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FIRST YEAR FEMALE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL: TRANSITIONS, PERSPECTIVES, ASPIRATIONS

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FIRST YEAR FEMALE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL
LEVEL: TRANSITIONS, PERSPECTIVES, ASPIRATIONS

By

Jennifer B. Tilton

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By

Jennifer B. Tilton

DEDICATION

For Paul, Madeline, and Claire who are my three loves and biggest supporters!

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FIRST YEAR FEMALE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL
LEVEL: TRANSITIONS, PERSPECTIVES, ASPIRATIONS

Abstract

By Jennifer B. Tilton

University of the Pacific
2020

Women continue to be in the minority in school administration in public schools in the United States, although the majority of teachers are female. The role of assistant principal is the gateway to school administration. The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals. This study used a phenomenological approach to understand the essence of the transition for the participants. Six women were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol to collect data on their experiences transitioning to the role of assistant principal. Using the process of horizontalization, the data were transcribed and analyzed using statements and quotes from the interviews to develop themes common to all participants. Findings revealed that these women continually seek to better themselves, others, and their organizations. They experienced a significant sense of loss as they transitioned to their new role. Lastly, the supports needed by women as they continue in their career as school administrators were uncovered.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

An ongoing and troubling theme in educational administration is the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, especially at the highest echelons of school administration. This theme is especially concerning given that women dominate the teaching profession. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2019) reported in the *2017 Digest of Education Statistics* that 77% of teachers in the United States are women, but only 54 % of principals are women. Additionally, a majority of female principals are at the elementary level. The NCES (2019) reported that 64% of principals in elementary schools, 42% of principals in middle schools, 30% of principals in high schools, and 40% of principals in combined schools, are women. The most common path to the superintendency is through the high school principalship (Hoff et al., 2006; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). With such a low number of women in the high school principalship, it is not surprising that so few women are represented in higher positions, especially the superintendent position. The *2010 Decennial Study of the American Superintendent* reported that women make up only 24.1% of superintendents nationwide (Kowalski et al., 2011). Leading researchers in the field of women in school administration continue to study this trend to understand why women are not represented in higher levels of administration at the same rate as their male counterparts (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Robinson et al., 2017; Skrla, 2000; Sperandio, 2015).

This chapter begins with a brief introduction of the position of the assistant principal as a pathway to leadership roles in schools. Next, I share the purpose, research questions, and the theoretical frameworks that guided this study. Then, I present a description of the research

design and argue the significance of the study. Lastly, I conclude with a summary of the organization of the study as a whole.

Background

The most common entryway into school administration is through the role of assistant principal. The transition from teacher to assistant principal is arguably a poignant and significant professional and organizational milestone for new administrators (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Herrington & Kearney, 2012; Marshall, 1990; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Research confirms that this critical period lays the foundation for an administrator's career (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Herrington & Kearney, 2012; Marshall, 1990; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). The socialization process that assistant principals go through shapes their identity as an administrator. As assistant principals move through the stages of socialization, they must transition between roles, relationships, and locations (Armstrong, 2012). This process begins with formal and informal training and experiences as a teacher test the water and explores the world of administration. These experiences include chairing school committees, going through an administrator preparation course, and volunteering for various leadership positions within a school or district. Once a teacher finally takes the leap and accepts a position as an administrator, a transformation begins. Assistant principals begin to learn the norms, beliefs, and skills needed to be an administrator within a specific school. The school itself now begins to shape the identity of the new administrator (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Hart, 1991).

Researchers note that the transition from teacher to administrator can take a toll on new assistant principals who face personal and professional challenges as their professional identity changes. Shifting from a classroom-centered mindset to a school-centered mindset requires time,

skill, and emotion. The school becomes integral in this process as the assistant principal's new transformation requires them to distance themselves from teacher roles and align themselves more closely with administrative roles and organizational norms (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). These socialization processes have a defining impact on the assistant principal's role and identity as well as future career aspirations and organizational behavior.

Problem Statement

In the small body of research focused on the assistant principal position over the last 30 years, there is agreement that all facets of this position need further research (Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Greenfield, 1985; Morgan, 2018). The assistant principal is considered the "forgotten leader" in the literature on school administrators (Cohen & Schechter, 2019, p. 100). Principals receive the majority of the attention in the literature surrounding school administration and instructional leadership (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 1994; Hallinger, 2003; Mertz, 2006). However, research agrees that the assistant principal position is the gateway to both the principalship and other higher-level administrator positions. The assistant principal is a critical position for teachers aspiring to become a school administrator (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Herrington & Kearney, 2012; Marshall, 1990; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Herrington and Kearney (2012) argued that "the most critical role that makes or breaks an administrator's career in the upward progression from teacher to principal to superintendent is the role of assistant principal" (p. 80). Marshall and Hooley (2006) posited that "a majority of assistant principals expect to move upward in administration" (p. 2). "Transitioning from teacher to assistant principal is an important professional and organizational passage that carries significant dreams and transformational possibilities for new administrators and their communities" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 686). The

literature agrees that the transition from teacher to assistant principal is an area that needs more attention (Armstrong, 2010; Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Olszewski et al., 2011). This study adds to the body of research regarding female assistant principals' transition from teacher to assistant principal and the impact of transition processes on this transformation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the challenges of the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What experiences motivate female high school assistant principals to pursue a role in educational administration?
2. What are the experiences of female assistant principals during the transition to their role as a school administrator?
3. What are the career aspirations of first-year female assistant principals?
4. What are the perceived barriers, if any, of female assistant principals to the high school principalship?

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by socialization theory with a feminist research approach that centers on women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations (Creswell, 2013). Socialization theory is defined as "the process of learning and performing a social role" (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987, p. 37). The socialization of female administrators is different than that of male administrators. Hart (1995) noted that the socialization process is challenging for all newcomers, but is increasingly difficult for those who are different, whether by gender, race, or ethnicity. A feminist lens was used in this study to view the participants from the perspective of

their own experiences, which in turn helps develop a version of reality that reflects their own experiences (Young & Skrla, 2003). This lens guided the development of the interview questions, participant selection process, and data analysis. The theoretical framework is described more fully in Chapter 2.

Description of the Study

This phenomenological study explored how female, secondary school assistant principals experience the transition from teacher to school administrator. This study specifically looked at female, secondary school assistant principals. The researcher conducted interviews with a small sample of female, first-year, high school assistant principals across the United States. A purposeful sample of women was chosen based on years of experience in the position. The researcher coded data and collected and organized the data by hand. The study design is described in detail in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

The assistant principal is an underrepresented figure in the professional literature; yet it is a critical role that supports the transition from teacher to administrator (Cohen & Schechter, 2019; Glanz, 1994; Marshall, 1985; Morgan, 2018). Studies that examine the transformation in role identity from teacher to assistant principal can provide a deeper understanding of how organizations can develop and support successful administrators, which can lead to recruitment and retention of qualified personnel for these positions.

This study focused on female secondary school assistant principals, an underrepresented population in the existing literature. Understanding how female assistant principals navigate the role-identity shift between teacher and school administrator can identify ways to help support the development of future administrators and help increase the number of women in administrative

roles both at school and district levels. The knowledge gained through this study is important for school district recruitment and retention of qualified administrators, can be used in professional development programs for aspiring administrators, and aids aspiring female administrators in their decision making as they consider the next steps in their careers.

Chapter Summary

Understanding the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions and the role of the assistant principal is essential for strengthening career pathways for women in educational leadership. The purpose of this study and the research questions guiding this study provide a solid foundation upon which to inform this area of research. The theoretical framework of socialization theory guided this study, including the research design and rationale for choosing the elements of the study. Finally, the significance of this study was presented. The following chapter anchors this study in the literature and gives this study a foundation upon which to build.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The road to becoming a school administrator is a journey that begins long before a person ever sets foot in a school office. Dotlich et al. (2004) noted that leadership is a predictable and intense passage. The transition from teacher to administrator signifies a change in an educator's role identity. McHugh and Thompson (1995) asserted that identity is "a tool which we use to present ourselves in-and possibly transform ourselves into" (p. 328). A person is susceptible to influences during role transitions (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Jones, 1986). Individuals have multiple identities, all of which are influenced by things, such as age, gender, occupation, family, and more (Retelle & Poole, 2006). The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the challenges of the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals.

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) offered this description of the transition from teacher to administrator: "Changing educational careers requires an individual to relinquish the comfort and confidence of a known role—such as being a teacher—and experience the discomfort and uncertainty of a new, unknown role—being a principal." (p. 470). As teachers transition into administration, they shift their identity. Their role in a school shifts, their environment in a school shifts, their relationships in a school shift. This identity shift was an essential element that this study examined.

This literature review introduces the role of assistant principal and the responsibilities of this leadership position. The theoretical framework of socialization theory is examined in relation to the role of assistant principal. The literature review then discusses women in

educational leadership, which includes a review of the barriers to advancement and supports needed for women to be successful in educational leadership positions.

Role and Responsibilities of Assistant Principals

The assistant principal plays a vital role in a school. Armstrong (2009) noted that assistant principals “represent the face of school administration” (p. xii). According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the assistant principal “maintains the norms and rules of the school culture” and “encounters daily the fundamental dilemmas of school systems” (pp. 2-3). The assistant principalship is the place where administrators develop the behaviors and skills needed for advanced positions in leadership (Armstrong, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

The assistant principal role was created to meet the demands of a growing and increasingly more complex school system (Glanz, 1994). The urbanization of society in the early 20th century and a growing school system saw the duties of school principals increase as the authority of local superintendents became less involved with the day-to-day operations of schools (Glanz, 1994). As responsibilities increased for principals, the creation of a new position helped ease the burden of these extra duties. This new position was created not from thoughtful planning, but from an urgency to fill a need (Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz & McNeely, 1999). Assistant principals, as this position became known, took over many administrative duties such as attendance reports, school programs, and collecting data for the principal. Much of the current research indicates that responsibilities for assistant principals have changed very little since this time (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 1994; Hartzell et al., 1995; Mertz, 2006). The literature describes the responsibilities of assistant principals as “duties as assigned” (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 1994; Hartzell et al., 1995; Mertz, 2006). The principal

typically assigns these duties, and they vary from school site to school site and district to district (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 1994; Hartzell et al., 1995; Mertz, 2006).

Common Responsibilities

Marshall and Hooley (2006) noted that, “although specific job descriptions vary, most assistant principals have tasks in common” (p. 5). Traditionally, the role of the assistant principal has included providing support for teachers, extracurricular activities, and student management (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 1994; Mertz, 2006). Marshall and Hooley (2006) classified assistant principal duties into four categories; conferencing with students and parents, handling student behavior, master scheduling, and student counseling. Similarly, in their review of assistant principal duties, Oleszewski et al. (2012) found that student discipline and management “has remained one of the top ten duties throughout the years” (p. 274). This is echoed in studies by Glanz (1994), Hausman et al. (2002), and Kwan (2009). These studies found that student discipline, scheduling, personnel management, and administrative duties were all common duties among assistant principals.

Assistant principals who aspire to the principalship need to learn the skills necessary to be effective instructional leaders and help improve student achievement at their school sites. Oleszewski et al. (2012) noted that, “unlike time devoted to student management, time spent on instructional leadership can directly lead to positive student achievement results” (p. 278). The time spent on student issues often leaves little time for assistant principals to focus on curricular demands and working with teachers on instructional practices (Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Kwan, 2009). Hausman et al.’s 2002 study in Maine found that assistant principals spent the least amount of their time on instructional leadership activities. Glanz’s (1994) study of assistant principals in New York found that over 90% of assistant principals think that

instructional leadership is one of the most important tasks they can do. Hausman et al. (2002) found that assistant principals described their work-life more positively because they felt that they were impacting students and their schools. Olszewski et al. (2002) further argued that “time spent on instructional leadership is positively linked to efficacy and commitment” (p. 278). Muñoz and Barber (2011) surveyed 636 assistant principals in K-12 schools in Kentucky. The survey respondents viewed the duties focused on instruction more attractive than duties focused on student discipline. Muñoz and Barber (2011) concluded from their study on the recruitment of assistant principals, that job descriptions that include more instructional leadership duties are more likely to attract higher-quality candidates for the position.

Role Ambiguity and Conflict

The literature surrounding the transition to the assistant principal role is clear in that role ambiguity is a major challenge for new administrators. The creation of the assistant principal role filled a need without clear direction and planning (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz & McNeely, 1999). There is no formal job description found in the literature for assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2012; Glanz, 1994; Hartzell et al., 1995; Mertz, 2006). This lack of clarity in the assistant principal job description leads to role ambiguity and role conflict for many beginning assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Marshall and Hooley (2006) described this role ambiguity to mean that the role includes “ill-defined, inconsistent, and incoherent responsibilities” (p. 7). This ambiguity can lead to a lack of confidence, a lack of job satisfaction, and a sense of ineffectiveness (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). New assistant principals often feel powerless and overwhelmed due to a lack of control over their role, their duties, and their workload.

As new assistant principals develop a new sense of identity, they have to develop new relationships with teaching staff, administrative staff, students, and parents. Grodzki (2011) noted in his study that new administrators have difficulty with the expectations that come with their new roles. Likewise, Craft et al. (2016) found similar results in their study of new assistant principals. They noted that needing to meet the expectations of various campus stakeholders was a common theme among their participants. In Retelle and Poole's 2006 study of assistant principals, they also found that new administrators face difficulties in developing a new role identity due to the messages they receive from various groups within a school. New assistant principals are no longer teachers and face the difficult challenge of leaving that peer group behind. They are also not versed in the norms of being an administrator and therefore do not fit in with this new peer group yet. This transition and the accompanying challenges are all part of the socialization process a new assistant principal must endure. Socialization is discussed further in the next section.

Socialization Theory

Socialization theory is defined as "the process of learning and performing a social role" (Marshall & Greenfield, 1987, p. 37). Greenfield (1985) described socialization as the formal and informal processes through which administrators learn the behaviors, technical knowledge, moral dispositions, and values required to perform their roles. Mertz (2006) posited that the goal of socialization is to ensure that the person fits into the organization and will perpetuate the organization as it is. Research suggests that there are four main stages of socialization for assistant principals; anticipation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Marshall and Hooley (2006) described the socialization process as a series of enculturation tasks. These tasks or steps are

deciding to leave, selection, staying calm in the face of shock, defining relationships, learning the art of the “street-level bureaucrat,” identifying and protecting one’s territory, and discipline management (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, p. 53). Armstrong (2010, 2012) characterized the passage into administration using a visual metaphor of four transitional epicycles. The epicycles are; entry-exit, immersion-emersion, disintegration-reintegration, and transformation-restabilization.

The socialization process falls into two categories; professional socialization and organizational socialization. Heck (1995) noted that professional socialization is the process by which one becomes a member of a profession and, over time, identifies with the profession. In professional socialization, a person participates in both formal training and informal experiences as they learn the skills, knowledge, and persona needed to fill the role of the administrator (Armstrong, 2012; Greenfield, 1985; Hart, 1991). In organizational socialization, a person learns the knowledge, values, and behaviors needed to fill a role in a particular organization or school (Hart, 1991).

Professional Socialization

Professional socialization begins the moment that teachers begin to think about becoming an administrator. This period is the first phase of socialization, also known as anticipation, deciding to leave, or entry-exit (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). The literature offers several reasons why teachers make this shift into administration. These reasons include wanting to affect change on a larger scale, being tapped on the shoulder for a position by someone in administration and fulfilling career goals. “Assistant principals leave teaching because they see an opportunity, they have role models that encourage them, or it has been a career goal” (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 272). Marshall and

Hooley (2006) explained that deciding to leave entails great self-analysis, combined with strong signals from the school or district, indicating opportunities are available. Armstrong (2012) argued that the assistant principals' dominant motivations to enter administration are professional advancement and the desire to "make a difference" at the larger system level (p. 406).

Marshall and Hooley (2006)'s second enculturation task, selection, falls into this first period of socialization. Assistant principals look for ways to separate from teaching and participate in experiences that demonstrate their interest in administration (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). This phase includes both formal and informal experiences that allow assistant principals to learn about the role of administrators. Formal experiences include completing a professional preparation program and participating in district selection processes. Informal experiences demonstrate to current administrators that a teacher is interested in administration. These experiences include taking on administrative responsibilities and assuming leadership roles outside of regular teaching responsibilities (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). Assistant principals learn what they should and should not be, what are possible qualifications, and personal characteristics of the person selected for this career (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). The next socialization processes fall under the category of organizational socialization.

Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization begins when assistant principals advance to the position of administrator in their organization. Organizational socialization is the time when a person learns the knowledge, values, and skills needed to fill a role of a specific organization or school. Armstrong (2010, 2012) described this next process of socialization, encounter or immersion-emersion, as the period when the new assistant principal enters the role and subsequently

confronts the tasks of being an administrator. Armstrong (2010, 2012) noted that this second epicycle is an abrupt shift that separates the newly appointed assistant principals from their familiar roles, relationships, and contexts. Marshall and Hooley (2006) described this stage as staying calm in the face of shock. Administration can be a culture shock for the new assistant principal. The new assistant principal is shocked at the vast array of tasks given to them, shocked at how unprepared they are, and shocked at how tasks are accomplished in administration (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). During this time, new assistant principals go through a period of conflict as they are leaving their teaching persona behind, but they have not yet fully adopted the administrative persona (Armstrong, 2012).

