 2009; T. R. Williams, 2003). Appropriate supports such as coaching and mentoring could help female educational leaders deal with the increased stress, emotional isolation, and potential burnout that can accompany the job (Ely et al., 2010; Grodzki, 2011; Lattuca, 2012; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013; Simkins, Close, & Smith, 2009). Given the ongoing requirement for educational leaders (Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012; T. R. Williams, 2003), women must be supported and encouraged to seek out, take up, and remain in educational leadership roles. I explored the point of view of women as they experienced these educational leadership roles to understand their unique perspectives, and to explore their experiences within educational leadership. This exploration gave insight into how women perceive themselves within the male dominated world of educational leadership (Burkman, 2011; Drudy, 2008; Jull, 2002; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Wallace, 1998, 2004).

In this chapter I outline the purpose and significance of the study and state the central questions for the research. Following this, I discuss limitations, delimitations, and definitions.

After discussion of the research situation and process, I define how I selected participants. The final section outlines myself as the researcher within the study.

Purpose of the Research

This research was undertaken to help add to the existing literature available around female educational leaders' lived experiences as school leaders. Although a great deal of literature exists supporting male educational leaders, understanding of the female leader experience is lacking (Bierema, 2016; Shakeshaft, 1982; Young, 1994). This research attempted to understand three women's reflections, thoughts, stories, and feelings and to provide insight into how they experienced educational leadership. The purpose of this study was to provide an interpretive analysis of the experiences of female educational leaders in order to provide insight into their thoughts and experiences around these experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study is timely in the field of educational leadership. Women and men live different experiences within the realm of educational leadership (Blackmore, 1989, 2006; Bierema, 2016; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1982). It is necessary to understand the experiences of female candidates in educational leadership, to better understand how to encourage and support female educational leaders. This research provided the opportunity for female educational leaders to share their experiences and understandings through the framework of interpretive inquiry. The results of this study contribute to understanding the diverse needs of women within educational leadership and some of the ways women practice educational leadership. This study offers insight into their experiences and support for women educational leaders within a male-dominated field by exploring the feelings, thoughts, and stories around their experiences and providing context

for other women seeking to understand. This study also provides hope and encouragement to other women by diminishing their isolation and creating an acceptable space for ongoing conversations and stories. Finally, it explores the ongoing inequality that exists in the field of educational leadership and how this inequality leads to increased challenges for women in this profession.

Research Questions

This research was designed with the following question in mind: How do female educational leaders experience educational leadership? A number of secondary questions helped to frame the analysis as I proceeded with my work.

- Why did these women choose educational leadership and how did they experience the transition into this realm?

- How did these women prepare for the role of educational leader?

- How did these women experience educational leadership from a gendered perspective?

- How did these women overcome the barriers that impede their success in educational leadership?

- How did their experiences within educational leadership influence their practice?

Delimitations

This study was delimited to exploring the experiences of three women as newly appointed educational leaders. As such, the barriers, impediments, and experiences for women in school leadership were the focus of this study. I did not explore the experiences of men within educational leadership, nor how they might specifically experience this field although some of the literature will reflect the practice of men, given the lack of female

specific literature around some of the topics I explored. Given the complexity of the responses and the amount of generated data, the study was delimited to three women, women who were part of the designated school district, who met the criteria, and who were willing and able to participate.

Limitations

Every study and method has inherent limitations. The limitations of this study are focused on the people involved in the study itself. My own location, formation, experiences, and biases influenced my interpretations of the research and provided the first limitation. Second, given the small group of participants and the focus on a single school district, these results may be limited with respect to transferability; they are specific to the time, place, culture, and context of this project. As well, the interpretation of this phenomenon is a single interpretation. I present only a partial picture of the whole. In addition, the results depend on the shared experiences of my participants; *what* they chose to share, *how* they chose to share, and with what *transparency and honesty* they chose to share. This research was not triangulated – a limitation established by the fact that it was carried out by a single researcher using only a single method for research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Negative case analysis was also not possible, and while questions were explored expansively and literature was thoroughly reviewed, the use of only three participants prohibited discovery of negative instances of data. Finally, the participants are limited by their social positions and are representative of a similar category of middle-class, privileged white females. This research may, nonetheless, speak to many as the participants' experiences, while not exactly the same, do contain similarities and common elements nonetheless.

Definitions

I have used some significant terms throughout this study that require definition. First of all, it is important to clarify the definitions of *educational leadership* and *educational administration*. These terms are closely related; however, I use *educational leadership* throughout the document to refer to positions of formal leadership held by individuals within a school district or school. The participants themselves often referred to these positions as *administration* or "*admin*". These include positions such as principal, assistant principal, and vice-principal. Participants also alluded to central office positions such as director, associate superintendent, or superintendent.

A second designation I refer to throughout the paper is that of *principal.* The School Act (2003, c. S-3, Section 1[1]) states: "'Principal' means a teacher designated as a principal or acting principal under this Act." Under this act, the principal is the individual designated through appointment by the school board as head of the school and assigned responsibility for the school site, staff, and students. This reference was included as this law defines the practice for the principal. These duties are used to measure competency and skill, and they outline necessary qualifiers and provide a beginning frame of reference for understanding the expectations for an educational leader. The School Act is the basis of supervisory evaluations for educational leaders.

The terms *vice-principal* and *assistant principal* are used interchangeably throughout the literature. For the purpose of this study, I employed the term *assistant principal* to refer to both designations. There is no mention of either of these terms in the School Act (2003, c. S-3). Although the role of the assistant principal can vary enormously depending on the school, context, and assignment (Kwan, 2009; Oleszewski et al., 2011; A. Walker & Kwan, 2009),

there is no questioning that this individual is integral to the successful functioning of the

school (Hausman, Nebeker, & McCreary, 2001; Oleszewski et al., 2011). This role is also

assumed as preparation for a possible career as a principal (Kwan, 2009; Lieberman & Miller,

2004; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Sackney & Walker, 2006; A. Walker & Kwan, 2009). For the

purposes of this study, the assistant principal refers to the individual designated to assist the

principal with his or her responsibility for the school site, staff, and students.

Designated tasks in the realm of educational leadership vary depending upon the

school site, district, and school community. In this study, *management* activities refer to

duties as defined in the School Act (2003, c. S-3) that include such things as the duty to

> (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;
>
> (d) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of
>
> education set by the Minister;
>
> (e) direct the management of the school;
>
> (f) maintain order and discipline in the school; . . .
>
> (h) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students; [and]
>
> (i) evaluate the teachers employed in the school. (Section 20)

Leadership activities refer to instructional activities as defined in the School Act

(2003, c. S-3), such as the duty to

> (a) provide instructional leadership in the school; [and]
>
> (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is
>
>   consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved
>
>   or authorized pursuant to this Act. (Section 20)

Finally, *other* activities refers to instructional activities as defined in the School Act

(2003, c. S-3), such as the duty to

(g) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves; . . .

[and]

(j) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of

employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in

accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the

board. (Section 20)

Taken together, these tasks begin to comprise multiple roles and duties that principals

are tasked to fulfill "competently in order to support student learning and positively influence

school culture and administration" (Browne, 2010, p. 125).

Recent research, theory, and practice have expanded these roles and subdivided them

into multiple platforms or conceptions of practice. There is a host of research available that

has attempted to define these roles and responsibilities. In one example, according to Bush

and Glover (2014), successful school leadership is based on what they referred to as

contingent leadership. This type of leadership encompasses theories and practices that

fluctuate according to each school setting and each individual leader. Success for educational

leadership resides in artfully interweaving these requirements. These many kinds of

leadership are further explored in the literature review section.

Because this study focused on the female experience, a definition of the terms *gender*

and *sex* is required. "*Gender* refers to patterned, socially produced, distinctions between

female and male, feminine and masculine. Gender is not something that people are" (Acker,

1992, p. 391, emphasis in text), and whereas gender and sexuality are different aspects of the

human experience, both are inherently present within the context of education and the organizational bureaucracy. Shakeshaft (1989) asserted that "gender is a cultural term. It describes the characteristics that we ascribe to people because of their sex and the ways we believe they behave based on our cultural expectations of what is male and what is female" (p. 326). Acker (1992) also defined gender as such. Wallace (1998) argued that "they [gendered scripts] are socially constructed, value-laden, and gendered narratives which define possibilities and constraints for both men and women within the public and private spheres of human activity" (p. 4), and which are imposed by our culture and historical context. More recently, Dentith and Peterlin (2011) define gender as "something we do, something we think about, a set of social constructs and a set of practices and cultural meanings that organize people into categories that are ideological rather [than] biological" (p. 40). Finally, Shakeshaft (1989) defined *sex* as being biological, a division of humankind into females and males. Specific to application for this research was the belief that people's sex and gender are defined and imposed by the constraints of society. Understanding these two terms helped to provide context as I completed my analysis of the results.

Location

This study took place within a school district located just outside of a large urban centre in Alberta, Canada. This school district serves approximately 16,700 students in approximately 40 schools. The system employs approximately 890 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 515 full-time equivalent nonteaching staff. Schools also vary by geographic area, with the majority being located within urban areas and the balance being located in rural or small urban centres. This research took place at various sites of choice of

the participants in order to honour their time and involvement. The participants were chosen from the pool of currently practicing female educational leaders.

The Process

I interviewed three women over the course of eight months. The three participants were chosen because they were all women practicing in the field of educational leadership. Over the course of seven to eight months, we met on a semi-regular basis (given the complexity of scheduling and commitments). We met in a variety of casual locations, such as restaurants or coffee shops, and discussed questions pertaining to these issues (see Appendix A). The topics varied. We explored personal history and background focusing on their formative experiences in education and their choice to enter educational leadership. We explored their thoughts and feelings around their relationships with colleagues. We explored their journey into educational leadership and their transition into more formal leadership roles. We discussed family structures, roles, and responsibilities and their perceptions around stereotypes, discrimination, and other features of their experiences. We discussed how they practiced educational leadership, what they felt was important within this role, and how they defined educational leadership in practice.

Even though I had constructed formal questions for each interview, occasionally our conversations veered off topic. I asked for further clarification, comments, or reflections as new themes emerged. The interviews were relaxed, engaging, and interesting, and often lasted for over an hour or more. Prior to interviewing, we spent time chatting, talking, and laughing before the recording device was turned on. I recorded each of the interviews so that they could be transcribed. Often, each interview prompted personal thought or reflection, and afterwards, I jotted down questions that their answers or the discussion had inspired. Keeping

a reflections journal throughout this process helped me formalize these thoughts and questions as ideas emerged, evolved and developed. These questions I then tried to incorporate into our next sessions.

After the completion of each series of interviews, I personally transcribed the conversations verbatim. I then shared each individual participant's transcript with them. I asked them to review and provide feedback as they wished. This iterative process gave my participants and me the opportunity to review the material in depth (in part, to validate the content and, in part, to form the foundation for the next session). This opportunity for reflection was an important part of the research process.

Before beginning my analysis, I reviewed the literature again. As I read the literature, I began to see clear themes emerging from the data that had also been discussed in the literature. To reiterate and better organize these themes, I attempted to create a process that would organize the data. I began by reading the transcripts over several times, highlighting stories, examples, and reflections that seemed to be interesting, thought provoking, or that left me with questions with the use of a number of color codes. Because the basic questions had been similar for each participant, I began to see common elements in their responses. These common elements, phrases, words and ideas began to emerge as themes, around which I grouped the sections of the analysis.

As I reviewed the data, each interview revealed several common themes: participants' paths to becoming educational leaders or administrators, their experiences and reasons for choosing this path, and their growth once they moved into this field. I also saw themes around their experiences as women in leadership: barriers they faced, role conflict, discrimination, their own socialization, and gendered traits and how they lived these barriers.

I reviewed the broad themes again and began pulling everything together by narrowing the focus and reorganizing ideas for each participant. I regrouped specific words and phrases in large categories. I then defined these categories with further examples that I pulled from the color coded ideas. As I moved into deeper analysis, I used other questions to deepen my understanding and frame the analysis of responses. Finally, I interpreted the results by outlining salient points on which to elaborate my central question regarding these experiences. These steps are further clarified in Chapter 7.

Participants and Selection

Selection of the participants was critical to the success of this research. I conducted these interviews as an insider to the realm of education and educational leadership, and also as an insider in the district. I chose the participants based upon their availability and based on the previously outlined criteria of gender, administrative appointment, and willingness. I discuss the participant selection and criteria in further detail in Chapter 3.

Once the participants agreed to be interviewed, and when I had completed all ethical requirements, I conducted an initial interview (see Appendix A) and completed an initial check for appropriateness of questions. Following this, I continued with additional interviews. I began this process at the beginning of the 2014–2015 school year and proceeded with monthly interviews throughout the school year in order to develop deep, rich data and document ongoing growth and experiences from the participants. I also wished to explore the use of photography as a conduit of conversation, asking the participants to take photos of their experiences, which we then used as basis of conversation. I used this method once only as it was not as beneficial as I had originally anticipated, detracting, rather than adding, to the conversations. These photos simply created a starting point for conversations and elicited

memories that were tied to the moment of the photo. I did not keep the photos, but we did refer to them. They were used as an additional form of exploration and conversation.

I conducted my analysis according to the multiple steps outlined above, seeking themes, stories, and understandings in the data. Reading and re-reading the data helped create understanding as themes were uncovered. Participants had multiple opportunities along this path to verify their contributions as findings were assessed. This was an important step as it requested participant feedback on the final interpretations before completion of the research. This step helped build trust and trustworthiness in addition to forging stronger relationships with the participants.

The Researcher

It is important to acknowledge the reasons why I sought to complete this research and also to identify my location within these questions. In this section, I introduce myself as a multicultural subject in time, place, culture, politics, and history. I also identify my philosophical beliefs that may have influenced the way I have understood this research and my participants' experiences. These beliefs shape how I see the world and how I react to it and in it. I place myself into the context of my research and acknowledge how I discern the meaning within the experiences of my participants.

I am a middle-class, white woman who was raised in a midsized town in central Alberta, Canada. I grew up in a traditionally structured, middle-class home with white-collar working parents. I am the elder of two girls and in my white, middle-class, privileged life I had many opportunities as a young person. While privilege can mean many things, for this project, I use privilege to refer to the absence of poverty, ability to pursue and embrace education and develop cultural understanding through opportunity and experience

(Angelique, 2012). For me, privilege also included a stable home life, religious affiliations and volunteer opportunities. I learned to speak French and was able to attend university to complete my Bachelière en Éducation through the University of Alberta, Campus Saint-Jean. I had the opportunity to travel and work widely throughout Canada, Europe, and the United States, and through Mexico and Central America.

I began my teaching career well before I began teaching. My grandmother was a teacher. My mother, aunt, and uncle were all teachers. I knew I would become a teacher at an early age. As a young person, I taught Sunday school, ran summer programs and camps, and taught many students. I was also fortunate enough to develop a philosophy of caring and helping through years of volunteer work in nursing homes and hospitals and through active involvement in my church.

After completing my degree, I taught in various schools at various levels for 12 years, and I then pursued my Master of Education degree. The same year, I received my first formal educational leadership position as an assistant principal. This experience began preparing me for my next position as a principal. I have served as principal in three different schools and as assistant principal in two.

I have worked for the past 16 years in educational leadership, which I transitioned to after a successful 12-year teaching career. I have had extensive exposure to different styles of educational leaders. I have worked in several different types and levels of schools. I have been exposed to several different school cultures. I have also worked within a variety of school programs and curricula, and on many district initiatives and committees. This wide variety of experiences has led me to believe that I have gained deep experiential knowledge and skills.

My own home life was very traditional. My father worked, and my mother worked – both inside and outside the home. It was her responsibility to take care of the children and house as well as maintain her career. As I young adult, I began to question this apparent double-standard. Why was she required to work at home and my father allowed to "relax"? Plagued by many health issues, I used my father's frequent sickness to dismiss and excuse his lesser contributions to our family's domestic workload. I completed ironing, cooking, cleaning and even yard work without complaint.

As I entered the field of educational leadership, I experienced many questions as I took on this new role. Many of the issues I explored in my review of the literature were things that I experienced as a newly appointed assistant principal and as a newly appointed principal. I observed many behaviors that that I did not entirely understand and that appeared to be tied to "men" and "women" and their roles in the workplace. I began to question why, in my experience, there were so few women in specific areas of educational leadership such as central office roles, junior high school and high school principal positions, and even elementary principals. As I became more knowledgeable within my "widening horizons" (Bascia & Young, 2001, p. 277), I saw educational leaders who acted in ways that I perceived to be ineffective, and yet they continued to be promoted. I wondered how women managed the challenges of work and home. I questioned how I was supervised by male educational leaders. I wondered about my staff and their perceptions of me in this role as a woman. I struggled to learn about the many new requirements of this position that I felt unable to do and measured myself against my colleagues—many of them men—and wondered if I was competent enough. The formal and informal learning that took place as I grew in competence and understanding most certainly helped shape the way in which I saw

the world and my place within it, but I still had questions about being a women within this realm of leadership. I began to wonder if other women felt the same or if my experience was unique. I sought to understand how other women lived complex lives in educational leadership and in their own personal lives.

These many experiences also opened my mind to the possibility of conversation, story, and human interaction as I sought to build supports around me. They created new questions for me about educational leadership and the role of a school principal. They caused me to question and attempt to understand my philosophical beliefs and how I viewed the world. They helped me evaluate myself both personally and professionally and created a deep overarching desire to learn. In order to answer some of these questions and to continue to move forward in my own growth, I understood that I needed to share in the experiences of other female educational leaders. I wanted to listen to their stories and to interpret the meaning behind them, so that their lived experiences might provide additional understanding for female educational leaders.

Given my childhood, formative experiences in education, and immersion in the realm of all facets of education, my interest in this topic is no surprise. I acknowledged these assumptions and hypothesized that my research would reveal confirming ideologies of ongoing discrimination, challenges, and role conflict for women in the workplace. I expected educational leaders to feel, at times, overwhelmed, isolated, and unprepared. However, I also hoped to discover that women still felt the need to become part of this world of educational leadership, and I hoped to encourage them to continue to succeed, to build confidence, skills, and expertise. I also hoped that the literature that I explored would not be entirely accurate;

that women were not feeling the effects of these barriers and that they felt strong, empowered, and supported.

Dissertation Outline

In Chapter 1, I described the background, research problem, research question, and purpose for this study, identifying also the location and delimitations and limitations of the research. In Chapter 2, I explored the literature around this topic. I began with an exploration of the historical context of educational leadership, definitions and traits of educational leaders, and women's experiences in educational leadership. I explored existing barriers to success for women and feminist theories within educational leadership. In Chapter 3, I established the methodology for this study, in which I discussed the ontological and epistemological frameworks of my research, described the methodology of interpretive inquiry and thematic analysis, and outlined the necessary procedures around this methodology to create valid data analysis.

Chapters 4 through 6 are devoted to reorganizing and highlighting the data from my interviews with a focus on initial interpretations. I sought to regroup this information in a clear and coherent way to better understand themes and to bring forth the voices of these female educational leaders. In Chapter 7, I analyzed the data through the existing literature and began to dissect pearls of information and meaning through deeper analysis and interpretation. Finally, Chapter 8 summarized and concluded the research through reconceptualizing and revisiting the questions, purpose, and findings of the research project.

Chapter 2: Exploring the Literature

In this chapter, I explore the existing literature that surrounds my chosen topic. I begin by placing educational leadership within a historically generated, male-centered ideological framework. I then look at the developing literature from the field of educational leadership and the emerging theories with respect to the way women practice in this field. Next, I describe the barriers that exist for women within educational leadership, according to the literature and summarize these through a conceptual framework of literature.

The possible outcomes of interpretive inquiry are often unpredictable, as the richness of outcomes evolves through the process of analysis. In an attempt to anticipate what would emerge through my research, my review of the literature focused on a number of key areas as outlined above. An understanding of all of these topics was established through an exploration of literature pertaining to educational leadership. I explored barriers to success for women in leadership, educational leadership traits and theories, and feminist theory pertaining to leadership. In order to better understand the historical development of educational leadership, I begin by probing the historical context and evolution of educational leadership.

Historical Context of Educational Leadership

A predominantly male educational leadership system (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010) exists within a specific structure and context because of many historical factors (Bierema, 2016; Blackmore, 2006). Understanding this historical evolution will build understanding around the "who" and "why" of current practices in this field and how this male "norm" has evolved. Study of educational leadership began to emerge in the 1880s and it has evolved over time in response to the influences of today's political, social,

cultural, and economic demands. And although in multiple cultures, role and work are

equalized in all areas, including education (Wallace, 1998), the embedded beliefs around the

traditional nurturing roles of women have been perpetuated in many present-day education

systems, including in the North American context. This is due in part to the embedded

influences of North American culture and politics and the essentialism of women's roles

(Bierema, 2016). As a result, women's successes have traditionally been measured by these

traditional roles (Loder & Spillane, 2001; Tong, 2014; Wallace, 1998, 2004), and further,

these roles are strengthened by the expectations that they face in within education

(Blackmore, 2006).

Although educational leadership has been redefined (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011),

the gendered practices within educational leadership still persist (Wallin, 2015). Allison

(1989) provided an in-depth look at the history of educational leadership. First recognized in

1880, educational leadership was structured around numerous programs that supported a

vision of a "centralized, expert, executive, and above all, efficient, administration" (Allison,

1989, p. 4). Gradually, as new philosophies in education emerged, the improvement of

practice in schools became foundational to educational leadership. These ideas, however,

remained firmly entrenched in the idea of the "head" teacher (a knowledgeable, decisive,

authoritative person who was in charge of running the ship.) This "head," or "principal

teacher," was often required to demonstrate these specific traits, typically associated with

men (Blackmore, 1989a).

As a result, educational leaders came to "be associated with gender-specific

characteristics [of] assertiveness, independence, competitiveness, atomistic individuality,

hierarchy, abstract rationality and universal moral principles" (Blackmore, 1989a, p. 21).

And even though, increasingly, women began to enter into the educational world, it was clearly understood that "women were responsible for the affective domain (teaching and children) and men the intellectual (leadership and youth)" (Blackmore, 2006, p. 187). Women took on the nurturing roles of teaching, and men took on the managerial roles of leadership. These predetermined roles became engrained in the business of education and have remained largely unchanged. Women are still underrepresented in the realm of educational leadership, serving mainly as teachers, with a disproportionate number still working in primary education (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Wallace, 2004), while men are most often in roles of leadership, including higher levels of administration and superintendencies (Wallin, 2015).

Returning to the historical context, the next generation of leadership theorists proposed that managers or educational leaders needed to know how to keep employees positive and happy through their treatment of them (Schein, 1996). This idea of infusing the "human" touch into educational leadership was expounded by Greenfield (1974, 1986), who posited that scientific positivistic approaches should not be applied to educational leadership. Principals had a key role to play that involved complex cultures of practice within schools (Rousmaniere, 2009), and these roles could be best understood through the use of research that was based on the study of people, rather than systems and structures.

This change in understanding around the practice of educational leadership began to create a change in philosophy around the top-down, male-led, authoritarian leader, opening the door for women educational leaders. Recent academics, such as English (2008), Sackney and Mitchell (2002) and Sergiovanni (2004a, 2004b, 2005) have continued to support the need for relationships, cultural implications, and communication—human qualities—within

the realm of educational leadership. In the current context, much of current practice has now been over-ridden by the development of pervasive contemporary neoliberalist ideologies. These underline a need for "best practice, and de-professionalisation through standards-driven reform" (Blackmore, 2006, p. 192). Standardized testing, public scrutiny, and accountability have once again been brought to the forefront of education, and as a result, the concern with the role of women in educational leadership has been replaced as a central public and academic concern. According to Brodie (2008), this prevalent neoliberalism has eroded the post-war welfare state and has resulted in the gradual disappearance of gender from policy agendas.

And yet, ongoing inequality persists, hence the ongoing need for research of this kind—returning the much-needed voice of women to the public and academic discourse. A study by Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) found that "men fared slightly worse than women in settings which were defined in less masculine terms, especially in educational organizations" (p. 140). Yet in spite of the fact that "according to the literature, women lead schools and districts purposefully" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 2) women continued to struggle in these positions (Grogan, 2008) and they can feel alienated by the "macsulinist portrayal of power, leadership and organizational life which emphasizes control, individualism and hierarchy" (Blackmore, 1989b, p. 123) that is often prevalent in educational leadership.

Definitions of Educational Leadership

Because educational leadership is a fluctuating field of practice, it is important to review the literature that surrounds developing definitions, models, and traits of educational leadership. Many scholars have attempted to create definitions for educational leadership.

Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) placed educational leadership as a profession in the realm of organizational science—science being based on theory; "the task of the administrator is to bring people and organizations together in a fruitful and satisfying union" (p. 2). Dansereau, Seitz, Chiu, Shaughnessy, and Yammarino (2013) described leadership as "an interpersonal process in which a leader influences followers" (p. 799).

More recently, scholars have struggled to identify various models that will define successful educational leadership. Authentic leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1998; Coleman, 2012; Palanski & Yammarino, 2009), collaborative leadership (Coleman, 2012; Sergiovanni, 2005), distributed leadership (Blackmore, 2009, 2013; Coleman, 2012; Harris, 2004; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; MacBeath, 2006; Spillane, 2005; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), instructional leadership (Finkel, 2012; Hallinger, 2003, 2005; Prytula, Noonan, & Hellsten, 2013; Reitzug, 1997; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008), servant leadership (English, 2008; Spears & Lawrence, 2004), and transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Fullan, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Onorato, 2013; Palanski &Yammarino, 2009) are just a few of the most prevalent models that attempt to define, explain, and elaborate on effective educational leadership. Proponents of these models attempt to research successful educational leaders and determine the reasons for their success. For the most part, these theories base their differences upon identification of key behaviours or actions, which appeared to create successful schools. However, is it truly possible to identify key traits that will create success? Do these traits affect the experiences of female educational leaders? And where is the research that is specific to the experiences of female educational leaders and their practice in educational leadership?

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) believed that the practice of women is different than that of men and that the ongoing and evolving realm of educational leadership has been redefined from the above-discussed idea of a single individual leading. Rather, women practice leadership "with and through others" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 3). Women see empowerment, team building, and relationships as core to their mandate for leadership in education. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) organized the practice of women into five central themes: relational leadership, leadership for social justice, leadership for learning, spiritual leadership, and balanced leadership. Exploration of the practice of women in educational leadership surfaced during analysis of my research so I expand upon them briefly here.

Relational leadership is based upon the belief that a leader uses horizontal power through the development of relationships and the empowerment of others and is based on the idea that women conceptualized power differently than men (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). *Leadership for social justice* is centered around the notion that leaders must work "to change the lives of children, to make the world a fairer place and to change institutions so that all children have a chance" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 11). Blackmore (2006) argued that leadership preparation ought to be centrally concerned with the need to become socially just. *Spiritual leadership* is a simple yet powerful belief that the strength of the leader comes from self-knowing, spending time reflecting, and searching for peace, and that this self-understanding provides empowerment by giving leaders strength in difficult situations. Spiritual leaders are typified as leading with passion and hope (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Women who practice within the realm of *leadership for learning* typically focus on the importance of instruction and professional development as basis for their practice. They encourage risk-taking and innovation and strive to improve learning and their school

communities through efficacious teachers and staff (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Finally, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) discussed *balanced leadership,* a type of leadership outlined as the way female educational leaders "strive for balance between responsibilities at work and at home" (p. 21); finding strength in their experiences as women caring for families and homes and using these strengths to improve practice and leaders. All of these types of leadership are based in the identification of female-based qualities and move away from the single authoritative, male-dominated ideal of educational leadership. Women are exploring and developing their own ways of doing things and are experiencing success in spite of the experiences that may cause them to feel otherwise.

Traits of Educational Leadership

Some of the earliest attempts at developing theories around leadership involved the identification of specific inherent traits that would allow leaders to experience success. Much of the original research around these traits was based upon the identification of traits held by successful male leaders. Hence, the theory became referred to as "great man" theory. However, as ideologies developed, researchers began to question the validity of these beliefs. Could traits be acquired as they were practiced and what traits were inherently necessary to good practice in leadership? "Leadership varies within each person and is based on several variables such as individualism, experience, and culture" (Hughbank & Horn, 2015, p. 248). It is clear that "great man" theory is no longer valid. Traits fluctuate and vary depending on the role, the beliefs of the individual, their experiences, their background and a host of other factors that influence behavior and response and focusing on a single aspect of leadership theory only marginalizes all others (English, 1999).

Regardless of the difficulty in identifying common specific traits required for

successful leadership, many authors continue to attempt to delimit these. Leithwood, Harris,

and Hopkins (2008) believed that a small number of personal traits explained leadership

effectiveness. Bass and Steidlmeier (1998) argued that

> the ethics of leadership rests upon three pillars: (1) the moral character of the leader;
>
> (2) the ethical legitimacy of the values embedded in the leaders vision, articulation,
>
> and program . . . and (3) the morality of the processes of social ethical choice and
>
> action that leaders and followers engage in and collectively pursue. (p. 181)

Other scholars also continue to attempt to pinpoint these successful traits.

Trustworthiness appears often as an important influence in this leader–follower relationship

(Blackmore, 2006, 2013; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Palanski &

Yammarino, 2009; Sackney & Mitchell, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2004a, 2005; Stronge, Richard,

& Catano, 2008). Therefore, the ability to foster trust appears to be paramount in nurturing

successful educational leadership. Norman, Avolio, and Luthans (2010) defined positivity

and transparency as key traits for successful educational leaders: expanding these traits to

include hope, resiliency, optimism, and efficacy. Sergiovanni (1999, 2004b) focused on hope,

piety, civility, and community. In addition, many theories around successful leadership traits

are influenced by "kitsch management books" (English, 2008, p. 160), which appeals to the

public by promising success through the development of specific habits, skills, or ideologies

(e.g., Covey, 1990; Fullan, 2008; Whitaker, 2012). Finally, the "followers" (or teachers) also

have opinions as to what constitutes a successful leader (Oplatka & Tako, 2009). This varies

depending upon context, career stage, and perceptions and is also influenced by

predetermined gender-based expectations. While it is clear that it is impossible to identify the

"one way" that female educational leaders might successfully lead, knowledge of the variety

of theories and possibilities available can add to our understanding of their experience.

In summary, although a uniform and precise definition of specific and necessary

leadership traits is almost impossible to pinpoint, what is clear is that educational leaders

exerted significant influence over the success of the school (Heck & Hallinger, 2009;

Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Reitzug et al.,

2008). Educational leadership theories are being redefined. Women have influenced this

redefinition of educational leadership through their practice (Grogan & Skakeshaft, 2011)

and continue to develop leadership through a combination of traits and styles. Understanding

which traits and styles are successful was explored through the sharing of their experiences,

stories and perceptions through this research.

Women in Educational Leadership

In spite of increased numbers of women in educational leadership, imbalance

continues to exist (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kellar, 2013; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Smith,

2011; Tucker & Fushell, 2014; Wallace, 2002; Wallin, 2015; Young, 1994). "Women are

overrepresented in teaching and in the elementary principalship in relation to their

proportions in the population as a whole . . . and underrepresented in the secondary

principalship and the superintendency" (Shakeshaft, 1998, p. 11). These studies show that

inequality is ongoing, in spite of some noted improvements attributed to affirmative action

(Loder, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1998). "Pressure from affirmative action and the women's

movement have increased women's representation in school administration by only small

amounts" (Loder, 2005, p. 742). In some countries, such as Turkey, women saw

improvements as a result of economic and demographic developments, but generally

speaking, societal norms continue to support gender-driven division of labour and create

women who remain dependent on men (Celikten, 2005). This is true of my study as well.

Ongoing awareness around inequality in educational leadership must continue to be

highlighted.

Rising numbers of women in academia and in leadership have increased the available

information around gender and leadership, and theories about how women practice and

succeed in educational leadership are beginning to be reviewed (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011),

but much still remains to be explored. Much of the current research is defined as androcentric:

"The practice of viewing the world and shaping reality through a male lens" (Shakeshaft,

1989, p. 325). Shakeshaft (1989), Wallace (2004), and Young (1994) also noted that research

completed by males around the experience of males has resulted in inadequate theories

around the female experience (Bierema, 2016). Dunshea (1998) elaborated upon this point of

view:

> Failure to research women in leadership does constitute discrimination since their
>
> experiences are unexplored and therefore devalued. It is as though it is still believed
>
> that the experiences of women can be generalized from the experiences of men
>
> despite the fact that feminist literature has made it clear over the past 20 years that
>
> this is not the case. (p. 205)

Acker (1992) elaborated further as she believes that this gendered subordination of

women has created ongoing inequalities and oppression. Shakeshaft (1989) used the

following example to emphasize this point: Will words spoken by a male educational leader

to male teachers mean the same as words spoken by a female educational leader to male

teachers? If even such a small context affected the interpretation of female leadership, then

this experience requires closer observation from a uniquely feminine point of view. Eagly et al. (1995) also explored gender as it affected leadership, using social role theory (Eagly, 1987) as the basis of sex differences in social behaviour, whereby

> people are expected to engage in activities that are consistent with their culturally defined gender roles. Social pressures external to individuals generally favor gender role consistent behavior, and, to some extent, people may internalize cultural expectations about their sex and consequently be intrinsically motivated to act in a manner consistent with their gender roles. (Eagly, 1987, p. 126)

> This learned socialization is ingrained into people's behaviour, making this theory important in understanding gender in leadership and how it works to create ongoing role conflict and other barriers to success for women.

Barriers to Success for Women

Although "female and male leaders did not differ in effectiveness" (Eagly et al., 1995, p. 137), understanding the experiential differences between men and women is important. One way that this is explored is to attempt to understand the experience of becoming and being a leader as a woman. Exploring the numerous barriers that exist to attaining this goal is a first step. The categorization of these barriers varies, but some of the more common identification of barriers include role conflict, such as between multiple identities and most especially family and home roles versus work roles (Bierema, 2016; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kellar, 2013; Loder, 2005; Loder & Spillane, 2006; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Tong, 2014; Tucker & Fushell, 2014); self-concept and socialization (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997); discrimination (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010), which some have referred to as the "Old Boys' Club" (Kellar, 2013; Loder, 2005;

Shakeshaft, 1989, 1998), and which Shakeshaft (1989) categorized as either overt (blatant

sex discrimination such as hiring policies and practices and job conditions) or covert (sex

discrimination such as lack of encouragement from peers); and even lack of mentorship and

peer networks, or fewer networks than men (Kellar, 2013; Loder, 2005), cause barriers to

exist for women seeking leadership positions in education and, as a result, inequity.

   Role conflict. Role conflict in educational leadership continues to exist as a barrier

for women with families, as they are simultaneously fulfilling many roles (Hoff & Mitchell,

2008; Kellar, 2013; Loder, 2005; Loder & Spillane, 2006; Oplatka, & Tamir, 2009; Phillips

& Imhoff, 1997; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Tong, 2014). Family demands and traditional

gender stereotypical roles impede women's ability to succeed in leadership. Society's

expectations that a woman first fulfill expectations at home create conflict in a woman with

regards to her chosen career (Tong, 2014). Fully meeting these multiple expectations at work

and home can lead to stress, burnout, and fatigue. Combined with a fear of lack of support

from supervisors and colleagues, these role conflicts impede success and promotion. Along

with the stereotypical projections placed on women, their desire to advance is thwarted by

male reaction, stereotypical hiring practices, or even self-imposed unrealistic expectations.

Leadership commitments may also compound the aforementioned family conflicts and create

a juxtaposed internal conflict around stereotypical roles and obligations. Women who are

juggling family, home, and work obligations have for the most part not been successful in

decreasing expectations at home (Bierema, 2016; Loder, 2005; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997).

Although studies have explored the importance of sharing domestic responsibilities, ongoing

studies continue to report that while women are taking on more responsibility outside the

home, the amount of domestic responsibility for women has not decreased (Loder & Spillane,

2006; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Young, 1994; World Bank, 2012).

A second type of role conflict that affects women in educational leadership is found in the transition from teaching to educational leadership:

Role conflicts generally arise when commitment and attachment to roles do not match up. For example, individuals who transition from teaching to administration may find that the commitments associated with administration . . . are incongruent with their attachment to teaching. (Loder & Spillane, 2006, p. 266)

This is expressed as role conflict between teaching andleadership and arises as women are typically associated with the nurturing role in education and may have to don more masculine practices when they move into educational leadership. Eagly et al. (1995) tied the adoption of feminine leadership styles to social role theory. They suggested that traditional gender expectations by colleagues created prejudice in the workplace, creating additional role conflict. To overcome the barrier of role conflict in the movement from teacher to educational leader, female educational leaders must learn to use their experiences as former teachers to their advantage (Loder & Spillane, 2006).

Self-concept. Self-concept is an additional barrier to the progression of women in educational leadership. This topic explores the factors around a woman's self-definition, confidence and her readiness to make educational and vocational choices (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). This self-concept is gender referenced and tied to the previously discussed role conflict. Entry into the workforce seems more problematic for women than for men, sometimes due to the timing of having a family, which causes women to return to school or work later in their lives. This disadvantages them from men and negatively influences their

self-concept (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Entering into educational leadership at an older age due to these necessitated choices may perpetuate that negative self-concept. In addition, female self-concepts are developed by the roles they fulfill and the expectations that are placed on them "by high status members of the group" (Grodzki, 2011, p. 13). If these high status individuals are for the most part male, and idealize the male norm (Bierema, 2016), how then would a new female educational leader create her self-concept within this organization? Women begin their careers later than men (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997) have additional demands upon them, and continue to develop their ability based on gender-referenced norms, and therefore continue to struggle to move into educational leadership.

Socialization. The experiences of these female educational leaders were highly influenced by their own socialization. Part of this socialization includes their role within education and educational leadership. Socialization includes the surface culture and deep culture of a "particular time, place and social context" (Sensoy & diAngelo, 2012, p. 15). As stated by Wallace and Wallin (2015), "As women, we come to identify ourselves as gendered subjects in relation to the discourses of normative gendered behaviour to which we are recruited" (p. 413). This time and place creates an ambiguous understanding of educational settings and makes navigation of the educational setting complex, particularly for female educational leaders. Because educational leadership is a gendered realm this therefore perpetuates barriers for women that lead to inequality. Successful socialization in an educational setting is influenced by the way in which new leaders use previous experience to inform new practice (Loder & Spillane, 2006). Although this process is somewhat confusing, research has suggested that leaders actively reflect in order to transition from one role to the

next. This is difficult, however, due to prevailing former perceptions of teachers and students towards the new educational leader (Loder & Spillane, 2006). Women are especially vulnerable in this area of socialization if they typically hold teaching positions for longer periods of time than men, and they are consequently more socialized into the teacher's role (Loder & Spillane, 2005). In addition, teaching is the traditional role for women (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Wallin, 2015). It is more difficult for them to project themselves into the role of educational leader without role models or experience with successful strong women leaders.

These multiple roles, tasks, and transitions are daunting for an educational leader. Levels of success are heavily dependent upon at least two additional important factors: appropriate socialization and the mastery of skills required to successfully do the job. Job success is reliant upon the effective understanding of the norms, culture, and expectations of each organization (Armstrong, 2012; Daresh, 1986; Foster, 1986; Grodzki, 2011; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Weick & Westley, 1996). Sackney and Mitchell (2002) believed that this cultural understanding was necessary as the educational leader serves as facilitator to the construction of the school narrative, building human relationships based on trust within this cultural context. Each school site is unique (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998), each with its own norms and values that "exert pressure on the new principals to adapt to the norms of the culture of the new school" (Cowie & Crawford, 2008, p. 678). In a school, cultural analysis questions include the following: What are students like and how do adults deal with them? What are teacher expectations? Is there a collective focus on student learning and academics? How do we define the professionalism of teaching staff? Do staff collaborate? What is the structure of the school? (Firestone & Seashore Louis, 1999). In addition to the cultural context,

theoretical knowledge (Lattuca, 2012) or technical knowledge, including policy, procedure, and people skills, is also required (Cowie & Crawford, 2008). These frameworks of socialization are necessary to ensure success within the specific school and district context.

Crow (2006) believed that much of a new educational leader's socialization information was garnered from self-reflection and informal feedback from the school community and other administrators. He further defined this socialization process to include professional and organizational socialization. "Anticipatory socialization (the socialization we experience as a teacher) and personal socialization (the change of self-identity that occurs as individuals learn new roles)" (Crow, 2006, p. 318) are also crucial to the success of the new candidate because the greater the experience as a teacher, the more difficult it will be to develop a new identity as a leader. In addition, female educational leaders will want to adapt to societally imposed roles within their new position, and this can cause personal and professional conflict.

Personal socialization involves the realization of a new identity that is different from the previously formed teacher identity. This process is challenging for many educational leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003) but even more daunting for a female educational leader who has societally imposed male-referenced gender norms such as the ideal worker model (Reid, 2015) to confront in her leadership role. This socialization comes about through a two-phase process as outlined by Earley and Weindling (2004). They described the first phase as professional socialization, which typically takes place before placement and is based, for the most part, on first-hand experience gained from observation and modelling. The second phase, they called organizational socialization. This occurs after appointment as an educational leader during which the personal and professional values, abilities, and

interpersonal skills are developed (Earley & Weindling, 2004). Ultimately, educational

leaders need to develop a sense of self-efficacy and confidence. They "also need to feel

supported, recognized, and valued by the organization when engaged in these socialization

processes" (Grodzki, 2011, p. 32). Once again, females combatting role conflict and

questions around personal socialization may be faced with additional barriers not faced

typically by men in this arena.

A final and overriding aspect of socialization involves the shaping of girls' and

women's approach to their lives, roles, and careers through family and socialization within

society (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997; Sensoy & diAngelo, 2012; Smith, 2011; Tong, 2014). This

also has an impact on self-concept, as well as creating additional role conflict by imposing

gender referenced family norms upon women (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). These norms

include expectations with regards to work roles, family roles, and societal roles. They are

also present in the ways that others are perceived and expected to behave, work, act, react,

and even converse within established roles. Imposition of traditional gendered and

stereotypical roles are internalized and manifested in the home and workplace. These

ideologies affect how a woman measures her worth and how she sees herself. They affect

how she behaves. They affect how she communicates. They are present in every aspect of her

being. How then would a female educational leader use her experiences to develop her own

identity within a gendered organization as a gender socialized person?

Career choice. Attempts to further understand effective female educational leaders

led me to explore studies around the motivations for choosing to move into this realm of

practice. Farley-Ripple et al. (2012) concluded that some decisions were self-initiated and

others the result of other processes and external influences; "these include recruiting/tapping,

requesting, reassigning, passing over, and removing" (p. 792). Dealing with personal issues (such as illness, death, marriage, or divorce) or raising children, responsibilities that most often fall to women, hinders the ability to take on new challenges and creates barriers for women (Beirema, 2016; Loder, 2005). Similar to this, a strong sense of efficacy or the desire for challenge could help potential candidates choose to move into leadership. Formative teacher and teacher–leader experiences are important to the preparation process of an educational leader (Murphy, 2005; Reeves, 2008).

Finally, gender is also explored as a possible hindrance or encouragement to move into leadership. Farley-Ripple et al. (2012) summarized these influences as being behavioural (relationships), environmental (conditions), and creating or maintaining equilibrium: a point of view very similar to findings by A. Walker and Kwan (2009). These behavioural and environmental factors highly influence a woman's choice to enter educational leadership given her external obligations to home or family. In addition to these factors, Stevenson (2006) discussed the importance of teacher experiences upon the choice to move into leadership, arguing that these experiences and motivations play a large part in the decision (or not) to choose to enter into educational leadership. Influence from other educational leaders also plays an important role in the development and choice to move into leadership (Maxfield & Flumerfelt, 2009). As previously discussed, if male educational leaders are supporting female colleagues, this could be highly beneficial to the potential female leaders. But what if they are not being supported? How can women be encouraged to seek out these opportunities?

Gender Discrimination. The field of education remains a realm of discrimination (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010) and of gender

inequality ensnared in the ongoing issues of jobs, wages, hierarchies, and subordination (Acker, 1992), and continues to be influenced by "gendered processes [which] are concrete activities, what people do and say, and how they think about these activities" (Acker, 1992, p. 391). Women continue to "function primarily as teachers, while men continue to occupy jobs in upper management, including school administration and government ministerial positions" (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999, as cited in Jull, 2002, p. 51). Bureaucratic ideologies have firmly established a hierarchy of power and expertise within the modern school reality (Jull, 2002), a hierarchy that is not conducive to the practice of women. Furthermore, this bureaucratic context emphasizes "an equitably impersonal administrative infrastructure" (Weber, 1964, as cited in Jull, 2002, p. 49). Successful organizations are seen as efficient, goal oriented, and strong, and are highly influenced by the image of the top-down manager. These organizations create an image of competitive success, and these qualities are the ones that people most often metaphorically attribute to strong male leaders (Acker, 1992; Jull, 2002; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).

Clearly, educational leadership is moving away from the idea of an all-knowing, top-down manager model where a single person is charged with running the site. Discrimination still exists towards women, particularly in high school or district office settings; however, the ways in which women (and some men) lead are changing these perceptions. These newly developing approaches are based on successful practice using shared decision-making, working with others, collaboration, and global sharing, which has redefined educational leadership and moved away from the historical "person in charge" definition. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) wrote that a "new definition of leadership is urgently needed" (p. 2) and based their new definition on the power of collective leadership practiced by many female

educational leaders. As these ideologies and practices become more prevalent, and their efficaciousness is recorded, perhaps discrimination will continue to decrease towards women in educational leadership, particularly in high school and district office roles.

  Other factors to consider. Even without barriers, the experience of becoming an educational leader is highly challenging (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). "Many [educational leaders] found it hard to earn trust from their former colleagues" (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012, p. 803). Armstrong (2012) found that the new career choice often created higher levels of scrutiny and accountability, requiring new appointees to redefine their teaching identities to realign with new expectations. Sackney and Walker (2006) and Daresh and Male (2000) also supported these findings.

  Crow, (2006) believed:

  Principals work in a societal context that is more dynamic and complex than in the

  past. Changing student demographics, the knowledge explosion, the larger web of

  roles with which the principal interacts, and the pervasive influence of technology are

  a few features of this complex environment. (p. 310)

  Many researchers have discovered that educational leadership is a complex and at times overwhelming job (Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley & Bubb, 2013; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; MacBeath, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996). Although mastering multiple and complex demands are stressful enough, experiences for a female educational leader are also influenced by additional barriers. Family obligations and perceived gendered roles and practices (Bierema, 2016; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kellar, 2013; Loder, 2005; Loder & Spillane, 2006; Oplatka, & Tamir, 2009; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Wallin, 2015; World Bank, 2012), alienation due to stereotypes (Eagly et al., 2005),

role conflicts (Loder & Spillane, 2006), high job demands (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010), and discrimination (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010) add additional complexity for the female educational leader. This role continues to be complex and challenging, and in spite of various forms of support, the general critique from recently hired educational leaders is that they still do not feel adequately prepared for their new roles (Browne, 2010; Daresh & Male, 2000; Kwan, 2009; Sackney & Walker, 2006; K. Walker, Anderson, Sackney, & Woolf, 2003; H. Williams & Szal, 2011).

Additional factors have also been explored to help explain the success, or lack of success, of a female candidate. According to a study conducted by Burkman (2010), female subjects consistently identified five top gender-related issues in educational leadership: a male-dominant culture, cultural stereotype of the professional role, a lack of support from higher administration, a lack of support from parents, and sexual innuendo made by colleagues. Many of these issues, such as overt or covert discrimination (Shakeshaft, 1989) and sexual innuendo, as well as cultural stereotypes were discussed previously. Other factors, however, such as a male-dominant culture and lack of support from higher administration, must be considered as ongoing barriers to success for women, specifically if the higher administration is predominantly male (Shakeshaft, 1998).

Personal context factors also create barriers to success. These factors "include both observable characteristics of individuals, such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, and educational or professional preparation, and unobservable characteristics, such as motivation" (DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012, p. 475). Other researchers also explored a leader's skill and training, and the match between the situation and the leader's style, as being influential (Eagly et al., 1995). DeAngelis and O'Connor (2012) explored the constraints of job

vacancies, endorsements or sponsorship, administrator salaries, and working conditions, which can all influence candidates. Looking at each area individually, however, could allow for further reflection on the specificity this would create for the context of women with regards to skill and training to fill a position in a male-dominated field.

Summary

In spite of the many barriers that women face, their desire to succeed is still strong. Resiliency and hopefulness prevail (Christman & McClellan, 2007, 2012; Farmer, 2010; MacBeath, 2006), and educational leaders express a high level of job satisfaction (Thomson, Blackmore, Sachs, & Tregenza, 2003). Female leaders are depicted as visionary champions who are eager to make their mark on their school community (Gronn, 2004), exhibiting a deep desire to make an impact on their chosen school environment (Kellar, 2013). Despite job complexity, the desire and ability to make an impact, to affect change, and to influence children are listed as being key motivators for educational leaders (Earley & Bubb, 2013; Grodzki, 2011; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Kellar, 2013).

As well, in spite of the barriers and ongoing inequity, female educational leaders are demonstrating ongoing success in this profession. "Canadian studies tend to characterize 'women's ways' as emphasizing communication and caring interpersonal relations focused on building a community whose central concern is for the welfare of students and their learning" (Young, 1994, p. 361)—all admirable qualities to incorporate into the educational leadership of a school. And although barriers do exist, women are managing to "exercise personal agency, make choices (albeit within certain constraints), negotiate barriers and resist the factors limiting their freedom, in different ways at different life and career stages" (Smith, 2011, p. 22). In fact, given these numerous barriers, it is suggested that women "may be more

qualified and competent than their male counterparts" (Eagly et al., 1995, p. 127) within the realm of educational leadership and perhaps even better suited to it (Eagly et al., 2003). Eagly (2015) argued that there is some evidence that women have been found to be more transformational, collaborative, democratic, encouraging, and relational than men. Adapting to and overcoming obstacles has certainly allowed women to continue to advance, and they will continue to do so in the future, a point I explore further in my research.

Inequality for women on many fronts continues to exist, and although great strides have been made in combatting this, there is still work to do. The realm of educational leadership continues to maintain a disproportionately low number of female educational leaders in relation to the existing numbers of male educational leaders (Bierema, 2016; Coleman, 2012; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Jayne, 1989; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009) and may be connected to the homosociability of hiring within a male-dominated culture such as educational leadership (Blackmore, Thomson, & Barty, 2006; Burkman, 2010; Jayne, 1989). Confusion also still exists around the styles of leadership most commonly presented by different genders (Collard, 2001; Eagely et al., 2003; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010) and the influence female educational leaders are exhibiting over this area of practice. Can "[a] glass ceiling . . . slow or stop women's ascent in organizational hierarchies, despite their potential for leadership?" (Eagely et al., 2003, p. 586). These are all reasons why this research is necessary. Understanding the female experience in this realm can help to better understand educational leadership for women and how practice can be improved for female educational leaders.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

Employing qualitative interpretive inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Loseke, 2013; Smith, 1984) I interviewed three female leaders throughout the course of a year and used their experiences to understand how they experienced leadership. Use of the theories and processes of interpretive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) enabled me to interpret their experiences following a deliberate and reflective process.

This research was guided by specific ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs, using the methodology of qualitative interpretive inquiry with thematic analysis. In this chapter, I expand my philosophical beliefs and the theoretical framework that influenced my research I focus upon the process of analysis and interpretation of the data and discuss the ethics involved in my work. I also expand upon the chosen methods and other specifics around the actual project: criteria and selection of participants and applicability of my proposed study. Finally, I explore the criteria of trustworthiness within my study and how I developed this with my participants.

Philosophical Beliefs and Guiding Paradigms

Research is based on two main considerations: ontology and epistemology. According to Wahyuni (2012), "Ontology is the view of how one perceives a reality" (p. 69). Each individual holds a worldview, or paradigm, "that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). One of these paradigms is that of interpretivism. Interpretivists believe that the world is something that people construct, not something people find (Smith, 1984), and that people are constantly building their own social context through social interaction and experience (Wahyuni, 2012). Interpretivism "looks for

the culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world" (Crotty,

1998, p. 67), and therefore this ontology fit compatibly with my area of study as I explored

the experiences of women in educational leadership within the gendered and socialized world

of educational leadership.

Historically, interpretivism is linked with the work of Weber and calls for an

"empirical verification to explain causal terms" (Crotty, 1998, p. 71). However, more recent

use of interpretivism has relied broadly on the lack of certainty and subjectivity within the

study of the social world, lending itself to social construction and human interpretation rather

than objective reliance upon data found within quantitative research methods. My

interpretive inquiry was based in interpretation of interviews and sought to build

understanding around the experiences of female educational leaders. To elicit this

understanding, I employed semistructured interviews to elicit stories from my participants,

employing interpretive thematic analysis to tie these leadership experiences together and to

allow me "to delve into the meaning or essence of the phenomenon from the perspective of

the person or people involved" (Connelly, 2014, p. 422).

The ontology that guided this research is that of interpretivism and thematic analysis,

which "is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It

minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.

79). Even though interpretive analysis has historically been based within the more

philosophic and historical interpretation of hermeneutics, I used a less philosophic approach

for analysis, identifying instead tangible themes within the data rather than interpreting

hermeneutically. Given that modern day interpretivism does not seek a single answer, but

rather opens the experience for interpretation of new meaning within social contexts, these

paradigms helped guide my understanding and created opportunities for interpretation of my results.

Epistemologically, thematic analysis is also subjectivist, in the sense that the researcher and the participant are linked, and that resulting knowledge is a function of the interaction between the two parties (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative research the connectedness of the researcher and the participant are critical to meaningful outcomes. The researcher and the research are not separate; they are irrevocably linked. My learning is as important as that of the participants and is a part of the interview and analysis process. This connectedness is one of the reasons that I sought to use interpretive inquiry and thematic analysis. I am tied to my research through my own formative experiences and remaining completely objective would be impossible.

Theoretical Framework

My research focuses on the experiences of female educational leaders, as their experience is different and unique from that of male educational leaders (Blackmore, 1989, 2006; Bierema, 2016; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 1982). Understanding of a feminist perspective is important for this research as it examines female experience within educational leadership. However, a complete review of feminism is not possible here. There are many different interpretations, definitions, and practices of the theories around feminism, and as stated by Wallin (2015), "one of the first learnings that must be understood is that *there is no **one** understanding of feminism* that is, or should be, 'applied' to educational administration" (p. 81, emphasis in text). Wallin divided the many theories of feminism into four groups under the headings of liberal, radical, social, and postmodern feminism. Other authors, such as Tong (2014),

provided an analytical frame for feminism through the exploration of seven different

overarching groupings: liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism,

psychoanalytic and care-focused feminism, existentialist and postmodern feminism, women

of colour feminism, and, most recently, ecofeminism. Wallin also noted that:

> feminism is more appropriately pluralized as feminisms, and though there are some
>
> common "strands" of epistemological understandings that exist in its theorizations,
>
> there conceivably could be as many feminisms "out there" as there are scholars and
>
> practitioners considering and working towards equitable leadership practices for
>
> women and men. (2015, p. 81)

However, the one strand that unites feminism is the commonality contained in the

experiences of women in a patriarchal world within a masculine culture (Crotty, 1998;

Wallin, 2015). "Feminist theories, although varied and complex, seek ontologically to

expose the ways that gender operates as a social construct to effectively oppress women by

limiting their access to power and certain resources" (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011, p. 40). For

me personally, these expansive ideologies allow for ambiguity and interpretation of feminism

in my own particular context and understanding. While commonality occurs in the

experience of being and living as a woman, and particularly for this study, within educational

leadership, interpretation and application of feminist theory were fluid and evolving.