The next stage of organizational socialization is the adjustment period or disintegration-reintegration cycle. The adjustment period occurs when the new assistant principal finally lets go of their teaching identity and embraces their new role as an administrator (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). This process often involves a physical, cognitive, and emotional adjustment by the new assistant principal (Armstrong, 2012). Marshall and Hooley (2006) described this as the assistant principal defining relationships with teachers. Assistant principals often take on an “us versus them” mentality to cope with evaluating and supervising teachers who may have once been friends or allies (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). This stage is also characterized by a reintegration when the new assistant principal develops new skills and relationships, adopts new attitudes, and has a better understanding of their role (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

The culminating stage of socialization is the transformation-stabilization cycle when the assistant principal is fully incorporated into the administrative role and feels fully integrated into the school and district (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). Experience is the key to this stage, and with it

comes a sense of stability (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). With this stability, the assistant principal completes the shift in their goals, values, and professional outlook (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). Marshall & Hooley (2006) noted that this is when the assistant principal asserts control over their areas of responsibility. The assistant principal begins to take control of the duties assigned to him or her and feels confident and stable enough to mark and protect their territory (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), this final stage also involves discipline and conflict management. In this stage, assistant principals feel stronger in their ability to handle conflict and discipline due to their increased stability and confidence (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). A shift in behavior occurs as the assistant principal moves from being task-oriented to being people-oriented and finds success in establishing connections across the vertical and horizontal levels of the educational hierarchy (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). Armstrong (2012) clarified that while this epicycle represents comfort and stability, “it is not a period of stasis” (p. 417). As socialization is cyclical, people are continuously projecting into the future and preparing for transitions into new leadership roles (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). Assistant principals begin thinking about the future and the next steps in their career, thus beginning the socialization process over again as they contemplate another role change.

Underrepresentation of Women in School Administration

Throughout the literature, research shows that women continue to be in the minority in school administration (Mertz, 2000, 2006; Shakeshaft, 1987). As early as the 1900s, the bulk of teachers have been women, although mostly at the elementary level (Shakeshaft, 1987). The elementary level is the only area that women are in the majority in administration. In other areas of administration, women continue to be a minority (Shakeshaft, 1987). Eckman’s (2002) study

of female high school principals in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin found that while 48% of high school teachers in these three states are women, only 15.2% of the principals are women. Some of the factors that contribute to the under representation of women in administration include family constraints, needing to feel over-prepared, a lack of adequate mentors or a support structure, and gender bias (Biklen, 1980; Hoff et al., 2006; Sherman, 2000).

Barriers to Educational Leadership Roles

Women often wait until later in their career to enter school administration (Eckman, 2004; Hoff et al., 2006; Kruse & Krum, 2016). Kruse and Krum (2016) found that 61% of the women in their study waited until they had met all of their education requirements and for their children to be grown before becoming a school administrator. Additionally, women are more likely to move into an administrative position because an opportunity presented itself, or they were nudged into it by a colleague.

Family Constraints

One of the barriers to a female administrator's career is the divide between the role of professional and personal responsibilities (Biklen, 1980; Paddock, 1981; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Sperandio, 2015). The challenges of trying to balance work and family roles lead to role conflict. Eckman (2004) noted that women tend to experience more significant work-family conflict than men. Women face issues of balance and mobility when playing the dual role of professional and parent (Biklen, 1981; Eckman, 2002). In Eckman's (2002) study of eight female high school principals, the participants expressed a high level of role conflict and difficulty with juggling the needs of family and their job. In a 2006 study of 174 female school and district administrators, Hoff et al. (2006) found that 68% of the respondents struggled with maintaining a balance between personal and professional lives. Long workdays, new challenges

at work, and increasing professional obligations all contribute to these struggles. The norms of administrative roles, which include evening activities and 60-hour work weeks, are based on outdated roles of men and women in families and in society (Marshall & Kasten, 1994). In Kruse and Krumm's (2016) study of four female, first-time, high school principals, they noted how all participants had to make accommodations for family responsibilities. All participants waited until their children were grown before moving into administrative positions.

For many women, the community in which they live affects their access to jobs. Some research shows that women do not feel they can move their families to advance their careers (Biklen, 1981; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Sperandio & Devdas, 2015). In their 2008 study of 404 male and female school administrators, Hoff and Mitchell (2008) found that women were less likely to switch districts for a new position than men. They noted that the comfort of known relationships was a reason cited by women in their study for not wanting to move. Some women also noted that they would move for their husbands' job, but not for their own. Likewise, in a study of 109 female district administrators, Sperandio and Devdas (2015) found that the women in their study were hesitant to take positions more than an hour away from their home or relocate for a position.

Feeling Prepared

The literature examined suggests that women need to feel over-prepared before they apply for administrative positions. Women often wait until having all of their education requirements complete before considering a move into school administration (Hoff et al., 2006; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). In a study by Hoff et al. (2006), participants noted that they delayed moving into administration until they could finish their entire leadership program and could gain many years of teaching experience. Similarly, Kruse

and Krumm (2016) found that all of their participants completed more than the required degrees and had ample classroom experience prior to finding an administrative position. Sanchez and Thornton (2010) noted that women question their own abilities and may not apply for positions unless they believe they have all of the necessary qualifications.

Opportunities and Nudges

Women often move into their first administrative position later because they are encouraged to apply, or the opportunity presents itself. This process is often referred to as tapping (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; McNair, 2014; Myung et al., 2011). Tapping is a recruitment tool to help identify future leaders. In Kruse and Krumm's (2016) study, they found that their participants were nurtured and encouraged by gatekeepers to complete their education and apply for positions. Hoff et al. (2006) found that 76% of participants were either encouraged by colleagues to apply for positions or positions appeared in the district at the right time. Young and Mcleod (2001) found that almost all of their participants had been encouraged to enter administration. They note that this nudge into administration was a confidence booster for their participants. Myung et al. (2011) found that 93% of principals and 89% of assistant principals in their study were all encouraged to become an administrator by at least one person. Myung et al. also noted that male teachers are twice as likely to be tapped by their principals than female teachers. This is consistent with the literature on gender bias in school administration.

The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling is a term used to describe the invisible barriers to women's career advancement (Patton & Haynes, 2014; Stufft & Coyne, 2009). In the arena of educational administration, these barriers are a constant struggle for women. This marginalization includes sexist attitudes in hiring practices, androcentric views of a successful leader, the existence of a

good ol' boys network, and feelings of isolation in leadership positions (Hoff et al., 2006; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Sherman, 2000).

Gatekeeping for hiring school administrators has historically lent itself to sexist attitudes (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Women are discouraged from applying for positions, not hired for positions, or are offered positions that may be different than what was originally posted. Sherman (2009) noted that hiring and promoting practices often work against women's best interests. School boards and hiring committees often look for candidates using criteria that is predominantly based on male characteristics. Research notes that promotion by merit is often measured by values of the dominant class of leaders, most notably, men (Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Sherman, 2000; Stufft & Coyne, 2009). Often, these hiring practices are based on outdated, androcentric views of the qualities of an effective leader.

Gender stereotyping in educational administration is an ongoing barrier for women attempting to break into the ranks of leadership. Across the literature, there is significant discussion on the view that a school leader, typically the principal, must be a tough male who is able to exert authority and maintain control (Bernal et al., 2017; Sherman, 2000; Stufft & Coyne, 2009). Burton and Weiner (2016) pointed out in their study of gender identity in principal preparation programs that even preparation programs have a gender-skewed view of leadership. Hoff and Mitchell (2008) suggested that men have an advantage when competing with women for leadership positions because the higher-level positions are seen as needing the kind of authority often attributed to males. Sanchez and Thornton (2010) echoed these sentiments, noting that existing stereotypes suggest that successful leaders must portray masculine characteristics. Although women may be qualified for leadership positions, they continue to encounter these constraints which limit their opportunities for administrative roles.

Gender bias is not just in hiring practices, it is also pervasive within networks of school leaders across schools and districts. Women often report feeling isolated once they step into leadership roles as they often find themselves at odds with the good ol' boys club that still exists throughout school districts today (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Sherman, 2000; Sperandio, 2015). The term good ol' boys club refers to the network of male leaders within a district. This network is often found to be isolating for female leaders as they are often on the outside of the political loop with these groups. Hoff and Mitchell (2008) noted that the good ol' boy network is often seen as either providing assistance to men in regard to job opportunities and resources, or withholding information from women, keeping them on the outside of the loop. Similarly, Sherman (2000) noted that women often do not enjoy the same collegial relationships as male leaders. This network is also marginalizing to women in administrative settings by overlooking women in meetings, leading them to feel invisible. The invisibility and isolation are compounded by the lack of female networks available to women in these same districts. These mentors and networks are essential for the success of female leaders.

Mentors and Support Structures

Research is clear that mentor relationships are critical to the success of men and women in educational leadership (Hoff et al., 2006; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). Unfortunately, a common theme among researchers is the challenge women face in finding adequate mentors and support networks (Hoff et al., 2006; Sperandio, 2015). In a study by Hoff et al. (2006), 78% of first-time administrators reported they did not have a mentor. Hoff and Mitchell (2008) noted that their participants had mentors who gave them “nuts and bolts” information but did not pass on information on behavioral norms and landmines (p. 9). This type of insider information is critical to career success. Pence (1995) noted that women face

additional challenges due in part to stereotypes of being an administrator and being a woman. Hart (1995) noted that, often, as women assume new roles, those who they are leading form negative expectations based on past experiences with other women. Hart (1991) posited that if a new administrator does not fit preconceived notions, teachers may isolate her. Pence (1995) also noted that mentors are vital to women or minorities who are different from the traditional image of an administrator who is “white and male” (p. 125).

As women enter leadership positions in schools, they experience a transition. They encounter new social groups, require new knowledge and skills, and face new norms, beliefs, and assumptions about their new role. Effective mentors help women in educational leadership by showing them the ins and outs of the job, listening to them during periods of high stress, and encouraging them to apply for more advanced positions (Hoff et al., 2006; Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Gardiner et al. (1999) posited that mentors play a pivotal role in demonstrating to women how to combine professional and personal duties. One thing that mentors can do, it seems, is to help women identify the barriers they may face when they move into roles where they are underrepresented. They are used to being overrepresented in the teaching profession; a mentor can help them navigate the gender imbalance in the administrative arena and the additional barrier of gender inequity that exists in school administration.

Feminist Research

According to Ackerly and True (2010) feminism is “the search to render visible and explain patterns of injustice in organizations, behavior, and normative values that systematically manifest themselves in gender-differentiated ways” (p. 464). Feminist research is an approach to studying women from the perspective of their own experiences. The literature is clear that there are varying and complex approaches to feminist research (Brown et al., 2013; Gray et al., 2015,

Olesen, 2011). This variety is a result of researchers coming from different perspectives, the problems or issues that provoke their curiosity, and the methods they choose to explore those problems (Ackerly & True, 2010; Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). There are some common themes across the broad topic of feminist research, including understanding women's experiences, improving women's lives, and equalizing or reducing power imbalances in the researcher respondent relationship (Brown et al., 2013; Gray et al., 2015, Olesen, 2011).

Understanding Women's Experiences

Feminist research is about knowledge. It seeks to understand women's lives through their own voices and experiences in a respectful manner (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Gray et al., 2015). A wide variety of methodological techniques are necessary to help researchers understand women's lives. Using open-ended qualitative approaches allows for in-depth study of women within their environment, social contexts, and using their words (Gray et al., 2015). This is not the only approach to feminist research, but the in-depth discussions help us gain the rich detail in women's stories.

In an effort to understand women's experiences, we must also recognize and respond to power structures in the research process. This includes our own position—class, race, status, culture, whiteness, etcetera—and the influence it has on the research process (Daley, 2010; Gray et al., 2015). As a researcher, the need for reflexivity throughout the research process is essential so that we are aware of our backgrounds and the assumptions that we bring to the research and how this influences our interactions with our participants and the data.

Improving Women's Lives

An outcome for feminist research is to bring about change in women's lives. By exploring and illustrating the diversity of women's lives, we open up the sharing of knowledge,

awareness, and learning of the impact of social hierarchies (Ackerly & True, 2010; Brown et al., 2013). We empower women through their participation in feminist research. We help them bring about change in their communities, reflect on their own experiences, and educate and inspire them to take action (Brown et al., 2013; Gray et al., 2015).

Researcher-Respondent Relationship

Using an ethic of care, women engaged in feminist research work to reduce power imbalances between researcher and respondents (Brown et al., 2013; Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Gray et al., 2015). By having both parties share their personal identities and experiences, researchers build a sense of trust and rapport with their participants. Reflexivity is necessary in reducing power imbalances by keeping the researcher aware of their own identity and assumptions. Power will always play a role in the research process. Researchers must work to have an inclusive partnership with participants, to ensure they are valued and respected and that their voices are heard (Gray et al., 2015).

Feminist Research in Educational Leadership

Many studies on women in educational leadership are grounded in feminist research approaches. In 1999, Jill Strachan studied three female principals in New Zealand using a feminist qualitative research design. Kruse and Krumm (2016) used feminist standpoint theory in their study on access factors for females becoming a principal to “view the inequality of differing social groups from the standpoint in which they view the world” (p. 29). Murakami and Törnsten (2017) used a feminist post-structural discourse analysis in their study on female secondary school principals. In their study of seven female superintendents, Allred et al. (2017), note that “feminist scholarly principles were employed in discourse with the participants and in communication about the research” (p. 4).

This study aimed to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals. This study employed feminist research principles in the discourse with participants and in communication about the research.

Chapter Summary

Much of the literature on socialization in school administration is geared towards specific positions, such as the superintendent or the principal. Far fewer studies examine the assistant principalship, with even less focus on female assistant principals. Hart (1995) noted that the socialization process is especially challenging for those people who are different in ethnicity, race, or gender from those who traditionally fill the role of school administrator.

This literature review has examined the role and responsibilities of assistant principals over time. The literature has demonstrated that the assistant principal role continues to be an ill-defined role with an ambiguous job description. The majority of responsibilities are still focused on student discipline and management, and less on instructional leadership.

Socialization theory as a theoretical framework was also presented in this review. The literature discussed the different stages of professional and organizational socialization and the effects of these stages on the role of assistant principal. Finally, literature reviewing the under-representation of women in school administration was discussed. Family constraints, gender inequities, and lack of support continue to be issues for women in educational leadership. The literature has shaped the design of this study which is discussed further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

It is essential to understand why women enter school administration and how this transition from teacher to administrator impacts the upward career mobility of women. Women are underrepresented in K-12 school administration, especially in high school principal and district superintendent positions. The gateway to these positions is most often as assistant principal. The purpose of this study was to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the challenges of the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals.

This chapter describes the study's research design, including research setting, participant sampling, data collection methods, data analysis, the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research explores a problem in its natural setting in the world and attempts to interpret, analyze, and make meaning from it through the eyes of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Schwandt, 2014). Creswell (2015) noted that while quantitative research identifies a research problem based on trends, qualitative research addresses a problem with unknown variables that requires exploration and development of a detailed understanding of a phenomenon. Qualitative research allows us to hear silenced voices, empowers individuals to share their stories, and helps us to understand the complexities within issues. A qualitative design was selected for this study to understand the complexities of motivators and barriers that

women may experience as they transition from teachers to assistant principals and to give a voice to women, an underrepresented group in school administration.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What experiences motivate female high school assistant principals to pursue a role in educational administration?
2. What are the experiences of female assistant principals during the transition to their role as a school administrator?
3. What are the career aspirations of first-year female assistant principals?
4. What are the perceived barriers, if any, of female assistant principals to the high school principalship?

Research Design

This study encompassed a phenomenological research design with a feminist approach to research methods. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to research using the lived experiences of individuals to describe the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2015; van Manen, 1997). Van Manen (1997) noted that “to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). By giving a voice to female assistant principals, this study aimed to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals.

This study looked explicitly at female assistant principals. Telling the stories of these women through the lens of feminist methodology allowed for an “interpersonal and reciprocal relationship between researchers and those whose lives are the focus of the research” (Bloom, 1998, p. 1). Lather (1991) noted that “feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle that profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives” (p. 91). This study used a feminist research approach to explain how women experience the transition from

teacher to instructional leader. According to Creswell (2013), “feminist research approaches center on and make problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations” (p. 29). By sharing the voices of the participants, this study illuminated how participants experience the realities of developing as a leader. Young (2003) described this type of research as “an approach to studying women from the perspective of their own experiences to develop versions of reality that more accurately reflect their experiences” (p. 37).

Sample

Purposeful sampling is an approach to selecting participants for qualitative research that has three main components; whom to select as participants for the study, what type of sampling strategy to use, and what size the sample is to be studied (Creswell, 2015). This study used criterion sampling to select participants. Phenomenological studies often use criterion sampling, as all participants must experience the phenomenon. For this study, the criterion for participants was female assistant principals in public schools in the United States in their first year in their position.

The following brief biographies introduce the six participants in this study (see Table 1). I used pseudonyms and changed all identifying information to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Participants

Anne

Anne, who is a biracial (Caucasian/African American) woman, was 33 years of age and married with two children, ages three and six years. Anne has an undergraduate degree in communication studies, a graduate degree in education, and an education specialist degree in educational leadership. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in education. Anne has seven

years of teaching experience. She was a first-year assistant principal at a middle school in South Dakota, with 700 students in grades 7-8. She was one of two administrators, and her principal is male.

Anne found my invitation in a Facebook group for school principals. She contacted me directly to participate in the study. Once we established rapport, it took several days before Anne could commit to an interview date. Her principal was out on leave, so she was busy with school activities and could not reply quickly. Anne returned to her hometown to take a position as an assistant principal. She currently works at the school she attended when she was in middle school. The grade levels at the school had changed from a grades 6-8 school when she was a student to a grades 7-8 school now.

Catherine

Catherine, who is a Caucasian woman, is 26 years of age and married with one child, age two years. Catherine has an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a graduate degree in educational leadership. She has four years of teaching experience. Catherine is a first-year assistant principal at a high school in Texas with 2,300 students in grades 9-12. She is one of six administrators, three of whom are women, and three of whom are men, including her principal.

Catherine found my invitation on a local assistant principal Facebook page. It took several emails to get in touch with Catherine after her initial reply, but we were able to set up an interview quickly once we established rapport. Catherine moved from teaching elementary school to high school assistant principal. Catherine's new position was in the same district where she taught.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a Caucasian woman, 29 years of age and married with one child, age 2½ years. Elizabeth earned an undergraduate degree in early childhood education and an MBA with a concentration in educational leadership. She has seven years of teaching experience. Elizabeth is a first-year assistant principal at a high school in New Mexico with 1,904 students in grades 9-12. She is one of five administrators, three of whom are women, and two of whom are men, including her principal.

Elizabeth responded to my invitation through a Facebook principals' group. She and I quickly developed a rapport through our messages to each other. She also recently found out that she and her husband will be moving in August due to her husband's military career. Elizabeth moved from teaching elementary school to high school for her position as assistant principal. Elizabeth was nominated to go through a leadership program that pays for a master's degree but comes with a three-year commitment to the school district in a leadership role. Her current position is the start of her three-year commitment.

Margaret

Margaret is a Caucasian woman, 35 years of age, and married with two children, ages two and six years. Margaret has a bachelor's degree in English, a Master of Science degree in education, and a degree as an education specialist in educational administration. She has 14 years of teaching experience. Margaret was a first-year assistant principal at a middle/high school in Ohio, with 500 students in grades 6-12. She is one of two administrators, and her principal is male.

Margaret also found my invitation in a Facebook group for school principals. After I contacted her directly, she quickly accepted the chance to interview with me. Margaret is an

assistant principal at the same school where she taught for 11 years. Margaret was the only participant to not move to another school for her transition. Assuming a supervisory role within her current school was a unique situation for Margaret and brings with it an additional set of challenges.

Mary

Mary who is a Caucasian woman, is 43 years of age and divorced with two children, ages 10 and 23 years. Mary has an undergraduate degree in anthropology and a graduate degree in educational leadership. She has 15 years of teaching experience. Mary is in her first year as an assistant principal at a high school in Texas with 850 students in grades 9-12. She is one of four administrators, two of whom are women, and her principal and one assistant principal are male.

Mary found my invitation in a Texas assistant principal Facebook group. She was the newest assistant principal in this group of participants as she was hired mid-year for her position, moving from elementary school to high school in a new district.

Victoria

Victoria, who is an African American woman, is 30 years of age and married with two children, ages three and seven years. Victoria has an undergraduate degree in English, a graduate degree in secondary education, and a doctorate in K-12 leadership. She has seven years of teaching experience, including one year as a teacher/dean before becoming an assistant principal. Victoria is in her first year as an assistant principal at a high school in California with 869 students in grades 9-12. She is the only assistant principal at her school, and her principal is male. She is the first African American administrator at her school.

Victoria was the first person to respond to my post for participants. She responded to my invitation in a Doctor of Education Facebook group. As a Doctor of Education herself, Victoria

was quick to schedule her interview and eager to assist me. She and I spoke on the phone the very next day for over an hour, discussing her transition to school administration. Victoria spoke very confidently and candidly about her experiences this school year. Victoria had relocated to a new city and a new school district for her assistant principal position, moving her children and husband with her.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Age	Marital Status	Children (Ages in Years)	Years of Experience
Anne	33	Married	2 (3 and 6)	7
Catherine	26	Married	1 (2)	4
Elizabeth	29	Married	1 (2½)	7
Margaret	35	Married	2 (2 and 6)	14
Mary	43	Divorced	2 (10 and 23)	15
Victoria	30	Married	2 (3 and 7)	7

Creswell (2013) noted that 3-10 participants are recommended for phenomenological studies. This study included six participants. I recruited participants through the use of the social media app, Facebook. As participants were identified through social media or snowball sampling, I sent them a letter of introduction with a brief description of the study, a description of the use of the data, and the time commitment required if they chose to participate (see Appendix A). Participation in this study was completely voluntary and all participants signed and returned a consent form to me (see Appendix B), which I kept in a secured file.

Data Collection

Wolcott (1994) asserted that there are three main ways for researchers to collect data; examining it (documents), acquiring it (interviewing), and experiencing it (observation). In a phenomenological study, the researcher collects data from the individuals experiencing the phenomenon (Creswell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). The primary method of data collection for this study was in-depth interviews. Interviews are a way for researchers to gain in-depth understanding and detail about a research topic (Glesne, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Van Manen (1997) noted that in phenomenological research, interviews serve a very specific purpose; they are used as a means for exploring and gathering experiences as well as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship. In exploring and gathering experiences, the interview helps develop a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (van Manen, 1997).

This study is somewhat unusual in that participants represent multiple geographic areas in the United States. One reason for this is that this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. By March 2020, schools across the country shut down for the remainder of the school year, and teachers, like their students, were sheltering at home due to the nationwide quarantine. Because of the challenges of being quarantined myself and married to an active duty member of the military, which required several relocations during the three years prior to this study, I did not have local contacts or a relationship with a specific school district or area from which to draw participants. I chose instead, to recruit participants through social media, which allowed participants to come from all over the country.

I started the recruitment process by inviting participants from various doctoral program Facebook groups. These efforts did not generate much interest, so at the suggestion of several group members, I joined administrator-specific groups both from my state and nationwide,

including military school administrator groups. After posting invitations in these groups, I received several replies from women expressing interest. I also noticed that people would tag other friends on my post, thereby sharing the information with more people. While this snowball sampling was not intentional, it did help me find additional participants.

After people responded to my post, I sent them a personal message with my formal script inviting them to an interview. Some people never replied to my message. Others did reply and even scheduled an interview but then never showed up for the interview by not answering their phones and then stopped replying to messages. Even with these few no-shows, I scheduled and interviewed seven women. Prior to each interview, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). Each participant chose a time that was convenient for her. Because we were in different parts of the country, we had to work around time zones and work schedules. Additionally, due to the quarantine, participants were dealing with challenges, such as working from home, having children home, and meeting the needs of their schools, which required an additional level of creative scheduling. Our phone interviews and transcriptions were sometimes challenging as there were often interruptions from children. Each participant was individually interviewed once, using a specific interview protocol (see Appendix D), with the interview lasting 1 to 1½ hours.

I only used six of these interviews for this study. Participant number seven disclosed in her interview that she had been working as a district administrator for four years before being an assistant principal. Since she was not a new administrator, she did not meet the study criteria, so I excluded her interview from the findings.

Van Manen (1997) asserted that it is vital to stay close to experiences as lived. He recommended that conversations with participants be audio-recorded to encourage them to share

personal life stories. I audio-recorded all interviews on a recording device and transferred the recording files to a folder on my password-protected, desktop computer. A transcription service transcribed the recordings and I stored them in a password-protected file in Dropbox.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) asserted that data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in a study but are interrelated and coincide. Wolcott (1994) offered three ways to present data; stay close to the data, expand and enhance data through a systematic approach, and interpret the data or make sense of it. In phenomenology, data analysis follows an approach known as *horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1994). Through this approach, the researcher stays close to the data by highlighting significant statements which provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Van Manen (1997) explained that “a phenomenological description is an example composed of examples” (p. 122). During the interviews, I took notes as the participants shared their stories, noting their tone of voice and any statements that stood out to me. I used these notes as I read through the transcripts the first time. I used a journal as I read the transcripts multiple times, taking notes, and pulling out significant statements and themes from each interview. I also listened to the recordings again to hear the participants’ stories through their voices. I left space after each interview so that I could go back and add one-word themes that I saw emerge from the interview, which I then compared to find commonalities between all the participants. My next step was to use the transcripts from each participant and create a new transcript by clustering the responses to each question and rereading them for a new perspective. Through this cross-analysis of the interviews, common themes emerged again, and I compared them to my lists from my journal notes. I used these common

themes to create cluster meanings and began writing passages using descriptions from these clusters, thereby illuminating the essence of the experiences of the participants.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring accuracy and trustworthiness in data analysis is an essential part of doing research. Lincoln and Guba argued that researchers establish trustworthiness when findings, as closely as possible, reflect the meanings as described by the participant (as cited in Lietz et al., 2006). Triangulation is a strategy in which the researcher uses multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings (Mathison, 1988). In this study, I established trustworthiness in the data through the use of multiple data sources and member checking. Turner and Coen (2008) stated that member checking, otherwise known as respondent validation, is a crucial tool for establishing credibility in qualitative analyses. I sent a draft of Chapter 4 to each participant to review for clarification and to comment on their stories and offer suggestions for edits as needed. I used thick descriptions of each participant's background as well as the setting of my study to ensure that the reader may fully understand my process. In addition, findings include extensive personal quotes from the participants to keep their voices central to the study.

Researcher Positionality

In phenomenology, the term *bracketing* refers to the researcher setting aside their own experiences to take a fresh perspective of the phenomenon in the research (Creswell, 2015). I have a background in education and have experienced the phenomenon of the transition from teacher to assistant principal. I spent seven years as a secondary school assistant principal in two different public high schools. Maxwell (2012) argued that "what you bring to the research from your background and identity is a bias" (p. 44). In order to guard against potential bias, I made

an intentional effort to keep my experiences bracketed during data analysis. Moustakas (1994) called this process of bracketing the *epoché*. Epoché is a Greek word that means stay away from or abstain. In epoché, we put aside our biases, judgments, and preconceived ideas (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) encouraged researchers to think about epoché as a fresh start to looking at data.

Limitations

A researcher can never entirely remove herself from the research process. This bias was a potential limitation to this qualitative study, and I discussed this in greater detail related to researcher positionality. However, my experience and positionality may be seen as positive qualities as well. Perhaps study participants may view my experiences as a common thing, and this may support building a rapport more quickly or lend itself to greater authenticity in responses.

The small number of participants may be perceived as a limitation. However, the number of participants is consistent with the aims and goals of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2015). The stories of the participants represent their experiences only and may not be the same as those of other women who are first-time assistant principals. Because the research design follows established procedures for a phenomenological study, the findings can inform practice and advance scholarship related to assistant principals.

Chapter Summary

This study explored the perspectives and experiences of new, female, secondary school assistant principals as they transitioned from teacher to instructional leader. This study used a phenomenology approach to better understand the complexities of the transition from teacher to assistant principal. In-depth interviews provided data for the study, while data analysis used

horizontalization to explore the essence of the lived experiences of the participants. Member checking helped ensure trustworthiness. Reflexivity throughout the process helped create a rapport and trust with research participants.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

Women continue to be in the minority in school administration, even though 75% of the teaching population is female. The role of the assistant principal is the entryway position to school administration. This qualitative study aimed to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the challenges of the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What experiences motivate female high school assistant principals to pursue a role in educational administration?
2. What are the experiences of female assistant principals during the transition to their role as a school administrator?
3. What are the career aspirations of first-year female assistant principals?
4. What are the perceived barriers, if any, of female assistant principals to the high school principalship?

For this study, I interviewed six women and analyzed their responses to questions about their transition to the role of assistant principal. Using the process of horizontalization, I transcribed and analyzed the data, using statements and quotes from the interviews to develop themes common to all participants. These three themes are the essence of better, the essence of loss, and the essence of support. All four research questions are intertwined within these three themes.

In the following section, the six women tell their stories in their voices through the common themes that emerged from their interviews. In feminist research, readers need to

connect with the participants. Consequently, I intentionally included lengthy quotations to keep these women's voices at the center of the findings.

Themes

The Essence of Better

The theme of improvement was a constant discussion throughout the interviews with all six participants. These women were continually looking for opportunities to better themselves, their schools, their colleagues, and their students. This concept aligns with the professional socialization processes described by Armstrong (2010, 2012) and Marshall and Hooley (2006). Assistant principals look for ways to separate from teaching and participate in experiences that demonstrate their interest in administration (Armstrong, 2010, 2012). This phase includes both formal and informal experiences that allow assistant principals to learn about an administrator's role.

A better role. Some people go into teaching expecting to stay in a classroom for their entire careers. Other people begin their teaching career knowing that they want to become an administrator. Whether or not the participants had consciously decided to go into administration, they all sought out opportunities to "better" themselves or others. However, by stepping into these roles and taking on extra responsibilities, participants may have unknowingly cast a positive light on themselves, which resulted in them getting a "tap on the shoulder," thereby starting their transition into the role of assistant principal.

Two participants knew from the beginning that they wanted to become a school administrator. Victoria was very clear that she intended to be a school administrator and eventually a superintendent:

To be honest, I knew I was going to become an administrator when I first became a teacher. I taught for seven years when I started my teaching with Teach for America, and

so I was able to teach in South Carolina, Mississippi, and then at an urban school in Compton, California. Being with my kids and understanding the lack of equity in urban schools strengthened my decision really early in my career that I was not going to be a teacher for much longer, and that I was going to move into administration and ultimately become a superintendent to be a part of the change. I knew early on that I wasn't going to be in the classroom for over 10 years. I knew at five, seven years I was going to be out.

Like Victoria, Catherine knew from the beginning that she wanted to be a school administrator. Catherine got her master's degree after only a semester of teaching. She knew she wanted her degree and wanted to be an administrator: "I knew ever since college that I wanted to be an administrator because I love teaching, and I love being a teacher in elementary and all that."

In contrast to Victoria and Catherine, the other four participants did not enter teaching to become a school administrator. Their reasons for eventually moving into administration were varied. Mary noted that a position in school administration was never her goal. However, over time, she felt that she could make things better on a grander scale as an administrator:

I didn't think I ever wanted to be an administrator. This was not my career path. I did not have it in mind at all whatsoever. But I've been in education for 15 years, and as I went through it, I realized that so many people are in education for the children, but as I became a more senior, I guess, kind of like, what's the word I'm looking for, seasoned teacher, I realized that the teachers are not getting the support that they need in order to be there for the students. A lot of education is pushing for support of the students, there wasn't a lot of support for the teachers.

Elizabeth became an administrator as part of a grant program. She had to fulfill her obligation for the grant by serving three years in a leadership position:

And so I was nominated by my then principal to go through that program, and after the program, you commit to three years of a leadership role in your district. So, I had to agree to those terms in order to get the grant.

Similar to Mary and Elizabeth, Anne was not looking for a career in school administration, but she always wanted to help others to be better:

I didn't think starting out that I would be an administrator. I think I always knew I was going to be at least be in education as a teacher. I liked the helping aspect and I think that really helps me as I form my leadership perspective. I definitely lean towards servant leadership as my goal. My dad was a teacher I always thought that that would be my end goal. I don't know if anyone ever encouraged me versus, I needed that piece of paper to get what I thought I wanted and thought steamrolled me instead of people encouraging me.

As with other participants, Margaret never saw school administration as her career path either, even as other administrators were pushing her towards the role:

Administration was never on my radar, ever. The last several years my principal, my head principal, has been saying: "I really think you need to go into administration. I really think you need to consider it." I was like: "Nope, not what I want to do. Not interested. Maybe guidance counseling someday," that kind of thing.

Bettering themselves. After realizing their goal of becoming an administrator, all six participants returned to school during their teaching tenure to earn graduate degrees, administrative credentials, and education specialist degrees. Victoria is the only participant with a doctoral degree. She shared how bettering herself made her feel ready to apply for administrative positions: "I earned my preliminary administrative credentials. I also enrolled in a doctoral program and finished. Once I was finished with my doctorate degree in K-12 leadership, I knew, okay, I'm ready to start applying for an administrative position."

Catherine got her master's degree after only a semester of teaching. She knew she wanted her degree and wanted to be an administrator: "...I only taught for a semester and then I went and got my masters because I knew that's just what I wanted to do." Mary returned to school in 2017 for her master's degree: "I did it in the fall of 2017, and I started grad school January of 2018, and I finished grad school in December of 2018."

Elizabeth was nominated for a graduate school opportunity by her principal and entered her program after seven years of teaching:

So I became an administrator because I was nominated to go through a program called the Woodrow Wilson program, and they pay for your master's degree. And my master's degree is in business, so they pay for your MBA with an emphasis in educational leadership.

Anne returned to school to complete her degree and apply for other positions in her school district:

I thought I was going to come back as a teacher but as I was teaching, and I was getting into more and more leadership positions I wanted to actually be an activities director at one point. I didn't get an interview because I didn't have the degree so I went back for my ed specialist and then through my leadership classes realized how much I loved the instructional leadership side of it and so pursued more of a traditional administration role instead of activities, which I thought I was going to be doing.

Anne is currently enrolled in a doctoral program: "It's my Ed.D. for leadership and administration. So it's my same specialist. I just continued on to the Ed.D."

Margaret shared how she was hired as an administrator and then returned to school for her graduate degree, which she just completed in May:

Then we had an assistant principal who came last year for one year and he was phenomenal. I'm the eighth administrator in this position in eight years. Yes so it's high turnover rate for this position. He was taking a head position somewhere else and he was doing my evaluation. He just was like: "It's a travesty if you don't try to get into administration." He's like: "I've already told the superintendent that I think they should look at you for this job." I'm like: "I've never even done administration. I've never even taken a class for it." So they asked me if I would consider it and they interviewed like five other people and still wanted me to do it. I got an emergency certificate and started my own master's program for it and that's where we're at today.

All six women described themselves as lifelong learners and have not only tried to be better through their education, but also through the opportunities they sought out as teachers.

Bettering others. As teachers, all six women found ways to continue their learning outside the classroom by taking on extra responsibilities and leadership roles. They all looked for ways to help their schools, their colleagues, and their students grow. Victoria noted:

I went to my principal at the time on different ideas. I was a student-government advisor and so I created a detention system and our first restorative justice system and after a

year, it really worked well. So I got confident after that. I had a lot of trial and error and I had administrators who backed me up and supported me and wanted me to grow because they didn't have any relationships with parents and kids. They used me and I used that experience to boost my resume and strengthen my own skills and confidence with making decisions for an entire school.