For the purpose of this study, my conceptualization of feminism began embedded in

the concepts of liberal feminism and has evolved to embrace postmodern feminism as my

theoretical framework developed. According to Tong (2014), feminism is connected under

the adjectives of "interdisciplinary, intersectional and interlocking" (p. 1), which I interpret

as connecting on the level of women and their experiences. Liberal feminism is rooted in the

basic premise that women's success is limited because "women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men" (Tong, 2014, p. 2). Liberal feminists see this discrimination as unfair and strive to ensure that all women are treated equally. They seek to create equal opportunities for women through reform of the laws and institutions of society that create inequality (Wallin, 2015). This ideology supports my own personal beliefs, experiences, and thoughts around women in educational leadership and is based in the historical, political, and economic practice of education.

Tong (2014) outlined the complicated evolution of liberal feminist theory. Beginning in the eighteenth-century with work by Wollstonecraft (such as A *Vindication of Rights for Woman*), feminism has evolved into a concerted effort at reforming rights for women and a search for "*personhood*, [and] full membership in the human community for women" (Tong, 2014, p. 33, emphasis in text). In summary, liberal feminists may be divided on some issues for women, but "they do agree that the single most important goal of women's liberation is sexuality equality, or as it is sometimes termed, gender justice" (Tong, 2014, p. 34).

Liberal feminism is not without its critics, however. The main criticism lies with the fact that liberal feminists are concerned specifically with the interests of only certain types of women, women who are white, middle-class, and heterosexual. Other feminists have criticized liberal feminism as being grounded in the emphasis of individual rights over those of all others, asking if it is not more important to be concerned with commonalities rather than differences (Tong, 2014). A final critique of liberal feminists lies in its claim that men and women can truly be equal. Critics of liberal feminist theory argue that humans are products of culture rather than nature and are therefore products of socialization, "changeable

at society's will" (Elshtain, 1981, as cited in Tong, 2014, p. 40) rather than biologically wired to our gender roles.

As my research progressed, however, I became aware of the ongoing struggles around power and the complexity associated with feminist thought within educational leadership. I sought to understand the experiences of my participants within a wider context of social relations including these relations of power. In order to better understand these complicated ideologies, I employed postmodern feminisms and specifically critical feminism to examine the multiple factors at play within educational leadership for women.

Postmodern feminists believe that:

postmodern feminist perspectives…are antiessentialist and view gender and gender relations as fluid and dialectical…[they] tend not to over-generalize since … one theory cannot take into account the multiplicity of all people's experiences. (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011, p. 38)

Postmodern feminist ideologies attempt to address all forms of human suffering and strive to uncover ways to identify, resist and overcome constraints through social involvement (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011). Grogan (1999) found significant advantages to a postmodern feminist perspective. She believed that postmodern feminism

- Uses gender as a legitimate category of analysis;

- Emphasizes the particular importance of women's subjective experiences;

- Is grounded in an ethic of social critique and resistance toward injustice, and

- Seeks to identify dominant and subordinate discourses related to knowledge and power. (p. 532-533)

In the realm of educational leadership, these tenets hold true. Female leaders are addressing

the fluidity of their practice through adaptation to context, situation and culture and seek to lead through a variety of contexts. Gender must be used to support understanding around this topic using the unique experiences of women as a basis for correction of ongoing inequities/inequalities for female educational leaders. For this research project, an examination of power is critical to developing further insight. Within critical feminism, power is seen not necessarily as a method of control, but rather is to be used to support, encourage and engage through democratic processes and collaboration (English, 2006; Dentith & Peterlin, 2011). These ideologies emerged many times within the conversations of my participants and although the participants did not necessarily specifically identify the conflicts as an examination of power, the evidence of the importance of relationships that support and encourage was identified frequently and will be examined in greater depth. Angelique (2012) believes that "it is only when we start … asking, 'Who benefits?' [that] we begin to unmask the social and institutional structures that maintain patriarchal, capitalist dominance" (p. 82). Examining the benefits of power relationships, both positive and negative, within educational leadership will help female educational leaders develop individual, subjective and legitimate responses within their practices. It may help clarify the use of power for support, and development of other women within educational leadership to address and diminish current ongoing injustices and inequities.

While both liberal and postmodern feminist ideologies provide theoretical frameworks for addressing inequities for women in educational leadership, it is clear that gender justice cannot be achieved alone. Women must work together to understand, change, and refine the ways women experience life, and in this research, educational leadership. Because the realm of educational leadership for my participants is situated in a particular

privileged, socialized, and historical educational context, the use of feminism is the most

pertinent place to begin for ideological grounding. My research attempted to understand

women's experiences, to explore the barriers that exist for women, and in so doing, to reunite

the various factors, influences, and differences that exist within their context based upon

gender. Feminist ideologies that rely upon subjective experiences to explore inequities

address ongoing power relationships within educational leadership from an antiessentialist

viewpoint will assist in analysis and exploration of the experiences of my participants.

Although determining a single feminist epistemology within one classification is

impossible (indeed it goes against feminist thought to create and categorize in this manner), I

nonetheless leaned towards the prevalent ideologies of liberal and postmodern feminism as

outlined in the previous chapter. Some feminists have stated "that the fundamental act of

knowing is different for women" (Crotty, 1998, p. 174). Accepting that women's experiences

are fundamentally different from those of men, based on culture, socialization, and

interpretation, forms the basis of this research. The exploration of these differences brings

women's concerns, thoughts and experiences to the forefront, allowing for deeper

understanding and construction of solutions to issues related to their specific contexts and

seeking to provide equality through these experiences and interpretations is central to the

ongoing support for female educational leaders.

Interpretive Inquiry

In this section, I explore interpretive inquiry in greater depth and also outline the

specific use of thematic analysis in interpretive inquiry. I outline the process I used to

develop themes and how these themes were discovered. I also explore the challenges around

thematic analysis and how I attempted to overcome these challenges. Let me begin with developing a deeper understanding of interpretive inquiry.

Interpretive inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Loseke, 2013; Smith, 1984) is increasingly adopted as a methodology and a wide expanse of research using this qualitative methodology is available for study. The focus of interpretive inquiry is to use research, in my case interviews, to help interpret human interactions. Interpreters aim "to help others understand the people and the situations they studied differently and . . . with greater depth and sensitivity" (Smith, 1992, p. 105). Typically, this inquiry is undertaken only when the researcher is "being 'struck' by something, being 'taken' with it" (Jardine, 1998, p. 40). This intrigue with a subject then creates the basis for the research. Many researchers have stated that the fundamental goal or outcome of interpretive inquiry work must be found within the creation of a new understanding (Carson, 1986; Gill & Goodson, 2011; Jardine, 1992, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Packer & Addison, 1989). As stated by Jardine (1998),

> The goal of interpretive work is not to pass on objective information to readers, but to evoke in readers a new way of understanding themselves and the lives they are living. . . . Understanding who we are differently, more deeply, more richly. (p. 50)

Interpretive inquiry can also "create spaces . . . for thoughtful reflection oriented towards improving practice" (Carson, 1986, p. 84), as was the case with this research. Other outcomes for interpretive inquiry include discovering answers to the three following statements, suggested by Packer and Addison (1989):

1. *Ideas for helpful action are identified.*

2. *New questions or concerns come to the researcher's attention.*

3. *The researcher is changed by the research—that is, the researcher discovers inadequacies in his or her own initial pre-understandings. (pp. 28–29, emphasis in text)*

Arriving at these understandings was challenging and required the thoughtful application of complex processes before completion. The reader must understand that my desired outcome was to provoke thought and reflection rather than measurable, definable, objective outcomes. Rather, interpretive inquiry seeks to evoke a new understanding around a phenomenon, typically social, and in the case of this research, to increase understanding around how women experience educational leadership. After data collection, which I explain in depth later in this chapter, analysis was completed using thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) "involves the searching across a data set—be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts—to find repeated patterns of meaning" (p. 86). This method of analysis involves a series of six phases, outlined by Braun and Clarke, which are detailed as the following:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data: Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.

2. Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2).

5. Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

6. Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis that involves an in-depth selection of examples, extracts, and relating back to the research question and literature. (2006, p. 87)

In using this method of analysis, I began by carefully transcribing the interviews. This allowed me to complete the first step by becoming familiar with my data intimately. I read and re-read the transcripts and reflected deeply on the recurring themes within them. Following this, I began to review the data in depth. I used a system of colour-coding and footnotes to identify what I believed were connected thoughts, ideas, and patterns within the interviews and attempted to tie these themes together through the common threads of a particular experience (Brenner, 2006). Following this initial organization, I began to organize the data into codes or themes. Some themes I combined, some I removed; some themes I changed and reorganized. Once I felt that I had identified the key outcomes, I grouped data under these headings, keeping in mind the definitions I had applied to each category. Finally, I began to pull the data out of the research and to interpret the common themes through reference to original literature, which helped provide a conceptual framework, and new understanding provoked by these experiences. I sought to uncover how these themes related to the participants' experiences and how they helped me come to new understandings as the researcher.

I completed my analysis and interpretation in different ways; both were separate yet connected. Following my first analysis, I began by identifying themes and tying together

individual experiences, trying to make sense of the participants' experiences and my (the

researcher's) lived experiences (Brenner, 2006; Gill & Goodson, 2011). Interpretation,

however, differs from analysis as it asks the researcher to "actively construc[t] the meaning

of what someone else says and does . . . by drawing on everything else he or she has heard or

observed" (Ellis, 2006, p. 115), and by employing the expression of the other (Ellis, 2006).

Further to this, interpretation also requires new information and the transformation of self-

understanding (Jardine, 1998). Without construction of meaning behind the expression of the

other and without discerning the significance within the participants' stories, the

interpretation is incomplete. The interpretation itself outlines these new understandings and

therefore builds knowledge.

The original purpose of interpretive inquiry—making meaning from the experiences

of the participants and the researcher to add to the collective knowledge—is the basis for this

research. "Evaluation of the data is conducted to identify relationships between the program,

group, person, or process that had been identified" (Turner & Danks, 2014, p. 28) resulting in

an "attempt to interpret deeply the understanding and meaning of individual cases, or mutual

relations of phenomena" (Murakami, 2013, p. 83). As I contemplated the data, I also

attempted to identify feminist themes within these shared experiences. These ideas helped to

shape the final interpretations of the stories and experiences of my participants.

Challenges in interpretive inquiry. Even though qualitative inquiry and specifically

interpretive inquiry are widely used and accepted in the modern world of research, debate

around this method of inquiry is ongoing. One of the challenges lies in the fact that the

interpretation does not provide for generalizable conclusions. "It is not possible to generalize

from one or a small number of cases to the population under study as a whole" (Chadderton

& Torrance, 2011, p. 54). However, more and more, "qualitative research is being valued for its differences to quantitative research, rather than being perceived as having methodological shortcomings in comparison" (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013, p. 12).

Tied to these issues of generalization is also the issue of relatability. "Not only does interpretive inquiry provide accounts that will not seem true to all people (because their concerns and their perspectives will differ), it provides accounts that will not remain true for all time" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 289). Does this, then, make interpretive inquiry less valuable? Parker and Addison (1989) maintained that the true value in interpretive inquiry is that it allows researchers to better understand the people they study. The key is creating coherent, comprehensive, and persuasive accounts. Success lies in the processes used to complete the analysis. These processes are complicated, but are necessary to help the researcher decide what to include, how to interpret the data, and therefore how to create these accounts (Chadderton & Torrance, 2011).

Challenges in thematic analysis. Specific also to thematic analysis, questions remain around the validity of the interpretations. Although "no interpretation is uniquely right or wrong" (Smith, 1992, p. 101), neutrality is impossible because "human behavior is never context free and . . . both respondent and investigator exert a reciprocal influence on one another" (Smith, 1984, p. 382). It is therefore impossible for objectivity to exist. Knowledge is not created individually, but rather "we create knowledge *from* our social contexts, and with an appeal *back to* these social contexts" (Wilson, 2006, p. 408, emphasis in text). Research around social phenomena is therefore a way to develop understanding rather than define social law or provide explanation for social behaviour (Rennie, 2012; Smith, 1984).

In addition to the concerns of objectivity, the giving over of "voice" to the oppressed has proven problematic during thematic analysis in that it may be difficult to represent this voice as an outsider (McCoy, 2011). In my study, one that I approached as an insider both from a woman's and an educational leader's point of view, I acknowledge that my interpretations were subjective. Rennie (2012) stated that as an insider, I am accorded authority. I use this authority to help interpret experience. In fact, I believe that this self-understanding and the use of my voice is crucial to clearer understanding of these experiences and that "our prejudices or preunderstanding are necessary conditions for our understanding of the present. . . . We never meet the world without prejudice, but with preconceived expectations of it based on prior experience" (Rennie, 2012, p. 58). As a subjective, female educational leader, I used these experiences and expectations to help organize, analyze, and interpret my results.

Research Considerations

Researchers refer to pertinent decisions that have to be made before the research begins. How the data will be transcribed, described, and displayed are important parts of this process. Will global, selective, or no transcript be created (Brenner, 2006)? Will coding be used? How will the data be organized? Will the researcher employ "matrices, graphs, charts, networks, flow diagrams, and typologies" (D. Scott & Usher, 1999, p. 85) or "verbatim quotes, in-depth examples, or mini case studies" (Brenner, 2006, p. 367)? Many types of summaries must be considered for inclusion in the final analysis, and all of these revolve around the careful use of language.

Although language is situated in experience, "understanding is always temporal, since as our prejudices change and our language changes, so do the interpretations we can make"

(Ellis, 1998, p. 9). This is important to remember during research, as the researcher must constantly seek deeper understanding from participants and yet remain aware of the fluid and changing nature of these interpretations. This understanding requires comprehension in terms of not only language, but also the researcher's personal context, history, values and experience and those of the participant(s). I approached my study as an insider, and used my context and insights to my advantage. Using themes from the data helped organize ideas around my own insights to provide a greater depth of understanding of my participants while still maintaining an open spirit towards listening to and understanding their experiences.

Trustworthiness.

Careful adherence to all of the above-described processes helped strengthen this research. However, in order for interpretive inquiry to withstand academic scrutiny, it must also demonstrate trustworthiness, which contain criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1986) compare to criteria for rigor. These criteria include credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). A number of these criteria were implemented in my research to ensure credibility. For example, this research took place over a long period of time and with a large number of interviews ensuring prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Licoln & Guba, 1986). Whenever possible, member checks were completed with participants by allowing them to review and edit transcripts and writing. Finally, frequent peer debrief occurred throughout the process whereby I discussed ideas and reflections with my advisor, numerous colleagues and classmates. Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest that the researcher must determine whether or not the participants found the analysis to be credible – a question I reflected upon frequently and which I determined to be true through conversation, reflection

and feedback with my participants.

Additional criteria that must be used to determine trustworthiness are transferability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This is described as thick descriptive data, which is transferable to other situations as well as an audit of process including a clear description of the process itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Inclusion of this type of data and detailed descriptions of process are found within this research. Finally, an audit of product must also be included so that the data could be reconstructed if required. This also builds trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This is necessary so that the research can be repeated in another situation if required. Throughout this dissertation, I have included information around process, and product to help the reader understand the research more easily and to ensure that trustworthiness is enforced.

In addition to credibility, authenticity of the research is also required to build trustworthiness. This included processes around fairness, transparency, openness, consent, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Participation in an ethics review, writing / sending letters and emails for permission and of introduction, initiating meetings, and providing research information, were many of the processes involved in this research to develop this authenticity. In addition, using introductory questions and being open to negotiation of transcript review and edits added to this as well. Lincoln and Guba (1986) also stress the importance of the sharing of the findings with the (in my case, this involveds my Central Office supervisors and superintendent) so that they may at least have the chance to respond and be educated (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This will be one of the final steps in the trustworthiness criteria that will take place upon final completion of this research.

In order to meet these criteria, it was important to be certain of my own beliefs before beginning. It was also imperative that the participants' points of view were accurately recorded and interpreted. Participants also had to believe in my credibility and trustworthiness. Packer and Addison (1989) added that in order for an interpretive account to be accepted, it must demonstrate coherence, a strong relationship to external evidence, acceptance of the participants' participation, consensus among a group, and future practical applicability. It was interesting to note that even using these measures for evaluation, Packer and Addison admitted that some researchers continued to find flaws with interpretive inquiry. Even with the growing acceptance of qualitative research, there still exist conflicting opinions about the reliability of qualitative research in general. To combat these conflicts, I ensured that my research was conducted in accordance with the highest possible standards.

Role of the researcher. "The gendered, multi-culturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 11). This quote defines the role of the researcher, but other skills were key to success in this role as well. Merriam (1998) reiterated: "Qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed*" (p. 6, emphasis in text). She went on to elaborate key characteristics that would enable a researcher to be successful. Tolerance for ambiguity, sensitivity (to timing, data, inherent biases), and being a good communicator (possessing empathy, listening skills, oral skills, and written skills) are all included in her list of requirements. All of these skills are needed to fulfill the purpose of the qualitative researcher.

I believe that a personal awareness of values (axiology) is necessary for qualitative research and is a key responsibility of the researcher. "Values have pride of place; they are seen as ineluctable in shaping . . . inquiry outcomes" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). Guba and Lincoln (1994) also outlined the importance of ethics, underlining that the participant and the researcher are closely tied together. This may sometimes cause "special and often sticky problems of confidentiality and anonymity" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). Awareness of values and ethics enabled me to be more mindful of the thoughts, feelings, concerns, and uncertainties of my participants with respect to the motivation for and use of the inquiry. This insight helped elicit franker feedback from the participants.

Participating in research is demanding and time consuming. Without the participants, the research would not be possible. Oliver (2010) stated that participants should be treated with "care, consideration and sensitivity" (p. 123). Loseke (2013) asked researchers to consider possible harm to participants before proceeding with research. Even when thoughtful consideration is given to participants, Oliver (2010) also underlined that research containing inherent values was easier to disseminate and to justify to the public. This is important because the public has a right to question these values when attempting to understand and apply it. Throughout my research, I endeavoured to treat my participants with the highest degree of care and concern, and I am deeply grateful for their contributions to this research. I attempted to incorporate my personal values of servitude, relationships, honesty, and care into all interactions with these women. I used my insider position to demonstrate ongoing compassion for their stories and situations and to help interpret their experiences.

Building a relationship of trust, dependability, and respect is an important factor in the interview process. As Weber (1986) outlined, the potential for the participant to remain

closed or to terminate the relationship is ever present. The potential for the researcher to seek

only to answer her or his own questions rather than to truly listen to the participant is also

problematic. Finally, the perception of power on the part of the researcher as the interviewer

could also hinder the research process (Weber, 1986). Moving beyond the scope of an

interview "to its earlier meaning of 'seeing the between' (*entre vue)* or meeting to share a

viewpoint" (Weber, 1986, p. 68, emphasis in text) helps to ease these kinds of concerns.

Ultimately, the real hope for the outcome of the research is a strengthened relationship for

both parties, with an accurate representation of the communicated experiences and a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon. Adherence to these ethics and values helped build more

trustful relationships between my participants and myself and helped make my research

trustworthy as well.

Data Collection

Loseke (2013) said that is it up to the researcher to define the population and create a

sample size that is appropriate to the specific research situation. Although interpretive

analysis cannot represent an entire population, it can choose representative or nonprobability

samples and "should be justified as logical given the research question" (Loseke, 2013, p.

107). As previously discussed, I elicited the participation of three female educational leaders,

and I revisit my criteria for their participation here again.

I chose the participants based upon their availability and in order to fulfill the

previously outlined criteria of being women filling educational leadership positions, and

being willing. I sought to find participants who were eager to share their stories and who

were forthcoming with their beliefs and experiences. A variety of women were most

beneficial to help create diversity in the stories. I tried to elicit the participation of women

with a diverse array of experiences, knowledge, and educational settings. Ultimately, after approaching five different women who met these criteria, I settled upon three participants. They were chosen because they were the most willing to participate, were excited about the prospect of the research, and were excited about the prospect of sharing their experiences and stories.

I used a variety of interviews as sources of data for my research. In order to maximize the participation of my participants, I adhered to several guidelines. Ellis (2006) outlined that participants needed to feel comfortable during their interview in order to "recall significant experiences, analyze them, and reflect on their meaning" (p. 113). It is important for the researcher to also establish open-mindedness and engagement with the topic of research before beginning. (Ellis, 1998; Weber, 1986), all the while retaining their primary purpose as researchers, which is to seek to understand the topic of research from the point of view of the participant (Ellis, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

To establish my interest in my participants and to build our relationship, I used general open-ended questions, structured around their experiences, in order to get to know them and as a beginning point for discussion. This helped build trust and rapport. Groupings of additional questions around their experiences were then developed. I wrote the questions down and used them as guidelines to encourage the sharing of stories, experiences, thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Questions did change or adapt as new experiences were brought to light. I endeavoured to be open to unanticipated responses and was prepared to pursue unexpected lines of inquiry by modifying questions as the research progressed (Loseke, 2013). I also remained open to informal conversations, being aware that these kinds of interactions could provide deep insight and sharing of experience. Carson (1986) believed that "by engaging in

conversation researchers are helping to create spaces within educational institutions for thoughtful reflection oriented towards improving practice" (p. 84), and this research sought to understand and improve practice for female educational leaders. In an effort to best understand my participants' experiences, I remained open to structured interviews, informal conversations, and other possible forms of interaction as they developed throughout the research and during our conversations.

Ethics

Although I have already referred to the importance of ethics in research, it bears mentioning once again that adherence to the highest standards of ethics is especially important in research in the social sciences. Two fundamental questions to keep in mind were from Oliver (2010):

1. Am I fully confident in the morality of how I am collecting these data?

2. Am I sure that I am not taking advantage of respondents in any way? (p. 129)

Keeping these questions in mind strengthened my ethical standpoint and ensured that I treated my participants with dignity and respect.

I was aware of using pseudonyms when reporting my findings in order to protect the participants' privacy. Identifying participants through research could potentially harm them or their careers, depending on the information and stories that they share. It is important to have participants fully understand that interviews are private, but by writing them down and sharing them, they become public. They had the scope of the sharing of the research explained to them clearly and agreed to this sharing. Unless participants truly believe that their feedback is safe from attribution back to them, I would not likely have received full and frank disclosure, and the value of the research would have been diminished.

My situation as researcher within this study must also be justified. I am aware that my assumptions, fore-structures, and biases precluded creation of entirely objective results, but this was not the purpose of this qualitative, interpretive study. I feel instead that these experiences only added to my understanding of the participants' stories. In carefully understanding their experiences personally, I was able to lend my personal perspectives to the analysis. Bhattacharya (2007) questioned the developing relationship with her participant and the blurred lines between relationship and research. I also needed to be aware of these blurred lines during my research, as the participants in my research, although I do not work with them specifically, are all colleagues whom I respect and admire, working within a challenging profession. Li (2001) also clearly situated herself inside the research she did and demonstrated that this positioning helped to strengthen her research, as I believe it also strengthened mine.

Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the paradigms that I use to construct my world of understanding. I have outlined the ontological and epistemological frameworks that I used to complete my qualitative interpretive inquiry research. I have expanded on the required processes for thematic analysis that I used to create valid research findings. Finally, I have discussed my research methods, the participants, and the ethical way in which I organized my study.

Chapter 4: Jenny's Experiences

The next three chapters deal with each participant individually in an attempt to create a clearer picture of who they are and why they believe in what they do. Each participant was given a pseudonym; however, I also reveal background information about each participant. In so doing, I present the participants as culturally and socially placed women in the time, space, and context of their situation. Outlining the experience of my participants also gives these women a certain plausibility and reliability. After introducing each participant, I highlight the most relevant themes that were revealed through the many hours of interviews and conversations. I spent a great deal of time poring over these data in an attempt to decipher the most critical pieces, to find the moments that helped define these women, and to accurately represent who they are. I focus on their insights about women in educational leadership and how they experience this role. After transcribing, reading, and coding, I again looked at the significance of the themes, turning to my initial literature readings and tying the evidence to these findings. Finally, I sought to comment on these themes through interpretation and extract from them a new way of understanding these women in educational leadership.

Over the past year, I was privileged to work with Jenny as I explored the realm of educational leadership through her experiences. She freely shared stories, experiences and thoughts with me, and this open, honest communication allowed me to grow, reflect, and discover. Just as with myself, it is important to locate her in her own time, place, culture, and history to better understand her point of view and her ideas surrounding this research. Jenny grew up as the youngest child in a large middle-class, Catholic family, surrounded by four siblings in a large urban centre in Alberta. She grew up in a traditionally structured home with a white-collar working father. Her mother stayed at home to raise the children. This

places Jenny in the social and historical arena of white women of privilege, as does her

chosen profession, and many of her responses reflect these ideals of liberal feminism.

She admires her mother, grandmother, and great-great-grandmother and is inspired by

their strength and character. In fact, her interviews are filled with references to these strong

women and her admiration for them.

So I really thought about it—who are the people I admired and the first people that

came to mind, was actually my grandmother—great-great-grandmother—who was a

dairy maid in Scotland, outside of Glasgow. And dairy maiding, at that time, was a

really treasured skill for the big houses. And she and her sister were dairy maids and

they were hired by a big house in the north of England to come and run the dairies

there, and so they arrived—and I don't know if in my head I think of them as

walking, because I suppose they were in a cart and went from this part of Scotland to

northern England—so it was these two women that had the skills and the ability and

they supported their husbands.

A second story Jenny referenced also highlights her admiration for her strong,

determined grandmother. These stories serve to outline the importance that she places on

having strong female role models. Women speak proudly of strong women, acknowledging

their strength and fortitude (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2008). This admiration of strong women

is a recurring theme in educational leadership that is often found in women who practice

balanced leadership models. Given the lower number of women in influential leadership

positions, such as superintendents, executive school district leadership must continue to

develop and promote strong women within educational leadership in order to provide strong

role models for women in this field.

Jenny made the choice to stay at home with her children while they were growing up. However, when she did return to school to complete her education degree, she knew that her choices would be regulated by her responsibilities as a mother.

> I made choices, based on my husband being the breadwinner and having a good job and . . . so, by default, I found myself as a stay-at-home mom . . . I would go to school at night, but I always had to work around my husband's schedule. . . . I waited until the youngest one was in school. So my life is about 10 years behind.

> This choice is one that many women face and is an ongoing barrier for women in the workplace. Women are often required to choose between work and family and often to set their goals and aspirations aside to work around these factors in their lives. Generally speaking, men do not live this experience. Complicating these decisions are the expectations that women place on themselves, and that are placed on them by other women in their socialized roles as mothers and caregivers. During one conversation, Jenney referenced the "Mommy Wars." She framed this experience around her choice to be at home with her children, but obviously felt conflicted. Her conflict arose out of her desire to be at home with her family and to pursue a career, a choice many women are confronted with and strive to overcome.

> Then I stayed home with my children and so that led to a whole different kind of discrimination of the Mommy Wars, and the first time I saw that women could be pitted against each other for their philosophies. It was an unfriendly exchange . . . So there I was with the stay-at-home moms and finding myself at odds with them and my sisters that worked full-time (and I don't mean biological sisters, but as part of the

feminine mystique). Having to explain myself as to my choice, that seeing staying at home at that time as a choice, rather than an obligation, which it was.

Whereas Jenny organized her life to reflect her own choices and clearly stated this several times, was it truly freedom of choice that caused her to wait before pursuing a career? Her ongoing conflict was even represented in how she worked around various demands to attend night school and pursue her education degree.

> All of those, what I would call "pinch points" in my life, children, relationships, school demands for the kids, kids' activities, husband's work, husband's work schedule, all of those fall along the way. . . . But I think that the pressures on women change at different stages in their lives.