Mary discussed how she took on leadership roles on her campus and how her principal

gave Mary more responsibilities to help her grow as a leader:

So I had been, I don't know, I'd been department head, I'd been in charge of a lot of extracurricular activities, and to be honest with you, I have an amazing principal where I was at, and she was such a great leader on our campus, I was like: "We really need more leaders like her." And she kind of pushed me into a leadership role, just giving me responsibilities on our campus, and this was when I was in...high school, this is right before I left this year...and she kind of molded me. But I think it just happened naturally, it wasn't an intentional thing, and it kind of molded me into the leadership role and I just embraced it, and I think we both kind of felt like that was a good path for me.

Elizabeth talked about the programs she brought to her school for her students:

I started bringing in different experiences for our students. So I worked with New Mexico Ag in the classroom and I was really into project-based learning and bringing experiences to kids, and that just kind of took off in our school. So we had kindergarten, second grade, third grade, and fifth grade all working on the same school project by the time that I had left.

Catherine mentioned how she helped other administrators and looked for opportunities in

her district to grow and learn about school administration:

Well, the school that whenever I was teaching, I would try to do as much volunteer type stuff as possible to help my admin. Then in the summer, elementary schools would hire summer school principals but they were just normal teachers and so I would do that during the summers at different campuses so that I could meet more principals trying to get my name out there more. Then meeting with HR people to get my name out there more just to see what they think I would need to do.

Anne discussed ways she got involved on her campus and in outside organizations:

So the last three or four years I started getting restless and so I was volunteering for school improvement committees or scheduling committees, student morale type things that we had. Just trying different ways that I could either grow in leadership or be around different groups of students because sometimes at the high school you get the same kinds of students or the same classes. So as I did that, whether it was directing different kinds of students or I would market and choreograph our musical, just working with different groups of adults at the same time I realized that I was pretty good at budgeting, I was

pretty good at scheduling. I could talk to adults in different parts of our building needed different things and so some of those experiences helped me. When I was teaching, I got really involved with our local education association and I moved up into state. And then was traveling with the NEA stuff. So I did women and minority leadership training and that took me all over.

Margaret shared how the opportunities she engaged in were not just to help herself grow but also her colleagues:

I taught yearbook and I was head of the English department as well. I always sought out leadership activities within my teaching role. I'm just the type of person that I'm always trying to achieve higher and do better and improve. I felt like, I don't know, I had just really sought out opportunities to be a leader in my building, an educational leader in my building, and I think people saw that. Like I said, I was head of my English department. I put everybody on Google. We were not a Google school a couple of years ago and I got Google certified and got everybody else on board. I just was always seeking opportunities to improve the school, improve my own teaching practices, improve my colleagues, just grow, positively grow.

Bettering their future. These women have just begun their journey into school administration and yet they are all already looking towards the next steps in their career. For some, the next step is a principalship, and for others, another assistant principalship, but at a different level. Some are even looking towards continuing their education. Victoria was clear about her future as a superintendent and even intends get involved in local politics:

I'm going to be a superintendent. That's my goal. That's what I'm determined to do. That's the next step. Not sure if five years, but I would say within the next seven to 10 years for sure. I'm currently...I don't know why I was going to undermine myself and say this sounds crazy. No, this sounds realistic. A teacher of mine has really put in my head that I should run for city council. That I think is something that's very realistic in the next two to three years for me. That's where I see myself in the next two to three years.

Mary has aspirations to be a secondary principal and hopes to return to her former district:

I would really like to be back in my old district as a principal. Probably middle school or high school, I like secondary. I love teenagers. They're my favorite. I prefer high school, but I know that high school people probably aren't going anywhere anytime soon, so....It's all family there.

Elizabeth wants to continue as an assistant principal but would be open to other school levels:

I thoroughly enjoy being an assistant principal at the high school level. I think I would enjoy also being at an elementary position, but definitely still in administration, whether it's at an elementary school, high school, middle school, I don't know. But still doing the same job.

When asked about being a principal, Elizabeth was hesitant about making that move: "I don't know. Right now I think my little one is still a little too little for me to take on that much responsibility. So maybe once he moves on and graduates high school or something." Catherine wants to return to elementary school to be an assistant principal or principal: "In five years. I hope to either be back at elementary. And either an assistant principal or even better would be a principal." When asked about staying at the high school level, Catherine mentioned only staying to see her current students graduate: "I'm thinking for maybe four years until the group that I started with graduates and then I don't know that I would ever want to do middle school."

Catherine noted that she would continue to other positions after being a principal and hopes to pursue her doctorate:

I have no idea. I plan on getting my doctorate and superintendent certification so that if that's something I want to do, I could. We have several assistant superintendents and some of the elementary ones are principals that are really good and I really enjoyed getting to know them so I think that would be a neat job, they seem to love it. Then also I thought about going into the colleges and becoming a professor or something in that. What we could do is endless. No, I'm not like: "Oh, I want to be a principal and be a principal for 30 years."

Anne wants to finish her doctorate and eventually take over as the head principal for her current school and one day possibly teach at the college level:

Hoping to finish my doctorate and then I believe the plan is for my head principal to retire, and then I'd like to take over this building. I think I would like to be at a college. I don't have a timeline for that, but even when I started teaching, I always liked that

environment. So I don't know if that's after my career or before retirement. I don't know but I'd like to be at the college level.

Anne was not sure she ever wanted to be a district-level administrator: "No. But then I said I'd never be an administrator too so I don't know. That's too far away from kids I think for me."

Margaret indicated that she would like to become head principal of her current school eventually. When asked about her future she noted:

Head principal hopefully. My head principal is retiring in two years. When I interviewed for this position it was openly discussed, if this goes well for you we would like for you take over as head principal...I have no interest in superintendency...I've taught college English classes, so I've done that. I think head principal is where I'm supposed to be ultimately, where I'll finish my education career.

We always have to be better. Even though these women work hard to improve their schools, their colleagues, and their students, they often feel that they still need to be better. They all shared how they often need to be perfect in all that they do, and they always have to be at the top of their game. Whether starting in their new positions or in moving up the ranks, they continually feel the need to be at the top of their game and better than their male counterparts. Victoria made this observation about moving up through the ranks of administration: "I think if anything in trying to move up, I have to work twice as hard and be twice as competent as my male counterpart."

Often times, this feeling of needing to be perfect came with sacrifices, as Mary described in this scenario when she first started her position as assistant principal:

I'm short, so it was very important to me to look a little bit more impressive than I am, and I know this sounds silly and trite, but my first two weeks of school I was so concerned about making a good impression and looking like a strong woman that I neglected my feet, and I had bloody blisters all over my feet from walking across that high school back and forth so many times. And I know that sounds silly, but I think women have to, like I said, you have to kind of prove yourself initially, whereas a lot of guys don't, and I sacrificed a lot of...well, my skin.

Mary also observed that women feel the need to be perfect and check all the boxes before applying for jobs:

When it comes to looking at a job, we will look at a job and all the job description parts, we will say: “Oh, do we have this, do we have this, do we have this, do we have this?” If we have everything checked off, then we will apply for that job. Men be like: “Eh, I got three out of the 10 things that they need in order to be an administrator,” and I think women expect perfection from themselves in order to feel capable enough to be an administrator, otherwise they feel like they are going to have some serious impostor syndrome.

A common issue for women in leadership positions is the need to be over-prepared for a position before applying for it. Anne discussed this feeling of needing to be over-prepared as a female since they are so few and far between in her district:

I think my first barrier was deciding what level of education I was going to have. I did feel like I needed to have more than other people. I always feel like I need to have one more step just in case. A lot of the male administrators just have master’s and so I came in with my Ed.S. and even further I want a...like I said, there’s no female secondary principals in my town so wanted to go and get my doctorate. So I feel like spending that extra money, time, stress deciding on what level of education I felt like I needed to be prepared there.

Anne also shared how she always had to think about her identity and how she put herself out there: “But yeah, trying to create my identity and how I wanted to present myself instead of how I want people to perceive me I think was one of the biggest barriers because people have a lot of assumptions.” Anne observed that women need to be intentional about how they present themselves at all times:

I don’t feel like I’ve been able to see enough women in that role, and the ones that are, are very intentional with how they present themselves. So, I feel like the men that I’ve seen are at ease in their role. They know that they’re secure in that role. They’re either in an assistantship with a career path that’s pretty clear-cut or they have their head job that they’ve been shooting for and they’ve gotten it pretty quickly. Whereas women that I’ve seen as assistants and trying to move up, I feel like they’re always having to play the game.

Margaret also shared her perspective on having to be perfect all of the time:

You need to make sure you are bringing your “A game” at all times, because as a female you are more heavily scrutinized than a man. So although that’s not fair, you need to approach the position knowing and understanding that that’s a reality.

While school administration may not have been the path that these women initially intended to walk, through their passion for lifelong learning and helping others, all of these women found positions as first-year assistant-principals this year. The next section shows some of the challenges these women have faced in their new roles.

The Essence of Loss

Armstrong (2010, 2012) noted that in organizational socialization, new administrators go through an abrupt shift that separates them from their familiar roles, relationships, and contexts. During this time, new assistant principals go through a period of conflict and grief as they leave their teaching persona behind before they have fully adopted the administrative persona. A common theme across all interviews was the essence of loss. The loss that these women felt ran through all aspects of their life during this first year. Several different losses came out in the interviews, the loss of: people, including their students, classrooms, and colleagues; opportunities; work/life balance; value and respect; stability; and finally, confidence.

Loss of students and classrooms. All of the women expressed some sadness at leaving their students and classrooms behind. Losing their students carried a lot of guilt for many of the participants. Victoria talked about the guilt of leaving her students behind:

My students were a barrier for me moving up at first into administration. Again, I was the constant person at my school for four and a half years and then I relocated to the Bay Area. Before then, everybody would quit on my students, so teachers would quit, administrators would quit, and it was a lot of guilt leaving my students behind. So that created a barrier. That was the reason I was like: “Oh my God, I’m not ready to become an administrator yet. Who is going to take care of my students?” So, I waited until they graduated from middle school before I said: “Okay, I’m ready to move to the Bay Area and give this a shot.”

Similarly, Mary shared her guilt about moving on from her students:

The hardest transition from teacher to administrator was losing the face of my children that I had every day, and that was the hardest part. I thought it was going to be the angry parents, and there's a little bit of that....I had a close connection with my students that I taught this school year, the 2019 to 2020 school year, I taught them in middle school, and then I moved up with them in high school, I taught them their freshman year and then I taught them again their junior and senior years. So I've known these kids since they were babies, so I really, my transition, I think it was a little bit unique in the fact like I really, truly felt like I was abandoning these kids their senior year of high school. So it was hard, but they also knew that this was something that I've been....They went with me to school, kind of thing, they supported me through graduation, everything, through my grad school. So they were very happy, but I know for a fact some of them were really hurt, and that hurt me, because I felt like I was abandoning my kids.

Elizabeth and Catherine both mentioned that they loved teaching and did not necessarily want to move on. Elizabeth noted:

So, it was a whole new world. I came from elementary, I was teaching kindergarten, just kind of doing my own thing. I was enjoying teaching, didn't really want to leave, but knew that I needed to fulfill the requirements.

Catherine shared "I miss teaching in that part of it, but I love this side of it."

Anne and Margaret had similar sentiments about leaving teaching and their students.

Anne shared how she misses teaching, her students, and her interactions with her families:

Yeah, one of the biggest things is, because I missed my classroom a lot. I was able to be creative in a different way. I was able to connect with students and then I could connect with parents differently. I miss that immediate purposeful that I had at....It's not purposeful but a different line of conversation with parents and families. Whereas as a teacher, I was in my own little world. I had some cool elective classes and they were my kids and I had my own little world.

Margaret noted: "It's been very difficult. I'll be honest, it's been one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Teaching, I felt was a calling for me. It was nothing I ever intended on going into." Margaret also felt the loss of her routine as teacher:

I am a very structured, routine person. I thrive on routine. I like routine. Coming in every day as a teacher and having a plan and almost minute to minute my whole day has been planned. Then to come into this position where I am putting out fires all around me every single minute of the day has really been an adjustment for me. I'm a to do list person and I knock things out, feel good about it because I'm accomplishing goals. I can't do that anymore. I might have a to do list on my whiteboard and all hell's broken

out in the last two days because there's a full moon and I've had seven suspensions and two fist fights and haven't gotten anything accomplished. So that's been a very big adjustment, is just trying to....It's so hard I feel like, most days, to catch my breath. I don't get a lunch. I don't get a prep period where I can lock myself away in a classroom and decompress. I don't get that time anymore. That to me has been the biggest adjustment.

Loss of colleagues and friends. Another common loss felt by all the women was the loss of their relationships with teachers as they assumed their new role. Victoria discussed the role of how social media and teachers affected her after becoming an administrator:

When I was a classroom teacher, most of my staff, we follow each other on social media. Once I became a dean, I recognize that I do not want to become a social media friend with these people. As a vice principal, more teachers wanted to follow me so I began blocking people so they couldn't find me, and even as you can see, on my social media, I go by an alias name. You are not going to find me on social media, people! They want to follow you; they want to invade your privacy and space so that they can hold it as leverage against you or because they are nosy. The transition as a vice principal, as a school leader is you have to be very hyper-aware, who is following you and why they are following you. You have to be hyper-aware of what you say because teachers will record you, students will record you and the slightest thing could be taken out of context and be used against you. It's a little bit of paranoia, but it's realistic.

Mary also noted the challenges with teacher relationships:

Oh, it's different. It's definitely different, I just forget that....One of the teachers that I'm connected with, we kind of were watching this TV show and she's like: "I don't even know if I should be discussing this with you, because you're my"....that Tiger King movie or whatever, and I was like: "Yeah, it's kind of inappropriate," but then she was like: "Here, I'm going to send you this meme." I was like: "That's funny." And I told some of the teachers when I got there because they knew I was fresh off the teaching boat. I said: "Look"....And so I tried to let them know that I was still on their team, and sometimes that's hard, because I understand their perspective on a lot of things...

Both Anne and Margaret shared how they "lost their people" when they transitioned to the assistant principal's position. Anne noted:

I think a tough part is losing your people. As a teacher, you have a department or you have your group of teachers, you have your go-to, whether it's your lunch group or your subject area. There could be full days where I'm just on my own course. I might not see my other administrator. I might not have time to call another building or see what's going on. I might just be nose to the grindstone. So, kind of losing a go-to group of people was really a tough transition that first year.

Margaret shared her unique perspective of losing her people as she moved into the assistant principal's role at the school where she taught:

I think one of the largest barriers for me was making that jump from being a colleague with these teachers to being their supervisor. That was unique because I don't think most teachers become administrators in the district they've been teaching at for the last 11 years.

Margaret continued to discuss how her relationships changed with her colleagues:

I was really naïve in thinking that it wouldn't change really. I thought, these people know me. I've taught alongside of them for the last 11 years. They're my friends. They know me. They know I support them. They know I feel about things. Nothing will change. It has been completely different. I have felt very socially isolated. I was very social on the staff. I would have little get-togethers at my house. We'd go out in groups. I was very social. I was a social butterfly on the staff. I was like: "Okay, this will serve me well." Nobody is not my friend or disrespectful or mean to me, but there is a clear divide. There's a clear divide now. You can feel it. I don't know how else to explain it other than it's tangible, you can feel it.

She also shared how she has made relationships work with a couple of her closest friends:

Two of my closest best friends are teachers there and we sat down and had a talk before I took the job. Because I wanted their opinion. They were very supportive. They were both very afraid it was going to change our friendship. So we laid out ground rules, like this is how it's going to be so that we don't let it affect our friendship. Those two, I've pretty much been able to maintain. We're good. We've figured out a system with us three that works well. There are a couple that I was very close with that I have had to, not formally reprimand, but have some uncomfortable conversations about things they were doing. It's different. It's definitely different. At the point I have to have those conversations, it's different.

Loss of work/life balance. The loss of work/life balance was by far the biggest common issue of all the women interviewed. Each woman had to figure out how to create a new normal for their family. This new normal included dealing with extended family issues, finding time to spend with husbands and children, and figuring out childcare for their children. Another type of balance these women had to learn was how to balance their emotional well-being with the stress of their new role as an administrator.

Work/family balance. Finding a balance between work and families was a challenge for all of the participants. Their new positions required long hours at work with extra-curricular activities in the evenings and on the weekends. Many of the women shared how they worked with their husbands to find a new balance at home with the increased demands at work.

Victoria discussed how her family was a barrier to her moving into administration. She noted how she and her husband had to adapt to a new normal:

Family was a huge reason why I thought I would not be able to move into administration well. I have kids, I have a husband, and there is an expectation no matter how inclusive your spouse is, but there is this expectation that the woman needs to be home more raising the kids. As a classroom teacher, I was out of work by 3:30, so I could grocery shop, I could clean up my house, cook, then pick up my kids from daycare and school and my husband can stay home, you know, can work late, come home and everything is in order. When I moved into administration, he had to be more flexible with helping because I have to be at work at 7 in the morning which means I am not able to get the kids dressed and on time and take them both to school like I once could. That created some tension in our marriage. That created divide at first and we had to learn how to make a schedule, balanced it out, and remove the expectation that as a wife, I had to put my kids before everything and my house before everything, because that's not sustainable when you are a wife, mom, and a school leader.

Victoria and her husband worked together to find ways to make her new role work for their family:

What I appreciated about what my husband did is he found someone to clean our house two, sometimes three, times a month and help with laundry which took chores away from me that I would do. And then we decided to buy a home that was halfway between his job and my job.

Mary discussed gender role expectations as a female in an administrative role and how that affected her work/life balance:

...The time expectation when you're an assistant principal, you've got a lot of family obligations still, as female, you still have to have those gender roles...I mean, not have to, but you're assumed to do a lot of the female gender roles at home, in addition, as an assistant principal, especially at a secondary school like a high school, you have to go to the football games, the track...