Working in a large, urban high school, Jenny was a high school teacher for only eight years, teaching social studies, language arts, and cosmetology before she was given her first opportunity in formal leadership and was called up to fulfill an acting assistant principal position that lasted five months. This first formal leadership experience gave Jenny insight into the world of educational leadership. She filled the role of department head as well during her teaching career, and after eight years in the classroom began to actively pursue educational leadership as a career option. She clearly demonstrated skills and growth that identified her as a leader, and Jenny once again referred to the importance of a female mentor who provided her with an opportunity, who believed in her and promoted her career.

> I certainly had the encouragement of . . . people that I had worked with that liked their job so much. . . . And here I am. And I would never be here, I have to say, I would never be here if [she] had not taken me on faith. She saw something in me that I did not see in myself.

The power of women supporting other women is clear within Jenny's stories and interpretations. Women need strong role models. They needed common understanding and mutual support to be successful. The supportive relationships that women provide for each other help them grow and are an ongoing theme in this study. For Jenny, this was revealed by how she talked about role models, how she talked about other women, and how she felt supported by women. She felt that women supporting each other was key to success and outlined this importance in her journey to educational leadership.

Coming to Educational Leadership

Jenny did not originally seek out this role as an educational leader. She initially referenced educational leadership as a job she "could not, would not do." In fact, it was encouragement from others, and the opportunity that was handed to her, that challenged her to begin thinking along these lines. This recruiting or tapping is often the route that develops educational leaders (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012) and is perhaps even more pertinent to the situation of women within this profession, for if women are lacking in self-confidence, or feeling conflicted between home and work, personal identification of potential in leadership would be crucial to moving women forward. Jenny was given this opportunity, and during this first long-term educational leadership assignment, she shared her responsibilities:

> It is the programming, the hiring, the development of the long range vision, the idea
> of developing new programs, professional career development . . . accepting the
> students, reviewing their transcripts, submitting marks . . . contacting family and
> community services, liaison with the other high schools . . . grant applications, . . .
> liaison now with post-secondary institutions, . . . staff supervision, evaluation of
> classified staff, conducting team meetings, acting as liaison for the principal and the

staff, . . . attending administration meetings, supporting other APs [assistant

principals], IPPs [individual program plans] and getting them signed, . . . liaison

between central office staff, . . . committees, . . . parental contact, . . . technology

services, . . . surveys for the site, . . . brochures, . . . teaching courses, . . . volunteer in

some evening sessions, . . . open house, . . . summer school, . . . hiring, interviewing,

and oh! Counsel students to help them to figure out what courses to take and where to

take them.

Researchers agree that educational leadership is a complex and demanding job

(Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley & Bubb, 2013; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; MacBeath, 2006;

Sackney & Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996). This complexity can be compounded by the

transition from classroom to formal leadership, but Jenny did not perceive this complexity

during her transition. She felt that her staff treated her only marginally differently than other

staff did when she was a teacher. Through her stories, Jenny demonstrated a growing

confidence and self-assurance, without which she could have been impeded in her leadership

role (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). She was also vaguely aware of the influence she held over her

staff in this role.

I'm the one directing the meeting. I'm the one discussing, but I'm the one giving

the—this is how we are going to do this . . . While I like to say there is a flatness to it,

I am more than aware that eventually, it's me saying, "Here's what we're going to do

for now."

Her enormous learning curve caused her some concern. She felt that her prior

experiences helped prepare her for the job, but also worried that her experience was not

expansive enough to succeed in this position. She based this concern on her new appointment

to the position rather than her role as a woman located within a male-dominated staff.

> That's why I think this position is probably better served by somebody who has been
>
> in the system for a while, because they would know. I mean just, they would know
>
> the people to contact, they would know the procedures, and the policies, and the
>
> regulations about things like diploma exams.

In spite of sometimes feeling that she did not have the requisite experience, Jenny

reiterated the importance of support systems to her ongoing success. She has found support at

home, with colleagues, and among friends. She outlined the importance of the support she

receives from women, an ongoing theme throughout her interviews.

> I get support at home—tremendous support at home. . . . I find tremendous support
>
> from friends. . . .There's a big network out there. . . . Sort of every opportunity that I
>
> have had has come from women. It has been women that have seen that something in
>
> me to offer. . . . I have observed that female leaders, in my experience, have a
>
> network that I was unaware of. . . . And I think that as women, . . . the women that
>
> can work in a network are the strong women. The women that don't work well with
>
> other women, those are the ones we hear about. Those are the ones we often have to
>
> work with, but that's what limits them in their professional and personal growth.
>
> They are not part of a collective. . . . All women that pulled together; the suffragette
>
> movement; the feminist movement; this idea of a collective of women . . . unless you
>
> are an individual that is capable of understanding the strengths that a variety of people
>
> bring to a situation and you get past the "grade eight girl" mentality, of women as
>
> competition, you cannot grow.

This idea of women as a collective and as working together was prevalent in the early beginnings of radical feminism, where groups of women came together to understand that "their individual experiences were not unique to them, but widely shared by many women . . . and that all women are sisters" (Tong, 2014, p. 51). Within the tenets of educational leadership, the support and understanding that women demonstrate with one another within this area of practice can only strengthen their experiences and widen their knowledge and practice.

The current support that Jenny receives from female colleagues is informal, yet more structured support would have also aided her in her new role. She reflected on areas of formal support that she felt had been lacking as she came to the end of her first year in educational leadership. One recurring idea for her is that of structured mentorship. She outlined how she could have benefited from this. Her experiences within her current model of mentorship gave her ideas about what should have been changed and revolved a great deal around the importance of the role and training of the mentor.

> I think it would be beneficial to have a formal mentorship program that actually has some kind of guideline or ideas that you actually exchange. . . . I think it's really important that your mentor has been trained and that they realize that they are taking on a responsibility that will require time. . . . It has to have a purpose to it. There has to be an understanding of the different developmental stages of people in leadership.

It is interesting to note that gender did not enter into her conversation here. It would seem to make sense that if women benefited from strong female role models, as Jenny has suggested, then the creation of a mentorship program where women mentor women could be beneficial. On the other hand, learning to develop new points of view and exploring novel

ways of leading could be just as beneficial to a new educational leader and could be

developed by coupling male and female educational leaders together to broaden experience

and insight. Clearly, however, in Jenny's opinion, the mentor is necessary and, more

important, a highly trained, effective mentorship program with set parameters, expectations,

and outcomes would be most beneficial to her success and growth.

Traits in Educational Leadership

In the literature review I looked in detail at skills or traits that educational leaders

possess. Jenny had also given a great deal of thought to the qualities or traits that she has

found necessary in her job. These differed from the educational experiences previously

outlined as being more of the innate qualities or the soft "people" skills that are necessary for

success in these positions. In Jenny's words:

Sense of humour, a background in psychology and understanding of motivation, the

ability to communicate, to act with integrity, to make a decision based on careful

consideration that you stay with, . . . hearing other people's voices, . . . being visible,

. . . always remembering that the underlying principle is dignity. . . . You also have to

be up on the literature. . . . It is important to build a network so that you can discuss

your concerns in a safe environment. . . . So much of it [successful leadership] seems

to be the idea of human interaction.

Many of these are qualities that would be attributed to women. According to Eagly et

al. (1995) and Young (1994), democratic or interpersonally oriented traits are associated with

female leadership. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggested that female leadership is about

relationship and succeeding "with and through others" (p. 6) rather than "power over [others]"

(p. 7), which is more often associated with the masculine portrayal of power and leadership.

They also suggested that women focus on building relationships and building horizontal power in order to affect positive changes in the lives of children. The qualities that Jenny outlined equate to these outcomes. She suggested that "motivation, communication, integrity and human interaction" are integral to successful educational leadership. She also equated these qualities to other leaders that she respects, most of them strong women.

> I've learned from other people. She [my principal] had a vision of . . . what it [school leadership] ought to be. She walked a philosophy and breathed a perspective. And it influenced, because it was so integral to her. It was integral to every decision made in that school.

> Women lead in ways that differ from the traditional bureaucratic organizational leadership that relies heavily on the individual (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Studies have shown that women are successful within the profession of educational leadership (Eagly et al., 1995; Young, 1994) in spite of the numerous barriers to success that they continue to face.

Barriers to Success for Women in Educational Leadership

My literature review outlined several barriers to success for women and created a conceptual framework for the interviews with my participants. These barriers currently still exist in various forms within educational leadership. I was interested to see how my participants felt about these barriers for women in educational leadership and if they perceived them to be present within their context.

Role conflict. Jenny is cognizant that she made decisions about her life that were influenced by her gender. Our discussion centered on her experiences with role conflict.

> [One barrier was] balancing children and school and working, because I did all three of those at one point. If I had been a male, of my age, my wife would have worked to

support me to go to school, I would have gone to school full-time, and there would have been some other expectation for childcare.

Several times during different conversations, Jenny reflected on the stages of her life and how she made many decisions based on the needs of her children. Even though she consistently reiterated that these decisions were conscious and deliberate, they nonetheless have affected her education and career in different ways. The interesting point is that she managed to resolve this role conflict in her own life, and although she found this balance by postponing her education and career to a more opportune life moment, other women have resolved this dilemma through the practice of balanced leadership in which they attempt to manage work and home in order to enhance their practice (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The barrier, when resolved in this way, is no longer a barrier. I questioned, however, the time, energy, and devotion required to complete the multiple tasks of both worlds completely. In spite of the fact that women have found a way around this barrier, I wonder if this barrier has been truly and honestly resolved or simply reconfigured.

Gender Discrimination. Jenny was also highly aware of the existence of discrimination in her workplace and recalled several instances where she felt diminished by her gender. These experiences began as a young woman when she entered the workplace and were ongoing throughout each phase of her professional, and even, at times, personal life: "Yes, I have experienced sexist discrimination. . . . I had experienced that throughout every career I have ever had."

I include this next story as it speaks poignantly of a woman who experienced sexual discrimination for the first time and was unaware of how to respond or react.

Earliest experience [of sexual harassment]—first job—I was what would effectively

be a registrar at a college. A man who was one step above me, but not my direct

supervisor, would walk behind me and comment on my, the shape of my behind. And

he would, in sign language (at that time I was learning to become an interpreter), he

made a sign name for me that had to do with my sexuality. I was 19 or 20 in that

position, and it seems so long ago. I was completely caught as not knowing how to

respond to this. Nobody had ever talked to me like that before in that way; that made

me feel uncomfortable.

Even as an adult, and aware of the inappropriate behaviours, the most poignant and

hurtful experiences came later in life as she began to work as a teacher in a high school

setting. "When I first started teaching, the males that were my direct supervisory people, they

were absolutely horrible, and suspicious, and condescending, and had the Boys' Club

mentality."

She continued to reference the Old Boys Club in several instances, outlining her

perceptions that these kinds of gender-based "structures" still exist, to the detriment of all.

Then I end up in a school in a department that to say it was an Old Boys' Club would

be an understatement, to the point where there were three members of that department

that were downright suspicious and frightened of females. . . .[They] talked to

females in a very disparaging way. Nobody thought that that was unusual, not in that

department. It was unfixable as far as I can understand. . . . High school is very hard

to get into for female instructors, I guess. Somebody had said, you know, it's a Boys'

Club.

Studies have shown that high school is still one area where gender equality does not exist (Shakeshaft, 1998). Given that the bulk of Jenny's experience is in a high school setting, perhaps the prevalence of discrimination is because of this specific context and location. Clearly, in her experience, ongoing improvement must be implemented at this level. It is disappointing that Jenny identified these types of behaviours as persistent, prevalent, and tolerated. In addition, one of her most recent experiences with discrimination revolved around candidate selection for a specific position where the hiring supervisor claimed the need for one gender over another for a position. Sadly and unfortunately, these practices appear to be ongoing in her time and context. These are not simply perceptions. The examples that Jenny shared are real, tangible, and intolerable.

Gendered traits. Society often assigns roles to genders, but people also seem to assign them willingly to themselves. Jenny concurred. In her experience, society assigns gendered roles to people and then looks to have these confirmed in practice. She has also experienced this gendered configuration as other women confirming these predefined roles of women. She finds this ongoing confirmation detrimental to women in general.

I can remember . . . women saying to me something about, "Oh! You're so bossy!" But it was when we were working on a project in a school and saying, "Oh this needs to be done and that needs to be done"—like in retrospect it was a leadership moment, but how suspicious that it was another woman saying that, like we're all socialized that way. It's not just the men. . . . We don't really say that she [a woman] is a good leader. We say that she is a good organizer. . . . But for some reason it's more acceptable to call a woman a good organizer, rather than a good leader.

These gendered roles can also play out in educational leadership. Studies have shown that people are more comfortable responding to leaders who behave as they "ought to," or according to their "correctly-assigned" gender roles (Eagly et al., 1995). Jenny has struggled to share her view of gender as she seeks equality in her worksite and position. Her perceptions of how her staff respond to her are based on individual reactions towards her as a woman as opposed to the response of staff towards her male supervisor.

> I think my female staff respond to me differently because I am a woman. I think whether we like to acknowledge it or not, that we acquiesce to men much more quickly and not see them as equals because we see ourselves as less than [them].

These reactions perpetuate the assigned roles and expectations, so even though women may have developed different leadership models, and different ways of acting, responding, and leading, they may still be influenced by others' perceptions. Perhaps women implement balanced leadership, social justice leadership, and relational leadership (Grogan & Shakehaft, 2011) and other "female" types of leadership because they are attempting to meet socialized, gender-normative expectations placed on them by their situation and context within educational leadership.

> I think all in all it has to do with our perception, like our social perception of what those traits ought to be. . . . Men are decisive, those kinds of things, so it's not true, but we look to have our perspectives confirmed and so we will wait, and wait, ignoring all evidence to the contrary until it's confirmed. So you can have a very decisive woman and the moment she gets teary in a meeting you can say, "Oh! Women are emotional. They can't be rational."

In an educational leadership context, staff expectations can be detrimental in this way. Staff confirm the social gendered norms of the educational leader and respond accordingly. This is detrimental to an educational leader as it places extra burdens of preconceived behaviour on the incumbent.

Socialization. Socialization plays an overwhelming role in all aspects of people's lives. Many of the points of view that influence stereotypes, gendered roles, and expectations for leaders stem from everyday socialization. Socialization is ubiquitous: within families, within the workplace, and throughout the media. It is influenced by history, economics, and politics. People are often unaware of the influence it has on them and on their interactions with others. Jenny discussed her perception of socialization:

> We are so self-governing, to be "ideal", and, I mean it's reinforced around us everywhere. In our conversations with our friends and . . . the media, but it's not even that, . . . it's how we reinforce this in each other. How women talk about each other. How men talk about women, and those voices in our own heads.

Socialization is prevalent in education and in educational leadership, as I discussed in the historical review of educational leadership. The roles that women fill and the expectations that they face as educational leaders have historical and political connections. Female educational leaders are especially prone to these socialized influences because the bulk of current educational experience and research involves women as teachers, not leaders. As women move into educational leadership, the expectations often remain for them to behave in nurturing, caring, and feminine ways.

Jenny also outlined her beliefs around the creation of these stereotypes from a very young age. She elaborated on this perception through the example of how male and female

babies are discussed and how, even from a very young age, children are encouraged to fit into these societally defined roles as created for them by others.

> So when we talk about socialization? We think about it as almost a conscious indoctrination by our society, but I am going to suggest that it is almost like a privilege. We are unaware of it. We don't know how essential gender is to our understanding of the world. We interact with people based on their gender and so, for the people that I work with, because they were born with a Y chromosome, people have always responded to them differently. From birth we respond to them differently. . . . I mean, even if they are the same weight at birth, we talk about them completely differently.

She picked up this theme again when she talked about her perceived exclusion from certain male activities based on what she perceived to be her "femaleness":

> I feel I'm excluded from certain gatherings because I'm a woman. There are poker nights that occur, and that's when I . . . created the dinner and a movie night, . . . to sort of compensate for that. And now I'm in this book club that is over-representative of female leaders within our district, and I find that really satisfying. . . . But in a way, I also find that it's quite sad that we perceive that we have to do that. That doesn't make sense for me.

I would suggest that many women have lived through this perceived exclusion on many fronts. However, I wonder if this exaggerated sense of male and female socialization and separateness has more to do with Jenny's experiences in a high school setting as opposed to elementary education, where there is a higher ratio of female educators. Jenny's initial socialization was that of a privileged white female, and this has certainly influenced how she

acts and reacts to pressures in her roles. However, she is deeply conscious of the advantage that a white male holds in today's society, outlining these relationships through definition of power and privilege.

> I mean, they have an advantage just by walking on the earth in our culture as a white male. And to deny that advantage is to ignore a historical, social, economic reality that surrounds us. They are not swimming upstream . . . ever . . . ever, unless there is some really bizarre untoward factor.

Women can move past these socialized norms in education even though they are perpetuated in society through socialization and they create ongoing stereotypical expectations and roles. In Jenny's opinion, stereotypes are still strongly prevalent in education. She acknowledges these differences in genders and the barriers that may still exist for her and others, but has developed a philosophy of life that works to better her own beliefs in a complicated world. She would like

> to believe that traits are human traits on a continuum by both men and women, but maybe the traits that other people ascribe to women, like communication, let's say, like being empathic, to quickly monitor a room and ascertain what the mood is, but you see, I know men that are very good at that.

Jenny's outlook highlights her ability to reflect on the world around her and to interpret it, not to be forced into a defined way of thinking or acting. Instead, she has chosen to create her own ways of interpreting and seeing the world. She has an acute awareness of socialized genders but refuses to be bound by them personally.

Ways in Which Women Lead

Jenny's success in educational leadership is obvious. Her enjoyment of the position is evident.

So finally I'm in a position where I can make other people's lives so much better. That's kind of heady. That's exciting. And it doesn't involve students—having that opportunity to have a real impact on people's lives. It's . . . —it could go right to my head! But I think it will go more to my heart, right? . . . I'm able to make things happen, and I can make things happen for people. I can pay it forward.

Throughout the interviews, Jenny's love for her ability to create change shines through. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) believed that this need to improve things for others lets women lead for social justice. These types of female leaders seek an opportunity to improve things, and this aspiration is evident in Jenny's comments. She also places high importance on relational leadership and recognizes the importance of building strong relationships with staff.

Despite the ongoing issues related to equality in educational leadership, strong female leaders such as Jenny continue to grow, experience, reflect, and build relationships. Jenny's philosophy of her role encompasses stereotypical male and female traits, and she looks to establish herself in this work of educational leadership as herself. Encompassing ideals such as doing the right thing, being brave, demonstrating notable leadership, creating supportive relationships, and being kind to oneself are ideas she embraces and demonstrates in her daily practice.

Doing the right thing despite what public opinion may state. . . . Those kinds of

people I really admire, and I would like to think that under certain circumstances, I

would be brave like that. . . .

It's important to keep our dignity and to help others to nurture and discover

theirs . . . respect, support, encouragement, opportunity, hopefulness, what can I do to

help you be a better, not just teacher, but person.

. . . It's not the short game. I'm not in it for the short game. It's not the long

game even. You have to think: infinite game.

These quotes are pulled from the conversations shared with Jenny over almost a year

of interviews. Her insights demonstrate that in her experience, ongoing issues continue to

exist for women in the realm of educational leadership. Role conflict, discriminatory

practices, and socialization are all issues that she deals with. Her strong self-concept and

deep understanding of these issues has allowed her to effectively interpret and attempt

resolution of conflicts within her own life and practice and to begin to explore her reasons for

choosing educational leadership as a venue for improving her chosen vocation. The

importance of women, as well as their support, their mentorship, and their role modelling,

was evident throughout our conversations. As I turn now to Kate's experiences, I keep these

stories in mind as I expand on the experiences of female educational leaders.

Chapter 5: Kate's Experiences

In this chapter, I discuss themes that emerged in conversations with Kate and that create a clearer picture of who she is. I reveal background information about Kate and then attempt to highlight her most relevant stories, thoughts, and ideas from the interviews. I continue to focus on emerging themes around women in educational leadership and how Kate experiences her role in educational leadership.

Kate grew up as the elder of two children in a middle-class Lutheran family outside a large urban centre in Alberta. She grew up in a traditionally structured home with two white-collar working parents. She was quiet and shy growing up, and although she traveled a great deal, she ended up literally marrying the boy next door. Her husband's occupation involves shift work and so her life is complicated, but she works around these issues with her usual positive outlook, spending as much time as she possibly can with her two children. Her childhood and her current social situation place her in the realm of the privileged, middle-class white woman, and her chosen professional context has served to enforce these placements.

Kate's stories and experiences demonstrated her respect and admiration for strong women. In one of the first stories Kate shared, she cited Coco Chanel as being someone who she admired: "She was a strong, confident woman who was ground-breaking and brave, . . . [who] knew what she wanted; knew to go after it." She also referenced her admiration for her mother, saying that she was "the one who ruled the roost" and often referred in an admiring way to her female role models, former principals, and other female mentors as women who "were decisive, took charge, and were willing to take on the challenges."

When I said earlier, you know, these female mentors that I've had in my life as principals whom I admire, one of the things that I've said is that they are brave. They don't mind taking on these things. If it needs to be done, then they do it.

Kate clearly admires women who demonstrate this ability to take action and to stand up for what they believe in. This admiration for strong, fearless women is demonstrated in her own adventuresome spirit. And while she claimed she is not a big risk-taker, she took advantage of opportunities as they came her way and also took risks in travel, work, and study that many would not consider.

I am not a big risk-taker, adventurous person, and yet adventure has been part of my life all along and I don't know how it happened. . . . It was what the universe had in mind for me, and it just happened.

Kate has extensive experience as a classroom teacher. She taught in England, New Zealand, and Alberta, and worked extensively as a substitute teacher. After several years of teaching she became a counsellor, and she credited this experience as being key to her growth and development because it allowed her the opportunity to work closely with school educational leadership and forced her to complete many administrative tasks.

I was out of the classroom, I was in an office dealing with parents, dealing with my work, having to organize things, have contacts at central, be a liaison between the teachers and central office, having to set up meetings, having to organize people, make sure things were looked after for programming. . . . It was a good segue way into the world of admin.

This experience as a counselor allowed her to consider her career path and gave her the incentive to pursue educational leadership.

Coming to **Educational Leadership**

Kate actively sought out a role as an educational leader, which demonstrate self-assurance and self-confidence, and although she pursued this path, at times she felt uncertain that she made the right choice.

So then, that's when I started applying for leadership roles, and then I was so nervous when I did apply, because I thought, "What if I hate it? What if I'm no good at it? What if I don't like it? What if it isn't satisfying the way teaching and counselling is satisfying?" But I didn't have to worry, in the end. It was very satisfying and I've just stayed.

At the time of this research, Kate was completing her third administrative assignment, and was still considered new to educational leadership, fewer than five years' experience in the field. She was in her first year as principal in a new school, having worked previously as an assistant principal for two years, and principal in another elementary site for two years as well. She described the job as complex, as supported by numerous studies that I have previously mentioned (Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley & Bubb, 2013; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; MacBeath, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996). In spite of this complexity, she was able to identify and define her role in a certain sense.

Okay, so the most important job is the instructional leadership. . . and making sure that everybody knows what the rules are in the district and the school, and that we are all striving for the same thing. . . . Then there's also the budget. . . . And then there's kind of the management piece as far as timetabling, facilities. . . . I believe the biggest piece is the people piece: relationships with kids and team building. I love building

those relationships with the kids. . . . You can work with them and make them better people.

It was interesting that Kate quickly identified several of the key ways that women lead in her own description of leadership. She selected relational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) as she highlighted the importance of relationships and building on them staff and with students. She also referred to "instructional leadership," which Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) would call leadership for learning as it focuses on "putting instruction and learning at the center of [her] leadership mission" (p. 18). In her role as leader, she is highly aware that she holds responsibility for everything at her site. The following quote demonstrates the complexity of the educational leadership role as well as the personal responsibility that she feels for even the detailed tasks at her school site.

I was in over the break and . . . I climb up on this ladder on stage, and I had this long pole with a stick on the end, and I was taking down all our curtains on the stage because we had our fire inspection and they of course have to go. . . . Like no one's going to do that, right? Silly things, too, like the daily custodian leaves at 1:00. So it never fails, 10 [minutes] past 1:00, there's a kid throwing up, so who's going to clean that up? . . . So I'm there with the mop.

This attention to detail could form the basis of the practice of balanced leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) in Kate's ability to combine menial and large-scale school tasks and complete them thoroughly. Although Kate did not state this in so many words, this theme continued to surface throughout her interviews. I discuss this in greater detail through the theme of barriers to success later on in this chapter.

This complexity of roles does occasionally cause Kate to feel plagued by self-doubt and overwhelmed by the scope of her responsibilities, as has often proven the case for educational leaders (Crum, Sherman, & Myrna, 2009; Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley & Bubb, 2013; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; Grodzki, 2011; MacBeath, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996).

> Sometimes, you know, you don't want to [do something] because we are so swamped. You want to procrastinate and put those things off. But you're the leader of the school, and if you don't do it, no one else is going to.

Although Kate is at times overwhelmed, she has, in her perception, been well prepared for the role. She credited three keys areas for being crucial to her preparation for educational leadership. In addition to her graduate studies, she felt that her experience as a counsellor and as an assistant principal were the most important experiences in this preparation, and highlighted the assistant principalship as being, to her, the most important of all. "Being an AP was better than any master's [degree], better than any courses, better than Leadership for Tomorrow [the local school system's educational leadership training program]. That was like hands on, getting in there and doing stuff."

Part of Kate's success and preparation was also due to her support systems, which she found at home, with colleagues, and among friends. She often referred to her network of female colleagues with whom she could talk, direct questions, or ask advice.

> I feel supported by my female colleagues. I have a range of people that I can phone any time or go for coffee with, either vent or ask advice. . . . And so we get together sometimes and meet and talk about things.

She also feels supported by her spouse and children. This support is critical to her success and job satisfaction and also ties into the balanced leadership model, which outlines the importance of managing home and work responsibilities successfully. A supportive spouse and children was key to this "way of doing" as outlined by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) in female educational leadership.

Traits in Educational Leadership

Kate believed in the importance of on-the-job training for providing her with successful experiences before becoming an educational leader; however, she also acknowledged that many required skills are simply innate. "I think that my principal, when I was an AP, probably knew within the first month: "Yeah, she's going to be a principal someday, or no." . . . But I think you've either got it, or you don't.

Kate described these innate skills as the soft skills or people skills. In the following response, she outlined positivity, friendliness, flexibility, organization, empathy, and fairness as being key to success. These are all descriptors of traits, whether innate, developed, or learned. She obviously identified these because they are personally important to her. "I think you have to be a really positive person to be really successful . . . Really positive, friendly, outgoing, flexible. You have to be organized . . . And you have to be empathetic . . . be fair."

Research has shown that success in educational leadership can be attributed to a small number of traits (Leithwood et al., 2008). Other authors have outlined specific moral and ethical values as key to success, with the ability to create trust leading the way (Blackmore, 2006, 2013; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Palanski & Yammarino, 2009; Sackney & Mitchell, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2004a, 2005; Stronge et al., 2008). However, some of these are skills that may be typically associated with a "male" model of leadership and

authority, such as managerial leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014). The traits outlined by Kate as important to her would be more successful in learning or relational leadership models. They could also be present in such models as distributed leadership (Coleman, 2012; Blackmore, 2009, 2013; Harris, 2004; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; MacBeath, 2006; Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2001), servant leadership (English, 2008; Spears & Lawrence, 2004), and transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Fullan, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Onorato, 2013; Palanski & Yammarino, 2009); models which are attributed to a more shared platform of leadership rather than the top-down managerial model most historically associated with men. One reason for these new ways of leading may be a result of growing numbers of female educational leaders who can now successfully influence the development of these new practices within leadership. These new approaches may also be a natural evolution of ideas that stem from an increased understanding of school site management. These would be interesting ideas to pursue further.