Elizabeth had similar challenges with the loss of family time with her husband and two and a half-year-old son. She shared how the long work hours affected her family life:

Another challenge has been with family. I have a two-and-a-half-year-old, almost three-year-old now, and I do spend a lot of time at work. So our admin team, we share duties. So we split up the high school games that we have to go to. We split up any sort of academic ceremonies we need to go to and things like that. So it's not all on one person, but that's still two to three nights I'm not getting home till nine, 10 o'clock at night and my little one wasn't used to that.

Additionally, Elizabeth shared how she and her husband carved out special time for the family:

We had a lot of discussions about just like time management and really setting aside days where we would spend family time together and being very purposeful about what we did. So we always set aside Sundays and it was just family time, so we wouldn't plan any sort of gatherings or going to a friend's house or anything like that on Sundays unless we were going over as a family. And just the conversation of this is going to be a lot of time and it's going to look different than being in the classroom because it'll basically be on call 24/7.

Catherine noted that the time commitment was challenging and how she and her husband have taken turns with their careers:

Yeah, it is a lot of time commitment because we have all the extra activities and things that we have to go to in high school. Luckily my husband started a business a couple of years ago. He's a [blinded company name] agent so it was like a year where he was working a ton and all that. I was like: "Well, now it's my turn." So it hasn't been too bad.

Work/caregiver balance. Most of the participants have young children which was another challenge in their new role as assistant principal. These women experienced pressure, guilt, and sadness at not being available to take care of their children during this transitional period. Finding a support network to help with childcare was essential for all of these women.

Victoria and her husband worked out a schedule for taking care of their children:

He is responsible for taking my son to school and I'm responsible for taking and picking up my daughter from school. That adds a balance, but it took time and it took kind of ignoring traditional family structures in order for that to work.

Mary had to find ways to make her new role work for her as a single mom:

And it's a lot, but I waited, my daughter is a little bit older, so it worked out for me. But having a younger child, that would have been very difficult, because the expectation is that you're not supposed to bring your kid and that kind of thing, even though it's extra hours.

Elizabeth discussed how she relies on her husband and parents to help with childcare:

Yeah. So, my husband picked up quite a bit of the slack. He is fortunate enough to have a position that is a little bit more flexible, so he can go in a little bit earlier and come home earlier to grab him. And then also my parents live in the same town as we do. So my parents have helped pick him up and watch him on weekends or things like that whenever we need it.

Anne shared how her parents help with childcare:

I can be gone six nights out of the week and so having a family and being the main moneymaker and main caregiver in my household was something that I had to work out between home, work. Luckily my parents are still around so they're gracious enough to help us with childcare. My husband's in law enforcement so his hours are all over the place, but just getting on that schedule there.

Margaret acknowledged that balancing being a wife and mom with her new role as an assistant principal has been a considerable challenge. She said: "I think the second largest barrier was figuring out how I was going to handle all of the responsibilities and still be a wife and mom." Margaret noted the loss of being able to attend events at her son's school:

My son is in kindergarten in the district. They have tons of family events that happen during the school day. I'm 100 feet away and I can't go to any of them because it's very difficult for me to get out of the building. There's that constant feeling like I have to pick and choose sometimes between the job and the community's kids and my own.

She continued:

I have two small children and dividing that time between still being a mom in the evening to my own children and attending a slew of events and whatnot going on at the school I think is a unique kind of challenge to female administrators, particularly ones with children. Thankfully I have a husband who pitches in and will help and hang out with the kids and whatnot, but typically I think in our country, and maybe even in the world, that stereotypically the mom is with the kids. I feel like I have to do some more maneuvering to make sure I've got childcare than a male administrator would have to do.

In some cases, the guilt of balancing work and family came from family. Victoria had the additional pressure of her parents and her in-laws questioning how she was going to balance being an administrator with her family:

...My husband's parents, my parents, they then bring in their own opinions about how a house should be governed, which does not work when you are an administrator. For example, my husband's father saying: "Oh, well, who is going to take care of the kids? Who is going to help make sure he is all right?" I would say: "He is grown. He can step up and help out." My parents were saying: "You need to just hire a nanny. You need to just this and that." It's like, well, financially, sure, we can hire a nanny, but I just want to make sure that I and my husband are on the same page and we can help and support each other without having to bring a third party in our home.

Mary had to deal with her ex-husband's doubts about her ability to balance her work and home life:

My ex-husband is kind of concerned about my ability to mother...because he kind of is like: "Well what about her during this, what about her during this?" My daughter's about to be 11, so she can go to the football games with me, or she can go to the extracurricular things with me.

Work/emotional balance. Several participants mentioned that aspects of their new role as administrator caused emotional distress for them in their first year. They had to learn coping mechanisms to handle new situations. Victoria shared how the stress of disrespect from parents and teachers put a strain on her in her new position:

I would say the first three months especially, I felt like I was going to break down. It was a lot of self-reflection that was needed to get me through those first few months. The constant being undermined by teachers and the constant disrespect, it wasn't just subtle. It was blatant disrespect from parents. I thought it was going to break me, and by "break me" I don't mean I was going to quit. I grew up in the hood. Excuse my French, I thought I was going to cuss their ass out and just be done with it. Culturally speaking, where I come from disrespect is something.

Victoria found an outlet for her stress at home:

And so I had to learn how to be disrespected and be okay with people being disrespectful without physically putting my hands on people. I learnt to block out social media, and I learnt to defend myself and defend my family's name in a professional and constructive

way. And that took a lot of patience, and it took a lot of boxing at home in my garage, so I can come back out fighting in a different way.

Anne talked about needing to learn how to create boundaries for herself from work:

In administration, it's around the clock, especially with this distance learning. It's so hard to turn it off. I just within the last two weeks finally did a do not disturb on my phone for emails. That phone email sound haunts my nightmares. It could really be 24/7 between calls, text, emails, and it is hard to finish. Especially this fall when I was trying to work on my first impression and my 100 plan, and all of those things and finish it by the end of the day. There really isn't an end of day. There's an end of business. So I wish I would've had more a realistic idea that I needed better skills on [how] to turn it off.

Anne also felt the emotional drain of giving 100% all the time:

Sometimes thinking about purpose I feel like as an administrator it's hard because when teachers or staff come in and I've tried to be better about me going to them outside of when I just need something, but when people come in it's because they need something done, or answered, or signed, or paid for and it's hard not to feel used. So instead of me getting to push out into my classroom and that give and receive you have with students, my first semester was just draining because I didn't feel like I was getting anything. I was just constantly giving. I was trying to figure out....This district uses different software, different communication tools, has different setups, there's no real student handbook. So just trying to create systems in place, create those things and give back and try to put out, and I'm a big first impression person, is I'm trying to be 100% all the time. So that was a hard transition.

Margaret found that dealing with students who had stressful home lives was very challenging for her:

Because I deal with discipline, I'm involved with every single CSD phone call referral that's made. We've had to pink slip students. I'm involved in all of that. We're talking like horrible home lives of these kids. It has worn on me as a mother. The first couple of months, I would have to sometimes excuse myself and go cry somewhere because the horrible things I had just heard.

Margaret found, however, that after some time it was less stressful to be in these situations: "The problem with that is you eventually get jaded to it and used to it. Even though it upsets you....I haven't had to excuse myself from a room in months. You get used to it."

Loss of opportunities. Another loss felt by all of the women was a loss of opportunities. Several participants described experiences of losing out on administrator jobs because they were women. Other times, the position they applied for was not the position that they received. In some cases, these women were at schools that had a history of only having male administrators.

Victoria talked about how finding the right position was difficult because the description of the jobs she applied and interviewed for were different from what the districts ultimately offered her:

Prior to me moving up, I had quite a few offers as an administrator, but it was always curriculum and instruction and that was not what I wanted. I wanted to do more of the student activities, athletics, and discipline. I thought that was very gender-biased because a lot of schools typically want men to be the disciplinarian and to have that authority, or they want men to be the athletic directors. I would interview for work that was specific for athletic and discipline and I would be offered with curriculum and instruction. I felt that was a very gender-based decision.

Mary found out that she lost out on positions because the hiring team was looking for males:

...they flat out did not even hire a single woman for the job because they said they did not want a woman for the job. So...flat out, even though I had been with the district for 12 years, they refused to interview a single woman.

Mary was surprised that she was not qualified because she was female: "I didn't even think that that happened this day and age, but they didn't feel I was qualified for the job because I was a woman and they wanted a man." Mary heard from a friend that the hiring team was not looking for a female:

So I found out from one of my friends who was in on the interview process, one of my administrator friends who was in the interview process told me that the superintendent and the assistant superintendent did not want to hire a woman, and they actually said: "Hey, we could get...in here just to say we interviewed a woman," and my administrator was like: "Absolutely not, you're not doing that to her."

Mary shared how this hiring practice will affect her in the future if she tries to go back to her former district:

They don't think the superintendent will stay, and my administrator, she grew up in that community, and I've kind of grown up in that community, so I just feel like it's kind of a waiting game just to get rid of the good old boys club that's in there right now and then they'll be fine. They flat out told me the last time I applied there, they wouldn't hire me for a job because I wasn't male, they wouldn't even interview me. So unless that superintendent leaves, and the assistant superintendent, who's also a female, which is really disappointing...

Elizabeth also noted a similar instance where she lost a position due to being "female:"

I do know that I was passed over in one job because I was a female. When I did interview at an elementary school, it came to light that they wanted a male presence on their team. Yeah, I'm close friends with the person who got the job.

Anne and Margaret observed that in their districts, female administrators were a rarity.

Anne works in the district where she attended school as a child and remarked that there were no female administrators when she attended school there: "Growing up, I never saw a female administrator." In looking for a position now, Anne noted: "I think getting into secondary is difficult around here, especially for a head position. A lot of times females seem to be at the elementary level."

Margaret noted that female administrators are in the minority in her state:

Okay, it is, in my county and my state, really honestly in Ohio largely, I'm not sure what the statistics are. Female administrators are hard to come by, especially in my county. They call it the boys' club. Just the fact that I'm a female administrator in this county is an anomaly. It is not common. So, I think you have that stereotype going into it to begin with.

Margaret detailed how growth opportunities are rare for women in her district: "Women are not given leadership roles in my building. It is rare." Additionally, Margaret discussed how she had not seen many women administrators during her teaching career: "In the 14 years I've been in

education, I've only been exposed to two other female administrators. They both were for a very short period of time."

Loss of value. Even though these women are highly educated and highly qualified for their new positions, they all suffered a loss in feeling valued during their first year as an administrator. The women talked about being dismissed because they are female, having to earn respect from parents and teachers because of their age, and being held to a different expectation than their male counterparts.

Being dismissed. Mary mentioned how she often feels dismissed in meetings with other male administrators:

My male administrators have been very dismissive. So when I speak in meetings and things like that, a lot of times they interrupt me, they cut me off. Sometimes I'll make a suggestion, and before I'll even finish, they'll: "Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, we're just going to do this," but then when my, like where I'm at now, I have another male assistant principal, when he suggests the exact same thing I suggested, they'll go with it. It's very frustrating, because sometimes I have to pass my ideas along to him in order to get them done.

Mary also shared how people dismiss her because she is new:

And also my ability to make educated decisions based on the information. I don't know, it just seems like I've got more experience teaching than the other APs combined, yet because I'm new, then all of those 15 years of education that I have in my background, they're dismissed, and it's just kind of like: "Oh, you're starting over again." I'm like: "Yes, but I have a whole toolbox of great stuff." But again, I'm the new person, so....And I don't think men have to prove that when they come in, because a lot of them don't stay as a teacher very long before they become administrators.

Additionally, Mary observed that other staff members dismiss her:

Even from our security officers on campus, because I was searching a kid's backpack one day and looking for drugs and vapes and things like that, and we had our campus officer in there with me to observe, and as I'm putting his clothes back in there, I'm folding them up and putting them back in, the kid goes: "You don't have to fold my clothes." And the police officer goes: "Well of course she does, she's a woman."

Catherine shared her views on how earning respect is different for women and men:

I think that men come with the stereotype that they are strong, mean, and powerful and they just immediately get respect. Whereas women, you have to prove yourself that you deserve to have it not that just you got it because of who you know or anything like that. I would say that aspect for sure. It's almost like they're just given the respect because they got the job.

Anne shared her experiences of being "othered" by male colleagues:

I feel like even coming back to my current position there's a good old boys' club and I know that's a sweeping generalization but that's my experience and it's hard to figure out what my role is and what they're comfortable with me being. I'm not going to try to be one of the guys right away but it doesn't always feel like my experience or my education, or my perspective is valued. If I can't talk about what they're immediately talking about I don't. I feel like even as a teacher in some of my jobs and now in administration I'm always othered and I know that I have a complex identity and it just adds that layer of where do I stand? But I don't think I've ever been in a room with male and female administrators that have felt like they're on the same page or same level of authority.

Additionally, Anne observed that the male assistant principals often support each other, but do not include her:

Just because there was another assistant male hired at the same time in another building, I feel like they call each other. They stop by each other's buildings and hang out. I'm busy. I don't need that but I definitely see it. That they just have time to hang out or call each other on their office phones and see what's going on and hang out a little bit more than I'm invited to.

Anne also shared her frustration over the good ol' boys network and how that affects her value as a female administrator:

I don't know if I'm surprised, but I'm frustrated how clear the good old boys thing is true. You're hoping that your merit or your work ethic, or what you know, or what you're able to bring to the table would earn you a spot but what is...if they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair. So I'm just in every meeting almost bringing my own chair.

Two of the women observed that being dismissed meant not having the same expectations as their male counterparts. Anne shared an observation about how she is treated by her male principal at times:

There'll be times where I'll have my notebook at an admin council and my head principal will tell me to take notes for him, or just little things like that as if I was like a personal

assistant instead of a colleague and I wonder if...I've never seen anyone do that to a male assistant. And again, I don't know if that's just my situation, but I can't imagine him turning to a male and saying: "Make sure you take notes for me" or "Where am I supposed to be today?"

Margaret also noticed a different standard for her than her predecessor when it came to attending extracurricular activities:

In the past all the male administrators we've had go with him to everything. They'll go out and have a beer after or whatever. But we don't do that. So there is a different expectation for me as far as that goes. Last year's assistant principal, he went to every single athletic event with the head principal. They rode together, they went together, everything.

Even though this may be a benefit to Margaret who has small children, the different expectation is noticeable: "I'm supposed to technically be attending every athletic event in the evening with him. But I have not had to do that. He said: 'I'm not going to ask you to do that. You've got two small children at home.'"

Being young. Several women shared that being a younger administrator made earning respect from staff and parents very challenging at their schools.. Victoria discussed having to earn respect as a young, black administrator at her school:

I think being a woman teacher is way easier as far as earning the respect of your students, earning the respect of your peers as in a teacher capacity, because women are seen as being nurturers, caretakers, pseudo-mothers to children in schools. So being a female teacher is an easy transition.

Victoria found that her age and race made it difficult to command respect from the parents of students: "At this point, again, I'm the first black administrator, I'm 30 years old and parents did not automatically respect my role as a vice-principal because of my age and because of my race."

She talked about the lack of respect that was present before she even started her position:

It's not like it was just one parent that consistently tried to undermine me, it was multiple parents. It was parents showing up to say: "Hey, who is this new vice principal?" and then I would say: "Hey, I'm Dr....nice to meet you." And then they would say: "Oh, you are the VP? How old are you, 16?"

Victoria also found that her age made earning respect with her teachers difficult:

One of the biggest roles you have as a vice principal is evaluations, like teacher evaluation. So again, my age plays a factor. I had mostly teachers who have been in the field 30, 35 years and we had a culture at our school, where teachers opted out of doing evaluations.

Catherine also had to deal with her age affecting how people viewed her as an administrator:

I think some of them might have, because I'm only 26 and so coming into high school especially, there were lots of things about me being so young and a woman. I just think it's lower expectations then they would expect with men.

Like Victoria and Catherine, Elizabeth and Anne struggled with being young administrators and gaining respect from staff members. Elizabeth observed:

I am probably one of the youngest administrators that my school had seen. I'm only 29. And so coming into that role of not only being new but also coming from elementary school and being so young, I had to really work on relationship building with a lot of the teachers before I could do any sort of leading with them.

Anne had the unique experience of attending the same school where she is now an administrator. Being a former student created an unusual situation for her with staff members that had once been her teachers:

Yeah. So he walked into my office and he's like: "Weren't you one of my students?" I was like: "Yeah, back in 2000 or whatever." So it's taken a lot to build that relationship and to show him that I'm not just one of his students anymore, that I can bring more to the table than that.

Anne also had to deal with people making assumptions about her because of her young age. Anne commented: "I think I'm talked down to, I'm young. I know I'm younger. I taught for seven years but I'm 33. A lot of my coworkers are in their 50s. Most of them are."

Being capable. Several women discussed having to prove themselves with the low expectations placed on them, especially when it came to school discipline. Mary shared how stakeholders told her that she would not be able to handle discipline:

Oh, I've had to walk in and, in fact, people have told me: "Oh you're going to have to do discipline, you're not going to be able to handle the discipline part," because I'm a very big-hearted person. Whenever a kid needed stuff on our campus, I was always the person that would be like sleeping on the roof to do a fundraiser to make money for the.... That kind of stuff. And it's hard for me, because people walk.... When I came into a campus, they didn't think I could handle discipline because I'm a female. And I may handle it less authoritarian and more authoritative, or whatever, but I think a lot of people were questioning my ability to discipline just because I walked into the role as a female.

Mary noted that coming from elementary school affected staff members' expectations of how she would deal with discipline: "There were a lot of people who didn't think that I would be successful at it because a lot of people think elementary is just giving them hugs and being sweet to you and nice and not actual real good teaching."

Catherine had to deal with people underestimating her abilities as a new administrator as well:

I think what surprised me most was how much people underestimated me. They just had low expectations of: "Oh, the kids are going to eat her alive. We'll see how long she lasts." Instead of just expecting me to do good because then when I do something good and it's something minor, it's like: "Oh, you did such a great job." It's like, well I can do such an even better job. You all don't even know the beginning of it.

Anne shared how community members questioned her abilities because she was female: "Oh, I don't know if a female can do that. If she can handle those kids." So earning community trust that it's not just because I wear heels doesn't mean I can't chase down a kid and jump a fence if I need to.

Anne shared how staff learned she could handle herself:

That summed up so much of what the prevailing notion was is that female just means weak sometimes and I'm the main disciplinarian and I think they learned really quickly that I can drop my tone if I need to and kids will leave if they need to.

Anne also observed how being a female resulted in her being treated differently in discipline situations because of lower expectations:

There were times where I feel like experiences or situations were taken out of my hands because they thought I couldn't handle it. If it's a big kid or a student that's very physical I was pushed to the side or said: "Someone else will handle it." Or I can be the one that makes the phone call even though I'm pretty good with talking students down. So I feel like the physical, they thought they were keeping me safe, so some of those situations were taken out of my hands which really everyone can see what's happening and it takes the power away from me instead of just letting me handle it.

Margaret shared the perspective of how students treat her differently as a female:

Just because like I said, I'm a woman. I'll give you an example. I have this one student who has now been evaluated from an emotional disturbance. But at the beginning of the year, he did not. This kid will call me every name in the book, every name in the book this child has called me. He's 16, but he does not do that to the head principal. I think if I was a man he wouldn't be acting towards me like that.

Loss of confidence. Challenging aspects of being a new administrator are learning all about a new role, a new school, new people, and a new identity. For many of these women, this led to a loss of confidence. They often second-guessed themselves, trying to keep their heads above water, wondering if they deserved their position, and hoping that nobody noticed that they did not always know what they were doing.

Victoria talked about the challenge of imposter syndrome:

I would say the first challenge is imposter syndrome. I think that's the silent killer. I think even though I had the education, and I was the dean and I taught, that little voice is still in the back of my mind because of the politics and the conflict of me taking the role.

Mary talked about imposter syndrome and questioning herself in meetings with other administrators:

Oh my gosh, massive, massive. I feel like that all the time. I sit at meetings and I make a comment, and my principal before it even leaves my mouth is already blowing me off or whatever, and I'm just going: "What am I doing? Am I even doing this right?" But then I sit in meetings and he's questioning my, I asked something about district alignment the other day: "No, we don't need to worry about what the district's doing," and I'm going: "Yeah, we kind of do, but okay." So yes, I question myself a lot.

Elizabeth talked about imposter syndrome and having to pretend that she knew what was happening:

I think just coming in not knowing anything, I had to fake it till I made it. And whether that was I told them outright that: “Hey, I don’t know what I’m doing,” or I just smiled and nodded and then went back to my office and researched and then I was like: “Oh, okay. That’s what they’re talking about.” And that happened a lot with our SPED Low Incidence. Someone would talk to me about an IEP goal or some services that they were receiving and I wouldn’t necessarily know what they’re talking about until I went back to my office and either called someone or did a little bit of research or read through their IEP again.

Anne talked about her self-doubt and not deserving of her role:

Oh, big time. Even as far as back as my first interview. I was like: “I shouldn’t be in this room.” And I don’t know if that goes back from starting my program I felt supported when really I didn’t feel like I deserved it. I got that intern position which was the first one at the secondary level so I’m getting this thought of like: “Why did I get it?” Even in my interview, I wasn’t done with my degree yet but why am I here? And then there’s so many times that doubt just fell....Or even getting into my doctoral program. There’s so many pieces that I feel worked really well, the timing was great, I busted my butt. I know what I’m doing but I look around and I feel like I’m....I do feel that imposter syndrome. Like: “When’s the gig going to be up?” Somethings going to fall through and I’m not going to have the answer and people are going to know that I’m new. Yeah, I think throughout my entire process of coursework, interview, and now the job I have felt that imposter syndrome.

Margaret observed that she had been second-guessing herself all through the first few months of the year and was finally starting to feel good about herself in her new role:

I think from basically September when the building opened until December I was just, fake it until you make it. Fake it until you make it. They closed our schools. March 16 was our last day. I really felt like I was getting into the groove of things. I was not second-guessing myself and I had processes down. I was really getting a handle on things and making it my own.

The first year in a new position as a school administrator was challenging for all of the participants. They all agreed that the piece that helped them overcome those challenges was the support they received. The next theme details the different kinds of support these women received and felt were necessary for a successful administrator.

The Essence of Support

As new administrators, all six women discussed the need for support both professionally and personally. Personal supports came in the form of nudges or taps on the shoulder from supervisors, family, and mentors. Professional support came from credential programs and district programs.

Personal support.

Nudges and taps on the shoulder. Nudges and taps are a common theme across the literature on female school administrators (Hoff et al., 2006; Kruse & Krumm, 2018). Whether these women planned to go into administration or not, these women have been nudged towards opportunities or tapped on the shoulder for roles in administration by a supportive principal or supervisor. Even though Victoria was intent on going into school administration from the start, she was nudged into it by her mentors and tapped on the shoulder by her principal to take on leadership opportunities at her school site:

The administrators would pull me from class to go to another class to calm kids down and then I would go back to my class. I had a mentor who was the superintendent at another school district that was like: “Okay, you really need to think about being an administrator because you have a really good, you build really good relationship with kids and you create good systems.”

Mary shared how her principal encouraged her to seek out a position in school administration:

I have an amazing principal where I was at, and she was such a great leader on our campus, I was like: “We really need more leaders like her.” And she kind of pushed me into a leadership role, just giving me responsibilities on our campus...and she kind of molded me. But I think it just happened naturally, it wasn't an intentional thing, and it kind of molded me into the leadership role and I just embraced it, and I think we both kind of felt like that was a good path for me. So I mentioned it and she's like: “Yeah, you need to do it,” so...

Mary talked about her female administrator at her previous school and how supportive she was:

So my female administrator, she took me under her wing and gave me extra responsibilities to prove it to the administration, the other administrators, the central office, that I was completely capable of handling the job. In fact, she would give me extra responsibilities. So she helped push me along to do these things, she's been super supportive. And my whole administration team up there, they were all females and they worked really well together, supporting each other. I know that's not the normal, always, in every school, but that was such a blessing in that particular district I was in.

Elizabeth was nominated by her principal to go through a leadership program where she earned her master's degree:

So I became an administrator because I was nominated to go through a program called the Woodrow Wilson program, and they pay for your master's degree. And my master's degree is in business, so they pay for your MBA with an emphasis in educational leadership. And so I was nominated by my then principal to go through that program, and after the program you commit to three years of a leadership role in your district.

Catherine had support from female administrators, helping her to get a position:

There were two female principals that I was working for at the time and they guided me and helped me through it all. Then after all that was over and I kept trying to get a job, one of them became my mentor. When I got job interviews and stuff, she would reach out to those principals and talk to them about me. She just helped guide me so that I would be successful.

Both Anne and Margaret had an administrator who helped push them into their new roles.

Anne talked about the nudges she received from her principal:

But the difference that one person can make going forward. He encouraged me to apply for jobs, the internship, I wasn't going to apply for. I figured I wasn't ready. He set me up with the superintendent, set up a conversation about that position, wrote me a letter of recommendations for the intern as well as my current position. He was someone who just gave me his number, said: "Call, what do you need? Who do you I need to talk to for you?" Just having that at least one person made a big difference on me moving forward even into my doctorate or applying for the positions that I'm in.

Margaret had a principal and an assistant principal nudging her into administration:

The last several years my principal, my head principal, has been saying: "I really think you need to go into administration. I really think you need to consider it." Then we had

an assistant principal who came last year for one year and he was phenomenal. He just was like: "It's a travesty if you don't try to get into administration." He's like: "I've already told the superintendent that I think they should look at you for this job."

Individual personal supports. For many of the women, they received support from family members, former administrators, and peer groups. Victoria spoke about a group she created to help her get through her first year as an assistant principal:

I created a group of African American female administrators in my district and so once a month we go out to dinner, we brunch, we go to museums together, we go to wine tasting together. That has been really cool. I wish I knew that there was a support system in place, or there can be a support system for female black administrators that can get you through a lot of the hurdles that you are going to experience. To be honest, they've been my support system and I've been theirs. That's what really got me through those difficult times my first year.

Victoria also shared how her husband has supported her this year:

What also surprised me is just how my husband accepts this so much; to be a support system at home and at my job. I think there is always this subtle fear that I would need to choose between my family and being a school leader, especially when I was first hired and all of the kind of drama in my household with the transition. My husband is at a point now where he will take both of the kids to basketball games when I have to chaperone. They are at movie nights. My husband helped me fund our staff lounge. He comes to my job to bring me lunch because as an administrator it's impossible to eat. You don't have time to eat. He has really stepped up a million per cent and that has been surprising and I'm grateful for that.

Mary described mentoring in this way:

Coaching and mentoring is huge, I think really it is. And it's not just, it doesn't have to be a specific platform like a program. More it's just putting the face and the heart of a person that's readily available to you and can help you bounce ideas off before you make a decision or make a fool of yourself. You need somebody around you that you can feel free to make mistakes, and instead of a punitive reaction, you get a growth reaction from them.

Mary continued to talk about a previous principal with whom she still keeps in contact:

Yes, she is my mentor. She is, and the other assistant principal there is as well. And I don't know how people would go through grad school with all the requirements and everything else if they didn't have somebody they could shadow and talk to. I don't know how people could do it.

Mary also shared an observation about finding a mentor:

If you don't have a good mentor, find one that you used to have. If you don't have anybody currently, then find another teacher friend who maybe went into administration, or find another principal that you know that you really could look to, or even if you go to college and you still haven't found anybody, a lot of the college professors that I had were willing to, they would give us their cell phone numbers and I asked them for advice all the time, especially when it comes to legal issues.

Elizabeth shared how her coach from her principal preparation program has helped her:

Okay, so through the Woodrow Wilson program that I went through, we met every other Saturday for two years with some educational coaches and they would bring in different speakers and have different lessons for us. They were really focused on the school leadership aspect of running a school. And so I did that for two years and then now I have a leadership coach that I meet with quarterly, and we meet as a large group quarterly and then I meet with her monthly. She helps me talk through different issues that I'm having. She challenges me to step out of my comfort zone when it comes to or whether it's talking with teachers or dealing with difficult situations, having crucial conversations and things like that.

Catherine shared how two female administrators helped her find a position as an assistant principal and ultimately became her mentor:

There were two female principals that I was working for at the time and they guided me and helped me through it all. Then after all that was over and I kept trying to get a job, one of them became my mentor. When I got job interviews and stuff, she would reach out to those principals and talk to them about me. She just helped guide me so that I would be successful.

Anne talked about the support she received from her dad, who was a teacher:

I think my dad was one. He had always played around with going back for his administrative degree and just never did. So when I started talking about it he was all for it and thought I would be able to handle it. He's seen a lot of administrators come and go in his time. He's been at the same building for about 30 years, just retired.

Anne also had a male principal who was very supportive of her and helped push her into administration:

He was one who asked me if I was getting my admin degree. He didn't know I was and he would always check in my classroom, see how my coursework was going, asked what I needed, asked when he could write his letter of support. He's someone just through conversation made me feel supported and I had someone to talk to. And it's amazing...

Margaret shared a different type of personal support. Moving up to being an assistant principal at the school she taught at put Margaret in a unique position. She shared her observations of the support she received from her teachers and community about going for this position:

They actually had a teacher panel for the interview. That was the first interview. These teachers that I've been teaching with for 11 years were interviewing me, which was interesting. But it was all super supportive and whatnot. I got a lot of support from the community as well. I live in the community. I'm not from where I teach but my husband graduated from here. Since I've gotten to the school I've coached, I've been advisors to different groups, I've been really active in the community, so once word got out that I was one of the candidates, people were posting on Facebook. The community was pretty supportive.

Professional support. All of the women were in agreement that support from professional organizations are necessary for success in careers in administration. These professional organizations included supervisors from their school sites, district trainings, and university programs. Victoria mentioned that it should come from a principal to an assistant principal:

It needs to come from the principal first when it's the VP. When it's the principal, that mentorship needs to come from a principal, support group of principals. I'll say the same thing for VP, like the group I created where we go to lunch once a month and stuff that helped. I think there needs to be more mentorship from area superintendents to principals.

Mary discussed support coming from a university program:

When I was at University, I had, my professors there also pushed us into the community. So we were teachers, and a lot of us were in grad school together in our little cohort, and she would have us go out in a community and do things, like she had me present my research, she had me go out and join a nonprofit organization. This was hybrid online classes as well, but she really took us and nurtured us as community members and got us out of our comfort zone a little bit, because a lot of us like to play safe, we like to be perfectionist, and she kind of pushed the envelope with us to get out there and get our faces out in the public to network a little bit.

Elizabeth asserted that programs should be widespread so that administrators can meet with colleagues from outside their school and district:

I think having a mentoring program where they're partnered up with someone not necessarily in their district. I think seeing and getting information from outside of your district and outside of your town is extremely important and I don't think that happens very often.

Catherine expressed that support and training should be ongoing:

I think there would need to be a training that's not, or maybe like a mentorship that's not just a four-day training and then you go back and you use what you learned. An ongoing type program where you're continually learning and reflecting and changing and growing to be better.

Anne had a different take on mentoring. Female administrators are rare in her state and Anne wasn't sure that the mentoring program would be successful for her given that all the administrators are men:

It's hard, I know we have a mentor program in the state but it's all men, because I looked. I looked when I first got hired because they do have a first year one and there were a few women but they were elementary. So I struggled with signing up with that because I would've had to pay for it, I would've had a male mentor and I honestly didn't know what I'd get out of it.

Anne felt strongly that a female mentor would make a huge difference:

But if there was a successful female I think that that would be huge. I think back to my principal, the one guy who kept pushing me and pushing me. Supporting me in different ways. I think that can make a big difference.

Anne also observed that classes and meeting with administrators outside of your district are a great way to get support and network:

So enjoying classes, enjoying that process and start networking. So if that's teacher leadership pieces, if it's being able to sit down with administrators getting experiences outside of your building because every building is so different, and even once you get one on one with your administrator you'll see that their perspective even if you don't see it on a daily basis, their perspective and why they do what they do is so different. Their reasoning, so starting to experience things outside of your classroom because once you start to see the big picture it all changes.

Like Anne, Margaret does not have access to female mentors and wishes she could have a female mentor:

I think for females it's absolutely crucial you have other female administrators that can serve as mentors. I do think that are experiences are unique and we need that kind of sense of community and especially because we're so rare.

Margaret also discussed how having a group of female administrators would be in terms of support and fostering success:

Yeah, so it would be nice to be able to have some kind of, whether it's an organization or something to where you can talk to other female administrators in these roles and discuss some of these issues that I think are unique to us. I think that would be a huge help that way. Honestly, education. I feel like administrators, in order to be the best and be effective and be this ideal principal, need to have that knowledge of why it's important to be that way. Why is it important that you're taking information from all stakeholders before you make a decision? So people feel like they've got a part in it and just that organizational leadership and organizational psychology. I think it's necessary that you have those kinds of support so you understand why it's important to do it this way.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented data collected from six interviews with female, first-year assistant principals. Using the transcripts from the six interviews, I coded and analyzed all of the data for this study. In this chapter, I shared the three main themes and subthemes. Themes that emerged from the data were; the essence of better, the essence of loss, and the essence of support. In discussing the essence of better, I share the subthemes of a better role, bettering themselves, bettering others, bettering their future, and always having to be better. The essence of loss was a large theme that included the subthemes of loss of students and classrooms, loss of colleagues, loss of work/life balance and work/emotional balance, loss of value, loss of opportunities, and loss of confidence. The final theme of the essence of support included subthemes of personal and professional supports. Using quotations and statements from each participant, these women

told their own stories to support each theme and subtheme. In the next chapter I present the discussion, implications, and conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological feminist research approach to understand the pathways and barriers of six women who, at the time of this study, were pursuing administrative roles. Women are underrepresented in K-12 school administration, especially in high school principal and district superintendent positions. Young and Skrla (2003) noted that in feminist research, we center women in our work and “explore the characteristics of women leaders and the institutional and professional cultures within which they work” (p. 1). I wanted to understand how women entered school administration, what their shared experiences were before entering, what their collective experiences were during their first year as an administrator, and how this impacts their future pathways as an administrator. The conclusions from this study may be helpful for other women who are considering a career in school administration. Additionally, other researchers may find this information useful as they study the experiences of female school administrators. Furthermore, this study may add insights into what supports are needed to help female administrators be successful in their upward career mobility.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the essence of the transition from teaching to school administration, the challenges of the role of a female assistant principal, and the career aspirations of female assistant principals.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What experiences motivate female high school assistant principals to pursue a role in educational administration?
2. What are the experiences of female assistant principals during the transition to their role as a school administrator?

3. What are the career aspirations of first-year female assistant principals?
4. What are the perceived barriers, if any, of female assistant principals to the high school principalship?

This chapter begins by summarizing the main findings found in the interviews of six female assistant principals as they relate to the research questions. Next, I offer recommendations for female assistant principals, followed by recommendations for further research on female leaders in education. I conclude with personal insights gleaned from this study and a summary of the findings.