Kate has also looked for support from mentors to help improve her practice, but she more often referred to the need for self-reflection as key to her own growth and development: "So, self-reflection [helps improve my practice]. . . . Thinking about what I am good at, what I need to improve. It is just self-reflection." This need for self-reflection is found in the spiritual leadership model (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Kate is keen to learn and looks to her inner self to help her grow and improve. This method of learning could also be classified as self-development (Orvis & Ratwani, 2010; Reichard & Johnson, 2011), defined by these researchers as relying on the individual to accurately identify and seek opportunities to pursue training, skill development, and understanding as they pertain to their particular role, job, and situation. Reflection is a key part of this process.

Barriers to Success for Women in Educational Leadership

My literature review outlined several barriers to women that currently still exist in various forms within educational leadership. I was interested to see how Kate felt about these barriers and if she perceived them to be an ongoing problem.

Role conflict. Kate explained that she led a complicated family life. Having a husband who works shift work often makes her responsible for the children's schooling, extra-curricular activities, and appointments. She manages the household duties as well. She has actively reflected on these conflicts and has developed systems that attempt to organize and manage all these responsibilities so that she can be present in her children's lives as a working mother.

> I go to school early in the morning. . . . So I'm at school early and then I leave school early so I have my evenings with my kids. . . . And then on the weekends, when I need to go in, . . . what I do is I get up at 6:00 and I'm at the school by 7:00. I can do four hours of work and be home just as the kids are getting out of bed. . . . So it's about organizing your time and knowing what the priority is.

Kate is aware that her personal life outside of work is very different from that of her male colleagues, based mostly on the roles that she fulfills outside of her professional realm.

> Hearing some of my male counterparts, who come home and dinner's ready and laundry's done and the house is vacuumed and they basically can sit back and relax for the evening. And that's not the case as a woman. The expectation is that you stop and get the groceries. You come home. You get supper going. You know, the laundry is yours. Cleaning the house is yours, . . . planning, . . . all those responsibilities are still mine as a woman. Those traditional roles are tradition in my house.

Her male colleagues do not face the same responsibilities or expectations as she does. While she fulfills her defined roles, Kate has developed a way to work around this conflict. This is typical of the multitude of women in educational leadership who practice balanced leadership according to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011). In fact, Kate credited part of her success to her own experience, upbringing, and personal work ethic, which are, in part, based on her gender. She explained that her abilities come directly from the expectations that were placed on her as a female: the juggling of roles, the multi-tasking, the organizational skills, and the need for quick responsiveness.

> As a female leader, I am used to juggling all those things. I can get it all done—I can look after my family and my work and do budget and timetabling and discipline and deal with all the parents who are phoning and you know, you just learn how to juggle and manage everything. Answer all your emails, so women have to do it all and do it well and on time. And it's not anything particularly that is a skill of mine, it's just, you know, females have to do those things.

> Kate is proud of this ability to manage multiple demands. She is cognizant that these skills help her manage her life. She also perceived that her male colleagues do not have these abilities. She believes that her ability to manage the many different aspects of these roles is critical to her success.

Gender Discrimination. Kate was adamant that she has not experienced discrimination in her career. She does not perceive that her opinions are not as valued as the male educational leaders that she works with, nor has she felt that a man has ever been hired over her based on gender.

When it comes to professional stuff, when we are sitting in a group sharing

information, I have never felt that my ideas weren't accepted on the same level as a

man's. As far as getting a position, in my personal experience, I have never felt that a

man got a position over me, just because he was a man.

At times, however, Kate has questioned the male and female structures that seem to

surface between men and women in administrative meetings or groupings. She explained this

as simply being related to what she perceives as choice rather than discrimination.

When we have gone to different events, there have been times when the men have

gotten together and done things, but then I think that there have also been times when

the women have gotten together. You know, and when we have leadership meetings

and stuff, the boys kind of sit together quite often and the girls kind of sit together. So

I can't say that it's discrimination, it's just choice maybe.

The theme of overt discrimination did not appear in my conversations with Kate. I

wonder why her experience is so very different from Jenny's and question again whether the

prevalence of discrimination felt by Kate is less given her greater experience in elementary

school settings where the staff are overwhelmingly women. Could it be because she comes

form a traditionally gendered environment? Or are there other factors at play here? A

growing number of female educational leaders are also present in these elementary sites, and

this could potentially diminish the practice of discrimination in Kate's experience.

Gendered traits. Kate believes that gendered traits are assigned to both men and

women. Her experience suggests that large groups of women can be challenging to work

with and that healthy educational environments require a balance of genders and types of

people to foster strong staff relations and to make the educational experiences for children as rich as possible.

> I would rather that there would be a balance, you know, equal male and female teachers for sure—that's a healthier staff. . . . There was bullying in elementary school with those women, and it wasn't healthy having just all women. . . .There was lots of gossiping [on a female dominated elementary school staff]. . . .Whereas now, I'm on a staff where it is mostly men, 60% men to 40% women, and it's a little more black and white.

Despite the lack of gender balance in the staff, Kate's reflections also outlined that in her experience, women and men behave in certain ways. These typical behaviours perpetuate expectations around leadership practice. She spent a great deal of time reflecting on predetermined gendered expectations and how they affect practice in a school. The quote below specifically refers to the expectations around nurturing, caring women and women who build relationships in schools. It also alludes to the previous ideas around strong, organized, and decisive female leaders.

> I think that there's a pretty big expectation that being a woman I am not going to crack down, that I'm going to give them a hug and send them on their way during discipline. And I don't know, the feeling I get from this new staff that I have is that the female principals that they have liked and respected were very organized, got work done, had agendas, communicated well, and . . . with men, that wasn't their strength. They stayed in their office a lot, didn't deal a whole with discipline, weren't into the paperwork, so, I almost think that there is an expectation that if a woman comes in, she's going to be organized and get stuff done.

As Kate outlined, these expectations could possibly be based on prior experiences or gender-based norms. It is interesting to contemplate how she herself could have influenced these expectations. As she arrived in this new position, did she then seek to affirm or contradict the expected practice? Or was she rather looking to confirm her own expectations of what she felt a female educational leader should do, how she should act, and what skills she should demonstrate according to her own reflection? These are difficult questions to answer, but generally speaking, it is clear that gendered traits are present in the practice of educational leadership for Kate—and this is not necessarily healthy or productive.

Finally, Kate did feel some pressures around her position based on her gender. Whether she is perpetuating the female norm or fighting it, she is aware of her gender within a realm of predominantly male colleagues. In the following excerpt, she referred to her attendance at a leadership meeting composed predominately of men.

> Anyway, . . . so it's hard. It's hard to come in and I do think that partly it is being a woman. I do feel like if I was a man, I would have more value, or more respect. . . . Not yet. Not yet. Maybe I'll get there.

When Kate elaborated on how she felt in this grouping, this was her response:

> Maybe being a little bit marginalized or having that underlying sense of being a woman in a meeting isn't as important as a man. Or if you take a certain stance on something, it might be marginalized or thought of as less, having less worth than what a man would say. If a man said it, everyone would stop and listen. If a woman said it, maybe not so much.

Even though Kate stated that she has not experienced discrimination, in my opinion, this story outlined just that. I hear fatigue and dissatisfaction with the status quo within her

statements. Her acceptance as a leader, whether male or female, should have been the current

norm. It appears that she has to continue to strive for this outcome.

     Socialization. Many of the points of view that influence these stereotypes, gendered

roles, and expectations also seem to stem from society in general and how people are raised

to perceive other genders around them. Kate's role in her family highly affected how she

fulfills her current position. She believes that many of her developed skills in her leadership

role stem from her role expectations as a woman. These skills developed through the

modelling and expectations that shaped her within her family.

> Also, as a woman, I'm used to having to juggle my job, my parents, my kids,
>
> birthdays, family dinners, grocery shopping, making dinners, doing everything. And
>
> then, so I already have to have those skills. . . . And so you are raised from a very
>
> young age thinking it's up to you to get everything organized and done and manage
>
> your time.

Kate clearly made reference to her socialization around gendered roles in her family

growing up. Her family was structured in a traditional way, and she was raised to follow this

pattern of thinking and doing.

> Well, when growing up, being responsible for certain things around the house, it was
>
> just a given that this is your role. I was never expected to go into the garage and do
>
> anything in there, you know, clean the car or change the oil or do anything even
>
> remotely car related or yard related unless it was maybe doing some weeding in the
>
> garden. But, I was expected to do laundry, cooking, cleaning. Those more typical
>
> [female] things.

Kate was aware of her upbringing; she is also proud of her ability to manage, complete, and organize many facets of her life. These again are some of the traits of women who practice balanced leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). I also believe that part of Kate's success in her current role stems from her early socialization to become an organized, hard-working woman who is able to successfully manage multiple demands simultaneously. On one hand, Kate questions her ability to change her socialization; on the other hand, she credits this as being key to her success and accomplishments.

Ways in Which Women Lead

In spite of the many different models of leadership for women that were identified by Kate in her conversations, the overarching model for her is that of social justice (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Kate is "in it" for the students. These youngsters provide her with a way to focus and remain strong in spite of challenging circumstances.

> I guess the motivator is feeling like you are helping kids, day to day, making that difference for the majority of the kids. . . . It helps me when you can see the difference you are making, and feel the difference that you are making with these kids. That's what motivates me most of all.

Clearly Kate also demonstrates other kinds of models of leadership for women. She referred to the importance of self-reflection (spiritual leadership) and several times spoke of her need to build relationships with students, staff, and the greater community (relational leadership). She also alluded to instructional leadership (leadership for learning) and was keenly aware of the importance of making sure staff are leading learning for students (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). It appeared to be important for Kate to employ a blend of different leadership methods that allows her to succeed in this role. According to Bush and

Glover (2014), successful school leadership is based on what they referred to as *contingent leadership*. This type of leadership encompasses the idea that leadership practice can fluctuate according to each school setting and each individual leader. Success for educational leadership resides in artfully interweaving these requirements. Kate seeks her own ways of doing and being within her leadership role. She shared many instances of perceived issues for women in educational leadership; she has, nonetheless developed a healthy perspective on how these play out in her practice and incorporated many different platforms of practice into her leadership. Although the barriers still appear to exist for her, she continues to strive to overcome these within her own practice.

The next chapter explores my last participant: Mia. Once again, Jenny and Kate's stories remained in mind as I continued to delve into the experiences of newly appointed female educational leaders.

Chapter 6: Mia's Experiences

This final participant chapter deals with Mia's experience and attempts to create a clearer picture of who she is. I present some background information about her and then highlight her most relevant stories, thoughts, and ideas. I decipher the most critical pieces to find the moments that help define her and to accurately represent who she is, how she developed into who she is, and why she feels the things she does. I focus on her insights around women in educational leadership and how she experiences this role, particularly as it pertains to her new position in educational leadership.

Mia grew up as the elder of four children (one sister and two brothers) in a middle-class immigrant family in a small urban centre in Alberta. She grew up in a traditionally structured Catholic home with two working parents. Her parents were both born in Italy, but her mother immigrated to Canada when she was three. Her dad did not arrive in Canada until he was 22. Her mother was a nurse, and her father owned a tiling business. Mia spent a great deal of time in Italy as a child, visiting every fourth summer or so to spend time with her grandmother. Mia met and married her husband in Italy, and she still spends her summers in the family home in Italy each year. Until recently, her husband worked in Italy and was home in Canada only about one month per quarter before returning to Italy. In the last year, he retired and is completing contract construction work with Mia's siblings and father. Together, Mia and her husband have two children: a boy and a girl, who are nine years apart.

Mia's situation is not typical. Her choice of lifestyle is different from the norm and provides insight into the evolving nature of family structures in a global economy. Living a large part of each year as a single parent forced Mia to develop many different strategies for managing a career and a home because she was still responsible for the upbringing of the

children. This certainly affected how she fulfills her role as an educational leader. Although

Mia's situation is atypical, she is also firmly in the realm of privileged white female due to

multiple childhood opportunities, access to education, and opportunities for personal growth

and self-actualization.

Mia respects strong women and cited her grandma, a strong woman, as being the

person she admires the most. Similar to the other participants, this admiration for strong

women continued to surface as Mia expanded upon her experiences and shared her stories.

She referred to strong female educational leaders who guided her growth and gave her

opportunities in her career.

The person that I admire most would be my grandma. [She's] just a very strong

person. . . and you know stuck to her beliefs and raised two children on her own being

an immigrant and not speaking English, so. . . she's my number one.

Mia had extensive experience as a classroom teacher. Even though she felt that

classroom experience was necessary, she offered that the most valuable educational

leadership experience is when a person is "learning on the job":

Well, I think they [educational leaders] should definitely have a variety of school-

based experience, whether it's as a teacher or an AP. I think the more experience they

have in different contexts and different situations, the better it is. . . . They need to

know . . . how to be able to learn. Because that's what it is. It is learning on the job.

She was able to work as an assistant principal for three years, and she thought that her

formative experiences had assisted her preparation for a principalship but that maybe

something was missing. She expressed surprise at the huge difference between the principal

position and the assistant principal position, and she did not feel that she was adequately

prepared for this new role.

> I don't know if I was adequately prepared. I think the AP part helps. Although going
>
> from assistant principal to principal is a huge step, and I didn't think it would be that
>
> different, but it is.
>
> Well, the last principal I worked for before I became principal said to me,
>
> "You won't believe the difference between being a principal and an AP," and I told
>
> her, "I don't think that's true. We do everything together here anyways, so I already
>
> know how to do everything," but it's so changed. It's so true that it's so different,
>
> because in the end the responsibility is on you.

Mia expanded on this gap in her personal preparation later in other conversations that

I delve into further on.

Coming to Educational Leadership

Mia actively sought out a role as a school administrator but might not have

considered it without some external encouragement.

> I actually hadn't thought about admin at all, because I had been working part-time,
>
> kind of just here and there, because I had small children. . . . The admin had said to
>
> me, "You know, you should really take Leadership for Tomorrow [the school division
>
> educational leadership preparation course]," and I thought, "Maybe I should." . . .
>
> And that kind of got me . . . on the path thinking, "Well, maybe this is something that
>
> I could do," so it was someone that pointed me in that direction.

This recruiting or tapping, which Farley-Ripple et al. (2012) identified as one of

several methods that encouraged new educational leaders to pursue formal leadership, was

what initially caused Mia to consider this role. Similar to other participants, a strong female

mentor whom she admired in leadership gave her this endorsement and helped her to see her

potential. In Mia's case, however, this external support as well as her desired hope for a

change both conspired to her seeking a more formal leadership role. "I needed a change and

looked for a new challenge for me, so that's what pushed me towards admin. . . . I felt like I

needed something more."

Mia is currently completing her second educational leadership assignment. She is in

her first year as principal in a new school, having worked previously as an assistant principal

for three years. In her words, her most important responsibilities include

> a little bit of everything. I'm in an elementary school so . . . basically, you do
>
> everything. Budget, lots of special needs, . . . lots of the dealing with student issues.
>
> . . . I also plan for all of our staff meetings, . . . [I'm] responsible for teacher
>
> professional development, and I attend any leadership meetings that I have centrally.
>
> What else? Lots of parent things that are under my umbrella as well. Parent council is
>
> under my umbrella. Evaluation and supervision [of staff], . . . technology, [and]
>
> facilities.

Once again, in Mia's perception, the educational leadership role is identified as being

complex and at times overwhelming, as has been shown by several researchers (Daresh &

Male, 2000; Earley & Bubb, 2013; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; MacBeath, 2006; Sackney &

Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996). Mia is certainly successful in her role, but the transition was at

times difficult as she was learning to deal with a heightened sense of responsibility and an

overwhelming number of tasks. "Sometimes I feel overwhelmed because I think, "Oh, I have

to do this, this, this, this," but then once I just kind of get to it, then I just get things done."

Mia acknowledged that the stress was consuming her and that she was trying to take steps to better manage her personal well-being, which ultimately has affected her family and her job:

It's hard. . . . I'm not doing the things I should be doing. . . . I was not coping like I should. I know I was stressed and I was, you know, short with my family. . . . I just decided that I can't, I can't live like I am living, like I am right now.

Mia was in her first year as a principal. She did not feel entirely prepared for the role and was having trouble managing the responsibilities. These many examples helped paint a picture of the complex and overwhelming job into which Mia was placed and the difficulty she was having during this initial transition. Daresh and Male (2000) called this period of transition, the "Culture Shock of Transition" (p. 95), where participants in their study stated "Nothing could prepare [them] . . . for the change of perceptions of others or for the intensity of the job" (p. 95). This was clearly the case for Mia as well: even though she had many experiences to help ready her for her new role, she still felt unprepared.

She credited her assistant principal experience as being the most important to her development for educational leadership but also acknowledged the high importance of the teaching experience as well. She drew a link between her world of teaching and that of educational leadership. "I think as a teacher, you have a classroom of students and as a principal or AP; you have a classroom of staff members . . . So I think that there are lots of things you need to take from teaching."

Mia's success as a teacher, she felt, was key to her success as an educational leader. However, it also helped to solidify the original perceptions that others had of her and may have perpetuated her staff's expectations of her in a caring, supportive teacher role rather

than a supervisory one. These perceptions could help or hinder her role as a newly appointed educational leader (Armstrong, 2012; Stevenson, 2006). This lack of preparation could sometimes be compensated for by the amount of learning that took place on the job during the first year (Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011); however, this effort left Mia feeling overwhelmed and isolated at times. Luckily, Mia had several strong support systems, which she found at home, with colleagues, and among friends, that offered encouragement and help.

My encouragement has come from working with amazing people. Being [informally] mentored by two, well, three great principals. That has really helped me along in the admin process and in this profession. They have encouraged and brought me along in my professional growth, and that has kept me going.

The support from her family and her spouse are recurring themes that appear often in Mia's comments. This support is valuable to her in keeping her happy and healthy.

I definitely feel supported [by my spouse], and he's definitely understanding about, you know, long hours that I put in some days. It's nice that he's home now to be able to support me. . . . But . . . I think that it's hard for him to understand the job that we do, because it doesn't end at the end of the day. . . . Even if you're trying not to think about it, you're still thinking about it.

Mia expressed that she had felt she was ready for this position; she thought that she "already knew how to do everything" before moving into educational leadership. This clearly was not so. With support, she managed her new position and survived her first year, but not without some challenges. The bigger question here is, how could leaders assure that new incumbents are adequately prepared? Educational leaders must be given supports to navigate this complex playing field so that they are adequately prepared.

Mia acknowledged that hands-on training is a necessary part of preparation prior to serving in a specific position, but also thought that many skills are simply best learned on the job. "To a certain degree I think they [certain skills] are helpful, but I think it's when you are in the role and learning on the job that you gain [the] most confidence and knowledge."

Mia understood the need for on-growing growth, reflection, and professional development. She pursued her master's degree and also began her doctoral studies. She has actively sought out learning opportunities and carefully considered professional development throughout the year based on her own needs.

> I think you need to identify what you are lacking and then go from there. . . .You have
> that general vision of what you need, but it's hard to think specifically. It's hard to
> base your professional development on, I don't know, a specific topic like
> administering PATs [provincial achievement tests]. . . . As I go along, I can decide.

This type of self-reflection is similar to the self-development model previously discussed. Mia reflects continuously on what she does and does not know, and seeks to find training and professional development as these areas for growth are self-identified. This thoughtful reflection is a trademark of spiritual leadership identified by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) as a way that women lead and was clearly beneficial to Mia as the year progressed. It is obvious that she felt more in control, more confident, and more assured as she gained experience and training. Her ability to reflect and then to learn was key to her success.

Feedback and support from mentors were also important to Mia for her personal growth and development. She looks to others for help in resolving her own dilemmas. She

questioned her own experience with mentorship, but these questions could be related to the type of formal district mentorship she experienced rather than mentorship in general.

> I don't think that you can just assign a person to be a mentor to another person when there is no relationship there, because you don't necessarily feel comfortable with that person. . . . I think that if you develop a true mentorship program, . . . I think that that's where a lot of the learning will occur.

Mia also had suggestions for how to improve this experience, outlining again the basic importance of having a mentor but desiring a more deliberate and established program than the one she participated in.

> I think an effective mentorship program has to be established based on the rapport between two people. . . . And then I think there needs to be some specific guidelines on what that mentorship program looks like and . . . how often those mentors should maybe be in touch with the person that they're mentoring. And some follow-up and maybe at the end some evaluation for how that mentorship went.

Mia expressed several times that she was unhappy with the mentoring model that she experienced in her first year as principal. As previously discussed, she felt alone and overwhelmed during this time. A more successful formal mentorship program may have helped to support her and lessen these feelings of anxiety. Happily, Mia's informal mentorship seemed to have been more effective for her during this last year.

> I will look to the people that I work with and admins that I know very well. I know that there are two or three people that I can always call if I have a question, and they won't judge me for the questions, and so, definitely a good support system.

This support is critical to Mia's success and job satisfaction and also ties into the relational leadership model, which outlines the importance of building key relationships in female educational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). These relationships extend beyond her school site to include her colleagues and peers. These secondary relationships were just as important to her as building the primary ones within her school staff.

Traits in Educational leadership

Mia was able to clearly articulate which skills or traits that an aspiring leader should, in her opinion, have developed.

> I think integrity is really important. Honesty. Strength. I think you need to believe in yourself and what you are doing. I also think you need to have . . . a thick skin. . . . And I think you need to be approachable. . . . I also forgot humility. You have to be humble. You have to be able to accept that you are not always right. And apologize for things. . . . Then I think you will be successful.

Mia suggested the above traits are more likely the people skills or soft skills that would help an educational leader navigate the complicated roles expected in a school. She stated the desire to demonstrate "approachability, humility, and honesty," and although these traits are not specific to a single model of leadership, they are closely linked to dealing with people and building relationships, or relational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). This desire to build a staff, connect with parents and students, and get to know her school surfaced frequently during our conversations. These traits may have stemmed from her teaching experiences, but they are also crucial to her current beliefs about educational leadership within her school site.

Barriers to Success for Women in Educational Leadership

My literature review outlined several barriers to women that currently still exist in various forms within educational leadership. I was interested to see how my Mia felt about these barriers and if she perceived them to be an ongoing problem.

Role conflict. Mia leads a complicated family life. Prior to this year, her husband was away working in Italy for much of the year. She was responsible for her children and was working full-time. She had great support from her extended family, and she had developed systems in her life to attempt to organize and manage conflicting schedules and priorities. This ability to manage both home and work is once again represented by Mia in the balanced leadership model described by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011). Mia is still working to resolve the conflict between work and home, and remains conflicted internally as well. Her own sense of duty causes her to feel torn between working and raising her children.

> I sleep very little. I think when I leave school, I try to leave school, and I try not to focus on what happened during the day or what's going to happen tomorrow. I try to put that part of my day "off" and then for the few hours that I'm actually at home, I try to focus on my family, because I get so little time with them. . . . So I try to make that time really matter, and I'm not always perfect at it and sometimes something happens during the day when I can't stop thinking about it . . . so, I stop and go back and start over.

This sense of "double duty" is with Mia constantly. She wants to give her full attention to both her children and her career and is still trying to balance that successfully.

> I know that there are things that I should be doing for school but I want to be with my family at that time. There's always kind of a little bit of turmoil. . . . But is there

conflict? Yes. Because sometimes I feel guilty that I'm spending too much time at

work, and sometimes I feel guilty that I should be doing more work but I'm actually

spending time with my family.

Although Mia strives to create a balanced leadership model that works for her and her

family, she is has still been unable to resolve this to her satisfaction. Once again, men do not

typically deal with these kinds of conflicts in the same way.

I don't know if I have an answer for how to resolve it. . . . I don't know that I do

resolve it. I think I do the best I can and sometimes I feel guilty and sometimes I feel

guilty more for the family than the work, because I think I work as hard as I possibly

can, and I know that my family sometimes is suffering for that. So, I haven't resolved

it, basically.

This turmoil is certainly not an issue that a typical new male educational leader would

be required to resolve to the same degree. If the responsibilities of home are not in his

domain, the down time at home would be less precious and as a result, he would feel less

conflicted. Liberal feminists would argue that men and women should share these

responsibilities equally. Women should not be required to try to find balance through

management of multiple responsibilities. Currently, in Mia's life, this balance has not been

achieved and could have added to her feelings of anxiety in her first year as an educational

leader.

Gender Discrimination. Mia stated that she has not experienced discrimination in

her workplace or career.

I actually, I don't think I have [experienced discrimination], and if I have I don't

perceive it [discrimination]. So it totally didn't affect me at all. . . . I think sometimes

we look for things, when something is important to us, or you know, it is part of who

we are. I think that colours our vision, and my perception of the world isn't based on

gender, so I don't think that even if it has happened to me, it wasn't about that.

Once again, the bulk of Mia's career has evolved in the elementary school setting.

This could in part explain the lack of discriminatory experience on her part. The schools she

has been a part of were predominantly one gender—female—and this would eliminate

gender conflict or differences.

Gendered traits. With regards to gendered traits, however, Mia believed that they

are assigned to both men and women. For women, these traits include such things as a

nurturing nature used to build the success of others. "I think that nurturing and wanting to see

people succeed is a trait that many women have as a core characteristic that's really

important." This reference to the success of others is a key shift in leadership ideology in that

educational leaders have been moving away from the hierarchy of vertical power and towards

a more horizontal, shared power within organizations. Women in particular feel success

when others are successful, and this is demonstrated through relational leadership (Grogan &

Shakeshaft, 2011).

Being nurturing is positive in Mia's point of view, but she also highlighted that

gendered traits are not always positive. Sometimes these traits hinder women rather than help

them.

I think we [women] may tend to take things more to heart than men. Maybe we

reflect on them more, . . . and sometimes over analyze it and think, "Did I make the

right decision?" . . . The same characteristic that makes us great sometimes can also

hinder us.

The way that staff interacted with different leaders also affected Mia's interpretation of her role and was based on gender. She elaborated at great length on how she viewed differences in perceptions between male and female leaders.

I think that it's easier for a staff to take direction from a male administrator and maybe there is less challenge towards that administrator since he's a man.I think that as women we have to work hard to sell what we are doing and ourselves, so that we are coming across as approachable, as being there to help and support.

I think sometimes . . . that there's different expectations from the female administrator–leader than from the male administrator–leader. And I think there's also a different view from the parent community as well. . . . Sometimes I think that maybe people don't question or don't challenge male administrators as much as they would female administrators.

Mia has identified that schools are gendered environments, which contradicts her belief that she has not experienced discrimination within her profession. Women and men in educational settings perpetuate different gender expectations through behaviours and responses. Even done subconsciously, discrimination towards one gender or the other is present in people's everyday interactions, conversations, and responses to one another. Staff, parents, and even students are influenced by these early ideas of power structure that men exhibit over women, and each of these school community members respond accordingly. Although Mia acknowledged differences between men and women, she wondered if this was societal or personal bias.

Sometimes, I'm not necessarily sure if it's their characteristics that allow them [men] to be successful, or if it's just like a societal kind of bias that allows them to be more successful. I think if a man says something, it's taken in a different way.

These biases are then perpetuated in political domains such as education systems that are based in a culture of socialization, history, and hierarchical power systems. These cycles of belief and practice are difficult to change, especially when they are perpetuated through socialization. Why is Mia resistant to the obvious gender issues that she is confronted with and cannot acknowledge them as present? This has become the accepted norm for her and yet feminists would argue that men should not be more successful than women, neither should their words be given more emphasis than those of women. These issues are prevalent and yet ignored. Why?

Socialization. Many of the points of view that influence these stereotypes, gendered roles, and expectations are developed in society and are present in how people are raised to perceive other genders around them. Mia's own experience certainly helped define who she is and how she relates to both men and women.

I do come from a semi-immigrant family, so you would think that male–female roles were very defined, but they weren't. . . . Well, if they [males] can do that, then I definitely can do that, too. . . . But then at the same time, I think that behaviour expectations were different.

Even though Mia was socialized into her female role, and her expected behaviours were different from those of her brothers, she also felt supported in anything she chose to pursue. This self-confidence helped her build a strong self-concept, which she claimed is important for women in male-dominated fields such as educational leadership. Mia

underlined this as being key to success for women; she perceived self-confidence to be a major difference in how men and women interact with each other in their gendered roles. Once again, this is evidenced by her admiration for strong, self-confident female role models.