Discussion of the Findings

There were some surprising revelations that emerged from the data, especially when comparing the participants' findings with each other. The findings on marginalization shared by all of the participants were especially disheartening. The main findings of this study are summarized and discussed in the following section by each research question that guided this study. A discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature on the theoretical framework and feminist research follows the main findings.

Research Question 1. What Experiences Motivate Female Teachers to Pursue a Role in Educational Administration?

As teachers, the participants all ultimately sought leadership positions within their school sites. Often, they were motivated by the need to help bring about change at their schools. To help her school, Victoria was the student government advisor and created a restorative justice program. Similarly, Mary was a department head and in charge of many extracurricular activities on her campus. Catherine was a summer school principal in her district and did volunteer work at her school to help her administrators. Elizabeth brought in outside programs for her students. Anne was on school improvement committees and choreographed school

musicals at her school. She also took leadership roles in the faculty union. Margaret was the yearbook advisor and department chair and looked for ways to help her colleagues grow. These experiences helped the participants be noticed by colleagues and supervisors. Whether they knew it or not, the participants' experiences with leadership were steps towards becoming school administrators.

Being tapped on the shoulder was a part of each participant's eventual shift from teaching into school administration. Although not all of the participants wanted to become school administrators, they were encouraged by supervisors and colleagues to take on leadership roles in their schools and to consider pursuing administrative positions. Victoria knew that she wanted to be an administrator from the beginning of her teaching career and was supported along the way by her supervisors and mentors. She was pushed by her principal to help struggling teachers in their classrooms and she was encouraged to move into school administration by a mentor who was a superintendent in another district. Similarly, Mary noted how she was encouraged by her principal to take on leadership roles and to move into an administrative position: "And she kind of pushed me into a leadership role, just giving me responsibilities on our campus...and she kind of molded me." Elizabeth was nominated by her principal to go through a master's program. Anne, who was nudged by her principal to apply for positions, noted how that one person could make a big difference: "Just having that at least one person made a big difference on me moving forward even into my doctorate or applying for the positions that I'm in." Likewise, Margaret was tapped by both her principal and an assistant principal to move into her assistant principal position. Becoming involved in leadership activities on their campuses and being tapped on the shoulder by mentors and supervisors, led each participant to the role of assistant principal.

Research Question 2. What Are the Experiences of Female Assistant Principals During the Transition to Their Role as a School Administrator?

Although it may seem paradoxical, the participants experienced a sense of loss during the transition from their role as teacher to their new administrative position. The participants in this study observed how they felt the loss of their students, colleagues, and their routines. Mary summed this up when she said: “The hardest transition from teacher to administrator was losing the face of my children that I had every day, and that was the hardest part.” Likewise, relationships with colleagues was another painful loss felt by all the participants. Margaret noted that, “there’s a clear divide now. You can feel it. I don’t know how else to explain it other than it’s tangible; you can feel it.” In addition to the loss of people, the participants felt a loss in value and respect as new administrators.

The participants repeatedly expressed feeling marginalized when they became administrators. They heard from friends, colleagues, and community members about how they would be eaten alive, not be able to handle discipline, and how being a high school administrator would be too hard for them. Mary was told: “Oh you’re going to have to do discipline, you’re not going to be able to handle the discipline part.” Likewise, Catherine heard comments such as: “Oh, the kids are going to eat her alive. We’ll see how long she lasts.”

Several of the participants noted how their age contributed to the marginalization. Victoria noted that parents made disparaging comments such as: “Oh, you are the VP? How old are you, 16?” Anne also had comments from staff, especially as she was once a student at her school. These findings demonstrate an ongoing barrier for female administrators’ career advancement and is discussed further in a subsequent section.

Research Question 3. What Are the Career Aspirations of First-Year Female Assistant Principals?

Out of the six women in this study, only Victoria stated that she wanted to be a superintendent. Catherine mentioned getting her superintendent certification and possibly getting a position in the district office, but she was not definitive that a superintendent position is a final goal for her. The other four women were all interested in continuing as assistant principals, with three of them wanting to eventually become a principal, either at their current school or at a school at which they previously worked. Mary noted that she wanted to continue on as a principal at either the middle or high school level. Elizabeth wants to continue as an assistant principal at either the high school or elementary school level. Anne and Margaret both want to take over as head principal of their respective buildings after their current principals retire.

Research Question 4. What Are the Perceived Barriers, if any, of Female Assistant Principals to Higher Positions in Educational Administration?

Many of these women encountered challenging obstacles within their first year as a school administrator, including family constraints, feeling underprepared, difficulty finding mentors, and gender bias.

Work/life balance. This study demonstrates that work/life balance issues continue to be an obstacle for women in school administration. As noted by Victoria:

Family was a huge reason why I thought I would not be able to move into administration well. I have kids, I have a husband, and there is an expectation no matter how inclusive your spouse is, but there is this expectation that the woman needs to be home more raising the kids.

Five of the six participants were married, and all six participants had young children, when they moved into administrative roles. Establishing new routines with their families as a

result of increased work hours was a substantial challenge for all of the participants. Many of the participants commented on how they had to work long hours and find ways to meet their family's needs. Margaret noted: "I think the second largest barrier was figuring out how I was going to handle all of the responsibilities and still be a wife and mom." Mary echoed this sentiment:

...The time expectation when you're an assistant principal, you've got a lot of family obligations still, as female, you still have to have those gender roles....I mean, not have to, but you're assumed to do a lot of the female gender roles at home.

Elizabeth mused how work/life balance and childcare were an issue for her moving up to a principal position: "Right now, I think my little one is still a little too little for me to take on that much responsibility. So maybe once he moves on and graduates high school or something."

Similarly, Anne noted how she left her big school district to take a position at a smaller school district because she did not see a female successfully managing school/life balance: "I didn't see a successful secondary female assistant principal that was the main caregiver that had a balanced work and home life that was happy." In addition to work/life balance, another barrier for women obtaining a position in education administration is the sense that they need to be more prepared than men in order to take on the role.

Feeling over-prepared. The need women may feel to be over-prepared before applying for administrative positions perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in administration. Women wait to acquire credentials while men are more likely to take risks and apply for positions even before they are fully prepared. Several of the participants echoed this sentiment. Victoria reflected: "I earned my preliminary administrative credentials. I also enrolled in a doctoral program and finished. Once I was finished with my doctorate degree in K-12 leadership, I knew: 'Okay, I'm ready to start applying for an administrative position.'" Anne

expressed a similar sentiment when discussing her own level of education and her perceived need to be over-prepared:

I think my first barrier was deciding what level of education I was going to have. I did feel like I needed to have more than other people. I always feel like I need to have one more step just in case.

Mary further noted that women feel the need to “check all the boxes” before applying for positions:

When it comes to looking at a job, we will look at a job and all the job description parts, we will say: “Oh, do we have this, do we have this, do we have this, do we have this?” If we have everything checked off, then we will apply for that job.

Additionally, she noted: “I think women expect perfection from themselves in order to feel capable enough to be an administrator, otherwise they feel like they are going to have some serious impostor syndrome.” The findings from this study demonstrate the ongoing need for female administrators to have a good professional mentor to help discuss career paths, professional preparation, and opportunities.

Mentors. Young women who are teachers and considering administrative leadership roles may see women who currently struggle to achieve work/life balance due to gendered expectations both at the school site and at home. However, seeing women successfully balance their career and families as they move into leadership roles is critical to helping young women advance their careers. Unfortunately, finding successful female mentors is still a challenge due to the underrepresentation of women in higher levels of administration. Many of the participants in this study addressed the lack of available mentors to them. Both Anne and Margaret worked in districts that had a majority of men in leadership positions. They both mentioned going to assistant principal meetings and noticing a “sea of men” in the room. They also reflected on how much they would like to have a female mentor to help them in their new positions. Anne

posited: “It’s hard, I know we have a mentor program in the state, but it’s all men....I would’ve had a male mentor, and I honestly didn’t know what I’d get out of it.” Margaret echoed similar sentiments:

I would love to have a female administrator mentoring me right now, but I wouldn’t even know where to look. I go to my principal meetings in the county every month, and it is men. It’s a sea of men.

Victoria noted the lack of support for African American female administrators which led her to create her own support group in her district: “I created a group of African American female administrators in my district. They’ve been my support system and I’ve been theirs. That’s what really got me through those difficult times my first year.”

Gender bias and inequity. The findings in this study were clear that gender bias and inequity is rampant in school administration. Three of the six participants discussed losing out on positions because they were female. Victoria noted that the jobs offered to her were different than what she applied for because she was female. Mary and Elizabeth discussed how they found out after interviews that the panel wanted to hire a man. All of the participants discussed how they had to deal with low expectations from stakeholders because they were female. The participants often heard that they would not be able to deal with discipline, they would be eaten alive, or they were too nice to deal with discipline. Several of the participants indicated their perceptions of a “‘good ol’ boys’ network” in their district that excluded them from key professional opportunities.

Several of the participants detailed examples of how they have found solutions for the gender bias they encountered. Anne talked about not “having a seat at the table” so now at every meeting she “brings her own chair.” Mary discussed women having to make a range of

sacrifices to meet expectations. She described how she sacrificed her skin by wearing shoes that gave her blisters in order to look more professional, make a better impression, and seem taller:

I always wanted to look very professional, it was very important to me. I'm short, so it was very important to me to look a little bit more impressive than I am, and I know this sounds silly and trite, but my first two weeks of school I was so concerned about making a good impression and looking like a strong woman that I neglected my feet, and I had bloody blisters all over my feet from walking across that high school back and forth so many times. And I know that sounds silly, but I think women have to, like I said, you have to kind of prove yourself initially, whereas a lot of guys don't, and I sacrifice a lot of...well, my skin. But did I keep wearing those shoes? Hell yes I did.

Victoria described how she learned to work out her frustrations at home to fight the disrespect she received at her school: "And that took a lot of patience, and it took a lot of boxing at home in my garage, so I can come back out fighting in a different way." Victoria was able to affect positive change on her campus in a variety of ways while fighting pushback from staff on the changes she instituted.

Findings Related to Existing Literature

Findings related to socialization theory. This study is framed by socialization theory, which defines the processes of learning and performing a social role. Existing literature suggests that there are four main stages of socialization for assistant principals: anticipation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). This study focused mainly on the first two stages of socialization: encounter and adjustment, as the participants were all in their first year as an assistant principal. Professional socialization begins the moment that teachers begin to think about becoming an administrator. This period is the first phase of socialization, also known as anticipation, deciding to leave, or entry-exit (Armstrong, 2010, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012).

The existing literature offered many reasons as to why teachers make a shift into administration. These reasons seem to fall into two categories; an intentional goal to become a

school administrator in order to affect change on a larger scale, and an unintentional goal that emerged only after seeing an unexpected opportunity or after a metaphorical tap on the shoulder where someone suggested a leadership role. “Assistant principals leave teaching because they see an opportunity, they have role models that encourage them, or it has been a career goal” (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 27). The findings from this study affirm these reasons in that the participants had many experiences that guided them towards a position in school administration. These experiences included serving on school committees, bringing new programs to their schools, taking on leadership roles, and leading extra-curricular activities at their schools.

Additionally, the participants described how they were encouraged to become involved in these opportunities and activities by other leaders and mentors. Tapping is a common practice discussed in the existing literature. McNair (2014) noted that “tapping identifies people at different stages of their careers who can then intentionally prepare for leadership at various levels in the organization” (p. 190). Being tapped on the shoulder was a part of each participant’s eventual shift from teaching into school administration. Although not all of the participants wanted to become school administrators, they were encouraged by supervisors and colleagues to take on leadership roles in their schools and to consider pursuing administrative positions.

The second stage of socialization occurs once teachers step into the role of assistant principal. Armstrong (2010, 2012) noted that this transition often marks an abrupt shift that separates the newly appointed assistant principals from their familiar roles, relationships, and contexts. The participants in this study emphasized their feelings of loss when they transitioned into their new role. These losses included the loss of their students, colleagues, and their routines. The literature is clear that this is a common feeling for administrators in organizational

socialization. During this time, new assistant principals go through a period of conflict as they are leaving their teaching persona behind, but they have not fully adopted the administrative persona (Armstrong, 2012).

The findings from this study supports the literature on socialization theory by demonstrating that through formal and informal experiences, the participants progressed through the first two phases of professional socialization during their transition from teaching to a leadership role. While these experiences are common to socialization theory, many of the findings shared by the participants are specific to women entering school administration and will be discussed using a feminist research lens.

Findings Related to Feminist Research

Feminist research is an approach to studying women from the perspective of their own experiences. According to Ackerly and True (2010), feminist research is “the search to render visible and explain patterns of injustice in organizations, behavior, and normative values that systematically manifest themselves in gender-differentiated ways” (p. 464). By exploring and illustrating the diversity of women’s lives, we open up the sharing of knowledge, awareness, and learning of the impact of social hierarchies (Ackerly & True, 2010; Brown et al., 2013). The experiences detailed by the women in this study demonstrate the ongoing gender inequity in school administration. The findings of this study were divided into three subgroups, the essence of better, the essence of loss, and the essence of support. These three areas are all specific to female leaders.

The essence of better. The existing literature notes that women often wait until having all of their education requirements complete before considering a move into school administration (Hoff et al., 2006; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). Women

wait to acquire credentials while men are more likely to take risks and apply for the positions even before they are fully prepared. This was true of the participants in this study. They had master's degrees, doctoral degrees, educational specialist degrees, and a variety of leadership experience as teachers. They shared the sentiment of "waiting" until they felt they were ready to apply for positions. These findings align with the research that demonstrates that risk-taking characteristics play a role in the career advancement of women (Hoff et al., 2006, Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).

The essence of loss. A glaring finding that came out of this study was the tremendous loss and grief experienced by the participants during their transition to their assistant principal role. While the experience of some loss and grief during the transition to a new role is a common theme in the literature, this study demonstrated a profound loss in many aspects of the lives of the participants that was not noted in the literature. The loss and grief felt by the women in this study went beyond leaving their students and colleagues behind and learning a new role. In addition to this, the participants discussed losing their work/life balance, emotional balance, professional opportunities, a loss of value and respect, and ultimately, a loss of confidence in themselves.

As noted in the extant literature, one of the barriers to a female administrator's career is the divide between the role of professional and personal responsibilities (Biklen, 1980; Paddock, 1981; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Sperandio, 2015). The women in this study each noted the loss of their work/life balance as they found themselves working longer hours in their new roles. Many of the women had to lean on extended family to help with childcare. Some of the participants expressed how they had ongoing conversations with their husbands about sharing responsibilities at home, finding ways to balance home responsibilities, and the increased

workload. Research on women in leadership roles has demonstrated that many women are expected to maintain traditional family roles independent of new job responsibilities (Loder & Spillane, 2005; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). This was echoed by some of the participants who did not want to apply for higher level positions because of their young children. They felt the time commitment would be too much with young children at home. This study demonstrates the persistence of this gendered phenomenon.

While the loss of work/life balance is a common topic in the literature on female administrators, the loss of emotional balance is rarely mentioned if at all. Dealing with disrespect from parents and staff, emotional anguish over the challenging home lives of students, and finding new boundaries with a job that does not end when the day is over, all tugged at the emotions of these new administrators. Each of the women had to find new ways of coping with the trials of their new position. In addition to coping with finding an emotional balance in their new role, the women in this study suffered other losses that come directly from the ongoing gender inequity found in educational administration.

The women in this study suffered losses in professional opportunities, loss in value, and a loss in confidence in themselves during their first year as an assistant principal. The loss of professional opportunities and loss in value are discussed in the literature surrounding gender stereotyping and gender inequities in educational leadership (Hoff et al., 2006; Hoff & Mitchell; 2008; Sherman, 2000). Several of the participants acknowledged how they lost out on professional opportunities because they were women. They either did not get a position or were offered a different position than what was advertised due to their gender. These practices are all too common as noted in the literature. Gatekeeping for hiring school administrators has historically lent itself to sexist attitudes (Kruse & Krumm, 2016; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer,

2006; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Women are discouraged from applying for positions, not hired for positions, or are offered positions that may be different than what was originally posted.

Gender stereotyping is a continuing practice in school administration (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010; Skrla et al., 2000; Sperandio, 2015). Across the literature, there is significant discussion of the view that a school leader, typically the principal, must be a tough male who is able to exert authority and maintain control (Bernal et al., 2017; Sherman, 2000; Stufft & Coyne, 2009). The women in this study suffered a loss of value and respect in their new positions as they were constantly dismissed by other male administrators. They often heard that they would not be able to “handle” their new positions, that they were “so young,” and that they “were going to get eaten alive.” They were overlooked in administrative meetings, left out of professional get-togethers with other male administrators, and subject to sexist comments and remarks in interactions with other staff members. Many of the women noted the persistence of the phenomena of a good ol’ boys’ network that created a level of isolation for them in their new role. Hoff and Mitchell (2008) noted that the good ol’ boys network is often seen as either providing assistance to males in regard to job opportunities and resources or withholding information from women, keeping them on the outside of the loop.

The final aspect of loss discussed by the participants is another finding from this study that is not often discussed in the literature. These women lost confidence in themselves and felt like imposters in their new positions. They were often second-guessing themselves, trying to keep their heads above water, wondering if they deserved their position, and hoping that nobody noticed that they did not always know what they were doing. Along with feeling isolated by other male administrators, having to prove themselves to staff members and students’ parents was one of the biggest losses felt by the participants. This loss of confidence also highlights the

need for professional support for these new administrators and the lack of female mentors available to them.

The essence of support. This study highlights both the need and the lack of support for female administrators. The literature demonstrates that support comes in many different forms. Many women receive support in the form of nudges or taps on the shoulder even before applying for administrative positions (Hoff et al., 2006; Kruse & Krumm, 2016; McNair, 2014). Tapping is a recruitment tool that can help identify future leaders. Most of the participants in this study were encouraged to apply for administrative positions. They were also given extra leadership opportunities at their school sites while they were still teachers. They all had supervisors or mentors who recognized their leadership potential. However, once they became administrators, they all suffered from not having a successful network of female leaders available to support them.