> I feel that most of them [men] are confident in themselves. I don't know if they are efficient and effective in their schools. It's hard to say when you are not in the building, but I do get a sense from most of them . . . [of] this confidence that may be lacking in female admins.

This desire to categorize men and women also perpetuates Mia's beliefs about men and women and how they lead. It creates gendered categories of behaviour that may perpetuate her socialization. It may add to the feelings that Mia expressed in that she still occasionally feels marginalized in the company of a large, mixed-gender group. She questioned whether these feelings are based on gender or rather on her lack of experience in her current role.

> Although some people are just naturally self-confident, or arrogant, it can be intimidating, for sure, especially when we are in a large group. Even if you have a really good idea, you don't necessarily want to say it because, you know, being the new person, do I really have the experience to talk about anything?

Mia questioned how others perceive men and women in educational leadership and shared her own perceptions. She reiterated that the female skill of organization makes women strong but noted that this skill, in her opinion, is often lacking in men and yet they are still successful.

> Sometimes they [men] are seen as less organized than women. Again, I saw that in the male leaders that I have worked with. They didn't focus on details as much, so

that might hinder or impede them unless they are working with a strong AP that can keep them organized. I definitely think they do have an advantage over females, in just the way they are seen and just because that's the way society is. . . . I think there is still some work to do in gender equality.

Mia was not the only participant to comment on a woman's ability to be organized and get things done. In fact, part of this ability is the premise for balanced leadership. It is interesting to note, however, that being organized, working hard, and balancing multiple tasks fall into the realm of managerial leadership, typically associated with a male-dominated power hierarchy within educational leadership. Recent studies have indicated that successful educational leadership requires the "human touch" and the knowledge and implementation of theories of human interaction (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). At the same time, the ability to manage a school site with all of its complexities is also required for the success of a school (Onorato, 2013). Balanced leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) could be more than just balancing work and home. Attention to detail, handling multiple tasks, and prioritizing, are also skills that were traditionally developed in female roles in the home which have successfully transferred to success in educational leadership.

Ways in Which Women Lead

In spite of the work–life balance and other challenges that Mia has encountered in her first year as principal, she is actively seeking to improve and move herself forward. She has spent much energy building relationships in her school and has carefully defined where she thinks her priorities should be. She is building her own vision of leadership and how she plays a role in moving her school ahead. This vision is partly based in relational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

I really take time to get to know staff; you know, it could be just informal

conversations. . . . If I'm staying positive and calm, then I think that kind of just

spreads around. . . . And then with the parent community, trying to be welcoming, . . .

building on what's positive in the school.

A great deal of Mia's self-satisfaction comes from her belief that she could influence

and create the school community that she envisions, and this plays out in the development of

leadership for social justice (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). She believes strongly in what she

is doing. She looks to improve her school site, her school program, and the experience for her

students. This belief is also tempered by her understanding that she is critical to bringing staff

together in a common goal for the school. Ultimately, the students and staff in her school

community keep her focused when things get tough. She gains strength from the importance

of her role and the large circle of influence that she has created.

I feel like I have a responsibility to my students and especially to my staff. I feel that I

have to make sure that they are working in a place that's positive, and that they feel

supported. Even when I am having a bad day or [dealing with] a family that is really

difficult, I keep thinking, "I need to do this because this is what is right and this is

what is going to help teachers and students."

Mia's stories reflect the conflicts she has experienced in this first year as principal.

She continues to grapple with her role and her attempts to create balance in her personal life

and in her life as an educational leader. Her experiences continue to demonstrate that

ongoing barriers exist for women in the realm of educational leadership in a variety of areas.

In Chapter 7, I dissect these experiences in greater detail. I begin with a review of the

research project and the process for the research, and then move to a more detailed

examination and interpretation of these emerging themes.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This study sought to explore three newly appointed female educational leaders' experiences through their stories, reflections, and conversations over a school year. In Chapter 7, I tie these stories together through analysis, interpretation, and review of the literature, identifying key themes. With the use of thematic analysis, I gathered the data into themes that emerged through the interview process and identified how these themes related to the literature. I uncovered some of the shared thoughts that have emerged over the course of this past year with my participants.

The original question that inspired this project was, "How do female educational leaders experience educational leadership?" In order to help frame my work, I also developed a number of secondary questions.

- Why did these women choose educational leadership and how did they experience the transition into this realm?

- How did these women prepare for the role of educational leader?

- How did these women experience educational leadership from a gendered perspective?

- How did these women overcoming the barriers that impede their success in educational leadership?

- How did their experiences within educational leadership influence their practice?

As explained in Chapter 1, I interviewed three women over the course of eight months in order to explore their experiences within educational leadership. Using interpretive thematic analysis, I analyzed and interpreted the data. In order to focus on and elaborate upon

these themes, I turned to Seidman (2006) who outlined questions that I employed to assist in the interpretation of the data.

- What connective themes are there among the experiences of the participants interviewed?

- How do I understand and explain these connections?

- What do I understand now that I did not understand before the interviews?

- What surprises have there been?

- What confirms previous instincts?

- How have the interviews been consistent with the literature? How inconsistent? How have they gone beyond? (pp. 128–129)

With the connective themes identified, I now turn to my understanding of and explanation for these connections and begin to tie them in with existing literature.

Coming to Educational Leadership

The women I interviewed each outlined a variety of reasons for moving into educational leadership. Farley-Ripple et al. (2012) stated that this is typical: "While some decisions are self-initiated, most decisions are influenced in part or entirely by other actors in the system. . . . We find a number of 'pushes' and 'pulls' that can inform efforts to recruit and retain school leaders" (p. 789). Some decisions are self-initiated, and others are the result of other processes and external influences. For my participants the reasons varied. The confidence that other colleagues expressed in Jenny's abilities convinced her that she would be a capable educational leader. Kate was looking for a new experience. Mia sought out a new challenge but was also encouraged by others. All of them referred to the importance they placed on receiving encouragement by others to pursue this challenge or change. They also

all referred to the importance of strong female role models in their lives. Having the support

of others and strong females to look up to appeared, for these women, to be key to

encouraging their decision to move into educational leadership. Given the need for increased

numbers of female educational leaders, especially in junior high, senior high, and district

level positions, it was critical to identify these needs. Offering support to aspiring female

leaders will be key to continuing to build capacity in future years.

      As the participants in this study moved into more formal educational leadership

experiences, they realized the scope of tasks and responsibilities they faced in the workplace.

Mia expressed her anxiety around the responsibility that she felt in her new role as principal.

Kate understood that many tasks fell to her when required. Jenny, while confident, was

"expect[ing] that she will make mistakes." All participants expressed both nervousness and

excitement in their new roles. "Just as a person entering a new country must learn a new

language and a different set of ways of doing things, beginning principals must learn how to

behave and how to get things done in a new organization" (Sackney & Walker, 2006, p. 344),

and this transition can be tricky to navigate.

      Support for navigation of this "Culture Shock of Transition" (Daresh & Male, 2000, p.

95) can come in many forms, one of which is mentorship, both formal and informal. Support

can also come from family, colleagues, and other educational leaders. Mia, Jenny, and Kate

were grateful for the support that their families, friends, and colleagues provided to them.

They have each built of a variety of support systems to help cope with these challenges in

different ways. The key commonalities were that the support was required, sought out, and

established. I found Jenny's thoughts around the importance of the female collective as a

support to be most intriguing. She discussed the importance of women working together and

supporting one another and how she believed that, historically, this has been the strength of women. Support from others was crucial to enable these female educational leaders, all mothers with children, to balance the multiple demands of a leadership position with home and family responsibilities.

Another theme that emerged was the requirement for preparation, training, and skills development. These women all shared some common experiences prior to moving into educational leadership. Each participant experienced successful leadership in her role as a classroom teacher before considering a career in educational leadership. Both Kate and Mia had the opportunity to work as assistant principals prior to moving into a principal role. Both Kate and Mia credited their experience as an assistant principal in allowing them to prepare for a more responsible position as principal. Jenny credited her current assistant principal role for allowing her to have a leadership experience that she might have otherwise never considered.

A variety of models for training and preparation for roles in educational leadership were identified in the literature. This training allowed new candidates to experience a number of positive benefits and an apparently high level of role preparation in administration (Ely et al., 2010; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013; Simkins et al., 2009). Even though the format and delivery of the programs varied, their necessity was clear (A. Walker & Hallinger, 2013). Teaching experience, assistant principal opportunities, work shadowing, formal university training, and district level programs all aimed at preparing candidates adequately for new roles. The participants in my study experienced all of these in various forms. All three women valued their learning opportunities; however, all reiterated that in spite of these experiences, there were still times when they felt unprepared for the many duties that they

were required to fulfill. This point was also supported in the literature (Browne, 2010; Daresh & Male, 2000; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; Kwan, 2009; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Sackney & Walker, 2006; K. Walker et al., 2003; H. Williams & Szal, 2011). Specific to these women was the emphasis that they each placed on their experiences as women as being critical to their current success in educational leadership. The balanced leadership model outlined by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) was present in each of the three participants' experiences.

Both the literature and my study participants confirmed that preparation and support for educational leaders was key to their ongoing success (Bhindi et al., 2009; Eller, 2010; T. R. Williams, 2003). A key to strong practice for women included building up a network of friends, colleagues, and leaders that could be approached when needed. These relationships were critical to the work that these female educational leaders were completing, and without this support, there was an even greater possibility of anxiety and stress.

Educational leaders' stress and anxiety comes from an increasingly complex and, at times, overwhelming job (Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley & Bubb, 2013; Farmer, 2010; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; MacBeath, 2006; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996). It is difficult to elaborate on all of the tasks that an educational leader currently fulfills, but it is clear that these tasks are many and varied. Onorato (2013) stated:

> The following are just some duties of a school principal's leadership responsibilities with respect to the functionality of the school:
>
> - Identifying a school's clear mission and goals
>
> - Maintaining relationships with teachers and staff
>
> - Managing classroom practices of teachers
>
> - Coordinating the curriculum and instruction

- Ensuring the students' opportunity to learn and perform in accordance with standards. (p. 35)

Mia, Kate, and Jenny all attempted to outline the complicated duties that were assigned to them daily, but clearly their roles were never static and were constantly evolving. Kate attributed some of her success in her role to female qualities, claiming that her ability to manage her many responsibilities came from her experience as a woman—in particular a mother, fulfilling multiple demands at home. With this preparation, she was able to "juggle and manage everything" that faced her as an educational leader. Jenny suggested that a mother's requirement to be organized at home allows for her success in educational leadership, where she is required to be organized to succeed. Whether it is disciplining a student, balancing a budget, organizing staff professional development, or mediating a parent concern, it was clear that the job is not an easy one, and both formal and informal preparation are important contributors to success. Multiple experiences, training, preparation, and ongoing support are required for educational leaders to succeed and, in particular, for female educational leaders who are also juggling other demands outside of the workplace.

Another commonality found in the experiences of Kate, Jenny, and Mia was found in how they viewed the mentorship they received. These commonalities could be explained by the fact that they all worked within the same school system and that the perceived weaknesses in their experiences were systemic rather than procedural. However, all three participants agreed that improvements to the existing formal mentorship program that they experienced were necessary in order to successfully support them in their transitions to new positions. Training for the mentor, structured outcomes and expectations for the mentorship,

and evaluation after the experience are suggestions the study participants made in order to

improve current practice.

Serving as a mentor is no easy task. In fact, Ely et al. (2010) suggested that

requisite coaching competencies include communication skills, analytical skills,

assessment and feedback skills, planning skills, goal setting skills, organization skills,

creativity and resourcefulness, ability to motivate and encourage, ability to challenge

and confront others, results-orientation and accountability, integrity, empathy, caring,

[and being] personable, approachable, flexible, empowering, and trustworthy. (p.

587)

Some of these skills may be innate, but others will need to be taught and developed

through systematic and clear processes, as suggested by my study participants. Clear

expectations need to be developed, and a post-mentorship evaluation process needs to be

implemented. The relationship between the mentor and the mentee is also extremely

important. As previously outlined by Kate and Mia, the mentor and mentee's personalities

and styles should be compatible so participants feel comfortable with each other.

Approachability, availability, and transparency have also been cited as issues in some

mentorship experiences (S. Scott, 2014) and were reiterated by my participants in various

forms. Although not directly stated by my participants, from a female perspective, it would

also be beneficial for women to be mentored by strong, successful female role models. As

previously stated, all three participants highlighted their admiration for strong women. Being

mentored by such people would surely increase their own self-confidence.

In different ways, all study participants expressed that informal relationships with

other administrators, colleagues, and central office staff were necessary for them to

experience success. This relates in part to what Crow (2006) called *traditional socialization* and focuses most importantly on the aspect of organizational socialization whereby new educational leaders "essentially make sense of their roles by themselves or by using informal feedback from teachers, students, parents, and other administrators" (p. 312). These other leadership relationships were important to my participants as the relationships allowed them to seek advice around specific issues or to share experiences in a nonthreatening way. They needed to have a non-evaluative relationship with another colleague who could, in essence, understand their point of view and offer strategies to deal with shared experiences. As both Kate and Mia stated in their interviews, even though their husbands were supportive of their work, they often did not yet understand the "finesse" (Kate) of the position, and therefore when Mia "just want[s] him to listen," there can be some conflict. An additional nonevaluative work relationship would be crucial to moving forward. A female relationship of this type would be most beneficial in supporting female educational leaders.

Traits in Educational Leadership

All of the participants were eager to define what traits they felt educational leaders should develop. This idea was the most complex to organize because the ideas, thoughts, and perceptions of each participant varied so greatly. The uniting factor in all of these conversations was that certain skills were important determinants of success. This categorization can be complicated, in part, because terminology varies widely and also because of the influx of various leadership skills theories and "kitsch management texts" (English, 2008, p. 160) that abound around these ideas (e.g. Covey, 1990; Whitaker, 2012). In addition, the idea of the "Great Man" that possesses specific, innate and identifiable traits has dwindled in recent research exactly because of the difficulty associated with determining

which specific traits allow for success (Taylor, 1994). However, within this study, when asked, each participant managed to identify what she felt to be key traits necessary for her success. These included humour, integrity, and dignity (from Jenny); positive, outgoing, and flexible (from Kate); and honesty, strength, and humility (from Mia). While varied, these all represent ethics, values, and soft skills. The importance of this theme lies in the participants identifying ethical and moral traits as being necessary to their success. Another clear connector between the different traits was that all of these skills would be used in building relationships and this points to the exploration of the positive use of power previously discussed in postmodern feminism. These traits were important to these women because they all informally identified the need for relational leadership at their school sites; building relationships were, to them, key to their success (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Their use of the positive influence of power through relationships supports the postmodern feminist understanding of how power can be used successfully within educational leadership for these women.

The previous literature review outlined leadership models, such as collaborative, distributed, instructional, servant, and transformational, but the bottom line is that leadership style is different for each leader, developed through personal reflection and contemplation and influenced by the community in which the leader practices. These participants did manifest certain ways of leading that suggested patterns of success for female educational leaders. These ways of leading were similar to female ways of leading as outlined by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011); these are clarified at the end of this chapter. Certainly, it is impossible for one person to have all possible traits and to lead in all ways. However, what was clearly established was that reflecting on *how* one leads is necessary. Each study

participant demonstrated a great ability to reflect, identify, and develop skills. They could

each verbalize what they wanted their practice to represent, as evidenced by their comments

around what they believed were necessary and fundamental skills, how they spoke about

other practitioners, and which experiences they chose to relate. This ability to visualize and

vocalize who and what they would like to represent in their practice is perhaps the most

important piece of the personal growth of a leader. Grant and Zeichner (1984) supported this

viewpoint: Time spent in reflection of practice is valuable and necessary.

One of the reasons behind such a variety of responses around leadership traits could

be that each educational leader comes to the position with individual experiences, points of

view, and ideas, as was obvious with Kate, Mia, and Jenny. All participants came from a

white, middle-class, privileged background. The privilege lay in their formative experiences,

access to education, stable home lives and other socio-economic factors that determine

advantage for a small portion of the world population. They were also part of an educational

system that is based in the same paradigm. However, even though these paradigms are

similar, other experiences were different for each participant. As they have grown and

developed as educational leaders, through reflection and experimentation, these women

demonstrated that they learned what worked for them and what did not. These educational

leaders also began to see the need for identifying and defining their own personal

philosophies and values. For these women, a part of this identification took the form of

vocalizing required successful traits. Part of this definition also included allusion to reasons

for being in educational leadership. Farmer (2010) suggested that a focus on a personal

mission statement is just one of multiple coping strategies that can help develop resiliency in

educational leadership. This identification of what is ethically and morally important is

another piece of a leader's personal growth and development, and these thoughts surfaced throughout the experiences of each participant. Each woman thought, questioned, and reflected on what was important to her in current practice and also previous practice with other educational leaders.

The study participants all discussed the importance of their own professional development and how their reflections helped to shape their learning goals and plans. In reference once again to the complexity of educational leadership positions, it was challenging to narrow the focus of required professional development, and this theme emerged during all conversations, with Jenny stating, "How do I know what I don't know?" Daresh (1986) conducted a study wherein "the concerns of beginning principals can be viewed in three distinct areas: These are (a) problems with role clarification, (b) limitations on technical expertise, and (c) difficulties with socialization to the profession the system" (p. 169).

With this narrowing focus, it becomes clear that leaders must have the freedom to choose what professional development they require based on their own evaluation of their needs. Choices around skills (such as developing a budget or supervising and evaluating staff) or socialization (team building and knowing who to call for what issue) were outlined as concerns for all these women, but in different areas. Jenny expressed her frustration at not knowing who, in central administration, was responsible for what or how to contact that person. Mia was questioning her skills around budget creation and was also thankful for the opportunity to complete workshops in staff evaluation. Kate built her professional development around the socialization in a junior high school, a new area of practice for her that she determined she needed to better understand. Clearly, each study participant was able

to identify and pursue topics of interest and need. This approach was key to effective

professional growth and continued success in practice.

Jenny, the least experienced of the three participants, was still trying to grasp social

understanding at a basic level within the district, while both Mia and Kate, having more

experience, required specific understanding around narrower aspects of their jobs. Looking at

specific requirements of educational leaders within their career paths would be an interesting

area of study, but there was the appearance of an evolution of growth. It would be interesting

to expand upon these ideas more fully, as this information could also help effectively form

professional development programs for educational leaders based upon their experience,

needs, and understanding. The most important part of this theme is that educational leaders

must have the choice of professional development in order to meet their individual learning

goals. From a female point of view, women might clearly request specific requirements for

professional development. It would be important to develop an open, honest, and transparent

educational culture so that these kinds of needs could be discussed openly, and the training,

information, or required skills could be presented as needed to women—and men—in order

to specifically support their individual and unique learning needs.

Barriers to Success for Women

Contemplating feminist ideologies, allowed many themes to emerge around the

experiences of these women leaders within the previously reviewed gendered organization of

education. Below, I examined these common threads. Women continue to be discriminated

against in the field of educational leadership and lived professional lives that contained

perceived inequities. My literature review identified several barriers to success for women

that continue to exist today. These barriers were discussed with study participants and arose

as themes around role conflict, discrimination, gendered traits, and socialization.

Role conflict. A prevalent theme emerged around the conflict that women experience

in relation to their responsibilities in the home as caregivers coupled with the responsibilities

they are required to take on in the workplace (Coleman, 2012; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008;

Oplatka & Tamir, 2009; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). This conflict plays out because, for the

most part, stereotypical gender roles support women as caregivers and men as providers.

Each of the participants had dealt with this role conflict in varying degrees thus far in

her career; each had determined her own solutions. It was also interesting to note that this

issue was still prevalent notwithstanding the amount of time that has passed since feminist

movements and discussions around equality began.

What made these choices specific to the situation of women in general is the fact that

the participants were aware of and acknowledged that they have had to create their own

balance within their home lives and work lives. Jenny made the decision to delay pursuit of a

career because of family obligations. She chose to raise her children first and then continued

her studies and career. Kate organized her work responsibilities around her husband's work

schedule and made her life fit his and her children's needs. Mia is still struggling to find the

resolution to these issues. Each participant felt to some degree the conflict between work and

home.

Through the lens of a liberal feminist perspective, decisions around work and home

should be equally shared. From a postmodern perspective, roles of men and women must not

be essentialized but rather fluid and evolved to allow for equal partnership and a sharing of

power. Sacrifices should be equally borne, and both partners in the relationship should

benefit equally from the decisions that are made. In the case of these women, they claimed to have made these choices deliberately, yet they continued to grapple with ways to work around barriers that their male partners do not have to deal with. Mia expressed how frustrated she sometimes felt that she is still working to resolve these conflicting issues. Kate, too, is aware of the traditional roles within her home and is not without some regret that the situation could be different. The persistence of these challenges would undeniably indicate that the battle for equity is ongoing. Feminists too, must remain persistent. These issues of delaying career choice, guilt, and conflict around raising and caring for children, and conflict between work and home roles in pursuit of a career, are not issues that men generally deal with (Bierema, 2016; Loder, 2005).

On the other hand, these women were all proud of the fact that they were developing strategies to manage these multiple demands. They feel empowered by their choices, choices they perceive as being entirely their own. Jenny mentioned several times that the choices she made were hers and hers alone. Kate also stated that her experiences growing up gave her the ability to succeed within her role as educational leader, and that she had managed to find balance with work and home. Mia, while still struggling to find that balance, also believed that her skills as an organized woman give her success in her leadership role.

One way in which women could continue to resolve this barrier around role conflict would be ongoing conversations. Initiating conversations and sharing stories around these issues could offer support and understanding to women who share a common struggle. Vocalizing issues could lead to uncovering solutions or ways to work around the issues. In spite of progress in this area, it is clear that women who are juggling family, children, home, and other obligations have still not been entirely successful in decreasing expectations at

home (Loder, 2005; Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Notwithstanding support from colleagues in the workplace, many successful female educational leaders still continue to struggle to define balance and share the multiple responsibilities they are faced with managing.

Gender Discrimination. Many authors have reported ongoing discriminatory practices within educational leadership (Burkman, 2010; Coleman, 2012; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). This discrimination includes bias, sexism, and/or stereotypical expectations that hinder female appointment or success. The study participants were divided in their experiences around discrimination. Neither Kate nor Mia perceived discrimination to be a problem, and yet both defined schools and their work environments as gendered. However, Jenny has frequently experienced what she perceived as discrimination. Why is there such a difference in experiences and perception? "Silence and unawareness are common themes in relation to gender dynamics and experiences held by women administrators" (Killingsworth, Cabezas, Kensler, & Brooks, 2010, p. 532-533) as it could be easier to be silent than to confront the problem and "may actually reflect a fear of rocking the boat so much that one is dumped out" (Killingsworth, Cabezas, Kensler, & Brooks, 2010, p. 534). While I did not detect "fear" on the part of the participants, both Kate and Mia do possess a wealth of experience in elementary education. Drudy (2008) examined data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and found that in North America, women constituted 84.4% of primary teachers in 2005. The ratios in the primary level were much higher in women than men, while the opposite is true for secondary and post-secondary education (Drudy, 2008); this is where the bulk of Jenny's experience comes from. Could it be simply that the frequency with which one encounters gender-based behaviour determines the frequency of discrimination? Or is it perhaps more systemic?

Where a certain type of discriminatory culture has been established, developed, and perpetuated, does this allow behaviours to manifest themselves in discriminatory practices?

Another question that should be explored lies in the leadership at the school site itself. A large number of researchers have shown that the principal exerts a strong influence at a school site (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Reitzug et al., 2008). If a male leader (or multiple male leaders) is in the leadership position in a school, does his support or modelling of behaviours influence and exert certain "male" expectations with regard to behaviours, roles, and expectations for other males? This acceptance or noncontradiction of certain behaviours could encourage followers and would then, in turn, perpetuate discriminatory practices that could be detrimental to individuals such as Jenny.

Finally, an issue raised by Mia is that of the perception of discrimination. She stated that this point of view was not "on her radar." This raises questions around the perception or true existence of certain behaviours. The discrimination is either present or, perhaps, only exists in the eyes of the perceiver based upon experience and exposure. Have women been so exposed to discrimination that it has become the natural state of being? Are the socialized stereotypes of women creating an ability to overlook behaviors that are discriminatory and unacceptable? These thoughts require further exploration.

Gendered traits. One of the most prevalent issues within educational organizations is the overarching normalized principal identity (Blackmore et al., 2006). As male traits are commonly associated with educational leadership practice, this specific gender-based identity could potentially alienate possible female leaders (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010) and create preconceived notions of who or what the principal should "be." My study participants were

also influenced by the expectations of society and have developed beliefs around what they

or others perceive as male or female traits. Jenny viewed women as being organized and

balked at the term "bossy," which she felt is used too often to describe female leaders. Kate

talked about the strengths and weaknesses of women. She referred to the cliques and gossip

in a women-dominated staff but also argued that women are stronger than men, taking on

hard conversations and dealing with difficult situations as required. Mia also used the word

"organized" to refer to women but suggested that school staff generally accepted male

direction more easily and credited this, in part, to staff interpretation, but also the general

confidence displayed by men as compared to women.

Each woman has different perspectives to explain what she perceives to be

differences between genders. All study participants had varying reflections on the differences

between the genders and attempted to apply their understanding, in some way, to their

position. Differences do exist, and therefore it would be beneficial to try to understand these

differences and work within them. Building understanding would be the best approach to

help alleviate inequality and help make schools the best possible working and learning

environments that they can be. Educational leaders must attempt to work within the gendered

norms by demonstrating alternate solutions to staff, students, and communities and by

working to create equality within all school communities.

Socialization. Phillips and Imhoff (1997) proposed:

underlying all subsequent aspects of women's vocational experiences are the

following formative questions: "Who am I?" "How far can I go?" "What can I, as a

woman, do?" Answers to these questions are generated early in life, well before the

point of choice and implementation. (p. 33)

The answers to these questions are highly influenced by how humans are raised and taught to interact with others. From an early age, parents, siblings, and friends teach individuals as they learn the expectations associated with gender. As Jenny stated, "It is a privilege. . . .We are not even aware of it." These norms are all encompassing and pervasive and help people determine how to interact with one another. Jenny gave the example of how people talk about babies, immediately identifying their gendered roles by referring to the "bouncing baby boys" who were "going to be . . . football player[s]" and then immediately turning to discuss a female baby of the same size who has "delicate fingers" (Jenny). Individuals are constantly bombarded with images, messages, and ideas around how girls and boys should be, act, and live.

Jenny gave additional poignant examples of adult socialization. Her reference to "her exclusion from poker games" and her need to create a similar female experience is one example. She experienced a missing element and responded to her need for similar experiences by creating opportunities for women to meet, talk, and grow together. She also expanded her point of view around male privilege and what I refer to as the "fear factor." The heterogeneous, able-bodied white male is never in the minority (Sensoy & diAngelo, 2012) and has never experienced fear when walking down a street, yet experiences such as these are critical to female understanding.

Kate acknowledged that much of her traditional acceptance of male and female roles came from how she was raised and hence socialized. There were jobs for her and jobs for her dad, and she learned from an early age that this was how it was. Mia, on the other hand, always felt that she was encouraged and raised in the same way as her brothers. Many varying factors could be examined around these three women and their socialization. Family

structures, experiences while growing up, and experiences in the workplace were just a few. Added to these are the multiple and often conflicting images of women presented by media which in turn, can lead to the development of a complex, confusing, and challenging female identity.

The home environment has been closely linked with the formation of a child's gender role self-concepts, values, and career orientation (Sandberg, Ehrhardt, Mellins, Ince, & Meyer-Bahlberg, 1987). This socialization into a specific gendered identity could lead to women lacking confidence or a strong self-concept, an additional barrier to the progression of women in educational leadership. This home environment could also lead to women developing a strong sense of self. This theme emerged as the participants questioned their own self-definition or "the beliefs held by individuals about what they can do, . . . the role of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and other self-perceptions in determining the traditionality of what is chosen" (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997, p. 38). Jenny understood this need for self-confidence as being key to encouraging the awareness of the ongoing vocalization of the plight of women. Kate referred to her feelings of marginalization and Mia, while occasionally unsure about herself, wondered if her lack of confidence was more related to her lack of experience than feelings of inadequacy within gendered stereotypes. Once again, the emergence of these themes support what the literature has demonstrated: Women are still struggling to deal with barriers to success in areas that men do not have to consider. Inequality for men and women is still prevalent.

Looking back to the importance of the role of the family, it is interesting to note that both Jenny and Mia referred to grandmothers or great-great-grandmothers as the people they most admired. They each told stories of strong women who had inspired them with courage,

strength, intelligence, and risk-taking. Kate also reiterated her desire to imitate strong women by emulating their strength and determination. All participants referred several times to the strong female leaders who supported, encouraged, and influenced them as they pursued their careers. The importance of these stories is crucial to understanding these women and how they experienced their world in educational leadership. Through these stories I have gained a deeper understanding of who these women are and who influenced them to become the leaders they are today. These stories are also part of their socialization. These are the legends that were handed down through families that obviously inspire yet today. This is still socialization, but socialization that has worked positively through the images and stories of strong women and has helped to create women who also aspire to be strong.

Stereotypes still exist in the world of education. Jenny summed this up nicely with this example: "So you can have a very decisive woman and the moment she gets teary in a meeting you can say, 'Oh! Women are emotional. They can't be rational.'" Kate and Mia both agreed that stereotypes are ongoing in their schools. Both of these women expressed their concern around what they perceived to be the unhealthy and unbalanced environments that existed in most elementary schools. These schools have far higher ratios of women than men, and therefore, do not have balanced or natural environments. The opposite is true for most high schools. The participants were cognizant of the fact that more balanced ratios of men and women were required, in order to have a balanced perspective on staff. School staff composed of a majority of women (elementary) or of men (secondary) are neither healthy nor reflective of the community. Some research has suggested that gender makes no difference to the success of the students (Drudy, 2008). However, in a world that is growing increasingly diverse, it is imperative to adequately represent and understand the needs of the student

population through a more diverse representation of community. Without diversity,

socialized norms become accepted and perpetuated. This needs to change.

Ways in Which Women Lead

What is educational leadership? It means something different to each study

participant. Each woman had a different way of living and describing her experiences within

this field. Each woman also faced varying kinds of barriers in varying degrees. Many of these

are barriers that male educational leaders do not have to deal with. This makes an already

complex role even more challenging. Role conflict, including families, childcare and

domestic responsibilities, discrimination, gendered traits, and stereotypes in the workplace all

add to the challenges of being an educational leader. How would educational leadership be

different for women if these barriers did not exist?

Study participants, each in their own way, have developed ways to help them make

sense of how to succeed in educational leadership. Kate focused on her students. Mia was

thinking of her staff and how to bring everyone together. Jenny was focusing on "doing the

right thing." Even though each participant had developed her own model of leadership,

similar models exist for many other women as well, as found through research by Grogan

and Shakeshaft (2011). Balanced leadership was prevalent in the experiences of these women,

as was relational leadership and leadership for learning. Both Kate and Jenny also related the

importance of leadership for social justice, making a difference in the lives of their students

as they practiced leadership. Mia and Kate used spiritual leadership to reflect on their

practice and attempted to make sense of the multiple demands that face them every day.

These multiple methods of leadership could also be combined under the model of contingent

leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014), which states that a variety of different leadership models

are required in order to be effective. Instinctively, this is what these women have discovered. Through conversation, self-reflection, and informal female relationships with other female educational leaders, they have developed and implemented practice that makes sense and is efficacious for each of them.

Managerial leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014) is also important to the success of a school site. These women all defined the importance of being organized and detail oriented, and both Jenny and Mia outlined lack of decisiveness and procrastination as being weaknesses that they perceived in male colleagues. Recent theory around leadership has shunned the use of the term *manager* as being something negative (Bush & Glover, 2014), but it is nonetheless an important piece that is necessary to the smooth running of a school. According to Bush and Glover (2014) managerial leadership is essential to the success of schools when used in conjunction with values-based approaches. This addition of values somehow shifts the definition of manager from the historical male model of "boss" to value-defined supervisor or facilitator. These women have clearly identified their values within the discipline through identification of key traits. They have used value-laden approaches combined with "managerialism" within their practice. These women also identified the ability to be organized, strong, and decisive as strengths perceived in other strong female role models and leaders. A definite blend of skills and models is required to run a school, and so managerial skills should not be dismissed as unimportant. Strong leaders must manage (within this newer definition of management) as well as lead. Many different approaches must be combined in order to successfully lead in education.

These women were proud of their resiliency as they dealt individually with multiple demands, perspectives, and issues. In spite of ongoing barriers to their success, they are

successful. A deeper understanding of their thoughts and reflections and their expectations within the world of educational leadership has been developed through the sharing of these experiences. How they face barriers and resolve issues around these barriers is better understood. This study provided encouragement to other women by diminishing their isolation and creating an acceptable space for ongoing conversations and stories, for deeper understanding, and for personal reflection and growth.

The significance of this research also lies in the fact that these issues continue to exist. The literature review clearly demonstrated ongoing issues around equality for women, and in most instances, the stories that these women shared corroborated these findings. One would not expect this to be the case; this study is therefore timely in its revelation that this is, in fact, so.

Summary

Generalization is not possible within a study group of three participants, but it is nonetheless clear that many commonalities exist for these three women. Given the fact that these women work in the same school district, live in relatively close proximity, and share many common experiences with regards to educational formation, preparation, and transition, commonalities would be expected. These women also shared privilege. The fact that they were all white, middle-class women who had access to education and opportunities also create additional commonalities. Even their chosen field and place of practice was similar in its location and culture. In spite of all of these common bonds, however, what is surprising is that they continue to live their lives in ways that are in some ways hindered and controlled by their gender.

Sifting through the conversations and stories highlighted these common bonds, and although these experiences may not be generally applicable, they do nonetheless contain common pertinent elements. The most startling commonality lies in the participants' perception of the ongoing barriers they face in their chosen profession. Chapter 8 delves more deeply into these commonalities and focuses on recommendations for future practice and research while highlighting the most prevalent findings.

Chapter 8: Tying It All Together

In this final chapter, I revisit my original, overarching question, as well as the questions that were secondary to my exploration. I reflect on my own journey as a researcher. I outline key findings from the research, and, finally, I review implications for theory, policy, and practice. The original questions that guided this research were as follows:

- How do female educational leaders experience educational leadership

  - Why did these women choose educational leadership and how did they experience the transition into this realm?

  - How did these women prepare for the role of educational leader?

  - How did these women experience educational leadership from a gendered perspective?

  - How did these women overcome the barriers that impede their success in educational leadership?

  - How did their experiences within educational leadership influence their practice?

The demand for school leaders continues to grow (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; T. R. Williams, 2003). With an ongoing need for educational leaders, school districts have the opportunity to continue to encourage women to seek out educational leadership opportunities and have the responsibility to support them through preparation, training, and mentorship to maximize their prospects for success. Concurrent with these emerging opportunities, women continue to face numerous challenges tied to ongoing gender issues. My research sought to uncover and interpret women's experiences in educational leadership. With the research data in hand, I explore what executive school district leadership can do to understand and support female educational leaders.

Reflections on Myself as the Researcher

Clearly, my interest in this research was personal. This research was undertaken, in part, because of my desire to understand my own experiences as a female educational leader through the sharing of those experiences with other women in the profession. Reflecting on my own professional journey helped to build rapport with my participants through shared experience. As a practicing female educational leader for the past 16 years, I continue to observe and experience challenges unique to my gender. This research was part academic and part self-discovery as I strove to understand educational systems and inherent gender bias; to find ways to resolve these conflicts; to continue to create a satisfactory, fulfilling place for myself; and, perhaps, to stimulate further discussion around this important topic. Listening to other women helped me to do this.

As the researcher in this process, I unavoidably brought my own experiences to the table and to the analysis. However, I was careful to always approach study participants with an open mind and an open heart (Ellis, 1998) seeking to understand and create space for further conversation and reflection, learning, and growth. Open-mindedness was and is critical to my own reflection. As I listened to my participants, I realized that I shared many commonalities with them. Although my own career path was challenged by the conflict I felt between having children, managing responsibilities at home, and pursuing post-secondary studies, I also made a decision to try to balance this as best I could. In my own experience, I felt I was neither adequately prepared nor supported in my first leadership role. I was an educational leader who was "simply placed in a building and left to discover how to lead, satisfy the needs of the community, and support [my] teachers and students" (Eller, 2010, p. 957). Prior to being offered a principal role, I was a highly successful classroom teacher

pursuing a Master of Educational Leadership. I had completed the district training program for educational leaders, and completed an assistant principal assignment, but I still did not feel prepared. When I began my career in educational leadership, I did not have any connections, and there was no established mentorship program. My supervising administrator lacked the fundamental skills required to help support me. I had worked with male supervisors always and their ways of leading left me questioning my own practice. How could they be judged competent when they were indecisive, unavailable and lacking vision or work ethic. Even as I worked as a successful principal, I was faced criticism of being too emotional by supervisors or presenting as too passionate in my position. These personal reflections helped shape the conversations I had with my study participants.

I also continue to seek to define my personal practice through reflection and in striving for constant growth and improvement. Leading with dignity, integrity, trust, honesty, kindness, and love are all themes that I find necessary in my practice as an educational leader and that I intentionally and deliberately attempt to incorporate in my practice daily. I have come to the realization that leading is not about power. Instead, I use my abilities to create relationships to build success in others. I am aware of the power in my position, but chose to equalize this power and use it to support and create collaboration and trust. I choose to focus on creating a school environment that is centered on strong instructional practices. I spend a great deal of time reflecting and building a spiritual awareness around my work. Finally, I keep the students and staff at the forefront of what I do—striving to make their educational experience the best it can be in every aspect. I lead in many ways that other women also choose to lead. I have discovered the importance of these qualities through trial and error and many years of practice and reflection.

Although I do not feel that I have experienced gender discrimination, or perhaps more specifically I have not personally identified discriminatory practices directed at me, I can still lack self-confidence when dealing with large groups of men or aggressive men, in spite of the fact that I have a strong self-concept and am otherwise extremely confident. Part of this could be because I have spent the bulk of my career in female-dominated elementary school environments, and so I can sometimes feel intimidated by groups that are dominated by men. These feelings were evident in my recent experience in a high school setting where I was responsible for running department meetings, staff meetings, and committee meetings dominated by men. I also can still feel intimidated by an angry, demanding male parent arriving in my office with a loud voice and threatening manner. My male colleagues may have felt a similar reaction, but I would argue that they share an equal relationship of power in that they are both male. In such an instance, the white, heterosexual, middle-class father holds the dominant power of position over me (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012), as socially defined, and in some cases this power is used against me—whether consciously or subconsciously. All of these experiences were in my reflections as I continued with this research.

Finally, I also admire and respect strong female role models such as my mother and my grandmother—strong, successful women. I am deeply in awe of my great-great-grandmother, also a hero of mine, who arrived by ship to Canada with no husband and 16 children in tow in order to build a new life for herself and her family through homesteading. These are the kinds of women I keep in my mind as I build my self-concept. I think about their influence, as Mia, Jenny, and Kate most certainly think about the women who have

influenced them. I think about their sacrifices, their risks, their challenges, and then one angry male parent does not seem so bad, does it?

These are the type of things I focus on when I find that the job is becoming overwhelming. I focus on my students, my staff, and my own values. I remind myself that I base my practice on trust, understanding, love, fairness, compassion, respect, honesty, and dependability. I have sought to define these values, and they have helped me shape what I believe in. Even when my position is clouded with issues around genders and inequality, I still attempt to focus on the positive and develop my resiliency.

I am also proud of the fact that I am competent. I work hard. I manage the multiple demands of school and home. I deal with issues quickly and confidently and seek to inspire confidence through deliberate reflective action. I am a good manager, but lead through carefully selected values that I have chosen to define and uphold.

When I began this study, I questioned many practices as being unfair, but I would not have classified myself as a feminist. Sometimes that label is so big, so all-encompassing, and so overwhelming that I would not have used it to label myself. I have developed and changed through the growth of this study, however. I am more aware of the ongoing issues around equality for women and understand that they are more overtly present than I had considered. Talking with these participants, hearing their stories, reading the literature, and seeing similarities in my experiences made me realize the scope of the problem is broad.

Reflections on the Journey

When I first embarked on the journey of a doctoral dissertation, I had no idea what it entailed. I was, above all, interested in continuing my learning and this seemed to be the next logical step for me. Having to complete research and writing for classes was foreign to me.

The enormous amount of required reading provided me with considerable new knowledge. There has also been learning around completion of the candidacy proposal, the ethics review, and the entire research process, involving the vast collection and analysis of data that my work represents. In these respects, my quest for learning has certainly been fulfilled.

The writing of this dissertation was one of the most daunting aspects of this process. Sifting through transcripts and sorting the ideas into themes left me contemplating conversations for hours. I woke to my contemplations. I went to sleep with thoughts running around in my head. There was also the choice of what to include, what to exclude, and how to determine what was important. I spent a great deal of time contemplating my findings and the significance of my work. At times overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data, I constantly reflected on the big picture as I completed what seemed like a giant puzzle, always keeping the primary question central to my thoughts: How are these women experiencing educational leadership? As I worked through the numerous pieces I felt a deep, personal satisfaction in my accomplishments, my increased skill in writing, my ability to separate what mattered from what did not, my deeper understanding of ideologies and concepts, my learning.

Throughout this process I have been constantly reflecting. I have reflected on the new knowledge I have acquired; on what I have read, written, and analyzed; and on new ideologies and viewpoints. I have reflected on the experiences of my participants. I have reflected on my own situation, growth, and learning. I have reflected on educational leadership, my district, and my place within this educational community. I am proud of what I have uncovered.

I thoroughly enjoyed interviews as a data collection method and the resulting conversations. If I were to complete this project again, I would employ this method a second

time. It allowed me to develop deep, meaningful relationships with the participants and to interact and respond in ways that would not have been possible with other methods such as surveys or written responses to questions. Even group conversations around similar topics would not yield the same results as individual, ongoing questions and conversations such as these. These conversations have been very valuable to me.

Reconceptualization

The literature considered in Chapter 2 explored unique issues facing female educational leaders. Despite the fact that belonging to a white, middle-class social group in a relatively affluent community arguably privileged this study's participants, they dealt with many of the issues and barriers discussed in the literature. If the privileged women I interviewed faced these issues, what does this mean for other women? Women of diverse race, colour, sexual orientation, social status, or ability would surely face similar issues in the pursuit of roles in educational leadership. District leaders need to explore how all women could be supported and prepared for leadership roles, address and try to influence the numerous barriers they face, and understand how they can be encouraged.

The literature has not clearly established that differential support for women pursuing roles in educational leadership is necessary or perceived as a prerequisite for facilitating increased female participation in educational leadership roles. The conversations I shared with my study participants clearly revealed the necessity of support and understanding for ongoing success; these issues were, nonetheless, poorly documented. In fact, few solutions to these issues have been proposed.

Creating support systems for female educational leaders would benefit everyone. If women have the supports that would lessen their burdens at home and receive understanding

around role conflict, their ability to enter the workplace would be strengthened. Equal

sharing of domestic responsibilities could lessen the demands they perceive at home and at

work, making it easier to enter and remain in high-demand leadership positions. These

support systems could take the form of approved absences involving care of family;

educating colleagues, supervisors, and staff; or even the possibility of higher salaries in order

to compensate for required child care. Information and policy around combatting stereotypes

and discrimination should also be mandatory in order to provide support for female

educational leaders. Creating and acting upon policy that enforces equality in the workplace

around such issues as hiring practices, training, staffing, and supervision would create

supportive environments for both men and women. Finally, creating mentorship programs

that offer support specifically to women and building networks of empathetic female mentors

who could function less as supervisors and more like models and peers would also be

beneficial in creating ongoing supportive work environments for female educational leaders.

Equality is a basic tenet of liberal feminism (Tong, 2014) and equity is the final goal

of postmodern feminism as well (Grogan, 2008). The difficulties lie in the ongoing structures

of society that "favor men and disfavor women in the competitive race for power, prestige,

and money" (Tong, 2014, p. 34) as well as preconceived essentialized notions about

behavioural expectations for both genders which define masculinity as "rational, ambitious

and independent, and feminine [as]. . .emotional, nurturant, and dependent" (Tong, 2014, p.

36). These arguments have received multiple critiques and solutions have not yet been

resolved. "Complete human beings are *both* rational and emotional" (Tong, 2014, p. 39,

emphasis in text). Clearly, in the case of my participants, their success is in reflecting and

adopting multiple different models of leading. These models are based on the participants'

own ways of perceiving, doing, and leading, and although the models may contain similarities to the ways in which other women lead, they have been developed by the participants' own individual experiences, preparation, and development.

Findings

Sifting through these shared stories created many themes within the data. Deep reflection on these themes finally revealed what I present as the findings of this research. I discuss them in depth in this section.

How do female educational leaders experience their role in educational leadership? I asked myself how what I know about the experiences of female educational leaders has been challenged by my work. I have learned that inequality/inequity is ongoing. Women experience discrimination, role conflict, gendered traits, and socialization within educational leadership. I have also learned that in spite of these barriers, and in some cases because of them, women are successful educational leaders. The three women interviewed in this study are competent, knowledgeable, and reflective. They work within the confines of socialization, discrimination, gendered environments, and role conflict, and yet they thrive. They have developed ways of leading that reflect their own ideals, values, and virtues and still maintain the ability to successfully act as managers. These findings have not challenged my knowledge of female experiences within educational leadership, but rather they have supported what I already thought I knew and added to my collective experiences as a woman within educational leadership. Women are needed in education to support leadership for social justice, to encourage the importance of leadership for learning, to build relationships, to collectively create spiritual and ethical spaces in education, and most of all, to continue to

demonstrate to other women that balance in our lives is possible in spite of ongoing societal beliefs.

Why did these women choose educational leadership and how do they experience the transition into this realm? "In terms of administrator characteristics, we found that personal or family relations, a sense of efficacy or challenge, and beliefs about administration were salient when making career decisions" (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012, p. 802). Although this study demonstrated that family relations were important in the decision, the participants in this study chose to pursue educational leadership as a challenge. Each of the participants was also encouraged to do so by a supportive mentor. In the case of all three women, this mentor was an admired female supervisor. They chose educational leadership but were highly influenced by someone they considered to be a mentor who encouraged this path.

Even though the conversations I shared with my participants clearly revealed the necessity of different kinds of mentorship to encourage ongoing success, mentorship programs that specifically target women's issues are nonetheless not well documented. How can this be reconceptualized for women? Multiple different types of preparation and mentorship programs have been developed (Kwan, 2009; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Oleszewski et al., 2011; A. Walker & Kwan, 2009), but the literature does not identify mentorship designed specifically to help women navigate the complex maze of educational leadership. Some work has been done to explore the success of cohort groups within preparation programs (Killingsworth, Cabezas, Kensler, & Brooks, 2010). Perhaps this could be the beginning of further exploration into gender-based groupings to support women educational leader development.

The participants clearly recognized their appreciation for strong women. This theme was recurring throughout the conversations. They also expressed a desire to seek support from other female role models. The fact that the relationship with the mentor was also identified as extremely important suggests that women are looking to support and encourage one another reciprocally. Perhaps looking at ways to create these strong female relationships could be one area to begin within mentorship programs. Identifying and acknowledging the existing issues for women by women would also help to create a collective where women could build ideas, solutions, and resulting change together—effectively mentoring, supporting, and encouraging one another. Perhaps this is more than just mentorship: Perhaps, in the female collective. This is also friendship, camaraderie, and enjoyment of the other. It could also represent a way to identify ongoing common issues and, through discussion, verbalize solutions or responses to these issues, providing women with the opportunities required for these kinds of conversations and opportunities.

How did these women prepare for the role of educational leader? Preparation for the role of educational leader is key to success in this position (Eller, 2010; Kwan, 2009). Many educational leaders, however, have felt unprepared for the complexity and responsibility of the role (Browne, 2010; Daresh & Male, 2000; Kwan, 2009; Sackney & Walker, 2006; K. Walker et al., 2003; H. Williams & Szal, 2011). Part of the reason for this lack of preparedness could be explained by the gap in standardization of delivery in training programs (Kwan, 2009; Oleszewski et al., 2011; A. Walker & Kwan, 2009). The participants that I interviewed each entered the position with a variety of prior experiences, including teaching and graduate studies. These women had served in various capacities in leadership in their careers prior to entering formal educational leadership; however, the experiences they

shared around their new appointments clearly demonstrated their lack of preparedness. Each

participant, at some time or another, found the job to be overwhelming. Clearly these were

only three women's shared experiences, but it appears that there is an ongoing concern that

candidates are not adequately prepared for these roles. Ongoing research and program

development are required to improve this situation. In addition, women who are also dealing

with additional gender barriers require perhaps more preparation in order to help them

manage these multiple demands more readily.

Women must also be prepared to face the realities of the barriers in this role. They

must have an awareness of the discrimination they may face. They must have an awareness

of the gendered environments in which they will lead. They need to be aware of the

overriding socialization they will face in their school sites. They must be made aware of the

implications of the complicated family duties that they will be facing. Awareness, a type of

preparation, on all fronts will help them more easily respond to and deal with this complexity.

Preparation in this manner could potentially allow them to deal more competently with these

complex social and gendered situations. Preparation programs that address these kinds of

concerns for female educational leaders would be helpful and could once again diminish the

barriers of inequality.

How did these women experience educational leadership from a gendered

perspective? The experiences that these women have lived are undeniably different from the

experiences that men have lived because gender is part of most everything people do.

Through socialization, "the systematic training into the norms of our culture . . . [humans

follow the] process of learning the meanings and practices that enable us to make sense of

and behave appropriately in that culture" (Sensoy & diAngelo, 2012, p. 15). For the most

part, the socialization that has affected these women was that of gendered roles. Their own upbringing as well as their variety of experiences within gendered organizations (e.g., school districts, high schools, and elementary schools) created preconceived ideas of what their roles and behaviours should be. In their own socialization, they understood and reproduced the traditional gendered roles that they have lived and learned. In the workplace, they also were aware of these definitions and incorporated them into their practice. Their strength in understanding this socialization was demonstrated through their ability to reflect on these predetermined behaviours and make deliberate choices about them. Educational leaders can grow to understand and move beyond social norms and expectations of learned experiences only if they choose to reflect, remain open-minded, and focus on the reasons for and behind this socialization.

The participants in my study were also dealing with socialization into their own school communities by attempting to understand the organizational and professional structure (Crow, 2006) at each of their sites. Their personal socialization, in turn, affected and determined how they acted, reacted, grew, and developed in their individual school environments based on their individual perceptions. These traits of efficacy and beliefs about educational leadership would certainly be based upon prior experience and development. How do female educational leaders then understand and react to the effects of these social pressures?

Staff and community also enforced the effects of socialization for these women. Staff members' experiences within their own upbringing, families, society, and education all affect how they act and react with each educational leader. Members of the school community have preconceived ideas about what to expect from each educational leader based on past

experience and context. These predetermined social expectations then create behavioural, emotional, and managerial expectations towards the leaders and are compounded by community expectations, historical practice, and established norms. For an educational leader in a new position, these multiple expectations add enormous ambiguous pressures as she attempts to understand and respond appropriately to the pushes and pulls of her school. These factors potentially compound equality issues as well by being based within the status quo and perpetuating exiting stereotypes and practices within a gendered context.

Although the actions and reactions of staff and community can neither be predicted nor controlled, they were addressed through the participants' responsive behaviours. The participants shared stories about how they acted and reacted in their roles based on their own perceptions. Jenny proudly talked about how she liked to act in whatever manner she chose. Kate relayed a story of discipline on the first day of school when she specifically did not respond in an expected "female way" to a behaviour concern. These examples relate to the reflective nature of these women. They were aware of the roles they were expected to play within the workplace and chose to create new roles for themselves. These are some of the ways that women can choose to redefine socialization within their own school sites.

How did these women overcome the barriers that impede their success in educational leadership? Even though the conversation around inequality within the tenets of feminism began long ago, women still experience inequality (Acker, 1992; Bierema, 2016; Jull, 2002; Wallin, 2015). Why does this imbalance still exist, and how can stakeholders improve conditions for women? In my own experience, prior to this doctoral journey, I was aware of these issues in a peripheral sort of way, but, until now, I had not taken the time to reflect, understand, and attempt to resolve the issues around and impacting me. This research

demonstrates that women need not be isolated in their experiences as female educational

leaders. Other women continue to struggle with ongoing issues of role conflict,

discrimination, gender-based roles, and socialization. Conversations that bring awareness to

these issues are simply one way of encouraging, supporting, and recognizing their existence.

I have discovered the importance of this "female collective" (Jenny) and am happy to be a

part of it.

Educational leadership is a complex and challenging profession (Daresh & Male,

2000; Earley & Bubb, 2013; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; MacBeath, 2006; Sackney &

Walker, 2006; Skelly, 1996). It is even more complex and challenging for women because of

the numerous issues that they are dealing with outside of the position itself. These issues are

often beyond their control and reside in the actions, attitudes, and reactions of others around

them. Spouses, children, colleagues, supervisors, parents, staff, and students each learn

gender-defined behaviours and act upon them in their own way, based on their own

experiences, interpretation, and knowledge. As female educational leaders, women must seek

out and develop positive, supportive networks and find ways to be fully successful within

these demanding roles.

In some ways, the school environments within which these educational leaders work

perpetuate the socialization barriers. The image of the female caregiver is ongoing at the

elementary school level for both Mia and Kate by the structure of the institution of education

itself whereby women are perceived as nurturing caregivers. (Burkman, 2010; Collard, 2001;

Jull, 2002)The higher numbers of female staff at the elementary level also adds to this

stereotype (Drudy, 2008). If schools are to overcome this barrier, leaders must continue to

strive to develop more equal gender ratios at all school levels and work towards creating

open-mindedness towards the image of a female leader and what is expected of her in this role. They must also continue to encourage diversity in all areas of educational practice. This includes not only school staff, but school and district leadership as well. Promoting gender diversity is only the first step in creating healthy, natural, and balanced school communities that are truly reflective of the communities they serve.

Women must also continue to strive for equity in their home and work lives. It is disconcerting that all of the participants lived traditional lives in accepting the care and responsibility of children and home while still managing a career. Although their responses to this barrier varied in terms of choice, timing, and supports, this inequity is still ongoing in a culture that claims that the issues of equality for women have been resolved. I admire the way in which women use this experience as a strength to support their ability to lead. Despite family responsibilities being classified within the literature as a barrier to success, these participants chose to define the experience of multiple home demands as strength to support their practice and themselves. What is contradictory in this finding is that equality has not actually been addressed, but rather overlooked. Women are still assuming extra burdens, workloads, and responsibilities in spite of their perceptions of the outcomes.

Finally, with regards to existing barriers, it is disconcerting that even one participant should experience what she perceives as discrimination within her workplace. That these kinds of actions and behaviours are ongoing is unfathomable in today's world. If these women of privilege have experienced ongoing discrimination, one might conceive that similar practices may look worse for women of other social minorities.

How did their experiences within educational leadership influence their practice?
My study explored the experiences of women in educational leadership, yet I have come to

realize that individual experiences are irrevocably tied to all other experiences. Each

experience is interpreted individually, based on prior experience, which makes each

experience unique to each human being. When people share an individual experience with

one another, this experience of sharing then becomes part of their own experience. My

observations beyond the scope of the conversations that I shared with my participants lead

me to believe that people are constantly seeking to share their experiences to find someone

else who has lived what they have. They are seeking commonality. It is powerful to be able

to talk with another person, to share a story or an experience and say, "Yes! I have lived that

too. I understand what you are saying because this experience is similar to my own." This

seeking to reaffirm one's beliefs is both empowering and limiting. It empowers because

understanding and empathy are created. New learning takes place. New insight can be

developed. However, it can also limit because by seeking to reaffirm existing beliefs, the

opportunity to grow in a new understanding may be missed.

        As I listened to the experiences of my study participants, I was struck by their

willingness and desire to share. Clandinin, Murphy, and Huber (2011) outlined the

importance of this sharing to help people make sense of their existence. If people choose to

listen and reflect, they can create deeper understanding about why certain practices exist and

to question the status quo. The sharing with another has the power to create new

understandings that can create new ways of seeing and doing. This is one way to create and

build new practice. "Ears are not simply passive recipients of a story, but rather tools that

filter, add to, and refract stories in different ways" (Dewey, 1934, as cited in Caine, Estefan,

& Clandinin, 2013, p. 582). Growth in practice stems from both the experience itself and the

sharing of it. Sharing the experience, reflecting on practice, and adjusting this practice to

meet the needs of the required community have created ongoing growth in the educational leadership of my participants.

For these female participants, the opportunity to share common experience was the unifying thread of this study. The isolation of educational leadership is draining. Compounded by issues around equity/equality, these women sought to find understanding with me, as the researcher, through conversations and the sharing of experiences. As the researcher, I also discovered common links with these stories and felt united with the participants through the "feminine collective." The growth in understanding, empathy, and potential for practice developed for both parties. Opportunities for the sharing of similar experiences must be provided for women in educational leadership in order to help them strengthen their understanding, their practice, and their common goals.

Implications

Implications for practice. Obviously, educators have much work to do. Combatting a complex and evolving issue around gender equality within leadership is no small task. Will changes in practice affect and create fundamental institutional change with regards to gender? I hope that these women would not feel obligated to act in certain ways in their roles to fulfill the expectations of staff, community, and colleagues. I hope that they would not feel intimidated by male staff members. I hope that they would find ways to resolve issues of role conflict within their own homes.

In relation to current educational leadership, women could engage in many additional practices that would improve their own situations. These practices will not be easy. First and foremost, women must become their own advocates. They must challenge behaviours or decisions that appear discriminatory or gender-based. Women must also build strong

supportive networks around them within their practice. These networks could consist of both men and women who share the desire to create equality within education and educational leadership. These networks can also supply opportunities for women to discuss, support, share, and solve issues around existing barriers. Colleagues, mentors, friends, and family must engage in frank, honest, and open dialogue in an attempt to question and change the status quo. In addition, these networks can provide forums for discussion around policy, implementation of change, and future goals that target equity/equality for all and particularly for women.

Socialization is difficult to change, but it must be revised. Bringing awareness to socialization in how boys and girls are raised and educated is key to creating lasting and durable improvements. Without this awareness, reflection and change in practice cannot occur. Providing opportunities for different and authentic experiences for both genders could help alleviate some of the pervasive existing socialization practices. Changes in practices within all media platforms are also required in order to alleviate the constant barrage of predetermined, essentialized, stereotypical social behaviours demonstrated therein. I believe that these kinds of changes are beginning to emerge. Increased open-mindedness towards alternate gender, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are awakening society to the fluid nature of gender and having people question the embedded socialization practices that surround gender and are basic tenets of postmodern feminism amongst other ideologies. Women embedded within traditional, white, privileged structures, such as the current education system, will need to closely examine their practice around the socialization of students and even their own children in order to bring awareness to and to help implement much-needed change, acceptance and understanding.

Aspiring educational leaders must also be aware of these issues and receive education, information, and training on how to combat potentially discriminatory situations and practice before entering educational leadership. Educational leaders will be particularly susceptible to socialization pressures as they seek to adapt, learn, and impact their schools and practice. In order to combat the ongoing perpetuated practices, they must be aware of these challenges and supported throughout their development as educational leaders. Implementing formal and well-developed mentorship programs could be one way to support educational leaders. Establishing and implementing supportive policy would also support these changes. Finally, building expectations for certain behaviours in all members of the education community would diminish the occurrence of discrimination and normalized inappropriate behaviours.

Implementing change for practice within traditional roles at home must also be a mandate for women. Women must continue to strive for equity in terms of domestic and work-related duties. Informing men about the duality of standards and extra workloads may help improve this situation. Other interventions such as law, policy, benefits, and salary, although previously attempted, have not been successful, but appeals for change must be ongoing. Women in this study felt they had successfully incorporated domestic responsibilities into practice, but this is not yet a viable solution. Women educational leaders must continue to search for better, more tangible solutions to improve work and home situations.

As I ponder the implications for women that are seeking roles in educational leadership, I am aware of the many challenges that they face. However, I would encourage women to move forward, to step up and take the challenge. Strong, determined, vocal women will be the ones that continue to pave the way for change. Women will need to demand

change in practice through modeling, vocalizing, and most importantly reflecting on the

status quo. They will need to continue to share stories and to develop new stories, painting

pictures of where they wish to be and what they wish their situations to look like. They will

need to share these "stories" and help make way for change. Change in practice will take

time, but working together, women can make educational leadership an environment that

continues to allow them to succeed as women.

Implications for further research. This research was undertaken to add to the

literature that explored female educational leaders' lived experiences. I sought to bring a

voice to their experiences. I sought to understand their reflections, thoughts, stories, feelings,

and experiences about educational leadership. I attempted to provide an interpretive thematic

analysis of their experiences around emerging themes in the data. This research is far from

complete. Many additional questions remain to be explored around this topic for female

educational leaders. As I examined the data and the literature, ongoing questions arose that I

am currently unable to answer. These ideas were provoked by this research and would

require further examination.

One area to consider further would be that of the experiences of women outside of the

white, middle-class social group. Women whose race, colour, sexual orientation, social status,

or ability falls outside of this group would surely face similar and perhaps even additional

issues in the pursuit of roles in educational leadership. Addressing and understanding the

numerous barriers they must face, and how they should be supported, encouraged, and

prepared for educational leadership roles is a suggested area of further research. Wallace

(1998) made reference to other cultures that have been successful in bridging these gaps.

Further research into which cultures have been successful and the process for attaining that success could also be highly beneficial to women.

While clearly work has been done to explore women in educational leadership, (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), further research is necessary. Are the increased numbers of successful shared leadership models a result of increased numbers of practicing female educational leaders influencing this field of practice, or are they rather simply a result of a better understanding of leadership? Further investigation around specific practices of women within educational leadership could expand upon the theories of successful leadership practices for women specifically. Did the practice of the participants in this study cause their success or was their success reliant upon other factors?

What does successful mentorship look like for women in educational leadership? In this study, a strong female role model was a recurring and prevalent theme. The participants identified strong, successful women who were role models that they wanted to emulate and follow. It would also be interesting to further explore whether gender could have an important contribution to the role of mentor. Is mentorship gender responsive? Would women benefit from being mentored by other successful women? What should this mentorship look like in order to fully benefit the mentor and the mentee? Also embedded in the theme of mentorship were ideas around training mentors and establishing and evaluating formal mentorship programs. Further exploration of what successful mentorship programs would look like for women would be encouraged. Finally, within the realm of mentorship, the idea that mentorship might reproduce or disrupt gendered norms raises interesting questions. Would partnering female mentors with female educational leaders perpetuate or alleviate normative practices? In an effort to diminish socialized norms, exploration of the

implications of both same-gender mentoring models as well as opposite-gender mentoring models would be intriguing and interesting as a topic for future exploration.

One of the biggest surprises to me personally in this research was the ongoing perception of discrimination within education. In the conversations with my participants, they clearly questioned the gendered environments within which they worked, but even as they questioned it, they did not necessarily recognize the blatant discrimination within their school communities. Why was this not recognizable? Does the division of elementary versus secondary impact the number of discriminatory behaviours? Or is it perhaps more systemic? Where a certain type of discriminatory culture has been established, developed, and perpetuated, does this allow behaviours to manifest themselves in discriminatory practices? If present, enforcing existing discrimination and sexual harassment rules of misconduct is key. In this study, specific to this school district, discrimination was perceived to be present by one participant at the high school level. Are other high schools similar? Researching other successful districts and outcomes could provide answers to these issues. Finally, tied to the issue of discrimination is the exploration of the site leadership practices and their influence on the school community. Researchers have shown that the principal exerts a strong influence at a school site (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Oleszewski et al., 2011; Reitzug et al., 2008). Does the behaviour of a principal encourage or negate certain practices? In my study, Jenny experienced discrimination in the high school setting with a male educational leader in charge. Would her experience have been different if the leader had been female? What training, education, and policy are needed to rectify the ongoing issues of discrimination? Deeper examination of these issues is still required.

Finally, one overarching question begs further exploration. The realm of education is filled with socialized norms and gendered stereotypes. While this study sought to identify the barriers to women in educational leadership and through their experiences attempt to understand how they are overcoming these challenges, the ongoing perceptions of all members of the education community remain. How can female educational leaders reform or influence these perceptions? Can female educational leaders assist in creating new expectations towards educational leaders through their own self-defined unique practices? How do we understand, react to, and minimize the effects of socialization on female educational leaders? Are we able to overcome these barriers successfully and continue to build capacity for women in educational leadership? My interviews with these study participants represent only a tiny portion of potential conversations with women in educational leadership. I would encourage the conversations to continue so that exploration of the issues can lead to meaningful positive change.

Conclusion

As I arrive at the last section of this immense undertaking I am left contemplating my chosen profession. I opened this dissertation with a story about my pride in being a teacher and following in the professional footsteps of my grandmother and mother, whom I love and respect enormously. I remain proud to be a teacher and prouder still to be able to work in educational leadership, to share my learning and experiences with staff members and students in order to build strong schools and communities. In spite of the challenges, problems, and issues that I am faced with on a daily basis, I love my profession. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to take on leadership roles and to represent and advocate for strong, competent women in leadership.

As I look ahead, my eldest daughter has just completed her education degree. We will represent four generations of teachers. As I have always loved teaching, and it has been a part of me since I was a small child and a large part of my own growing family, it is not hard to imagine why she made this choice. I see in my daughter the same love that I hold for education, children, and teaching. As I contemplate what her career might look like, and where it might take her in the next 20 or 30 years, I feel proud, hopeful, and, at the same time, anxious. Education has, in my experience, become an increasingly complex field to maneuver in the past decade. I want my daughter to build a career that she is proud to be a part of. I want her to feel validated, professional, and equal to her male and female colleagues and educational leaders. I want to her to be able to look back on her time as an educator with satisfaction. It is my hope that she will also develop that deep sense of pride and accomplishment that I enjoy within education.

In completing this research, I feel a deep sense of satisfaction. These summarized thoughts will provide a steppingstone for further contemplation, reflection, and conversations around ongoing gender equality issues. It is my ultimate hope to be able to inspire a new generation of female educational leaders to continue to share their stories in order to create an open space for ongoing conversations. Together, women can support each other and create a world where men and women are viewed and treated as equals. Through ongoing research and education into these issues, men and women can continue to work together to create practice within educational communities that is equitable, inclusive, and diverse. Through exploration of policy and practice, we as educators can help improve equality for all. Together, we can help put processes and practices in place for the leaders of tomorrow, ensuring that their experiences can be positive and impactful.

So I close with one final thought. If men and women were truly equal, what would this equality look like in our homes, schools, or institutions? What would it look like late at night when out walking? What would it look like in a meeting led by men or by women? What would it look like in any social gathering? What would it look like in educational leadership? If we as community members cannot imagine true equality in each of these situations right now, then there is still work for us to do, improvements to be made, action to be taken, conversations to be had. As a woman, now increasingly aware of possibility, I will advance with the confidence, knowledge and experience required to instigate, implement and affect practice for female educational leaders.

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Appendix A: Open-Ended Questions

Group 1: Getting to know you better

1. Is there anyone (either a real person or fictional character) you admire and would like to be like?

2. If you could pick one thing that you wouldn't have to worry about anymore, what would it be?

3. Have you ever done anything that surprised other people?

4. What would you like to be really good at doing?

5. If you had one week off a month (or two days free each week), what are some of the things you would like to do with your extra time?

6. In all of your interests or all of the ideas you have thought about, what has puzzled you the most?

7. What's the best part of being your age? . . . What's the hardest part?

Group 2: Getting to know a little more about your broader professional experience in education

1. Over your years of teaching what have been some particularly memorable activities or events?

2. When you first became a teacher what did you dream about doing, or look forward to doing in your career?

3. When you think about your years in teaching are there any special people that come to mind—people who have been sources of support in any ways at all. Looking back, what kinds of people have made a difference to you in any important ways?

4. When you think about your years in teaching what parts of the work would you say have been the greatest sources of satisfaction?

5. As a teacher, what have been the guiding words you heard most often from colleagues, friends or other people who cared for you?

6. Looking back on your years in teaching what kinds of activities or experiences come to mind when you recall being helpful in some ways to other teachers?

7. What would you say are some of the ways that others have been helpful to you in your teaching. Do you recall any forms of support, advice or mentorship in particular that you valued or appreciated?

8. In your years of teaching are there memories of any leaders—formal or informal—that stand out, who you admired. What made any of them special?

Group 3: How your entry into leadership has been experienced?

1. When you first began doing teacher leader activities, what are some of the things you remember thinking about?

2. Think about your teaching practice <u>before</u> you became a leader. What has <u>changed</u> since you began this new position?

3. What has <u>stayed the same</u>?

4. Thinking back to when you began serving in a teacher leader role, what were some of the aspects of it that you <u>enjoyed</u> or appreciated? What aspects did you find <u>challenging or perhaps less enjoyable in some way</u>?

5. Were there some ways that your teacher leader activities seemed like a <u>continuation</u> of who you had been and what you had done in the <u>past?</u> . . .You know, were there

particular <u>prior experiences</u> that helped you feel comfortable or confident in teacher

leader roles?

6. When you think about <u>where your support</u> has come from and what in fact has

    constituted support for you in teacher leader roles, <u>what comes to mind</u>?

7. If you could have started your <u>administrative role</u> knowing what you know now, what

    might you have <u>done differently</u> in terms of how you thought about or approached

    moving into leadership?

8. What <u>advice</u> or support would you recommend for someone following your career path?

If there is time:

9. Think of a leader you <u>admire or respect</u> today. Why? What do you admire or respect

    about that person now that you are yourself a leader?

10. Currently what are <u>some aspects</u> of your teacher leader/administrative work that are

    more s<u>atisfying</u>?

Group 4: How you experience support in your position in educational leadership?

1. What kinds of people would you define as supportive?

2. You have previously talked about teacher mentors. Are there other kinds of teachers?

    How do they affect your practice?

3. You have previously referred to strong leaders. Are there other kinds of leaders? How do

    they affect your practice?

4. How did you determine what to communicate with your parent community?

5. How do you define the culture of your school? How will you uncover this culture?

6. How will you implement change if required?

7. How do you feel your new role is different from your past position?

8. Have you noticed any changes in relation to the staff or how they interact / treat you? How do you feel in relation to the staff?

9. Do they treat you the same or differently from previous roles you have held in education? How so?

10. How do you perceive or define your role in this new position?

<u>Group 5: How you experience barriers to success in your position in educational leadership?</u>

1. How do you balance work and family life?

2. Do you feel that you have to prioritize one or the other? How do you do this?

3. Do you feel supported by your spouse in your new career and how does he or does he not express this?

4. How do your children feel about your new role / identity?

5. How do you think your experience as a leader would be different if:

6. You were a male/female?

7. You were supervising male/female staff?

8. You were mentored by male/female principals?

9. Describe your socialization within your family. How do you experience this in your current role?

10. Have you ever experienced discrimination in your workplace and if so, can you describe it. If not, can you think why not?

11. Describe the relationship you have developed with female peers and peer networks.

Group 6: Your experiences around gender inequality or equality in educational leadership?

1. How do you feel about the distribution of gender in schools?

2. Do you feel your leadership role is predetermined by male or female attributes?

3. What do you see as being your strongest attributes as a female leader?

4. How do these compare to your male counterparts?

5. What, if any, do you see as being differences between male and female leaders?

6. Do you experience these differences present in your current role?

7. Do you feel that your own socialization impacts your experience? How or how not?

8. How do you experience leadership or admin meetings?

Group 7: How you experience your current position in educational leadership?

1. Is anything preoccupying you?

2. How are you dealing with the position?

3. How are you feeling?

4. Please take 3–6 pictures that you would like to discuss. (Something that provokes a feeling about your current position. It could provoke a thought, a question, a concern, a memory, an issue, a happy moment, a moment of pride, etc.)

Group 8: How you experience preparation for your position in educational leadership?

1. What kind of training did you complete before you moved into administration?

2. Did you find this training helpful? Why or why not?

3. What aspects of your training, if any, do you feel were missing?

4. What aspects of your training, if any, were the most helpful?

5. Did you feel adequately prepared to take on this new position? Why or why not?

6. What suggestions could you make to someone building or creating an educational leadership program?

7. Do you feel supported in your new position? Why or why not?

8. What would an effective mentorship program look like to you?

9. What do you feel are the most important skills, knowledge or training that someone considering acting as a mentor should have?

Group 9: Getting to know a little bit more about the qualities that define educational leaders?

1. What personal traits do you believe are necessary in educational leadership?

2. How can we determine which traits are required for educational leadership?

3. How can we determine if a candidate possesses these attributes?

4. In your experience, do women share common attributes / traits that allow them to experience success?

5. Do women share common attributes / traits that impede their success?

6. Do women share common attributes / traits?

7. Do men share common attributes / traits?

8. How have you perceived that others interpret these attributes / traits?

Group 10: Getting to know a little bit more about the complexities of educational leadership and your personal growth in this position.

1. What are you responsible for in your position or what are your main responsibilities?

2. Do you have other responsibilities that are not specified?

3. Do you think these are different for women or men?

4. Why did you choose this career path?

5. When were you aware that you wanted to pursue administration?

6. What motivates / encourages you now when your job is challenging?

7. How does your experience as a teacher influence your work as an administrator?

8. How do you pursue professional development and how do you determine what

    professional development you need?

9. How do you set your personal goals for growth?

Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form

Colleen Alpern
Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta
T6G 2G5

September 7, 2014

Dear [Name];

My name is Colleen Alpern, and I am a graduate student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. I am working on a research study that explores the experiences of newly appointed women educational administrators.

Research Project Title: Experiences of Newly Appointed Women Educational Administrators as Examined Through Interpretive Inquiry Case Study

Researcher: Colleen Alpern, University of Alberta;

Advisor: [Name Withheld], University of Alberta

Sponsor: University of Alberta

This letter will provide you the basic idea of what this research is about and what participation will involve. If you would like additional details about something mentioned here, or information not included, please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Men and women experience educational leadership in different ways, in part because of gender inequality, the institutional contexts in which men and women work, and differing family and community demands and expectations placed on men and women. These factors

can add to the challenges of an already highly complex job. Appropriate supports such as coaching-mentoring can help leaders deal with the increased stress, emotional isolation and potential burnout. Given the current aging population of educational leaders, and the growing need for new leaders to take their place, women must be supported and encouraged to seek out, take up and remain in educational administrative roles. Exploring the point of view of women as they transition to administration is necessary to understand their unique perspectives and points of view, and to understand their needs with regards to support, mentorship and professional development.

    To assist me in this quest, I am inviting you to participate in a year-long study during which time you will have the opportunity to explore your experiences through semi-structured personal interviews, journaling and photography. Some of the questions that I will ask will (a) help me to get to know you better; (b) relate to your previous teaching experiences; (c) explore your experiences as a leader (d) explore your transition into administration (e) explore your situation as a woman in educational administration. Throughout the year, ongoing conversations will further explore these areas. Personal reflective journals may be employed to further understand these experiences and in addition, selective photography of significant events will be encouraged as jumping points for further conversations around your experiences. You have chosen to participate in this study because you are a newly appointed (within five years) woman educational administrator. You always retain the right to answer only those questions you feel most comfortable answering and/or refrain from answering any questions without prejudice or consequence. Should you choose to withdraw, your data comments will be destroyed.

If you agree to participate in this study, we will arrange times that are convenient for you, in a location of your choosing to ensure that you are comfortable and to protect the privacy of our conversations. You will receive copies interview questions by email for contemplation prior to our first interview. All of your responses will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential. Only I will have access to the data. I will audiotape the interview using a digital voice recorder. You will be contacted directly by myself, and only I will know the identity of the administrators involved in this study. Your superintendent will be informed that administrators have agreed to participate, but will not know the identity of the administrator involved.

Your name and that of your school division will not appear in the results, and you will be provided with a pseudonym to protect your identity. This type of research uses interpretive inquiry and case study to create meaning from your shared experiences. I will be looking for new meaning around your experiences that can be shared with other women who may be living similar experiences. If at any time, should any of your comments suggest the identity of a person or school division, the data will not be used in the results or the discussion of the study. Should you speak about any other individuals who are not part of this study, any identifiers would be taken out of the commentary to ensure anonymity and /or the comment would not be used in the results or discussion of the study.

The transcripts of our audio taped interviews will be transcribed and typed by me and returned to you via email so that you can add, delete or change your responses to ensure all identifying information has been omitted. All data will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected electronic device by me. The electronic data will be erased or trashed after the required five-year period after completion of the study. You will be given up to six

weeks after review of transcripts to terminate your participation in the study by simply

providing myself, the researcher, with a verbal or written statement to that effect.

At the end of the study, you and the superintendent of your school division will receive a

copy of the final report. The final report will also be presented at local, national, and

international conferences, and may be disseminated in professional and scholarly journals.

Once again, your participation is voluntary. Should you wish to participate, please

sign the consent on the bottom of this page. **Keep one copy for yourself, and mail or email**

a copy to me for my records at the address listed below. If you do not wish to participate,

please discard this information. The Research Ethics Offices of the University of Alberta has

approved this research. Any questions you may have about this study may be directed to

Colleen Alpern at [telephone number] or my advisor, [Name Withheld], at [telephone

number]. Finally, by consenting to participate in this study, you will not waive any rights to

legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

Sincerely,

Colleen Alpern
Graduate Student
Department of Educational Policy Studies
7-119 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2G5
[telephone number]
[email address]

PLEASE SEE SIGNATURE PAGE ON NEXT PAGE

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at telephone number (780) 492-2615.

I, (name of participant) _____ have read and understood

the information letter for the study entitled: Experiences of Newly Appointed Women

Educational Administrators as Examined Through Interpretive Inquiry and consent to

participate in the research being conducted by Colleen Alpern, University of Alberta.

I understand that:

- I will gain no privileges for participating in the study or suffer no penalties for not
  participating.

- I will participate in a series of semi-structured interviews, conversations and other
  data collection methods based upon mutual understanding between the researcher and
  myself, and comfort of myself, the participant.

- The information I share may be presented at local, national, and international
  conferences, and may be disseminated in professional and scholarly journals.

- I have the right to withdraw at any time during the study and/or not answer any
  questions.

- I have the right to withdraw my data.

- I have the right to privacy and anonymity; my name and that of my school division
  will not appear in the results.

- The data will remain confidential only seen by the researcher.

- I have the right to a copy of the final document.

I have been asked to sign and return one copy of this consent form to the researcher and

retain a copy for my files.

_____

(Signature of participant)(Date)

_____

(Signature of researcher)(Date)

_____

The address to which you can send a final copy of the research project is listed below:

[Mailing address: email address:]

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at telephone number (780) 492-2615.

Appendix C: Email to Possible Principal Participants

Dear PARTICIPANT,

My name is Colleen Alpern, and I am a graduate student from the Faculty of

Education at the University of Alberta. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research

study that is focused on the experiences of newly appointed female administrators.

Research Project Title: Experiences of Newly Appointed Women Educational Administrators
as Examined Through Interpretive Inquiry Case Study
Researcher: Colleen Alpern, University of Alberta
Advisor: [Name Withheld], University of Alberta
Sponsor: University of Alberta

Men and women experience educational leadership in different ways, in part because

of gender inequality, the institutional contexts in which men and women work, and differing

family and community demands and expectations placed on men and women. These factors

can add to the challenges of an already highly complex job. Appropriate supports such as

coaching-mentoring can help leaders deal with the increased stress, emotional isolation and

potential burnout. Given the current aging population of educational leaders, and the growing

need for new leaders to take their place, women must be supported and encouraged to seek

out, take up and remain in educational administrative roles. Exploring the point of view of

women as they transition to administration is necessary to understand their unique

perspectives and points of view, and to understand their needs with regards to support,

mentorship and professional development.

I am inviting you to participate in a yearlong study during which time you will have

the opportunity to explore your experiences through semi-structured personal interviews,

journaling and photography. I have attached the consent form to this email which details the

parameters of the study, your right to withdraw at any time, and issues around anonymity and

confidentiality of your participation. You have been chosen to participate in this study

because you are a female educational administrator, with less than three years of experience.

At the end of the process, you and the superintendent of your school division will

receive a copy of the final report. The final report will also be presented at local, national,

and international conferences, and may be disseminated in professional and scholarly

journals.

Once again, your participation is voluntary. Should you wish to participate, please

sign the consent that is attached to this email and return it to me at the contact information

provided. If you do not wish to participate, please discard this information.

Sincerely,

Colleen Alpern
Graduate Student
Department of Educational Policy Studies
7-119 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2G5
[telephone number]
Email: [email address]

The Research Ethics Offices of the University of Alberta have approved this

research. Any questions you may have about this study may be directed to [Name

Withheld], at [telephone number]. Questions about your rights as a research participant

may be directed to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at the telephone

number (780) 492-2615.

Appendix D: Information Letter to District Superintendents

Dear SUPERINTENDENT,

My name is Colleen Alpern, and I am a graduate student from the Faculty of

Education at the University of Alberta. I am working on a research study that explores the

experiences of newly appointed women educational administrators. I am writing to ask your

permission to invite newly appointed female administrators within your division to

participate in this study.

Research Project Title: Experiences of Newly Appointed Women Educational Administrators
as Examined Through Interpretive Inquiry Case Study
Researcher: Colleen Alpern, University of Alberta
Advisor: [Name Withheld], University of Alberta
Sponsor: University of Alberta

Men and women experience educational leadership in different ways, in part because

of gender inequality, the institutional contexts in which men and women work, and differing

family and community demands and expectations placed on men and women. These factors

can add to the challenges of an already highly complex job. Appropriate supports such as

coaching-mentoring can help leaders deal with the increased stress, emotional isolation and

potential burnout. Given the current aging population of educational leaders, and the growing

need for new leaders to take their place, women must be supported and encouraged to seek

out, take up and remain in educational administrative roles. Exploring the point of view of

women as they transition to administration is necessary to understand their unique

perspectives and points of view, and to understand their needs with regards to support,

mentorship and professional development.

I am inviting your willing administrators to participate in a yearlong study during

which time they will have the opportunity to explore their experiences through semi-

structured personal interviews, journaling and photography. I have attached the consent form

to this email which details the parameters of the study, their right to withdraw at any time,

and issues around anonymity and confidentiality of their participation. They will be chosen to

participate in this study because they are a female educational administrator, with less than

three years of experience.

At the end of the process, you and the participants will receive a copy of the final

report. The final report will also be presented at local, national, and international conferences,

and may be disseminated in professional and scholarly journals.

I hope you will grant permission for female administrators to participate in this study,

because this issue requires additional exploration and understanding. Should you provide me

with permission to speak with these administrators, please sign the consent that is attached to

this email and return it to me at the contact information provided. If you do not wish the

teaching principals within your school division to participate, please discard this information.

Sincerely,

Colleen Alpern
Graduate Student
Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta
[telephone number]
[email address]

The Research Ethics Offices of the University of Alberta has approved this

research. Any questions you may have about this study may be directed to [Name

Withheld], at [telephone number]. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its

adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the University of Alberta Research

Ethics Board 1. Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed

to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at telephone number (780) 492-2615.