A common theme among researchers is the challenge women face in finding adequate mentors and support networks (Hoff et al., 2006; Sperandio, 2015). Effective mentors help women in educational leadership by showing them the ins and outs of the job, listening to them during periods of high stress, and encouraging women to apply for more advanced positions (Hoff et al., 2006; Kruse & Krumm, 2016). The participants in this study echoed the sentiments of the related literature on support for women. These women ached to see successful women leaders in administrative positions. Often, they commented that at their administrative meetings, they only saw men in the room. The lack of successful female administrators to guide them fueled their feelings of isolation and in some cases kept them from moving into higher positions. As existing literature notes, mentors and support systems have a direct, positive impact on women's ability to advance in their careers (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).

The findings from this study support the body of feminist research on educational administration by demonstrating the ongoing issues in career advancement for women in educational administration. These findings affirm the ongoing marginalization of women in school administration and the challenges faced by women climbing the ladder into leadership positions. Furthermore, these findings add to this important body of research and demonstrate the need for continued research on women in educational administration by documenting the enormous losses and sacrifices experienced by these women during their transition to leadership.

Recommendations for Future Female Assistant Principals

During my interviews with the participants of this study, each participant offered advice for women looking to enter the field of school administration. Based on their experiences and suggestions, the findings of this study, and my own experiences, I have created this list of recommendations and suggestions.

The first recommendation that I offer is to not wait to apply for positions. You will never feel ready. You will never be perfectly prepared. Victoria noted that she wished she knew this when she was a classroom teacher: "I'm very capable. I wish I knew that. Maybe I could thrive more, because I was paralyzed and immobile." This sentiment is echoed throughout the existing literature and the findings of this study. Many of the participants noted how they felt they needed to be over-prepared before applying for positions. I had this same feeling as an administrator. A female administrator who encouraged me noted, "you'll never feel ready, but you are. You need to go for it!" Keep an eye out for administrative positions that are posted within your district and if something looks interesting to you, apply for it. Do not be afraid to look at job postings in neighboring districts too. Step out of your comfort zone and apply for

positions. Even if you do not get the position, you get the experience of interviewing and you also get your name known to hiring committees for the future.

The second recommendation is to find a mentor who is supportive and encouraging to help develop the confidence you need to take the risk and apply for positions. As Mary noted, “If you don’t have a good mentor, find one that you used to have.” It is critical to have someone to turn to for advice and support. The women who have come before you have been in your shoes and understand the challenges you are facing. You may not find a mentor in your district. Look to other districts and to your preparation programs for mentors. You may need to create your own support system. Victoria did this in her district. She started a group of African American vice-principals from around her district that continue to be a support system for each other. Get to know the other assistant principals at your school site and at other schools in the district. Find ways to get to know them outside of district meetings. You need someone who you can be comfortable asking questions of and just someone who can listen to you when you have a rough day and who understands the struggles you are facing.

The third recommendation is that you do not know what you do not know. It is perfectly okay to not know everything. Part of being a new administrator is learning to be a leader and learning the ins and outs of a new school district. Administrative preparation programs will not prepare you for everything. As Elizabeth says, “Be confident and ask for help. If you don’t know something, ask.” Be comfortable with the concept of not knowing what you don’t know, and in your strengths and weaknesses. There are many unknowns with a new position and asking for help shows that you are open and willing to learn.

The fourth recommendation is to get your name out there and take initiative. From my experience, and echoed by the participants, one of the reasons we became administrators is

because we wanted to bring change to our schools. Find opportunities as a teacher and a new administrator to bring a change to your campus. Identify issues, even seemingly small ones, and find a solution. Share these ideas with your team and your supervisors. Catherine noted that “it shows a different side of a person than just doing a good job anytime they are told to do something.”

The fifth recommendation that came out of this study is to find opportunities to be a leader on your campus while you are still a teacher. Anne suggested finding different leadership positions and figuring out your strengths and what you like. Your credential and degree programs are great places to network and build support for yourself. Take the time as a teacher to serve on committees, be a department chair, start new programs at your school, and take classes. These activities and opportunities will help build your confidence and ultimately help develop the skills needed for a role in school administration.

The final piece of advice is a recommendation aimed directly at new female administrators. As women, we have to bring our best to our positions. As Margaret said: “You need to make sure you are bringing your “A game” at all times because, as a female, you are more heavily scrutinized than a man.” While this may not seem fair, it is a true statement. We have to work harder and be more prepared all the time. However, when taken in conjunction with all the other advice given by the participants, it is only one piece of becoming a good administrator. Having confidence in yourself, building a strong support network, and knowing your strengths and weaknesses all contribute to your A game.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study sought to add to the body of research on both assistant principals and female administrators. Separately, both of these areas need further research. First, assistant principals

continue to be an under-researched group in school administration. This position is the entryway to school administration for both men and women. Also noteworthy is the need for research on support for new administrators, as well as preparation programs directed towards the assistant principal position. Current preparation programs are geared more towards the principal position and are often more theoretical. As this study shows, new administrators continue to go through a state of culture shock when they begin their jobs. Preparation programs need to focus on case studies to help aspiring administrators understand the complexities of their new positions.

Second, additional research is needed to understand the systemic barriers that seem to conspire to keep women out of leadership roles and why women continue to be under-represented at the highest levels of school administration; this includes research on the persistent forms of loss experienced by women during their transition to administrative roles. These experiences of loss are perpetuated by the gender bias shown toward new female administrators. Further research on the loss of work/family balance and how professional organizations can find ways to help women be successful while raising a family, such as job sharing, is essential. Research on the continued pervasiveness of good ol' boys clubs and how to help school districts identify and eliminate them is critical towards ending the ongoing gender bias in educational administration. These networks encourage gender stereotyping and marginalization of women, thereby contributing to the challenges of women entering school administration.

Third, additional research is needed on successful mentoring programs that target women and lead to successful leadership. Mentors are instrumental in career advancement for women, yet in many districts, there are still so few females in administrative roles, which creates a lack of mentors for new and aspiring female administrators. Additionally, research is needed on leadership development programs for current school district leaders. Programs are needed to

help train current leaders on how to better support female leaders. Programs need to include understanding and identifying gender bias in school districts specifically to meet the support needs of female leaders, as well as support for all new administrators. By understanding the needs of new female administrators, we can offer better programs to help prepare them to be strong and successful leaders and in turn give back to the young leaders coming up behind them.

Implications for Change

It is clear from this study that there are systemic barriers in place in school administration that women continue to have to struggle against as they work to find their place in leadership positions. These barriers will not be removed easily. I offer some recommendations to help begin the process of breaking down these barriers.

School districts need help identifying and dismantling the barriers that exist within their walls. As this study has shown, school districts often work to keep women out of administrative positions. Hiring committees are often looking for men for the positions they are filling. School districts need help develop better pipelines for women to become administrators. They need to recognize the importance of having these pipelines for women to enter administration and then work to develop the paths for them get there. One suggestion to help with this process would be to partner with independent educational consultants from outside the district to examine the culture and identify these barriers. The consultants could then work with the district to educate administrators about what these barriers look like and help create programs that eliminate the barriers and provide a more inclusive, supportive environment for all district leaders.

Additionally, consultants can work with the school districts to revamp hiring processes to be less gendered and more available to women. Consultants can work with school districts to offer

support programs to female teachers that are designed to encourage these teachers to seek leadership opportunities and apply for positions.

Mentoring programs for school administrators are lacking in our school districts. The participants in this study all noted how much they wanted and needed female mentors to help them in their new positions. Universities and educational consultants need to work to create mentor training programs for administrators. Both male and female administrators need mentors. However, it's not enough for a seasoned administrator to just work with new leaders. They need to be trained on how to be an effective mentor. School districts could then partner with universities to bring this training in for current administrators. This could include professional development on how to support new administrators, as well as support programs for all administrators including the creation of teams of administrators who work together throughout the school year supporting each other. This training needs to be tailored to meet the needs of both male and female administrators. As this study has shown, female administrators have different struggles and need different supports than male administrators. It is critical that both mentor programs and school districts understand these different needs.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the experiences of women as they transition from teaching to a career as a school administrator. The transition from being a teacher to an assistant principal is an essential step in the career of a school administrator. This research is a continuation of the work done by many female researchers before me. Female school administrators continue to fight an uphill battle for representation in the highest levels of administration.

In this study, the six women interviewed have all met with some form of gender bias and discrimination during their transition to school administration. Each woman has dealt with the guilt of leaving their students behind and faced building new relationships with staff members. They have had to agonize over childcare issues and how to balance their professional and personal identities. However, even with all of the hurdles they have endured, they continue to look to the future and how they can help their students, staff, and schools grow and thrive.

This study demonstrates that issues brought forth in research on female administrators for the past 40 years are still prevalent in our schools. Gender inequities continue to exist and women continue to be underrepresented in the highest levels of school administration. While we have increased the number of women in principal and superintendent positions, we are still woefully underrepresented. We need to do better.

We need to continue the discussion on women in school administration. We need to continue to listen to the women in these roles and learn from their stories. We need to educate our school leaders and our preparation programs. Only then can real change begin to happen.

EPILOGUE

When I began this study, I was interested in the position of assistant principal. I had learned early on in my doctoral course work that the role of assistant principal was under-researched, and I was excited to choose this as my dissertation topic to add to the body of research on this critical role. As a female administrator, I had experienced the transition of going from a teaching position to becoming an administrator. I remember feeling like I was dropped in the deep end of the pool and told to sink or swim on my first day as an assistant principal. I know how it felt like I never completed a task in the first few months. I also experienced the low expectations of being a female in an administrative role. I remember male administrators taking my place in discipline situations where they felt it wouldn't be safe for me. I remember walking into an interview for a principal position and being introduced as "the lady in red," simply because I happen to be wearing a red dress. I worked hard to remain aware of my experiences and then to bracket them during this study. My experiences as an assistant principal gave me an advantage when talking with the participants because I could relate to what they were experiencing. At the same time, bracketing my own experiences enabled me to focus solely on my participants and their stories. I realized as I completed this chapter that my study had changed from when I first began; or rather, maybe it was me who had changed. Since I began my doctoral program, I left the world of school administration to become a full-time mother to my children. I became more focused on the *role* of assistant principal rather than the *person* in the role. Hearing the stories of my participants evoked certain memories of experiences from my own time as an assistant principal.

As I wrote this, I realized that this study is about the women in the role, not the role itself. It was about these women and their stories; where they had gone, where they had come, and where they are now. I was one of these women once. It was really about what was happening to them and what they were seeing and feeling in their new role; it was so much more than just the role itself. It was about these women and their experiences, and also my experiences, because all of a sudden I was seeing myself all over again and realizing things that I had forgotten. This study is also about the many women that will read this study in the future and see themselves in the participant's stories. I want the conversation to continue. I want the women coming up behind me to know that I support them and that I wrote this for them and that I understand how they feel. I want their paths to be better than mine, than the paths of the women in this study. I want them to have the support they need and I want them to give back to the women coming after them.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPTS

Email Introduction to Stakeholders

Hello! I hope you are well. I am connecting with you today as I move to conduct my research in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of the Pacific. The purpose of my proposed research is to examine the perceived role and career aspirations of 1st year female assistant principals in secondary public schools in the United States in 2020.

I am writing today to ask you to participate in my study. The interview will be 1 hour and will be either by skype/facetime or via phone call. There may be a 2nd interview after I review data from the first interview. To support accuracy, I will audiotape our conversation. I will have access to the tapes which will be destroyed after being transcribed. I will maintain transcriptions for up to three years in a password protected file in my home office in a locked cabinet. If you agree to participate, then we will both sign the consent form which is required to meet the University's human subject requirements. This consent form states that:

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. I commit to bracketing myself out of the analysis of the data and will work to present the results in an unbiased and open manner.

Again, the purpose of my research is to learn about your experiences and perceptions as someone who is a first-year assistant principal in a secondary school in the United States. If you agree to participate, please let me know and I will begin scheduling our time together.

If at any time, you wish to speak with my faculty advisor, please feel free to contact her. His contact information is: Dr. Delores McNair at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Jennifer Tilton
[REDACTED]

Interview Guide

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation. My name is Jennifer Tilton and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific conducting my research in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

To support accuracy in my notetaking, I will audio tape our conversations today. I will have access to the tapes which will be destroyed after being transcribed. I will maintain transcriptions for up to three years in a password protected file at my home office in a locked cabinet. In order to move forward, we will both need to sign the consent form which is required to meet the University's human subject requirements. This consent form states that:

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. I commit bracketing myself out of the analysis of the data and will work to present the results in an unbiased and open manner. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview and thank you for participating.

I have planned this interview to last one hour but it may go over that timeframe slightly. There are several questions I am hoping you can answer during this timeframe.

As a reminder, the purpose of my research is to learn about your experiences and perceptions as someone who is a first-year assistant principal in a secondary school in the United States.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Research Title: The First Year of a Female Secondary School Assistant Principal

Lead Researcher: Jennifer Tilton

Faculty Advisor: Delores McNair

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION: Your consent is being requested to voluntarily participate in a research study about the experiences and perceptions of first-year female secondary school assistant principals. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived role and career aspirations of 1st year female assistant principals in secondary public schools in the United States. You are being invited to participate in a one to one and a half hour interview via phone or skype/facetime. There may be a 2nd interview based on findings from the first interview or if we need more time. To support accuracy, I will audio tape our conversation. After the study, the results may be presented at scientific meetings and published. The audio recordings will be destroyed while the transcripts will be maintained in a password protected file for up to three years. There are no alternative research procedures, so your alternative is not to participate.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take approximately one to one and half hours.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are that your personal information may be accessed by an individual not associated with the study (in the case that my computer and audio recording information may be breached). Another risk is that you may feel somewhat reserved to speak about your experiences. The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study are that other individuals, educators, and administrators may speak about their experiences and the information provided may lead to a greater understanding of how to help new administrators transition from teaching into their new positions. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment or contract or any other benefits to which you are entitled.

COMPENSATION: You will not receive compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this research project, you understand that your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. It is possible that we may decide that your participation in this research is not appropriate. If that happens, you will be dismissed from the study. In any event, we appreciate your willingness to participate in this research.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your privacy will be ensured by deleting audiotapes immediately after transcription. All hardcopy data will be kept in locked cabinets, while all electronic data will be maintained on a password protected computer for three years after the completion of the study.

COLLECTION OF INFORMATION: Identifiers will be removed from the identifiable private information and after such removal, the information may be used for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact Jennifer Tilton at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. If I, (the lead researcher) cannot be reached, you may also contact the Faculty Research Advisor, Delores McNair at [REDACTED].

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact Office of Research and Sponsored Programs to speak to someone independent of the research team at (209)-946-3903 or IRB@pacific.edu.

I hereby consent: (Indicate *Yes* or *No*)

- To be audio recorded during this study.
 Yes No

- For the audio records resulting from this study to be used for my doctoral study.
 Yes No

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that your participation is completely voluntary, that you understand that you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

Research Study Participant (Print Name): _____

Participant's Representative (Print Name): _____

Description of Representative's Authority: _____

Researcher Who Obtained Consent (Print Name): _____

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Participant's Name: _____
2. Participant's Age: _____
3. Marital Status: _____
4. Number of Children: _____
5. Where do you live? (City/State): _____
6. Distance from current school of employment: _____
7. Education (degrees/certifications) _____
8. Number of years of prior teaching experience: _____
9. What grade levels/subjects did you teach? _____
10. Other prior positions in education before your current job: _____
11. Name of School/District where you are currently employed: _____
12. Years at current school: _____
13. Grade Levels at current school: _____
14. Number of students at current school/district: _____
15. Number of administrators (including you) at current school: _____
16. Breakdown of administrators: M _____ F _____ VP/AP _____
Principal _____ Other _____ (title)

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee Background:

- a. Name _____
- b. Position _____
- c. Institution _____

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your current role at your school site.
2. Some people become teachers with the idea that they will ultimately become administrators while other people say they became administrators only after they were encouraged by someone else. Describe your decision to move from being a teacher to becoming an administrator.
 - a. Probe: what experiences and qualifications led you to this point in your career?
 - b. What experiences, if any, did you have that might be specific to women entering administrative roles?
 - c. In what ways have other female administrators influenced you both prior to becoming an administrator and as an administrator? How is this different from the ways that male administrators influenced you?
3. Describe some of the ways in which you were encouraged to move into an administrative role and the types of support you received in preparing for the role.
4. Tell me about any barriers you experienced as you considered and prepared for the role of assistant principal.
 - a. Probe: have there been any barriers for you because you are female?
5. Describe your experiences in terms of your transition this year from teacher to administrator.
 - a. Probe for a specific story that exemplifies the transition.
6. What challenges have you faced this year in your new role?
 - a. Probe for a specific story that exemplifies the challenge(s).
7. In what ways, if any, would you say that your experience as an assistant principal differs from that of a man who is an assistant principal?
 - a. Probe for a specific story that exemplifies the differences.
8. What has surprised you the most about being an administrator?
 - a. What has surprised you the most about being a female in an administrator role?
9. In what ways have your perceptions of school administration changed now that you are an administrator?
10. What do you know now that you wish you had known before becoming an administrator?
11. Where do you see yourself in five years?
 - a. In what ways (if any) do you think being female may impact where you are in five years?
12. Describe the ideal high school principal.
 - a. In what ways do you see that this ideal reflects women in this role?

- b. What supports – in ed leadership programs or with coaching/mentoring – would help achieve that ideal?”
- 13. What advice do you have for female teachers who are interested in making the transition to become an administrator?
- 14. Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to add?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:
