

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF MOTHERHOOD AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation
by
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Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
at Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2022
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Reich College of Education

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DECEMBER 2022

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to understand the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership through the experiences of women who lead in a public school district in a southeastern state of the United States. Specifically, the research explored their experiences and perceptions of the mutual benefits and conflicts of maintaining both roles as well as their perceptions of the non-dichotomous relationship of the two roles. Previous studies have explored women in educational leadership as well as motherhood in general, but few studies focused specifically on the experiences of women who hold both roles. This qualitative study filled a gap in the literature by using feminist standpoint theory as a framework that allowed these women to add to the existing knowledge base regarding the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership. Focus group sessions were conducted and allowed for information to be gathered regarding the lived experiences of each participant. Through this research and an analysis of each focus group, followed by a cross-session analysis, three themes emerged: 1) emotional challenges including mom guilt 2)

mother's ways of leading, and 3) work-life balance and setting boundaries. Educational leadership programs and district leadership can use the findings of this study as they work to support women leaders who are also mothers. Future research might seek to understand the perspectives of mothers who are also educational leaders from diverse backgrounds and geographic areas.

Acknowledgments

There are so many people to whom I owe gratitude throughout this journey. First, I would like to thank all of the great women in my life who encouraged me and supported me through this process. Despite many life changes along the way including having a baby, these women continued to check on me and encourage me to carry on with my studies. These ladies, who I am so blessed to call friends, made me feel like I could do anything. I am thankful to have such great mentors in my career who inspire me and motivate me because they believe in me. Thank you to Dr. Sandy George, who took a chance on me as a new administrator. Thank you, Dr. Greg Little for being not only my superintendent, but also my career coach and friend. You have always invested in me professionally and that means so much. Thank you to Dr. Kim Morrison, my superintendent and a strong leader who serves as a role model for educational mother/leaders.

Thank you to the awesome ladies who served in my research focus groups. Your contributions meant so much to me both personally and professionally. I must also acknowledge my mother, who passed during my doctoral journey. She raised me to never give up and to be strong through adversity. She wanted me to shoot for the stars and not stop until I reached them. Despite the constant hurt I feel in her absence, I persevered because it was what she would have wanted me to do. To my husband who I married in the middle of this journey, thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to finish. To my children, Jackson and Lucy, thank you for being my “why” and loving me through all of the hours behind a computer.

Finally, to my committee members, Dr. Julie Hasson, Dr. Kimberly Money, and Dr. Vachel Miller, I cannot thank you enough for the time you invested in me and my work. You have been the best committee that I could have ever dreamed of having. Your support and encouragement kept me going. I am especially thankful to Dr. Hasson who always had a smile on her face no matter how many questions I had or how many meetings I requested. You are such an inspiration for all women leaders.

Dedication

The doctoral journey was full of what could have been roadblocks for me. My mother passed, I got remarried and had a baby at age 40, and I changed leadership positions within my school district all while working on this degree. There were many times in which I did not know if I could continue to balance all of my obligations. However, I took it day-by-day and eventually began to think about a dissertation topic. In talking with two awesome female educational leaders, I began to form my topic around motherhood and educational leadership; the two most important roles I was seeking to balance. Through my research I learned there are many women in the same situation as me, struggling to balance and establish healthy boundaries in order to be the mother they feel their children deserve.

I dedicate this study to all women who hold the very important roles of mother and educational leaders. You ladies, the ways in which you lead, and the experiences you bring to the table are invaluable to the people you serve and the field of education. Thank you for showing up for your staff, students, and families each and every day. Thank you for leading with your heart.

I also dedicate this study to my children. To my son Jackson, you have always known your mother as a student. You grew up with me professionally and have watched me earn two advanced degrees. I hope that you take away a dedicated work ethic and a desire to be a lifelong learner in whatever you decide to do. Thank you for being there for me through it all. To my daughter Lucy, who was born before my second semester of the doctoral program,

this study is dedicated to you. May you always live, love, and lead fiercely in all you do. Do not take no for an answer. Follow your heart and finish what you start.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Becoming a mother often initiates an epistemological change and new ways of knowing such as listening, maternal thinking, and diplomacy. Women leaders who are mothers tend to place value on ways of leading that may not be the same as leaders who do not have both roles. How do the roles of mother and leader influence each other? What does it mean to be both a good mother and an effective administrator? This research study will seek to understand intersectionality of the roles of motherhood and educational leader. In this introductory chapter, I will describe my personal connection to the dissertation topic as well as the problem statement. I will also present a brief overview of the methodology used as well as the organization of the study. The research questions will be presented and key terms will be defined in order to better understand this research study.

The Motherhood Identity

"History, ... was for centuries an art patronized by the rulers of society to ensure their own immortality, and written by members of church and court circles, or learned gentlemen of leisure fascinated by the wars and reigns of the powerful," writes Vandenberg-Daves (2002, p. 234). In the 1970s, when the feminist pioneers of women's history began thinking about the meaning of women in history, they immediately sought to study history that was hidden not just because it was about women but also because what women did in the home was difficult to find in the public record (Vandenberg-Daves, 2002). "In the climate of the late 1960s and 1970s, it was clear to white feminists in particular that motherhood topped the list of social constructions which have hampered women's power and autonomy" writes Vandenberg-Daves (2002, p. 234). African American feminists at the time had a more empowering view of motherhood, whereas

white feminists viewed motherhood as a burden that created a dependence on a man (Vandenberg-Daves, 2002).

Historical and modern studies of motherhood have deemed it a study of a private experience and the identity of being a good mother is very much socially constructed and varies in terms of cultural resources and constraints. Hattery (2001) writes, "Mothering is constructed through men's and women's actions within specific historical circumstances. Thus, agency is central to the understanding of motherhood as a social, rather than a biological, construct" (p. 25). Motherhood is a socially constructed ideology based in history and culture. The construct of motherhood has evolved over time based on the intersectionality of societal norms with factors such as gender, class, and ethnicity. These factors help define motherhood and the "ideal." Values regarding a mother's role in child rearing, the home, and the workplace are all shaped by the socially constructed ideology of motherhood. While the "ideal" in motherhood has changed throughout history, the value of the mother as the primary caretaker is still present today.

Ideologies are patterns of beliefs, ideas, or values that shape and are shaped by historical and social conditions and are powerful in their influence on people and societies (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). While there have been many efforts to define a mothering ideology throughout history, these efforts lead back to the definitive work of Hays (1996) on intensive mothering as the dominant mothering ideology in our culture. Johnston and Swanson (2006) noted the following,

Intensive mothering, according to Hays, is a child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, financially expensive ideology in which mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture and development of the sacred child and in which children's needs take precedence over the individual needs of the others. (p. 510)

Intensive mothering is the dominant ideology of motherhood in American culture and both stay-at-home and working mothers have internalized this ideology (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Both groups of mothers find a variety of ways to define their positionality within the intensive mothering ideologies. "Mothers 'weave' an identity that reflects their commitment to employment with their commitment to intensive mothering" writes Johnston and Swanson (2006, p. 511). Motherhood assumes an identity rather than a role. "Good" mothers, from the feminist perspective, can include non-custodial, step-, single, old, and working mothers (O'Reilly, 2010). Likewise, these new family formations have brought about new social identities, destabilizing the biological category of motherhood (O'Reilly, 2010).

The identity of a "good" mother includes the role of being the sole source of guidance, education, nurturing, and physical and emotional sustenance. Hays (1996) contends that these intensive mothering standards of "good" mothering are culturally and socially formed and are at odds with labor force participation. Working mothers must also construct a, "worker identity that justifies their decision to work or not to work outside the home" (Johnston & Swanson, 2007, p. 448). Employed women fall into four categories: co-provider, primary provider, secondary provider, or ambivalent provider (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). These roles identify economic rationales for maternal employment. There are also social predictors of worker identity, and due to increased choices in the worker-parent identity construction, there is an associated increase in anxiety and uncertainty and a need for validation from others for working mothers (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). In order to cope with the anxiety and need for validation and assurance that working and mothering can co-exist for women, mothers must find balance by negotiating either the societal mothering expectations or the expectations in the workplace and construct an integrated work-mother identity in which they feel successful in both roles.

Gendered moral rationalities are the social understandings of the appropriate and responsible decisions that a mother must make in regard to employment, co-parenting, and childcare. These moral rationalities bind the economic and social rationales and are gendered in nature (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). Clearly, there are constructed identities for working mothers that play an integral role in personal decisions regarding parenting, motherhood, and work. When adding an identity as a leader, the complexity of identity and decision-making becomes even more prominent for working mothers.

Personal Connection

On a Monday afternoon in late January of 2011, my life changed forever. I was a first-year high school assistant principal and was the only assistant principal in the school. I received a phone call that would become the news that led to my immediate new role as a single parent. My son was 4 years old at the time and given my new position and the extracurricular supervision responsibilities, he quickly became a regular at late-night high school events. I was constantly torn inside between being a good employee and a good mother.

For nine years, my son and I “grew up” together; him as a child experiencing the growth of life and me as a new administrator in both the assistant principal role as well as the principalship role experiencing professional growth. I also found myself growing as an independent woman and as a mother. With each new grade promotion, my son became more active in clubs, school, and athletics. I acquired more responsibilities with each new position into which I was promoted. As time went on, I found myself experiencing more and more role conflict and “mom guilt” as I was forced to make decisions between being present for my son and being present for my profession.

In 2015, I once again decided to further my education and begin the Educational Specialist program. Over the next two years, I would complete the program and also transition into the role of principal at a low-performing middle school, with the task of turning it around. My son and I also became a blended family as we welcomed my husband and his son into our family. In 2019, I began coursework to complete my doctorate degree and in 2020 was forced to take some time off as I welcomed a new baby girl at 40 years of age. Also, during this very busy and overwhelming time in my life, I transitioned from being a school administrator to being a district-level administrator. The role conflict became even more prevalent and intensified for me as my son became older and my daughter was born all while being a doctoral student and transitioning to a new district role. Serving in these dual roles is quite challenging at times. However, I know that I am learning and growing in both roles and these roles can be mutually beneficial to the other.

I tell this abbreviated story of my adult life to describe my personal experience with the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership. Often mothers who move into leadership positions may find themselves torn between being great at both roles. They struggle with decisions both personally and professionally and consider the impact these decisions will make on their other role. The two roles are often seen as non-intersecting and conflicting and historically have been presented this way for working women. Recent trends are moving in the right direction to narrow the gender gap in leadership positions and the sexual division of labor; however, women still have to navigate a labyrinth of challenges on their leadership journey due, in part, to many roles and responsibilities outside of the workplace. Feminist theory recognizes that while gender should not matter, gender *does* matter for both how people respond to leaders and what leaders can bring to their roles (Parker et al., 2015). Theorizations regarding the

intersectionality of motherhood and leadership are important not only to navigate the labyrinth of challenges faced by women but also to reform working conditions and hiring practices to appreciate the mutual benefits motherhood and leadership have and renormalize what an “ideal” employee may look like.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership. For this study, the term mother/leader will be used for women who maintain the dual roles of mother and educational leader. Mother/leaders must overcome the reality that gender matters in leadership roles, particularly regarding the expectations of and the value given to the person in the leadership position based on gender. Feminist values and ways of leading are often not valued in the traditional leadership ideology in education. Blackmore (1989) states:

Leaders display attributes and behaviours [sic], possess moral virtues and principles, which are generally associated with ‘masculinity.’ It is a view which has effectively displaced women in educational thought, and therefore rendered women invisible in administrative practice. (p. 64)

The historic patriarchy that exists in the education system has placed value on masculine attributes for educational leaders. Therefore, while the pipeline into educational leadership is predominately women, males occupy the majority of leadership roles.

Mother/leaders are faced with another challenge in balancing another important role in their life. This study will seek to not only understand how women leaders, particularly in educational leadership, make meaning of the intersectionality of these roles but also how these two roles influence and benefit one another. Educational leaders who are also mothers, are in the

position to make daily decisions regarding the care, safety, health, and well-being of children as well as engage daily with children both in a professional setting as well as at home. Given that educational leaders have this unique position of professionally leading both children and adults, the intersectional relationships between this role and motherhood are unique when compared to women in other leadership roles in areas such as politics or business. Their mothering ideology has the opportunity to translate into their professional roles and manifest itself in a way that can be influential in leadership roles in areas such as communication, human resources, relationships, and decision-making. Therefore, it is important to deeply understand how these two roles interact with one another.

This study will examine the intersectionality of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership. "Intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power," writes Davis (2008, p. 68). I will draw on the work of bell hooks (2000a, 2000b) to make the argument that while maintaining the dual roles of motherhood and educational leadership can create role conflict, a mutual benefit also exists between the two roles. bell hooks' emphasis on the multi-dimensions of power relations is especially useful to my analysis as it allows me to think through the intersectionality of motherhood and educational administration. It is here also that bell hooks' attention to a pluralistic feminist lens is of value for informing the understanding of the interconnected systems of oppression that working mothers experience. While using feminist theory as a lens, I will examine the intersectionality of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership from both a historical and current perspective. I will analyze both the conflicts as well as the mutual benefits that are experienced as a result of maintaining these dual roles.

hooks (2000a) claims that the societal structures and ideologies regarding effective leadership should be reformed from a masculine value to recognize the contributions of women and mothers. Feminist thought works to deconstruct gender stereotypes, which "shape managerial behaviour [sic] and occupational outcomes in the workplace with patriarchal expectations" (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021, p. 192). Despite the increasing provisions of equal opportunities in the workplace that exist today, gender stereotypes persist in the workplace even though they are not always intentionally adopted. These stereotypes place, sometimes unintended, value on certain masculine leadership traits that have been historically valued in Western society.

It is often the stereotype that successful leaders possess the masculine leadership traits of competitiveness, self-confidence, aggressiveness, and ambition. Whereas, women are associated with leadership traits such as helpful, kind, sympathetic, and sensitive. These traits are often closely linked with the role of motherhood and the intersectionality between these two roles. hooks (2000a, 2000b), along with other feminist scholars (Ahmed, 2000; Arendell, 1999), contend that these two roles complement one another and a work-home balance with these two roles is the key to eliminating gender stereotyping and its impact on women in leadership. Women can be successful leaders and mothers.

Organizational leadership in schools is hierarchical. Authority and power at the district level are delegated to the superintendent and the school board and at the school level, the principal has the power and authority. If these positions are predominantly male, a hierarchical and patriarchal structure is formed. Feminist values and ways of leading are often not valued in the traditional leadership ideology in education. A feminist reconstruction of leadership would view power as multi-dimensional and multi-directional, rather than hierarchical. Just as hooks

(2000) proposes a pluralistic view, power and leadership can also be practiced in different contexts and by multiple people. This relational leadership view recognizes moral practice as rational within certain social and political contexts and not according to abstract moral principles (Blackmore, 1989). Leadership creates a sense of community and collective values. In the feminist reconstruction of leadership, “the process of leading is both educative and conducive to democratic process, and, one would hope, consistent with education” (Blackmore, 1989, p. 64). This reconstruction of leadership places value on women’s ways of leading: relational leadership, leadership for social justice, spiritual leadership, leadership for learning, and balanced leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Valuing women in leadership also provides more female role models and values for students and creates a community culture in schools. Problematizing a hierarchical or masculine structure to leadership does not imply females are better leaders than males. This type of questioning simply explores the leadership and personal characteristics of women that make them qualified to be effective leaders in education and how the added role of a mother contributes to these personal characteristics. These two roles and their interactions will be further explored in this research study, particularly how the dual roles and identities of educational leader and mother relate, influence, and benefit each other.

Methodology

Qualitative methods explore how human behavior can be explained, within the context of the social structures in which that behavior takes place (Austin & Sutton, 2014).

This qualitative research study will focus on the experiences of five women educational leaders who are also mothers in a southeastern state in the United States. The study will seek a deep understanding of how these five mothers understand, experience, and balance the socially

constructed ideologies of being both a “good mother” and an “effective leader.” Feminist standpoint theory will be the lens through which the data is interpreted. This theory values knowledge generated from multiple standpoints and recognizes pluralism and the multiplicity of situated knowledge as well as the importance of experience and social location in qualitative research (Cabrera et al., 2020).

I will use narrative inquiry as the methodology for this study. According to the library guide published by Northcentral University (2021), “The primary purpose for a narrative inquiry study is participants provide the researcher with their life experiences through thick rich stories” (p. 1). Narrative inquiry aligns with feminist theories and the work to seek an understanding of women's lived experiences. In particular, this study will use narrative inquiry to explore the roles of motherhood and educational leadership and how these roles intersect and influence the other.

This study will use focus groups to collect experiences and understandings regarding the intersectionality of the roles of mother and educational leader at both the school and district levels. The study will attempt to identify how women leaders interpret, experience, and respond to the intersectionality of these two roles. Because these ideologies are socially constructed, I plan to limit the geographical area of my participants to mothers in leadership roles the same state who are likely to have similar social and cultural experiences.

Research Questions

This research study will seek to understand the intersectionality of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership from both a historical and current perspective. I will analyze both the conflicts as well as the mutual benefits that are experienced as a result of maintaining these dual roles. The overarching question of the study examines the perceptions of female education leaders about the intersectionality of motherhood and leadership.

The guiding question is: what does it mean to be both a good mother and an effective administrator? In particular, this study will explore the following questions:

1. How do women understand their identities of being an educational leader and mother?
2. What challenges do mothers face in their roles as educational leaders?
3. How do the dual roles and identities of educational leader and mother relate, influence, and benefit each other?
4. How do women balance and negotiate the roles and identities of being an educational leader and mother?

Definition of Terms

Mother: A woman who is “responsible for and in a parental relationship with one or more children” (Garey, 1999).

Educational Leader: A woman in a leadership position in the school or school system.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality refers to the “interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (Davis, 2008, p. 68).

Standpoint: a position in society usually involving awareness of an individual's social location from which elements of reality become important while others are made obscure (Swigonski, 1984).

Narrative Inquiry: Narrative inquiry can reveal unique perspectives and lived experiences of individuals through the recording of experiences of an individual or small group. Narrative inquiry often gives voice to marginalized populations (Deakin University, 2021).

Organization of Study

This qualitative research study will explore the roles of mother and educational leader in an effort to better understand the intersectionality of these two roles from a historical and current perspective. This research project will study the conflicts as well as the mutual benefits that educational leaders who are also mothers experience as a result of holding these dual roles.

A review of research literature related to the history of women's roles in the workplace and in education, as well as the historical development of the definition of a "good mother," the ways in which women lead, and the conflicts experienced by working mothers will be presented in Chapter 2. I will also discuss the theoretical framework of the study in Chapter 2. The research methods used to conduct this study and an explanation of the research process will be included in Chapter 3. The focus group data will be presented in the results found in Chapter 4. The findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2

The Research Literature Review

In many aspects, motherhood can be a great example of effective leadership practices. Qualities such as responsibility, helpfulness, trustworthiness, and nurture can be descriptive of both effective mothers and impactful leaders. Working mothers provide a unique skill set and perspective in the workforce. In this literature review, I examine the roles of women as working mothers. Beginning with the progression of women and leadership in the workplace and particularly in education, the role of the working mother will be examined to elucidate the challenges and benefits of maintaining dual roles. Gender bias, specifically related to workplace advancement will be explored as a hurdle to overcome as women negotiate their identities as both mothers and educational leaders. A pluralistic feminist lens, as proposed by bell hooks (2000b) is of value for understanding the interconnected systems of oppression that working mothers experience. While using feminist theory as a lens, the intersectionality and multi-dimensionality of motherhood and educational leadership will be explored; discussing conflicts as well as the mutual benefits that are experienced as a result of maintaining these dual roles.

History of Women's Roles: Home to Workplace

According to Webb (2010), "Throughout history, women's participation in the workforce has had a definite correlation with the rise and fall of the American economy" (p. 1). For example, the Industrial Revolution provided an increase in jobs and the opportunity for women to work as "mill girls" and receive a regular paycheck for the first time in history (Webb, 2010). Times of war also forced women into the workplace as men were away in service. By the 1920s, women's roles and social norms were evolving, new inventions were being made, and the unwillingness of women to return to past societal norms became evident. While there were more women who were college graduates at this time, women were forced into careers that were

deemed more “suited for women.” Webb (2010) states, “Women found themselves in teaching, nursing, social work, and in factories. Women made far less money in these positions than men and definitely less than men who were in careers not designated as women's jobs” (p. 2).

As the role of women in the workforce continued to bounce between tending to the home while men were at work to contributing in the workplace as other times of war and economic unrest occurred, women began to become more interested and active in areas such as politics and education as avenues for equality. By the 1970s, independence and equality became increasingly important for women. Media promoted this independence through sitcoms in which main female characters were successful through hard work and determination (Webb, 2010). This trend continued and is evident in present labor market statistics. Currently, in 2021, the United States women's labor force participation rate is 57% (US Department of Labor, 2021). "Women's representation has increased across the pipeline since 2016. However, women...remain significantly underrepresented in leadership” (McKinsey & Company, 2021b, p. 8). While trends in women's participation and status in the workplace have shifted in the right direction, there are still elements of the past that impact the present landscape. The ways in which women and men view their roles and are perceived by others in the workplace continue to be an area in which discrepancies exist, particularly for women in leadership positions.

Sexual Division of Labor

In order to understand the historical and present context of women in educational leadership, the sexual division of labor must first be understood. Teaching has long been perceived as a gendered profession. According to Tallerico and Blount (2004), “the sexual division of labor is one of the most enduring and universal characteristics of work” (p. 633). While the concept of a sexual division of labor implies there are two types of work, the division actually takes a variety of forms. “One form reflects a separation into private and public spheres,

with women predominating in household environments and domestic roles, whether paid or unpaid, and men predominating in work outside the home," writes Tallerico and Blount (2004, p. 633). The second form exists when either one or the other sex makes up the majority of the entire population of paid employees in a field of work and the third form, "manifests itself as stratification by sex within the same work setting" (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, p. 634). In American Education, from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, females far outnumber males in teaching roles, whereas males are the dominant gender in administrative leadership positions (Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Women as Teachers

A look into history provides the "story" for understanding the sexual division of labor and gender inequality in the field of education. In colonial America, women were introduced to education as a form of assimilating Native Americans to the colonial way of life; the nuclear household with the men as leaders and the women as domestic workers in the home (Spring, 2011). Starting with the American Revolution, the concept of republican motherhood provided more opportunities for women to be educated as their responsibilities shifted to citizenship (Spring, 2011). Following this time in which education focused on preparing future teachers, the focus of education shifted prior to the Civil War to the Common Schools Movement which funded public schools in every community, an effort led by Horace Mann.

Horace Mann viewed women as "natural" teachers. He believed that women were well-suited for teaching, a profession he considered to be "the most difficult of all arts, and the profoundest of all sciences" (Mann, 1837, p. 58). Mann conceived the ideal teacher as being nurturing, having virtue and moral character, good manners, and a positive social influence; all traits he believed were well-embodied by women (Mann, 1837). These early beliefs regarding schooling and teaching shaped the perception of what is ideal in the education profession and

laid the groundwork for a gendered profession in teaching. Over the next decades after Mann's Common Schools Movement, the profession of a teacher continued to be a feminine pursuit. Currently, women make up 76.5% of all public-school teachers in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a). Eighty-nine percent of elementary school teachers are female and 72% of all middle and high school teachers are female (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a).

From the Classroom to Administration

Perhaps a more perplexing statistic occurs when examining the transition to educational leadership. With females holding nearly three-fourths of teaching roles nationwide, one would speculate this trend to continue as teachers transition to leadership roles in education. However, 56% of all public-school principals are males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020b). The sexual division of labor is even more intensified at the superintendent level. "About 76% of the nation's K-12 educators are women. Yet, when it comes to school superintendents, the school district's CEO, only 24% are women, according to federal data and a survey conducted by AASA, the association of the nation's public-school superintendents" according to Ramaswamy (2020, p. 1). As indicated by the data, the pipeline to educational leadership is composed of a majority of females, yet school and district roles are held mostly by men.

Women in Leadership: Five Ways of Leading

While the outlook today for women in educational leadership is significantly better than in years past, an imbalance still remains not only in school leadership but beyond the principalship as well. For these women who do become leaders and serve successfully, it is important to recognize what makes them different and what sets them apart from their male counterparts. While feminist theory can help us understand the gendered landscape and occurrences of oppression in educational leadership, it can also provide a lens through which we

examine leadership styles and how women's leadership experiences differ from those of male leaders. In their work, *Women and Educational Leadership*, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) discuss five ways women lead. "While we do not argue that all women lead in a particular way, we have understood that there are preferences and approaches which characterize the leadership of many women," scripts Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011, p. 5). These generalized approaches to leadership are themes in many bodies of literature and help to understand what women value and pay attention to in this field of work. These five ways women lead can also provide avenues for consideration regarding leadership and how to reconceive the norms that have been established through the social history of educational leadership. How can we reconceptualize the idea that women teach and men manage and lead?

Relational Leadership

As described by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), "Relational leadership suggests that leadership is about being in relationship with others in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical sense" (p. 6). When considering their identity, women tend to view multiple realities of self and others as co-evolving and constructed "in relation" with others (Uhl-Bien, 2011). "They see sociality from the standpoint of interdependence, rather than independence, and examine the influential acts of organizing that contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships" writes Uhl-Bien (2011, p. 67). By focusing on others and their interdependence with the people around them, women tend to change the culture of leadership from hierarchical to relationality (Uhl-Bien, 2011).

Women in educational leadership have historically been ambivalent about their own power and often describe power as something that is increased as it is shared (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Women's conceptions of power are closely linked with the value they place on relationships. Women believe that power used to help others strengthens relationships, while

power used to control damages relationships (Brunner, 2000). This view of power influences how women confront change. The horizontal approach taken through relational leadership values the input of many stakeholders in the organization. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that, “Relational leadership is about facilitating the work of others who share the power and authority to collaboratively craft direction for the district” (p. 10). Women leaders are connected to their employees through their passion for change in many cases, and this passion can be directed toward many issues in education such as equity and injustice.

Leadership for Social Justice

The history of women in the workforce and in leadership is a motivating factor for women in educational leadership. Their perspectives and experiences provide background and cause for leadership for social justice. "The notion of social justice is an ethical framework in which equity and achieving a primary social objective is given priority" writes Ballenger (2011, p. 4). A leadership perspective through the social justice lens places value on morals, respect, care, and equity. Ballenger (2011) states, “The crucial question of social justice is what ends are being pursued, whom do they benefit, and whom do they harm” (p. 4). Studies document a commitment to social justice and compatibility with moral leadership, servant leadership, and value-added leadership as initial motivators and continuing missions of teachers (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Leadership for social justice involves a partnership with other teachers and leaders as well as a collaborative relationship with community members and a variety of stakeholders (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). What women “mean by social justice is a passion for doing work that involves making a difference in the lives of students who have not been well served by the current systems” (Grogan & Shakeshaft 2011, p. 13). Ballenger (2011) describes leadership for social justice as being defined by two principles: equal rights to the basic liberties of the total

systems and giving the greatest social and economic benefits to the least advantaged in a fair and equitable manner. Women educational leaders apply social justice leadership when working with students who have not been well-served by current systems. Likewise, “many women administrators are both focused on social justice and reliant on what they describe as a higher power to help them in their fight” as several studies document an additional dimension that women add to their social justice and relational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 13).

Spiritual Leadership

Due to the historical sexual division of labor and hegemony experienced by women in leadership roles, women may apply the intervening effects of personal resources to help them cope in this context (Mayer et al., 2017). Also, in order for women leaders to establish a positive and manageable work-life balance, they often turn to spiritual leadership. Mayer et al. (2017) write, “In general life, spirituality is often regarded as an enabling factor for an individual to develop a positive mindset and inner peace” (p. 190).

In their research on women educational leaders, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) define spiritual leadership as a source of personal strength and a way to understand the connectedness of others to the outside world. They explain that some women leaders relate spiritual leadership to conscious-raising and cite spiritual leadership as a strong theme, particularly in the comments of women of color (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). "A sense of spiritual leadership can also be found in the underpinnings of some feminist leadership research," write Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011, p. 15). Nel Noddings (1984) contends that through caring for others and being cared for, people develop an ethical ideal of caring. Laible (2000) describes a loving epistemology as, “Knowing other’s worlds is part of knowing them and knowing them is part of loving them” (p. 189). Both women of color and white women administrators discuss the relationship between spirituality and the ways they model behavior as well as the connection between spiritual

leadership and their success and ability to push forward in conflict and difficult situations (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Leading with passion and hope helps drive the resilience women leaders need to push forward and promote their agendas.

Leadership for Learning

The importance of learning often overlaps with the social justice leadership of women. Both men and women superintendents believe that women are advantaged by their instructional background and interpersonal strengths (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). “Before becoming principals, men and women are about equally likely to have served as department heads, vice principals, and club advisers,” write Maranto et al. (2018, p. 13). However, the path to the principalship differs in two key areas. “Women are twice as likely as men to have prior service as curricular specialists (31.3% of women and 16% of men), and men are three times as likely (52.8% of men and 16.5% of women) to have had prior experience as athletic coaches” according to Maranto et al. (2018, p. 13). Women have also spent more time in the classroom than men before assuming formal leadership positions such as principal or superintendent (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Because of their traditional backgrounds in curriculum and instruction, “women administrators are likely to introduce and support strong programs in staff development, to encourage innovation, and to experiment with instructional approaches” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 18).

In a study on gender differences, Shaked et al. (2018) noted that female principals often rely on their instructional knowledge and experience while male principals rely more on their decision-making ability and hierarchical authority as the source of authority as instructional leaders. In the same study, it was found that women leaders perceive good relationships with teachers and instructional leadership to be closely related (Shaked et al., 2018). “Female

principals felt that they were performing their instructional leadership role by paying attention to the maintenance of good relationships and collaboration with the staff, whereas male principals only seldom described maintaining good relationships as related to leading their schools toward instructional improvement,” write Shaked et al. (2018, p. 12). The importance of relationships and the emphasis on leadership for learning that is found in many women leaders’ narratives derive from their lived experiences in the classroom setting (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). A final connection to lived experiences is the theme of balanced leadership; stemming from the dual roles of management faced by many women leaders.

Balanced Leadership

For all leaders in education, the day-to-day tasks of managing and running a school and district are consuming. Additionally, many leaders have the responsibility of maintaining a home and supporting a family. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) state, “Although women leaders in the twenty-first century are clearly free to choose to concentrate on work in the same way a man does, many prefer to attain a balance between their work lives and their family lives” (p. 23). Balanced leadership involves the idea that women leaders are better able to perform their educational leadership duties if they have achieved a work-home balance and can manage their personal commitments and duties as well as their work responsibilities (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Balanced leadership also takes on another meaning beyond finding a balance between work and personal life. Balanced leadership can also be used to describe the leadership approach that women develop as a result of maintaining dual roles. “Managing households and caring for family members, often seen as the work of women, have brought a dimension to women's leadership that can enhance their performance,” according to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011, p. 23). There is a development process that occurs when becoming a mother that helps women

leaders strike an ideal balance (Kaplan-Leiserson, 2005). Maternal instinct is very similar to leadership instinct and brings about a blend of toughness and support. Leaders who are also mothers are, “trained in patience, compassion, and negotiating skills, and cultivate flexibility, a trait that makes them excellent situational leaders” (Kaplan-Leiserson, 2005, p. 12). The role of the working mother and how it interacts with the role of educational leader is an intricate intersection of skills and experiences that both enhance and complicate the responsibility that comes with maintaining dual roles.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) write, “These various ways of leading have served many women leaders well in settings ranging from kindergarten to college” (p. 24). These leadership approaches help bring about a shared vision and change in educational settings. As women continue to negotiate gender scripts in their roles, it is important to rely on skills from each of these leadership approaches to set them apart and achieve the desired outcomes of their missions as effective leaders.

A better understanding of how women lead is a helpful foundation for understanding how women also maintain an additional role in that of mother and balance and make meaning of both roles. The socially constructed meaning of an “ideal mother” has evolved over generations. Women who maintain both roles strive to be the ideal mother and educational leader, as defined by other social norms and structures. Exploring the evolution of the ideals and the structures that created them is integral to understanding how women leaders navigate their roles today.

The Ideal Mother in Theory

Feminist writers and activists, at various points in history, have moved between celebrating, critiquing, and reconceptualizing motherhood into an empowering experience for women (Kinser, 2010). For at least three decades, feminist theorists have worked to disrupt the

dominant perceptions of motherhood and mothering. “Motherhood ideology reaches deeply into the lives of individuals and family processes. It shapes women’s very identities and activities. Even when resisted, mothering ideology forms the backdrop for action and assessment,” writes Arendell, (1999, p. 3). Feminist writers and scholars have studied how the expectations for how women should mother are entwined with many other social expectations and not what is best for women or children (Kinser, 2010). Feminists have argued the expectations for “good” mothering are grounded in masculinity, dominance, capitalism, and racism (Kinser, 2010). The traditional idea of a “good mother” includes the ideology of intensive mothering. This ideology places the mother as the primary person responsible for child-rearing and maintains a child-centered focus for mothers (Hattery, 2001).

Over the years as the number of mothers entering the workforce has continued to increase, the motherhood ideology has slightly evolved. Along with changes in women’s biological and social mothering, the ideology of a “good mother” has also evolved. “Good mothers,” can now be employed mothers, even for noneconomic reasons (Hattery, 2001). Through feminist thinking, many women now understand themselves as having the freedom to "choose" motherhood and when and or whether to have a child and in what context. Through this disruption, the category of "mother" has been established as not only a biological category but also as a social category that is specific to history and culture (Goodwin & Huppertz, 2010).

hooks, however, takes the idea of motherhood to another level. Just as she contends that work does not liberate women, but rather it is equal work and equal pay that is liberating, she also asserts that motherhood is not as serious of an obstacle to women’s freedom and professional equality as some women’s liberationists claim. Many working-class and black women place a different value on motherhood than some of the white, middle-class, educated women leading the movements (hooks, 2000a). These early feminist attacks on motherhood

alienated certain groups from the movement. Many working-class and black women value motherhood and the humanizing skills and affirming experiences gained from the role. hooks (2000a) claims the solution to a work-home balance is eliminating sexism and the idea that the woman is the primary caretaker for children. These societal structure changes are still needed today in order to completely transform the idea of motherhood and the barriers that this role may produce for women.

Despite decades of feminist scholarship to deconstruct the dominant representations of mothers and motherhood, images of ‘the good mother’ are still prevalent. Goodwin and Huppatz (2010) write, “These images persist in public policy, the media, popular culture and workplaces, and saturate everyday practices and interactions. They continue to powerfully shape women’s lives” (p.1). Mothers continue to remain subject to close social regulation. The representations of the “good” mother are not uniform or stable, but rather they vary with the setting (Goodwin & Huppatz, 2010). These contemporary representations are aligned with the pluralistic feminist view proposed by hooks (2000b). Ideologies of “good” mothering are unstable and are formed by intersecting factors such as class, race, and culture.

Intersecting Factors of Motherhood

Differing ideas regarding addressing children’s needs when it comes to motherhood suggest that beliefs around the best practices of motherhood are grounded in a desire to regulate different women's lives in different ways to serve particular social and political ends (Kinser, 2010). Dominant ideas about motherhood are white, middle-class perspectives. Therefore, it is important for the work of feminist thinkers to expand the lens through which we view this role. Early feminist work did not include intersectional relationships of race, culture, or social class. Historically, there are defining differences in how African American women and European American women view motherhood. During the Industrial Revolution, white women viewed

motherhood as restrictive and oppressive as they desired to pursue a place in the workforce. During this same time in history, African American women who were involuntarily placed into the workforce viewed motherhood as liberating and empowering (O'Reilly, 2004). However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries brought much more attention to culture and class and their relationship to motherhood to include mothers of color, working-class, and poor mothers (Kinser, 2010).

Feminists have recently concentrated on how views regarding the work of mothers are grounded in race and gender biases (Kinser, 2010). By the end of the second wave and early third wave of feminism, a broader pattern began to emerge in activism and writing. This broadening view, "examined race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of identity, of turning a lens to women's lives globally, and of developing a more inclusive political agenda" (Kinser, 2010, p. 23). Alice Walker's (1984) book, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, helped to springboard the work of expanding the feminist vision. In this book, Walker (1984) describes the creative spirit of the black mother and how despite racism and oppression, the black mother passes the legacy of an appreciation for love, strength, and beauty to their daughters.

As feminist work continues to problematize mothering, gender, race, and class, the need to question and resist dominant constructions of motherhood and explore the multiple dimensions of this role based on the intersectionality of these roles. Beyer (2019), writes of critic Petra Bueskens argument that, "Motherhood, rather than gender, is the key differentiating factor between men and women causing pay inequality, lack of opportunities, and lack of career progression" (p. 3). Motherhood is defined by a set of experiences as well as by the social institution used to regulate behaviors throughout history through cultural norms and social scripts. Motherhood is central to the lives of women who are mothers. According to O'Reilly (2019), "Motherhood is the unfinished business of feminism" (p.14). O'Reilly (2004) proposes

the concept of matricentric feminism as work to position motherhood and the needs and concerns of mothers as the starting point for theory and politics for the empowerment of women; making motherhood the business of feminism. As feminist theory continues to develop and work to the end of gender discrimination, motherhood and the discrimination that is brought about by this role should be a focus of action as well.

Mothers in Educational Leadership

As women approach the fork in the road, a transition that may diverge into a position of leadership, they must make the decision to stay in their current positions or move into a role with more prominence, yet more demands both personally and professionally. Perhaps the road women traveled historically to get to their current status could be attributed to their decisions to pursue or not to pursue a role in educational leadership. “Teaching, long the exclusive province of males, shifted dramatically in the mid-1800s to become primarily female-identified work,” writes Blount (2000, p. 83). The few men who remained as teachers in the primary grades during this time were labeled with reputations as effeminate men. Ambitious women who managed to penetrate the guarded area of school leadership and were defined as masculine (Blount, 2000). Other women risked a gendered identity by taking on masculine-identified teaching roles such as coach or teacher in the areas of physical education, science, or mathematics (Blount, 2000). The transition of women to roles in educational leadership has proven to have historical challenges that are still evident today. However, the number of women in educational leadership positions is increasing.

As women take the helm as educational leaders, they face the challenge of managing multiple roles and identities. One such role is that of motherhood. “More than half of public-school principals are women, and for many of them their jobs as school leaders and mothers are inextricably linked,” writes Superville (2017, p. 1). There is a strong linkage between the dual

roles, and “while life at home has changed to some degree, women still shoulder the majority of family and household responsibilities” (Brunner & Grogan, 2009, p. 42). Given the time demands of administrative roles, women may not aspire to serve in these roles or may work to achieve a balance between work and family in order to be successful. Federal data show that school leaders work, on average, 58.6 hours per week (Superville, 2017). “Just the basic choice between the roles of wife-mother and career woman can create great anxiety given the time they both take,” write Brunner and Grogan (2009, p. 41). This anxiety creates competition among the roles, known as role conflict. Role conflict is a result of the human desire to be successful in two opposing demands or roles; in this case educational leadership and motherhood.

Work-Family Conflict

Alam et al. (2011) write, “Work-family conflict is a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p. 108). This conflict can be understood by the notion that sometimes the role, demands, and time of one domain interfere with the ability to perform the responsibilities of the other domain. As the cohesion between work and family is important, the work-family dynamic is a problem for working mothers as the conflict is a result of an individual’s attempts to, “meet an overabundance of demands emanating from the home/family and work domains in which the individual operates” (Alam, et al., 2011, p. 108).

Contributing Factors and Outcomes to Role Conflict

“The innovative policies advocated by feminists to expand working women’s opportunities have achieved impressive gains in jobs, wages, and loans,” writes Freedman (2002, p. 184). Despite strides in the right direction to transcend the sexual division of labor that impacts women in the workforce, there are still barriers to consider when managing multiple roles. Freedman (2002) writes, “Not all women choose to become mothers, but a large

proportion of women laborers do bear children at some time” (p. 184). Many women continue to perform child care, family tasks, and chores upon returning home from a full day at work. Combining childcare and other familial tasks posed few problems in preindustrial families as men and women worked near home (Freedman, 2002). When married women first entered the industrial workforce, they often left their jobs when they had children due to personal choice or employer regulations on pregnancy (Freedman, 2002). Since the 1950’s there have been an increasing number of mothers with small children entering and remaining in the labor force. “The dilemmas they face - the double day of paid and unpaid labor, the search for reliable and affordable child care, the conflicts that arise when children are ill - have inspired feminist political responses,” writes Freedman (2002, p. 186).

Alexander and Baxter (2005) describe the general outcome of these dilemmas as work-to-family or family-to-work strain.

The literature surrounding work-family balance recognizes [sic] that the interplay between the work and home environments is crucial to the understanding of individual and family wellbeing. It has long been recognized [sic] that events that affect the feelings, attitudes and experiences of a parent in either the family or work environment can “spillover” into other spheres of a parent’s life. These spillovers are usually characterized [sic] as work-to-family or family-to-work and can be both positive and negative. (p. 18)

Worldwide this strain can be attributed to what has been known as the “mother gap” in wages for working mothers, the high cost of childcare, and the double burden of parental labor that exhausts working mothers and depletes them of leisure and self-care time (Alexander & Baxter, 2005). These strains can lead to unrest and unstable relationships, resulting in divorce in some situations (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Long hours at work or home labor, continued strains

on childcare needs, and wage and opportunity gaps continue to add to role conflict. Additionally, mothers experience what is perceived as a workplace penalty when considering professional advancement. They believe they are held to a higher standard and experience barriers to consideration for leadership positions due to their family obligations outside of work (Gurchiek, 2019).

Working mothers are sometimes faced with the decision to continue to work or stay at home. This decision can contribute to financial and relationship hardships. While the work-to-family and family-to-work strain can be emotionally and physically debilitating for working mothers, there are also benefits to serving in multiple capacities.

Benefits to Multiple Roles

While having a balanced leadership style that is inclusive of all stakeholders is a strength of being a female leader, balanced leadership can also be considered in another way as an asset to working mothers. According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), “Balanced leadership includes the notion that women are better able to perform their educational responsibilities if they have found ways to manage their home duties as well” (p. 23). The acts of managing a home and caring for a family bring a new dimension to leadership styles and can also enhance experiences as an educational leader.

“There has been considerable resistance to examining the relationship between maternal or mothering skills and leadership in schools,” write Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011, p. 84). Qualities such as nurturing, organizing, motivating, and listening have been overlooked, marginalized, or diminished with respect to leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). While some may see the connection between leadership and motherhood as another way to marginalize women as the caretakers of children rather than leaders, there are many connections that prove this connection to be quite beneficial.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) write, "The mothering skills often associated with female leadership are attention to relationships, encouragement, protection, and support" (p.85). Women leaders who are mothers tend to place value on family-style leadership with collaboration and participation of all stakeholders. Becoming a mother often initiates an "epistemological revolution" and new ways of knowing (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 35). One such way of knowing is listening. Motherhood shapes the importance of being an active listener for educational leaders. These developed ways of knowing, such as listening, are gained through maternal practice and "maternal thinking" and are particularly important for those educational leaders and human service professionals who are invested in human development (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 13). As noted, motherhood is valuable training for workforce skills and leadership. "Moms get high marks from co-workers for diplomacy, communicating, multitasking and remaining calm under fire, according to recent research from Bright Horizons, which operates more than 1,000 early-education centers and preschools in the U.S" (Gurchiek, 2019, p. 1).

Additionally, mothers in leadership positions or even those in other full-time positions are role models for their children and inspire achievement and work ethic. Miller (2015) writes, "A 2010 meta-analysis of 69 studies over 50 years found that in general, children whose mothers worked when they were young had no major learning, behavior or social problems, and tended to be high achievers in school and have less depression and anxiety" (p.1). Another study conducted by Nobel (2015) found similar parallels between working mothers and their children:

Women whose moms worked outside the home are more likely to have jobs themselves, are more likely to hold supervisory responsibility at those jobs, and earn higher wages than women whose mothers stayed home full time, according to a new study. Men raised by working mothers are more likely to contribute to household chores and spend more time caring for family members. (p. 1)

Perhaps these positive impacts for children are a result of the many benefits of mothers serving dual roles. Many professionally trained women feel their work is challenging, enjoyable, and worthwhile (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Similarly, women in low-level service feel that work gives them, “sociability, a sense of usefulness, and respect in the eyes of others, including her husband” (Hochschild & Machung, 2012, p. 202).

Working mothers bring a unique skill set to the workplace with an added managerial and relational dimension insight only gained through motherhood. Their workforce skills and “maternal thinking” are particularly important and transferable to educational leadership when tasked with coaching, social justice, equity, and relationship building. Additionally, working mothers promote a work ethic and drive for their own children, resulting in greater contributions professionally and personally as their children become adults. Perhaps a more important benefit to the dual roles of being a working mother is the social-emotional benefits for the mother herself. Being a contributor to an organization as an employee and a financial contributor to the family can provide a sense of purpose, worth, and emotional well-being. Historically women, particularly mothers, have experienced gender bias regarding the position of employment and wages. Unfortunately, this bias becomes even more magnified and prominent within particular subgroups and populations of women.

Working Mothers of Color

“Women who are “Onlys”—often one of the only people of their race or gender in the room at work—have especially difficult day-to-day experiences,” according to McKinsey and Company (2021b, p. 34). Women of color are often the only woman and the only person of color in the room. In the Women in the Workplace study, McKinsey and Company (2021b) state,

Being an Only or double Only can dramatically compound other challenges women are facing at work. Mothers of young children are one example of this; mothers already face more bias and barriers than fathers and women overall, and when they are often the only woman in the room, their experience is even more difficult. (p. 35)

Compared to mothers who regularly work with other women, Onlys are more likely to experience burnout and consider leaving their jobs due to being uncomfortable with sharing personal challenges with colleagues and lack of support (McKinsey & Company, 2021b). They also are, “more likely to feel judged when they take advantage of options that make it easier to balance work and life, such as working from home or working nonstandard hours” (McKinsey & Company, 2021b, p. 15).

Working mothers who are people of color are often at a greater disadvantage due to their race and gender. The concept of multiple jeopardy asserts that the disadvantages of race and gender are often compounded, or even multiplied through the combined race-class status (Browne & Misra, 2003). “The “double jeopardy” hypothesis describes how Black women are punished for violating social roles stereotypically ascribed to both Black men and White women (Burton et al., 2020, p. 2). Despite the additional challenges faced by working mothers who also are people of color in their workplace, many skills and positive traits are also contributed by this subgroup. Asian women, for example, are highly motivated employees and are far more likely to seek top-level executive positions and lead with a purpose than others seeking the same positions (McKinsey & Company, 2021b). African American women are also likely to engage in leadership in productive ways and, “are shown to lead differently than their White counterparts, male or female” due to exclusion from established power structures (Burton et al., 2020, p. 2). They are known to approach leadership with an ethic of care and through a lens of equity and social justice despite facing, “the ‘triple jeopardy’ of gender racism and ageism by those they

supervised, parents and community members, and their superintendents” (Burton et al., 2020, p. 2). Their personal lived experiences as women of color, who in many cases served in multiple roles such as leader and mother, improved their ability to fight the double and triple jeopardy they faced in the workplace as they developed a skill set to make them stronger assets to their organizations. Often strong leadership is formed from experiences and circumstances that are overcome and used as learning opportunities and opportunities to add skills that will set working mothers apart from their peers.

Working Mothers in Covid

One such experience that has been quite a challenge for all in the workforce is the Covid 19 pandemic. This pandemic placed a strain on the global economy, the healthcare industry, education, and the family unit. The Covid 19 pandemic created a work-from-home reality for many workers. This new workplace shift forced a new thought process on productivity and efficiency for workers. For some, the new workplace at home was well-received and some businesses are now allowing productive employees to continue the work-from-home model. However, for some, this model created new stress and strain on their work-life balance. For leaders who are also mothers, “the intersections of personal and professional identities create specific constraints relative to their positioning” (Crosslin & Bailey, 2021, p. 165). In addition to the shift in day-to-day realities, mothers who are leaders have faced a range of challenges including a greater workload and blurred lines between work and home (Crosslin & Bailey, 2021). A year and a half into the pandemic, women are experiencing significantly more burnout than men (McKinsey & Company, 2021a). In spite of the added stress and exhaustion of the pandemic, “women are rising to the moment as stronger leaders and taking on the extra work that comes with this: compared to men at the same level, women are doing more to support their teams and advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts” (McKinsey & Company, 2021a, p. 5).

However, in a recent study one in three women has considered leaving the workforce or downshifting their careers (McKinsey & Company, 2021a). Companies are at risk of losing these women leaders with unique skill sets and values due to added stress both at home and work. “The collapse of the child care sector and drastic reductions in school supervision hours as a result of COVID-19 could drive millions of mothers out of the paid workforce. Inaction could cost billions, undermine family economic security, and set gender equity back a generation,” write Kashen et al. (2020, p. 20). Despite conditions trending in the right direction regarding female representation in the workforce and in senior leadership positions, the question still remains and becomes more important than ever to answer; how can women who serve multiple roles overcome a gendered workplace and be recognized as valuable assets to their organizations?

Theoretical Framework

This research study will use qualitative research methods. The goal of qualitative research is to achieve understanding. Creswell (1998) explains this understanding as a deep knowledge of some social setting or phenomenon. This understanding of first-hand experience explores how participants make meaning from their experiences or surroundings and how this meaning influences their behavior. Feminist theory will guide and focus the researcher when interpreting the data collected. The lens of feminist theory will be used to better understand the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership in this qualitative research study.

Feminist Theory

In order to understand the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership, it is important to first understand the lens through which the intersectionality will be explored. Feminist theory is critical in questioning what is taken for granted (Ahmed, 2000). Sarah Ahmed (2000) writes of the need to shift our thinking from feminist theory as a noun to feminist

theorizing as a verb. Theory is not a fixed object; it is an action, process, or analysis. There is a strong connection between theory and practice in the process of critically questioning what is taken for granted and contesting social norms related to gender.

“The overarching goal is to create spaces and opportunities to reveal lived realities of power inequalities and difference, and provide evidence that can be deployed in working towards addressing these engrained inequalities,” write Jenkins et al. (2019, p. 415). Feminist theory is produced where social norms about gender are contested, no matter the setting. The explanatory work of the theory addresses the broader social processes that link contexts together and moves or remakes “what is” by questioning the common knowledge and categories of analysis used by scholars (Ahmed, 2000). Challenging the binary is a form of feminist theorizing, “affecting or transforming the world in a way which is better, even if what we think is better, can never be fully agreed upon or fully decided” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 102).

bell hooks is a well-known feminist thinker. Part of what makes her work unique is the evolution of her thinking. While her work focuses on oppression, the goal of her work is to create knowledge that is emancipatory. hooks created theory in a way that creates understanding of the intersectional modes of oppression through discourse. “As our world shifts, she’s also shifting with it, and that gives us a road map to see how black feminism is changing and how questions around gender, sexuality, and race transition as well,” writes Goodman, about hooks (Goodman, 2019, p. 2). Her works provide a roadmap for creating conditions that lead to change.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

A specific feminist theory will be used in this study. Collins (1997) describes standpoint theory as, “an interpretive framework dedicated to explicating [sic] how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power” (p. 375). The basis for feminist

standpoint theory is the assumption that the world is traditionally represented from a predetermined social location and a perspective that prevents knowledge, free from bias and constraints, from being produced (Cabrera et al., 2020). “The need for sociological research from alternative standpoints to the hegemony of androcentric knowledge was revealed by Dorothy Smith (1979, 1987a, 1987b) who developed a sociological method from the standpoint of women,” write Cabrera et al. (2020, p. 309).

Feminist standpoint theory has many attributes that are aligned with this study. This theory recognizes pluralism and the multiplicity of situated knowledge as well as the importance of experience and social location in qualitative research. Feminist standpoint theory will provide a framework to guide the research to understand beyond the male meta-narrative of educational leadership and the multiple standpoints that women leaders who are also mothers have regarding their roles.

Conclusion

Working mothers tend to instill a work ethic and value into their own children and establish nurturing home and work environments for those in their care and supervision. Despite any challenges faced along their professional path, working mothers often must persevere to pursue their professional goals. Mothers in leadership bring so much more to the table than many employers realize and must work together to tear down walls and shatter ceilings; making their own path to leadership and top-level positions. As women continue to make advancements in the workplace, now is the time to problematize and deconstruct the old ways of viewing motherhood and placing limitations on the capabilities of women who also have the role of being a mother. School principals and district school leaders have a significant impact on learning and the well-being of their students. Women in these leadership roles tend to bring a unique perspective and set of skills to their organizations.

As the educational landscape will be forever transformed moving forward out of a global pandemic, it is time to rethink more than just how we teach and learn and the social and emotional needs of our students. While these aspects of education are extremely important, we are also faced with re-norming and balancing the demands placed on school leaders and the impact that these demands have on the optimal management and balance of both their personal and professional lives and the many roles they serve in both realms. Evolving feminist theory provides a lens through which to examine the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership for many groups of leading mothers.

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CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In the previous chapter, I discussed the need for further research regarding the intersectionality of the roles of mother and educational leader. I also discussed the history of women in the workplace and the evolving, socially constructed ideal of a "good" mother. I outlined the challenges women face when navigating through the ranks of educational leadership as well as the strengths that their ways of leading bring to education. I outlined the challenges of being a mother in a leadership role during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as ideas for cultural and practice shifts for employers to better accommodate the needs of working mothers.

In this chapter, the purpose and design of the study including the research questions, methodology, and data collection and analysis procedures are explained. This qualitative study sought to understand the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership, particularly the conflicts encountered as well as the mutual benefits of maintaining both roles. Feminist standpoint theory guided the analysis of the information collected in the study. The perspectives and stories of female education leaders who were also mothers were collected and analyzed to better understand how participants made meaning of their experiences and how this meaning impacted their behavior in both roles. The goal of this research study is to explore how five mother/leaders in the same school district understand the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative study used a focus group to explore the roles of mother and educational leader in an effort to better understand the intersectionality of these two roles from the perspective of five women who were both mothers and leaders in education. This research project studied the conflicts as well as the mutual benefits that these women experienced as a

result of holding these dual roles through the rich conversations of narrative inquiry. This study sought to understand deeply the experiences of these five women. Broad generalizations regarding motherhood and educational leadership were not the intended goal of this study.

Research Questions

This study explored the following questions:

1. How do women understand their identities of being an educational leader and mother?
2. What challenges do mothers face in their roles as educational leaders?
3. How do the dual roles and identities of educational leader and mother relate, influence, and benefit each other?
4. How do women balance and negotiate the roles and identities of being an educational leader and mother?

Research Setting and Context

The research setting for this study was southeastern United States. The study took place in a small, rural school district in which 86% of the staff is White. In this district, sixteen of the twenty-five school and district leaders are females, including the superintendent. Specifically, the setting included public-school grades pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade as well as public school administrative offices.

Qualitative Design

This study is a qualitative research project. Qualitative research collects and analyzes non-numerical data and seeks to understand things such as experiences and opinions. Qualitative research is a common practice in subjects such as education. According to Kalu and Bwalya (2017), "Qualitative research is carried out to enhance understanding of individuals' cultures, beliefs, and values, human experiences, and situations, as well as to develop theories that describe these experiences" (p. 44). Qualitative research has the ability for the researcher to be

transparent and accountable throughout the research process (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). Readers can "see" the decision-making process and analysis approach of the researcher. In this research study, I sought an understanding of the experiences, beliefs, and career and life choices of the participants, having both the role of mother and educational leader.

These aspects of qualitative research aligned with feminist standpoint theory and the goals of my research project. Feminist standpoint theory was the knowledge theory, or epistemology, determining, "what kind of knowledge, and through what evidence beliefs are legitimized as thought" in this study (Cabrera et. al, 2020, p. 309). Feminist standpoint theory advocates for the critical understanding of the relationship between knowledge generation and starting with the life and experiences of women as the basis of feminist research, both theoretically and empirically (Cabrera et al, 2020). My study used feminist standpoint theory to examine the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership. The life and experiences of five mother/leaders were shared as the basis of this feminist research study.

Methodological Approach

Narrative inquiry was the methodology used in this study. Narrative inquiry can reveal unique perspectives and deeper understandings of social situations (Deakin University, 2021). According to Deakin University's Qualitative Study Design, "Narrative inquiry records the experiences of an individual or small group, revealing the lived experience or particular perspective of that individual, usually primarily through the interview which is then recorded and ordered into a chronological narrative" (n.p.). Bach (2007) writes, "Experience differs from person to person; each undergoes, acts, and reacts differently. Each has a different 'angle of vision' that touches on a common world" (p. 282). While experiences are unique, they are shaped by the social, cultural, and individual narratives in which individuals are embedded. As individuals compose their lives, they create shared meaning through the stories they tell.

Narrative inquiry was the methodology used in this study. Through standpoint theory, this study created an understanding of the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership through the narratives of participants. In this study, five women who were both educational leaders and mothers participated in conversations about their lived experiences as mother/leaders including their perceived benefits and conflicts to maintaining both roles. Each participant had their own unique perspectives and experiences, and through their contributions to the research, shared meaning was created through narrative inquiry.

Participant Selection

Participants for the study were strategically selected to vary personal and professional experiences related to motherhood and educational leadership. Participants were identified based upon their grade level served as well as their role as a parent. Participants who were selected were mother/leaders in all grade spans in K-12 education and at the district level. Varying the grade level in which participants served provided a comprehensive viewpoint of leadership experiences. Participants were also selected based on their years of experience as an educational leader. Tenured leaders have different experiences to share than leaders who are just starting their journey and all perspectives are important in narrative inquiry to obtain a deep understanding of the research questions. Participants were also selected based on the ages of their children. Participants had children ranging from two to twenty-three years of age. Ages of children was important when discussing the challenges faced and the perceived benefits to maintaining the role of mother/leader. Varying the personal and professional experiences of the participants was integral for the use of feminist standpoint theory which advocates for starting with the life and experiences of women as the basis of feminist research. These varying experiences also helped promote the rich conversations necessary in research using narrative inquiry.

I personally invited each woman to participate and shared the goals and design of the study, prior to commitment. No participants were in a supervisory role over another participant. Likewise, I did not hold a supervisory role over any participants. There was no influence of power dynamics in the research. While all participants worked within the same school district, they all worked in different schools or departments. Participants also had an established rapport and relationship with each other as well as myself, as the researcher. These five mother/leaders, while working on different campuses, worked in the same small school district and through their work in leadership, had previous interactions and professional relationships. This rapport was a necessary criterion for participant selection in order to create the trust and safe space needed for participants to share rich conversations regarding lived experiences and thoughts, a necessary component of narrative inquiry and feminist research. hooks (2000b) writes of the value of safety and support in environments where the goal is clarity and understanding of participants.

Data Collection

This study used focus groups as the method for research. According to Lavrakas (2008), “A focus group is a qualitative research method in which a trained moderator conducts a collective interview of typically six to eight participants from similar backgrounds, similar demographic characteristics, or both” (p. 182). The use of focus groups in social science research can be dated back to 1941 when the method was used as a forum for permitting the participants to articulate the reasons for their responses to research questions around media coverage of war (Liamputtong, 2019).

Participants in the focus groups self-identified as educational leaders and mothers. Participants also had an existing relationship with the other participants. The reason for this criterion was that the research design of focus groups and the methodology of narrative inquiry

sought to understand through thick, rich narratives and experiences as shared by participants. These existing relationships among participants were essential to the trust of the participants to share their experiences, feelings, and identities. These existing relationships laid the foundation for greater participation and depth of shared stories and prioritized the well-being and comfort of participants. I personally invited each woman to participate and shared the goals and design of the study, prior to commitment. No participants were in a supervisory role over another participant. Likewise, I did not hold a supervisory role over any participants. There was no influence of power dynamics in the research. While all participants worked within the same school district, they all worked in different schools or departments.

In this study, the method of focus groups created open lines of communication among participants and dynamic interaction that would not have been possible using other methods such as interviews. Participants in this focus group had shared social experiences of gender and education background as well as a shared interest in the intersectionality of the roles of motherhood and leadership. This methodology was useful in exploring and examining what participants thought and why they thought the way they did about the research questions without pressuring them into making decisions or reaching a consensus regarding the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership. Through thick, rich conversations about the participants' experiences and discussions, data was collected and analyzed.

Each woman participated in four focus group sessions lasting approximately one hour each. Open-ended questions were asked in order to capture the experiences of each participant (See Appendix B). Discussions during the sessions were recorded via a digital recorder. All participants identified as White. There were no other ethnic groups represented in school leadership in the selected school district.

There were a few factors that I considered when conducting focus groups. I established an environment and norms that allowed all five members of the focus group to participate in the discussion and dominant personalities did not impact the discussion of the group. Also, having used participants from the same place of employment, I ensured the environment remained trustworthy, and participants were comfortable with sharing their experiences with coworkers. The location of the focus group sessions was private, doors remained closed during the sessions, and surrounding meeting spaces were vacant. As the researcher, I served as the facilitator of the focus group sessions. I recorded each session on a digital recording platform as well as took notes for later review and analysis. To get the focus group session started, I posed one of the research questions. As the conversation flowed, I would ask clarifying and follow-up questions to keep participants talking and on topic. I did not contribute to the discussion in any other way, other than facilitation.

I started each session with a reminder of confidentiality and the goal of a safe space to share personal reflections and thoughts. The superintendent of the school district was also a mother/leader. She saw value in the study and agreed for the focus group sessions to occur during the work day in an effort to respect the personal time of participants. The focus groups were also conducted during the summer months when the added stresses of school being in session would not distract the mother/leaders.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the area of truth-value in research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility refers to, “The confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information

drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views," according to Korstjens and Moser (2018, p. 121). I chose participants from varying areas of leadership, both at the school and district levels. I also selected participants that had a broad range of years of experience as well as ages of children. I practiced member checking at the beginning of each focus group session, which enabled participants to review the interpretation and challenge what they perceived to be incorrect interpretations. Each session would start with a recap of the questions explored in the previous session as well as the discussion around those questions. I explained to participants the themes that had emerged as I coded and analyzed the discussions from the previous session and asked for their input for accuracy. From their input, I reviewed the data and revised findings, as needed. I also kept a reflective journal to record my thoughts and critical accounts of the research process. I used this journal to document daily logistics and details of the research including methodological decisions and personal reflections of my own insights and values.

Participants also created a group text message after the first focus group session. The participants kept a continuous dialogue in this text group throughout the research process, in between focus group sessions. Topics shared included relevant news articles regarding celebrities and motherhood, research articles aligned with the research topic and focus group discussions, and personal stories and pictures that were relevant to the topics being discussed in the focus group sessions. While this text chain was not included in the data or analyzed for findings, it did affirm the themes that emerged through data analysis and member checking. The text message built a sense of community and connection among participants and provided an additional space for these mother/leaders to reveal lived experiences, share ideas to address shared challenges and

conflicts, and celebrate benefits in each role. These safe spaces and opportunities to share is one of the goals of research using feminist theory (Jenkins et al., 2019).

Transferability

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), transferability, “concerns the aspect of applicability,” (p. 122). It is the responsibility of the researcher to provide a rich, thick description of the participants and the research process. This allows readers to determine whether findings are transferable to the setting of each reader. In this study, I provided rich descriptions of the context of the research, the setting, the sample size and sample demographics, and the focus group and data collection process.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection about oneself as the researcher, including biases and preconceptions as well as the relationship to the participants of the study. “As a qualitative researcher, you have to acknowledge the importance of being self-aware and reflexive about your own role in the process of collecting, analysing [sic] and interpreting the data, and in the preconceived assumptions, you bring to your research,” write Korstjens and Moser (2018, p. 123). Reflexivity was an important consideration for me as I maintained the role of researcher, while also holding both roles being discussed in the research; mother and educational leader. The relationship between the researcher and the participants was described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as that of an Insider/Outsider. This relationship accurately describes the relationship I had in this research study as an outsider in the role of the researcher as well as an insider in the role of the educational leader in public schools and mother. The insider position helped to establish trust and credibility with participants. However, I acknowledged the potential

bias in this study that arose from my personal experiences and was intentional to not let this insider position influence data collection and coding.

Focus Group Protocol

Focus groups composed of educational leaders in public Pre-K through twelfth-grade schools who were also mothers were the participants in this study. Prior to beginning the focus groups, I collected information from each participant including the number of children and ages that each participant had, job position, title, educational level of the participants, as well as demographic information including age and race. This information was shared for transferability details.

Focus group participants were asked questions designed to gain insight and understanding of the research questions. A list of questions was pre-written, however, based on the flow of the discussion the researcher needed to add or modify the questions in order to progress or enrich the conversation. Therefore, the focus groups were semi-structured. The focus groups took place in the Summer of 2022 in a face-to-face setting. Participants gave input on the time and place for each focus group session in order to meet the scheduling and travel needs of the group. Prior to the first session, confidentiality and protection of human subjects as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any time were discussed with the participants individually. Information on how the data will be collected, coded, and reported was also shared. The study obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University before beginning the research.

Data Coding and Analysis

Focus group discussions were transcribed after each session. Once the transcript was complete, it served as the basis for further analysis. Each focus group session was recorded for

transcription purposes. After each session, I used thematic analysis to identify themes that emerged in the focus group conversation. Thematic analysis is, “a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2). I reviewed the transcripts and highlighted phrases or sentences and coded them to describe their content. After practicing member checking for each focus group session, I was able to identify accurate themes from the data. After I generated themes from the codes, I then went back and reviewed the themes in comparison to the complete transcript. Finally, I named the themes and defined them in the context of the study. I looked for themes that emerged from individuals as well as group discussions. I also conducted a cross-session analysis and identified themes that emerged across multiple sessions. Recommendations for future research emerged from these themes found in the coding and analysis.

Conclusion

The disparities in the number of women in an educational leadership role and the number of women pursuing this career path warranted a feminist study on the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership and the challenges and benefits of maintaining both roles. In this chapter, I have outlined the research process, including the research design, theory, methodology, and methods. I have discussed the process to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, and reflexivity. I also discussed potential researcher bias and efforts to mitigate this bias. This work sought an understanding of the research questions and how women understood their identities as leaders and mothers, the challenges they faced in these roles, as well as the relationship between the roles, and the benefit of maintaining the role of leader and

mother. This research used focus groups to better understand the experiences of these mother/leaders and how they made meaning of their roles.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of women who held the role of both educational leader and mother. Particularly, the research was designed to better understand both the conflicts as well as the mutual benefits that are experienced as a result of maintaining these dual roles. The study explored the personal traits of mothers that also influence the way in which women lead. Five educational leaders who serve in the same rural school district in a southeastern state were selected through purposeful sampling. Participants self-identified as both an educational leader and a mother. Participants were selected based on the grade level and position in which they lead as well as their years of experience in educational leadership. The participants agreed to be audio recorded as they discussed their experiences and perceptions of maintaining both the role of mother and educational leader.

Participant Profiles

Table 1 includes information for each participant and pseudonyms are used to refer to participants. All invited women chose to participate in the study. There were 5 women who participated in 4 focus group sessions. Each focus group session was conducted at a time and location that was convenient for each participant. All participants chose to meet at the central office of the school district in a private, collaborative space at the back of the building. We met at the same time around a conference-style table for each session.

Table 1

Participant Information

Name	Years of Experience in Education	Years of Experience as an Educational Leader	Years of Experience as a Mother	Number of Children
Ann	20	14	14	2
Brooke	13	6	4	2
Alexandra	13	5	5	2 and one on the way
Cat	4	4	23	2
Nellie	9	3	2	1

During the first focus group, the discussion centered around each participant’s path to educational leadership, and also their path to motherhood. I thought it would be important for participants to learn more about one another's paths to better understand the lens through which each participant was participating in the research.

Ann

Ann has been in education for 20 years. She has served as both a teacher and a district leader. Ann has been in district leadership for 14 years. She became interested in instructional technology as she was completing her elementary education degree. She went into a master's program in this area soon after graduating with her bachelor's degree. She started working with teachers and leading professional development within her school. She was approached by a female district leader to consider making the move to the district level as an instructional

technology facilitator. She wasn't quite ready to leave the classroom and did not consider the opportunity at the time. She became pregnant and was approached again about a district-level position. She chose to accept the position for the flexibility in her schedule as she became a mother. As she grew in her position and leaders retired, she was promoted to director and currently holds a Chief Officer position. Within this district leadership journey, she obtained her add-on license in school administration but has never used this license at the building level.

Ann is the mother of two children: one teenager and one pre-teenager. As Ann reflected on her path to motherhood, she spoke of how women do not believe they are allowed to say no. Ann commented, "The theme of women in general and being mothers is we can never say no." Ann was working on her Master's degree and got married. A few years passed, and Ann had a baby and got a new job with more flexibility. She then waited three years and had another child and decided to get the add-on license in school administration. As she reflected on this experience, she cannot think why she decided to get the additional licensure at such a busy time in her life. During the time she was working on the additional license, she felt locked in her basement for some time while her children begged her to spend time with them. She stated she regrets the timing of many of her personal and professional decisions such as motherhood and career advancement. She said she felt the guilt of being torn between her family and her professional and service obligations. She began to drop her roles in professional and service organizations to protect her mental health. She stated,

Teaching goes home with you in a way that you care about the children, are making lesson plans, and calling parents. However, I believe leadership bleeds into your home life in a more magnified way. You encounter these things that require you to abandon your home life and focus on work, you don't have a choice.

Ann commented on her belief in the importance of setting professional boundaries. She had to work personally to get to that realization and now tries to set boundaries to protect time for her role as a mother.

Brooke

Brooke has been in education for 13 years and has served as a building administrator, both as a curriculum coordinator as well as a principal for four years. While serving as a classroom teacher, Brooke was approached to become the literacy specialist for a school due to turnover. While she still enjoyed being in the classroom, she saw this opportunity as a way to extend her reach with students. While serving in this position, the curriculum facilitator at the school passed away, and Brooke was asked to step in and help the principal during this time. Brooke ended up transitioning into this role. She served in this position for two years after being hired and decided to apply for a principalship at another school in the district. She was chosen for that position and currently has served in this position for three years.

Brooke is the mother of two children under school age. She has four years of experience as a mother. When describing her path to motherhood, Brooke showed great emotion. Brooke always knew she wanted to be a mother, and she had a life plan for when she would have children. She got married, had completed her master's degree, and was ready to have children. She had always been the type of person to, "set a goal, accomplish it, set another goal, and accomplish it." However, her plans and goals for motherhood were not aligning. Brooke and her husband sought the help of fertility specialists and started the process of treatments. She commented, "The stress of educational leadership is enough in and of itself, and then to add in insane amounts of hormones and medications was like the next level." Brooke described the turmoil in her marriage that having a stressful job and complications getting pregnant caused.

After much medication, time, and procedures, Brooke was able to get pregnant with in vitro fertilization. She described how hard she had to work to get to step one of motherhood, pregnancy. "My journey to motherhood was so hard. It was one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do. It did not come easy and I never thought it would happen." Her second child came via in vitro fertilization as well and was a little easier with fewer medications. She sums up her journey to motherhood as a "hard road."

Alexandra

Alexandra has served in education for 13 years, five of the years in a leadership role. She first served as a teacher in a much larger district before choosing to move closer to her childhood home and move into her current district as a teacher. During her time in the large school district, she described herself as, "laser-focused on being a classroom teacher and never considered serving in a leadership role." Her principal asked her to be a team leader for her grade-level team of nine teachers. She was a second-year teacher and the newest person on the team and did not have the self-image of seeing herself successfully serving in this role. However, she agreed to serve as the team leader and felt encouraged and empowered to pursue her internal drive to assume more roles and take on more responsibilities. She decided to pursue her National Board Certification, got married, and then started her master's degree in school administration soon after making the move closer to home. While working on her master's degree, she was offered a position as the literacy specialist in the school in which she taught. She had never considered leaving the classroom but realized that in a small school district, it is important to pursue opportunities as they do not become available as often as in a larger district. She also liked the idea of having an impact schoolwide. After serving in that role for two years and having two babies during that time, the curriculum facilitator position became available.

Once again Alexandra felt torn as to what to do and considered all micropolitical aspects to applying or not applying for the position. At each transition, Alexandra felt herself wondering how she was going to balance it all, but always had someone who believed in her as well. She said that along the way we meet people who, “encourage you by what they are doing, and by what they say to you, and how they see you, and that makes a huge difference.”

Alexandra is the mother of two children, both under school age, and is expecting another child. When asked to reflect on her path to motherhood, Alexandra had what she described as, "little lines in the sand" regarding goals that she wanted to meet. She was enrolled in her master's program when her first child was born. She came home from the hospital with her new baby and was in an online class two days later. She said she thought to herself, "This is insane." She said, "Like many things in my career, I don't know how I did it, I just did it."

Her husband also got a new job in this time before her oldest child turned one. This job required a lot of travel and she found herself on her own. During this time, she also added another child to their growing family. The Covid pandemic slowed her progress toward her "lines in the sand" and her third child came a little later than she had planned. Alexandra frequently mentioned having thoughts of "how." At each transition, she wondered how she would do it. She wondered how she would manage it all and balance life. Alexandra commented, "you just do it."

Cat

Cat has fewer years of experience as an educational leader but is the closest to retirement of the entire group. Cat served in a leadership role in public service for 25 years before making the shift to education. She has four years of experience in education all in a leadership role. Growing up, she enjoyed the social aspect of school and being involved in clubs and social

groups. She never believed she would work in the field of education. She graduated from college and served in social work, local government, and parks and recreation before applying for a position in education. It was through her participation in a women's leadership group, that she realized that she was personally and professionally ready to do something different in her career. In order to make the transition into education, she had to go back to school to become licensed. It was stressful for her given her age and the point in her career, but she felt it was the right move to make.

Cat is a mother of two children who are both adults and living on their own. Cat became a mother at the age of 28. She had a lot of responsibilities with her job at the time. The environment in her job was very business-like, and that culture impacted her feelings about motherhood and her ability to succeed as a mother based on her work environment. She had another child three years later and her job had also changed and added additional responsibilities and expectations with both roles. She had also become a single mother and was having to take her children with her to many of her professional obligations.

She described her life in a progression of seasons. During the seasons when her children were living at home, there were times when she felt obligated to say yes to some things professionally at the expense of other responsibilities that came with being a mother. She said she often found herself torn between going to a conference or having a late meeting. Cat is grateful that she has worked in supportive environments for much of her career. However, there were times when she compared her experiences to her male counterparts and how they seemed to have more freedom to travel and say yes to opportunities than she did as a professional and a mother. She was asked at one point in her career to give a presentation at a conference on the topic of work-life balance. After completing the presentation, she told the attendees that work-

life balance does not actually exist, and it is more like work-life integration. She encouraged them to give themselves a break and integrate the two parts of life and stated that was a huge personal revelation for her.

Nellie

Nellie has nine years of experience in education, three of them being in a school leadership position. She began her teaching career in another school district and transitioned to her current district for a leadership opportunity. During her time as a teacher, she began to take on extra duties such as curriculum writing and designing online classes. She also led professional learning communities. She described herself as having the desire to share with and coach other teachers. She first desired to be a content area coach in her area. However, she knew jobs in that field were not plentiful. She happened to come across a job posting for a curriculum facilitator at the secondary level. She felt like she wasn't running away from a teaching position but rather running to an opportunity to work with teachers that does not come open very often. She applied and got the job and found out she was pregnant the day she accepted the job. After being in the role for two years, the administration shifted and the opportunity for a school administrator position opened in her school. She had always felt encouraged and trusted by her principal and she decided to pursue the role. She always felt like her principal believed in her which made her believe in herself. She has since completed her licensure in school administration and discussed how great the opportunity was to learn on the job while working in the role. While school administration was not on her radar until people believed in her along the way and helped her to grow her confidence as a leader.

Nellie has two years of experience as a mother. Like others, she described herself as a detailed life planner. After a long courtship with her husband, they were married. She planned to

be married for one year before becoming a mother. Her plan fell into place, and she found out she was pregnant as she transitioned to a new role in educational leadership. Nellie discussed how she checked off many things on her life plan in the order in which she intended. She completed her graduate degree before getting married. She was able to get pregnant within her desired timeframe as well.

While every participant had different paths to becoming a leader in education and a mother, there were certain commonalities in the stories of their journeys. Each participant described a person in their professional path who encouraged and inspired them to become a leader. Each participant also commented about their love for teaching and did not want to leave the classroom when first approached or considered for a leadership position. All participants also tended to struggle to separate the two roles of leadership and motherhood. When discussing the paths separately, all tended to intertwine their stories and experiences and blur the lines of the separate roles. This aspect of the discussion helped me realize how important it was to dive deeper into the intersectionality of these two very important roles.

Results

Through these focus group sessions, it was evident that these mothers in leadership were in a constant battle with how to be the best educational leader and the best mother at all times. Through the lens of feminist standpoint theory, I have organized the findings into themes based on two categories. The first category is the challenge of holding both the role of a mother and an educational leader and the second category is the mutual benefit of holding both of these roles.

Challenges of Dual Roles

What challenges do mothers face in their roles as educational leaders? The discussion around this question was rich and in-depth. The participants seemed passionate about the

challenges they face. From the discussions, three themes emerged. The most permeating theme was the concept of *mom guilt*. Participants frequently referenced an internal conflict when striving to balance and be successful in both roles. The second theme that emerged from the discussion was that of boundaries. Participants discussed the struggle to separate the two roles and establish boundaries to protect their time at home with their families. Another theme was centered around self-advocacy and how women struggle with this concept. They shared that female ideology does not promote self-advocacy and discussed the perceptions that may arise when females advocate for themselves.

Mom Guilt

Guilt and worry are emotions experienced by all leaders who are also mothers. It appears and surfaces in many different ways. Mom guilt was the most pervasive theme throughout this research, and the one that participants seemed to “feel” more deeply during discussions. Brooke stated that she could remember feeling guilty and being afraid to tell people in her professional circle that she was pregnant, and this guilt was magnified with her second child as her role in leadership had advanced at this point. She stated,

I have shared the struggle I had to get pregnant with my children. I remember thinking that when I tell people I am pregnant, they are going to think that I am not going to be able to do my job or be as good of a leader because I am adding to my family or because I have small children at home. I was happy to tell everyone else, but I can remember feeling afraid to tell my employers that I was pregnant. I felt like they would think that I could not be good at both roles. I don't know where that comes from. It is completely internal.

All participants commented that none of their supervisors had ever done or said anything to create or substantiate this guilt, but rather the source was completely internal.

As the discussion continued, participants began to discuss certain human resource processes that women must go through when they are pregnant. Women must request maternity leave in writing to the Board of Education and the Board must approve the leave. The group discussed how this process seems cumbersome and is never really explained to them. They are expected to figure it out on their own. Ann commented that perhaps this process is the starting point for our feelings of guilt. Each participant agreed and discussed that the process made them feel like they had no flexibility in the dates or the length of their maternity leave and they were expected to come back within a limited time frame rather than take the time they needed with their newborn children. They compared this process in education to other professional fields in which there is paid maternity leave, longer allowed terms for leave, as well as paid paternity leave. Ann commented, "Mom guilt begins before birth and extends far beyond infancy." Brooke agreed and said she constantly feels guilty and gave an example. Brooke commented,

If my kid is sick, I feel like I have to gauge how sick they are and weigh these factors as to whether I take a day away from work to stay home with them or send them to their grandparents. I feel guilty about missing work for things such as doctor's appointments or other obligations for my children. I feel guilty about spending time with my children and family.

The discussion turned to female versus male leadership. The group commented that men are generally better at delegation and can get by with doing less. They attributed these feelings to the mothering ideology of trying to take care of everything on your own and not asking for help. The group discussed how they do not think male leaders and fathers experience the same guilt as

they experience when trying to maintain both roles. Brooke commented, "I feel like we are judged sometimes as having too much on our plates and feel guilty about having to miss a meeting or other professional obligation and men, in the same situation, are praised for prioritizing their families." Ann related that to a historical or generational viewpoint of how for many years, men were not expected to be active in the home, and now when they are active, they are praised. This concept of mom guilt can be heard in the other themes taken from the challenges mothers face as educational leaders as well.

Boundaries

One of the challenges mothers experience is setting boundaries that separate the roles of leader and mother. Ann commented, "In our roles, the job comes home with you and bleeds into your family time." The group agreed that it is easier to sacrifice time with their families than it was to miss something or give up time at work. They feel there is no one else to do their job professionally. Alexandra commented that it was easier to set boundaries with their families than it was with their co-workers and she struggles to prioritize her family. Brooke added,

I feel like I take my principal mindset home with me. My husband will tell me to stop being a principal. I get two and a half hours a day with my family on average and I am so in tune with running a school that I come home and run it like my school. I do not know how to sit down and relax.

The inability to set boundaries also bleeds into self-care for mothers who are leaders. Cat commented, "Self-care is out of the question." Often educational leaders work longer hours and as mothers, go home to a second shift job of taking care of their families. This schedule forces mothers to either put self-care on the back burner or squeeze it into their schedule at the sacrifice of another component of self-care such as sleep. Ann commented,

I work out at 5 am so I am back at home to get my daughters up, get them fed, and get them to school on time. After a long day at work and an evening spent running to my children's events, I am exhausted by the end of the day.

The need for educational leaders who are mothers to set boundaries for themselves was a clear theme for participants. Cat commented that she realized how important boundaries were and how the inability to set them personally also makes everyone who works with you feel that they should not have personal and professional boundaries or feel guilty for having or wanting them. The group agreed that a more defined line between the two roles would help alleviate a great deal of stress and guilt in their lives, but that is almost impossible to accomplish in the role they are in. As Brooke commented, "My whole life revolves around my job. It shouldn't be that way but it is right now."

Self-Advocacy

The third theme of the discussion centered around self-advocacy and women. The group discussed how women were not good at self-advocacy. Cat commented that in her career as a female in leadership, the role has been predominantly occupied by males and she has felt she had to prove herself. She shared, "I felt I had to prove myself over and over and you get locked in this very different mindset. I often felt like I was in a glass house." She said she was never really great at asking someone to step in and help her because she felt like it was her job to do and she should do it. Adding the role of a single mother she felt the stress of being good at both roles in her life. She commented,

If I could go back to my former self and give her advice, I would tell her to give herself a break. I feel like women aren't good at talking about their struggles and their feelings.

Would we be talking about it if we weren't participating in this research? Sometimes establishing that culture where it is ok to talk about struggling in our roles is hard to do. Cat commented that females are not trained in advocacy. Ann added, "If you do advocate for yourself, you are viewed as a complainer or a modern-day 'Karen.'" The group talked about how they felt that if they advocate for having too much on their plate, then their supervisors would assume that they cannot handle "another thing" and they would not be considered for other opportunities that may come along. Brooke stated,

At times I have felt that if I advocate for myself now, I will be overlooked for future opportunities. I also think that if we don't apply for positions because we are a mom and we want to keep our lives balanced at the time the position is available, that is frowned upon as well.

Alexandra agreed but admitted that because she is a mom and would like to protect her time with her family as much as possible, she has decided to not apply for a larger leadership role a few times in her career, despite what this decision may limit for her in the future. The group praised her for sharing that decision and they respected her for choosing her family.

The group seemed passionate about sharing their struggles and conflicts with having two very important roles in their lives. They mentioned how beneficial it was to have a place to talk about their roles and to have a safe space to share and a support group to listen. Cat commented that the group would probably not be talking about the conflicts and internal guilt they experience had they not been asked to participate in this research study.

Coping with the Challenges

When asked about how mothers and leaders cope with the conflicts that arise while maintaining these dual roles, each participant shared their unique strategies. Cat described how

she focused on relationships. She discussed how her work relationships are like family relationships to her. She also offered advice to not overcommit socially outside of work. She commented, "Say yes to the things that matter most." I asked a follow-up question at this point. I posed the question around her comment about how she focuses on relationships and the importance of familial work relationships and asked if this approach conflicted with her need to set professional boundaries. Cat commented, "You know, I have never thought of it this way. I believe these relationships do make setting professional boundaries more challenging." Anne added that she believes that the importance she places on considering everyone's feelings and maintaining strong professional relationships also presents a problem when she tries to create professional boundaries.

Brooke discussed how she struggles with coping with the stress of both roles. She said she often bottles up her frustrations at work and takes them home with her. She discussed how as an educational leader, you often wear your game face at work and keep all emotion suppressed inside and then release the emotion at home, sometimes at the expense of your family. She commented that it is easier to release stress and bottled-up emotion at home with your "unconditional people" in a safe space where you will not be judged on your professional ability to remain calm and control emotions. She discussed times when she would lay awake at night and think about a stressful situation at work. She commented that seeing a therapist during those heavy times was also beneficial to her as she could discuss her professional stresses and struggles with an unbiased and non-judgmental party who, in turn, helped her cope with the stress and move past it.

Nellie shared that it makes her feel better about working long hours and having mom guilt when she plans experiences and activities for her child even though she cannot be there to

share those experiences with him. She said it made her feel better that she is unable to spend as much time with her child as she would like due to time demands at work, but she felt better when she knew he would not be missing out on things he enjoyed because she arranged for him to have these experiences with other people.

Alexandra shared another coping strategy. She commented, "I will share what I do to cope with the demands of both roles. While it may not be the healthiest strategy for a person to use." She then described how she has worked very hard in her career to perfect the art of keeping things compartmentalized in her life. She described how she uses self-talk to keep work at work and makes it a priority to not talk about work business at home. She attributed that to the fact that her husband is not in education and he would not handle stressors in his job the same way she handles them in her role as an educational leader. She also said she prioritized leaving her work at work since she only gets a few hours with her kids each day and she wants that time to be focused on them and her role as a mother.

All participants discussed how it was not easy for them to cope with the stress of maintaining the dual roles of motherhood and educational leadership. They all agreed that this is an area in which they could personally improve and use extra support. They discussed how it was challenging not to take the stress of work home with them each day.

Seeing Beyond Dichotomies: Value in the Challenges

After reviewing the perceived themes around the challenges of being both a mother and an educational leader with the group, I posed another question. I asked the group about the benefits of the challenges. Are there any positive takeaways from the struggles we face as we strive to successfully maintain two very important roles? The group took a longer period of time to reflect than normal. Finally, the conversation started with Brooke. She commented, "I think I

am a better parent because I work.” When she further reflected, it was revealed that she believes her profession gives her an additional and important sense of identity. She added that she does not believe she would be happy as a stay-at-home mother, and she needed the mental challenges, adult interaction, and personal growth that is a part of her professional life. The other group members agreed that work gave shape and purpose to their lives.

The feelings of *mom guilt* were brought back up as a main internal conflict. As the group discussed mom guilt and how it may be difficult to uncover any positive aspects of mom guilt, the conversation was slow at first. After the conversation started, they realized it wasn't as challenging as they anticipated. Cat started the conversation. She commented that she believes guilt could help us pay more attention and give more intentional positive attention to our role as parents. Cat commented, “I have read that guilt is considered an emotion of thought. This emotion has us constantly reflecting and improving.” The other group members added they have never thought of their guilt as a means to self-improvement. Anne commented, “I have never thought of it that way, but I believe you are correct. If we are constantly thinking about and reflecting upon our feelings of guilt, we will be making constant small improvements to our role as parents in order to get it better next time.”

Alexandra added that mom guilt could not only help us with self-improvement as mothers but also drive us to take action more systematically. “Our guilt helps us realize that there are improvements that can be made in our professional experiences to better support mothers who are also educational leaders,” Alexandra added. Nellie agreed that mom guilt could be a driving force to initiate conversations about changes in the workplace as well as a compelling factor to help us realize that women who are in both of these roles need support and need each

other. “Knowing that we all experience these feelings can help us better support others who may also be feeling this way,” Nellie added.

Mutual Benefits of Dual Roles

How do the dual roles and identities of educational leader and mother relate, influence, and benefit each other? The discussion around this question was rich and uplifting. Early discussion centered around how having the role of a mother impacted their leadership style. The discussion then reversed and addressed how the role of educational leadership was beneficial to their role as mothers.

Relational Leadership

When asked to respond to how the role as a mother impacts leadership styles for educational leaders, the first theme revealed was that of relational leadership. Nellie commented, “I am not the same type of leader that I was when I was leading a classroom. It is very different and I do believe it has something to do with being a mother. My leadership is focused on relationships.” She stated that while relationships were important to her as a classroom teacher, as a school leader her focus is even more relationship-focused. She talked about focusing on getting to know students and staff on a deeper level. As a school leader, she finds herself spending time reflecting on relationships and ensuring her staff feels supported, much like she does in her role as a mother. She talked about being able to see similarities in what she does daily in her profession with what she does as a mother.

Alexandra added that she believed being a mom would have impacted her actions as a teacher as well. Her expectations for students would have changed had she been a mother when teaching. She discussed how her leadership style as a teacher was more managerial, focusing on the efficiency of pacing and schedule. Now as a leader and a mother, she thinks more deeply

about students and how to plan schedules and processes through a more student-focused lens. She talked about her questioning of leadership decisions and how that has evolved, especially now that she has a child of her own who is about to start attending the school in which she leads. She talked about questioning, “What do I want for him?” when making decisions as a leader.

Cat was the only participant who had experience as a mother before entering the field of education professionally. She brought a unique perspective to this particular research question. She said, “I view the entire education system differently now that I am working in it as opposed to just being a parent in the system.” She talked about how she understood the rationale behind certain decision-making processes in education differently once she maintained both the role of parent and educational leader and how this understanding helped her understand the importance of relationships.

Alexandra talked about empathy, in particular how she feels empathy more with families and parents now that she is a mother. She used the example of attending Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings for students with disabilities. Before becoming a parent, she viewed her attendance as a requirement to check the box that there was a representative of the local education agency (LEA) in attendance. Now, as a mother, she thinks more from the perspective of the parent. She questions whether parents understand the difficult conversations, data, goals, and educational language discussed in the meeting or whether it should be explained in a way that is more understandable for the parents. She commented,

As a mother, I have gained more empathy for parents as far as wanting to make sure that I am not just checking the box as the leader in their school, but that I am truly helping them understand why things are the way they are in education.

Discipline

When responding to this particular research question, Brooke commented that the first thing that came to her mind was relationships and discipline. She talked about how she handled discipline in a very black-and-white manner before becoming a mother herself. Prior to holding the role of mother, Brooke commented that she handled discipline with the mindset, "these are the rules and these are the consequences for breaking the rules." Now she has a different mindset and handles the discipline with a "mom-to-mom" approach. She says using phrases like, "mom-to-mom" or "I have boys, too," or even having pictures of her children on display helps to ease the tension of difficult conversations around discipline and helps to find a common ground or relationship when talking with parents about discipline. Brooke commented,

We may disagree on something, but we both have common ground, we are both parents.

It has changed the way I deliver consequences and communication. I try to deliver these things the way I would want my child's teacher to deliver them to me as a parent.

Alexandra also reflected on her discipline practices through the lens of being both a mother and an educational leader. Alexandra commented,

I feel like I do a better job with discipline now that I am a mom. Before I had kids of my own, I felt like the parents thought I did not know what I was doing or where they were coming from. I now feel like I can handle situations with more confidence just from being a parent.

Cat added that maintaining both roles gives you confidence and credibility when working with parents in tough situations such as discipline. Alexandra agreed, commenting how things are no longer black and white when it comes to student behavior, but rather being a parent gives you a unique perspective for looking at the discipline in the context of the individual child and family.

All participants agreed that being a mother provided a unique perspective and approach to handling student discipline and communicating with families.

Reflective Leadership

Another response to how the role as a mother impacts leadership styles for educational leaders was reflective leadership. In this conversation, the focus shifted more from families and students to staff. Nellie commented, "I am a reflective leader and I want input from the staff when making decisions or launching new initiatives. I don't think I approached decision-making in this way before being a mother." Nellie explained that being a mother helped her understand the importance of buy-in and also the social and emotional health of the people she leads. Nellie added that her male principal serves under the idea of "doing what is best for the students and fair for the staff." While she agreed with this idea, she said she cannot help but worry about the staff's well-being when launching big initiatives or changes within the school. Brooke agreed and added that she tries to make the big and heavy decisions that need to be made and let the staff have input into the details of the execution. She commented that part of this strategy stemmed from her value for efficiency and valuing the time of her staff. She added, "This focus on efficiency definitely is a reflection of my own struggles to balance my professional life as a leader and my personal life as a mother. I want to protect my staff's personal time if at all possible."

Advocates and Resources

Another theme that emerged from the conversation around the mutual benefits of maintaining both the roles of mother and educational leaders centered around being a better mother because you are an educational leader. This conversation was slow to start because participants had been thinking about the research question from the opposite angle of the benefits

of being a mother in their role as educational leaders. However, once Brooke began to talk about communication, the conversation opened up. Brooke spoke about how her approach to communication and how she crafts conversations are different because she has experience as a mother. Brooke commented that a result of maintaining both roles is improved communication. She added,

I am a better communicator with my child and even my child's teacher because I am an educational leader. I feel like my ability to reason and talk things through with my child has improved due to the continuous conversations with students each day. I also think I am more reflective of how I communicate with my child's teacher and how I approach any situation that may arise in their education due to my experiences working with teachers and families.

Alexandra added that the way she leads is quite different than how her husband leads in his company, outside of the educational realm. She stated how she doesn't run things by him but instead deals with it internally, calls her friends and mentors who are also educational leaders, and takes time to reflect because she wants to lead with a, "caring and motherly approach." She said she believes it is natural for women who hold both roles to approach situations kindly and act as a coach and mentor to those she leads.

Cat added that she believes educational leaders are better advocates for their own children as students, particularly in their educational journey because they are knowledgeable of the educational requirements and benchmarks such as reading levels, graduation requirements, and available courses.

Alexandra agreed and added,

Not only are we better resources for our children, but for other parents. I have parents text me all the time with work samples or questions about growth or progress. I feel like I can help guide them and ease their worries about their child's experiences because I am both a mom and an educational leader.

Cat also commented that she believes being on the same schedule as your children helps to improve your performance as a parent. "Even though educational leaders work long hours, it is nice to be able to spend holidays and other days with our own children when the school calendar permits." All participants agreed that while their role as educational leaders tended to bleed into and sometimes take over their role as mothers, there were benefits to motherhood as a result of the role.

Seeing Beyond Dichotomies: Challenges in the Benefits

After reviewing the perceived themes around the benefits of being both a mother and an educational leader with the group, I posed another question. I asked the group about challenges to the benefits. Are there challenges that arise from the benefits that are experienced from maintaining these dual roles? Does the impact that being a mother has on leadership style ever make leadership more challenging? Does leading with empathy and relational leadership sometimes complicate situations as an educational leader? As the group discussed these questions, they began to discuss how their tendencies to be nurturing, kind, and compromising as mothers sometimes make it challenging to have difficult conversations with adults. Brooke commented, "When having to discipline students, this nature is a welcome approach. However, it also makes it challenging when having to discipline adults." Participants discussed the internal challenges with which they struggle when dealing with certain areas of human resources such as

employee discipline. "You know you have an obligation to uphold the rules and do what is best for the school, but the personal aspect of these challenging conversations sometimes keeps you up at night," commented Brooke. Ann added, "Putting your maternal instincts aside to handle challenging situations and hold difficult conversations is more difficult than you think. You want to show grace and empathy, but sometimes in leadership, there is no place for that in extreme situations."

Some participants have also led through school reform. Being rigid with expectations and structure in order to turn school performance around is sometimes challenging. Participants discussed how they have to put their maternal instincts of collaboration, buy-in, and reflective and relational leadership aside in a sense in order to put the necessary structures and supports in place for school reform. "It is sometimes challenging to know and feel the pressures coming from federal, state, and local entities and leading through those pressures by 'digging your heels in' and showing tough love," commented Brooke. Alexandra added that it is quite challenging to suppress your leadership style at times and be tough and rigid in order to move forward and make the needed progress. "In the end, we know this is what is best, but it is quite challenging internally to lead this way at times," commented Alexandra. "Sometimes you can't be the coach, teacher, or facilitator. Instead, you have to be the heavy. While this is similar to parenting, a mother's heartstrings are sometimes pulled," added Cat.

Summary

There is literature on both the conflicts and mutual benefits that arise when women hold the dual roles of educational leader and mother. The research further supports that while the workforce demographics are trending in the right direction in terms of males and females in the workforce, women's representation across the pipeline has increased since 2016 (McKinsey &

Company, 2021b). However, women continue to remain significantly underrepresented in the area of leadership, indicating there are elements of the past that impact the present landscape (McKinsey & Company, 2021b). Men and women view their roles and are perceived by others very differently, particularly in leadership positions. There are still barriers that women face and must overcome to maintain the dual roles of motherhood and leadership. Research also gives insight into women who successfully maintain both roles and how the roles interact. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) discuss how women lead differently and these differences vary depending on other life factors.

The results of this study, however, reveal even more nuances and further detail around the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership. Ideas of self-advocacy and setting boundaries were discussed as weaknesses for fear of being viewed as inferior to men in the workplace. The research further supports the concept of mom guilt that occurs when women are balancing two important roles such as motherhood and educational leadership. The research revealed that women in these roles are not equipped with a toolbox of skills to help them cope with and manage this guilt.

The research also revealed mutual benefits to maintaining the dual roles of motherhood and educational leadership. Relational leadership and reflective leadership emerged as styles that were a result of also being a mother. A "caring and motherly approach" to leadership was discussed. Participants all agreed that a shift in their leadership style occurred as a result of becoming a mother. These unique perspectives create an understanding of the perspective from both the role of the mother and educational leader. Feminist standpoint theory recognizes the multiplicity of this situated knowledge and provided a lens through which the perspectives that these women leaders who are also mothers have regarding their roles.

While there are clear challenges and benefits to maintaining the dual roles of mother and educational leadership, the data revealed that these two roles are not necessarily dichotomies. As participants pointed out, you can never be great at both separately. What was surprising from the research findings was just how much intersectionality there was between the two roles. While participants identified both benefits and challenges, they also discussed the non-dualism that exists between motherhood and educational leadership. The research findings reveal the nuance that no matter how hard participants try to compartmentalize one role in order to feel successful at the other, the two roles intersect to such a degree that compartmentalization is nearly impossible. Participants experience conflicts in the benefits as well as benefits in the conflicts of maintaining these two roles. This intersectionality is best summarized by describing participants as conflicted strivers in both roles.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of women who held the role of both educational leader and mother, particularly the conflicts and mutual benefits that are a result of maintaining both roles. This study used feminist standpoint theory as the theoretical framework that guided the analysis of the information collected through the narratives of the participants. This chapter will include an analysis of the study results as well as the implications. Limitations to the study and recommendations for future research will also be discussed.

Research Questions

The research questions used throughout the study are listed below. These questions shaped the framework for the data collection and analysis of the study, which will be discussed throughout this chapter. The overarching question of the study examines the perceptions of female education leaders about the intersectionality of motherhood and leadership.

The guiding question is what does it mean to be both a good mother and an effective administrator? In particular, this study will explore the following questions:

1. How do women understand their identities of being an educational leader and a mother?
2. What challenges do mothers face in their roles as educational leaders?
3. How do the dual roles and identities of educational leader and mother relate, influence, and benefit each other?
4. How do women balance and negotiate the roles and identities of being an educational leader and mother?

Analysis

Through this study, the participant data were analyzed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of women who hold the dual roles of mothers and educational leaders. The summary of this analysis was organized in response to the guiding research questions. The research questions about how women understand and balance their identities of being educational leaders and mothers, what challenges mothers face in their roles as educational leaders, and how they cope with these challenges can be explored through the women's lived experiences and perceptions. The results of this study have revealed multiple trends in both the challenges and mutual benefits of maintaining the role of mother and educational leader. The following themes emerged from a thorough analysis of the data collected.

Table 2

Themes from the Research

Emotional Challenges	Mother's Ways of Leading	Quality of Time Not Quantity of Time
Mom Guilt	Relational Leadership	Work-Life Balance
Self-Advocacy	Reflective Leadership	Boundaries

Emotional Challenges. Ideologies are patterns of beliefs, ideas, opinions, and values that are used to create meaning (Freedman, 2003). People both produce and consume ideologies and use them to define and promote a construction of reality (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). Ideologies are both "in us" and "to us" and as a result, we are not fully aware of the degree to which we internalize ideologies (Althusser, 1984). From the conversations of the focus groups, it was evident that all participants had similarly constructed ideologies regarding what the ideal mother

and educational leader should be. These ideologies of the ideal created an internal conflict for participants as they worked to create a balance between the roles.

As Brooke noted, it is hard to feel as though you are doing well in both roles at the same time. She went on to describe the pressures she felt regarding time and attention devoted to each role and how her professional role ended up taking precedence most often over the personal role of being a mother. These pressures and struggles created what participants coined as “mom guilt.” This guilt is an internal feeling caused by not being able to establish clear professional boundaries, being weak in self-advocacy, and a feeling of competition with males in the same profession according to participant discussions. Ann commented that without professional boundaries, work bleeds into home life. Participants agreed that it is much more common to sacrifice time as a mother than sacrifice time as an educational leader due to the competitive nature of the workplace, and more often, an unexplained internal pressure or drive. Participants discussed that even though their supervisors do not act in a way that makes them feel guilty for prioritizing their role as a mother, there is still natural, internal guilt that they feel and therefore they tend to succumb to the guilt and sacrifice time as a mother for professional obligations. "Attempts to integrate career and motherhood are itself a source of stress," according to Johnston and Swanson (2006). Work and family balance is a process of giving and taking and often gets out of balance. While participants explained the pressure and drive as “unexplained,” feminist theory explains the source of this conflict and guilt as the patriarchal foundation of the educational system and the masculine leadership traits of competition, discipline, and assertiveness that are still valued today. Mother/leaders feel this internal pressure to prioritize professional obligations as well as the intensive maternal ideology, making them conflicted strivers in both roles.

Professional decisions shape and reinforce the mothering ideology (Johnson & Swanson, 2006). "Mothers must find cognitive ways to reconcile their employment decisions and their mothering ideology," write Johnston and Swanson (2006). The need for this reconciliation was a theme described by participants when discussing their inability to establish work-home boundaries and the resulting mom guilt that came with the struggle to balance work and home. Participants discussed their feelings of failure as a mother as a result of the demands of their job bleeding into their personal time and lives. Cognitive theories suggest that women cannot sustain inconsistency between mothering ideologies and modern values associated with employment for long periods. Therefore, mothers are faced with the choice to modify their work constraints and situations or their mothering ideologies to relieve role conflict (Johnston & Swanson, 2006).

Alexandra talked about compartmentalizing work and motherhood to cope with stress. She discussed how she left work at work and did not let it impede on her time at home. Others commented that compartmentalization was a weakness for them and they very seldom could leave their professional duties at work and come home to focus on their family. In an effort to adjust their mothering ideology, participants discussed making the most of the time they had at home, planning activities for their families even if they could not attend, and seeking support from professionals as well as support groups to cope with mental angst.

To modify work constraints, participants discussed the two main strategies of self-advocacy and setting professional boundaries. Both of these strategies were self-identified weaknesses of all participants. Feminist thought attributes these feelings to gender stereotypes that drive different societal expectations for men and women. Men are expected to be assertive and ambitious while women are expected to be modest and sensitive. Women are better advocates for others than themselves, as discussed in the findings as a benefit to being a

mother/leader. hooks (2000a) contends that before women can change patriarchal societal expectations, they have to raise their own feminist consciousness with a focus on strategies for intervention and transformation which, in turn, makes them better advocates for themselves.

Self-advocacy includes the ability to identify needs, clearly communicate needs, and help others learn how they can support these needs (Emory University, 2021). Self-advocacy is a tool that can help mothers in educational leadership avoid stress and anxiety through heightened self-awareness and support. Cat introduced the conversation of self-advocacy. Ann added that she feels if she advocates for herself, she will be perceived as a complainer or a “Karen.” Other concerns raised by the group centered around the perceptions their supervisors may have of them if they do advocate for themselves. Brooke commented that she felt like she would be perceived as weak. Brooke expressed concern regarding the result of being overlooked for future opportunities.

Self-advocacy is a learned skill. All personality types can master the skill with practice and confidence (Emory University, 2021). Self-advocacy promotes overall job satisfaction and prevents burnout. All participants agreed that further training in this skill would be beneficial to help alleviate mom guilt and role conflict. Another practice that would improve emotional health for educational leaders who are mothers is setting personal and professional boundaries. Without these boundaries, others decide how time is managed for these women.

During a focus group session, Ann discussed how setting professional boundaries is difficult and how often professional obligations bleed into family time. In addition to trading family time for professional time, self-care, rest, and relaxation also were discussed as essentially non-existent. Not only was setting boundaries discussed as a need for the participants but it was also connected to setting that culture for the people who work with these women leaders. Cat

discussed if a leader cannot set professional boundaries, then it sends a clear message to others within the organization that they should not have these boundaries either. Professional boundaries eliminate the domino effect of professional domination of time from leaders to those which they lead.

Coping strategies such as setting boundaries and self-advocacy were an area in which I found gaps in the literature on this topic. This research study addressed these gaps by identifying two strategies and skills that could help mothers who are educational leaders manage areas of conflict when balancing the two roles. The study also identified challenges that arise when women leaders try to advocate for themselves or set boundaries. These challenges arise from their leadership style and the desire to be accommodating, inclusive, and considerate of the people whom they lead. The intersectionality of the two roles of mother and educational leader sometimes influences each separate role as outlined in the findings of this study. The mother's ways of leading can complicate the need to set professional boundaries and self-advocate for their personal life.

As participants were asked to think deeply about their perceived challenges of being a mother/leader and were asked to think beyond the dichotomies. They were asked about the values found in the perceived challenges of being a mother/leader. Conclusions drawn from this discussion aligned with the writings of hooks (2000a), outlining the need for self-advocacy in order to destabilize a patriarchal education system. Participants concluded that guilt can serve as a catalyst for women to take action to systemically support other women and transform a historically male-normed education system. Participants discussed support systems such as support groups and mentorships as necessary actions for improvement

Mother's Ways of Leading. While there were many resources tied to how women lead, there was very little research that specifically studied the leadership styles of women who were in the dual roles of mother and educational leader. This research helped tie the two roles together through trends that emerged in participant leadership styles and how these styles have evolved as their roles have changed. The findings of this study directly tie into the work of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) regarding how women lead with relational leadership, leadership for social justice, spiritual leadership, leadership for learning, and balanced leadership.

One of these leadership styles that emerged from this study is relational leadership. According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), relational leadership is about being in a relationship with others in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical sense. Relationships are at the center of leadership. These relationships are centered around empowering others by helping, listening, understanding, and teaching (Belenky et al., 1997). When asked to respond to how the role of a mother impacts leadership styles for educational leaders, the first theme revealed was that of relational leadership.

Participants discussed how relationships have always been valued by them, even as a teacher. However, after becoming a mother and an educational leader, how they lead shifted. They described a change in which they “think through” their actions and decisions with a relational and reflective lens rather than a structured and systems-based approach to leadership. "Often parenthood initiates an epistemological revolution," write Belenky et al. (1997, p.35). This epistemological revolution impacts how educational leaders who are also mothers lead professionally. This shift transitions to a leadership epistemology that is described by feminist scholars as care-based (Noddings, 1984) and love-based (hooks, 2000a, 2000b) as a result of the epistemological shift that occurs when women become mothers. Mother leaders experience a

“crossover” of motherhood traits into leadership style. The same care-based and love-based approach they use with their own children manifests itself in their professional leadership as well.

Relational leadership was a theme discussed by all participants as a way in which they lead their staff and interact with students and families. This was the primary leadership style that emerged when participants discussed areas of their profession such as decision-making, new initiatives, communication, and discipline. Relational leadership was also discussed as a source of internal tension for mothers who lead when it comes to setting professional boundaries and self-advocacy. Alexandra discussed having more empathy for parents regarding their child's education. She discussed making sure the parent understands the educational decisions being made for their child as well as making decisions based on what she wants for her children. She said she now looks through the lens of a parent much more clearly. She used the example of being an administrative representative in a student Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting. She described these meetings as high-stakes where important decisions about a student's education are made. She said she now, as a mother herself, finds herself wondering if a parent understands the jargon and acronyms being used and the impact on their child's education. She said she is very intentional to take the time to explain decisions and discussions to parents in terms they can understand because she would want someone to do that for her as a parent. She described thinking through decisions and interactions with this parent lens and believes it is a strength in her leadership.

Brooke discussed the importance she places on relational leadership when handling discipline issues that arise. She said being a mother has made her think outside of the "black and white" of the student code of conduct and look at the individual student. She also uses this

leadership style when having difficult conversations with parents about discipline. The relational approach to discipline has made having difficult conversations with parents much easier for Brooke. Leading through a caring-based approach (Noddings,1984) with a focus on relationships has helped Brooke shift from a “by the books” approach to discipline to looking at the individual student on a case-by-case basis and making decisions based on what is best in each individual situation. This shift occurred for Brooke after becoming a mother/leader and these two roles began to interact with one another.

Nellie discussed the importance of relationships with staff and making sure the staff is “ok” when changes are being made and during stressful times. She often seeks buy-in from her staff before making large decisions. She related these actions back to being a mother and how this maternal instinct naturally presents itself in her leadership. Cat agreed and added that being a mother gives you credibility with stakeholders. They believe that you care and understand from a family lens when leading through relationships.

Another theme of the research around how mothers lead is directly linked to the writing of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011). Spiritual leadership is described by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) as a source of personal strength as well as a way to understand the connectedness of others. This leadership style focuses on knowing the worlds of the ones in which we lead and being cognizant and respectful of those worlds when making decisions. This leadership style ties into the theme that emerged from the research. When asked how the role of a mother has impacted their leadership style, participants identified an additional way of leading and summed it up as reflective leadership. Reflective leadership is also based on relationships and the leader being self-aware, being knowledgeable of the people you lead, and carefully considering them in decisions made. Belenky et al. (1997), wrote about a similar way of knowing described as the

inner voice. This way of knowing by women challenges the dualistic perspectives on truth and knowledge as well as the binaries of right and wrong. Belenky et al. (1997) describe the "infallible gut" of women as a way of knowing and leading (p. 53).

Focus group discussions outlined the theme of how reflective leadership is used to make big decisions within schools. The group described being reflective of staff buy-in, feelings, and personal time in the decision-making process. Taking the stress off of staff, considering their emotional well-being, and respecting their time were all actions attributed to a shift in leadership style after becoming a mother. These considerations are also actions that mothers take with their children.

Relational, reflective, and/or spiritual leadership, as defined by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), can be not only beneficial for the mother/leaders, but also pose challenges. Participants discussed challenges when having to discipline adults or employees. The group discussed challenges with being firm, assertive, and direct and suppressing their tendencies to serve as a coach or teacher when situations that required hard conversations with adults arose. This firmness was especially difficult when there was a pre-established professional relationship and rapport with the adult. While being a relational and reflective leader was generally perceived as a benefit to the group, there were also challenges presented that problematized the dichotomous nature of the dual roles.

Quality of Time Not Quantity of Time. "Women leaders strive for a balance between responsibilities at work and home," write Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011, p. 21). This type of leadership is called balanced leadership and was an area in which all participants expressed weakness and a desire to improve. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) write, "Like men, women experience the day-to-day activities of leading as all-consuming, but unlike many men, many

women leaders go home to another ‘days work’ taking care of family and home” (p. 21). When the division of labor is negotiated at home, often mothers prefer to be the primary parent by choice (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Balanced leadership included the notion that women educational leaders can perform their professional responsibilities better if they have ways to manage their responsibilities at home as well (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Participants discussed that having the ability to manage households and families also added dimensions to their leadership styles that enhanced their job performance, such as reflective and relational leadership. However, participants also discussed how a balance between the two roles was nearly impossible to achieve. Brooke talked about how her whole life revolves around her job, despite what she knows is an ideal and healthy balance. All discussed the importance of the few "good" hours they had each day with their children and spouse. Alexandra talked about making compromises such as cooking healthy meals to get to play at the park with her children. Having a job that never stops, in a business that never closes, requires a lot of personal sacrifices and compromises. Cat discussed the importance of setting personal boundaries and self-advocacy, which the group agreed was a huge challenge. Alexandra summed the session up by saying that for right now, "It's not the quantity of time, but the quality of time that matters" with our families.

Limitations

This study was conducted in a small school district in a rural region of a southeastern state. The number of participants was held at five due to the nature of the focus group and research questions. The small number of participants led to rich and deep conversations among the participants. Each participant had a prior working relationship with each other and with me as the researcher, which also allowed the focus group discussions to be more natural and free-

flowing. The results of this study may not be generalizable to a different group of educational leaders and mothers in other parts of the United States and the world.

The study was unable to explore the standpoints of women of various races and ethnic backgrounds. Since participation was limited to a single school district, racial diversity did not exist in the group of participants. All participants identified as White. Female leaders and mothers from diverse backgrounds and marital statuses may have had differing experiences and expectations while maintaining the dual roles of mother and leader. Also, as a female district leader who works in the same school district as the participants, it is possible that the personal and professional relationships that I had with each of these participants may have influenced their reactions during the interview process. It is also a possibility that because I am both a mother and a female educational leader that my personal perception of the questions may have influenced the analysis of the focus group data.

Conceptual Framework

Feminist theory was used to understand the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership. Feminist theory is critical in questioning what is taken for granted and was used as the process or analysis in this study. There is a strong connection between theory and practice in the process of critically questioning what is taken for granted and contesting social norms related to gender. Jenkins et al. (2019) write about the goal of research using feminist theory. This goal is to create spaces and opportunities for participants to reveal lived experiences of power inequalities and differences, and provide evidence that can be used to address these inequalities. This research study used focus group sessions with five female educational leaders to better understand their perspectives and experiences of being a mother and a leader.

Feminist theory is produced where social norms about gender are contested, no matter the setting. hooks (2000b) proposed a new feminist outlook that uses a pluralistic lens to examine the interlocking and intersecting webs of oppression. hooks' view encouraged everyone to examine and interrogate common representations and images of women and their roles through oppositional gazing and disruption to eventually change the culture. This study interrogated the common expectations of school leadership and the conflicts that working mothers experience when trying to meet these common expectations. Participants discussed workplace culture and ways culture could improve to better accommodate and support the working mother.

This study also used feminist theorizing to examine women's ways of thinking, leading, and knowing as beneficial contributions to effective educational leadership. Working mothers create what is known as a worker-parent identity to justify their decisions in the workplace (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). These constructed identities for working mothers play an integral role in personal decisions regarding parenting, motherhood, and work. When adding the identity as a leader, the complexity of identity and decision-making becomes even more prominent for working mothers. This study explored the layers of daily decisions participants made as both mothers and leaders and the impact of these decisions not only on their performance in both roles but also on their mental well-being and their personally constructed identity as working mothers.

Feminist standpoint theory has many attributes that are aligned with this study. This theory recognizes pluralism and the multiplicity of situated knowledge as well as the importance of experience and social location in qualitative research (Collins, 1997). Feminist standpoint theory provided a framework to guide the research to understand the multiple standpoints that women leaders who are also mothers have regarding their roles. Feminist standpoint theorists believe these standpoints and the knowledge generated are socially constructed and situated.

Therefore, women need to share their uniquely situated stories, experiences, and knowledge to understand the intersectionality of motherhood and educational leadership.

Kinser (2010) writes, “being able to speak the lives of mothers, using mothers’ own voices, perspectives worth hearing, or stories worth telling, are indeed revolutionary acts” (p. 143).

These stories help in the understanding of maintaining dual roles and the conflicts and mutual benefits that arise. The perspectives of these five participants helped to explore the concept of mom guilt and how they struggle to cope with their guilt, set personal boundaries, and advocate for themselves professionally. Ann described the struggle with her comment, “Our professional obligations bleed into our time with family in the form of time and stress. It is challenging not to take the stress of work home with us daily.” Therefore, it is important for feminist qualitative research to uncover the invisibility of women leaders and their daily struggles as well as the positive impact their leadership styles have on education. Participants in this study described their leadership styles as relational and reflective and attributed these styles to their experiences as a mother. They discussed several aspects of their work in educational leadership such as discipline, empathy, and communication as being positively changed due to their dual role and experiences in motherhood. The stories told by the participants align with the literature on women’s ways of leading and the impact of motherhood on leadership styles.

The collaborative culture of the focus group promoted deeper and richer conversations than a survey or interview would have produced. Women were encouraged to hear other participants tell their stories of similar experiences and struggles when working to balance the two roles. The women discussed how they would not have felt safe in discussing this topic had they not participated in this study. They were surprised to learn that there were others who experienced the same challenges and internal struggles they felt daily. Their discussions revealed

that they did not feel like they had the power to discuss their conflicts and guilt with their supervisors, advocate for themselves or other mother leaders, or set personal boundaries to protect their personal and family time without being viewed as weak or incompetent. This powerless feeling comes from the historical masculine values, societal structures, and ideologies in leadership. hooks (2000a) writes about the need for a reformation through the critical questioning what is taken for granted and contesting social norms related to gender. This study provided a safe space for participants to unpack their experiences and thoughts around being a mother/leader. If these educational leaders feel unheard or powerless, this study through the lens of feminist standpoint theory, allows them to share their personal conflicts as well as experiences in which the two roles are mutually beneficial to create knowledge and understanding that may benefit other educational leaders who are also mothers.

Implications

One of the main purposes of this study was to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of mothers who are also educational leaders and use the findings to improve the personal and professional experiences of these women. From the analysis of the findings of this study, themes have emerged that can help inform the improvement of conditions for women in educational leadership who are also mothers.

Human resource departments in school districts could use the findings to improve hiring practices and working conditions for expectant, new, and experienced mothers. These departments could adopt the “employ the family” mindset to create more family-friendly working conditions, flexibility, and support for working mothers. Areas such as mental health support, self-care resources, and facilitated maternity leave procedures could be improved to alleviate stress from mothers in leadership. Additionally, if superintendents and other school and district leaders had a better understanding of the stress and feelings that often result from female

leaders also having the role of mother, they may be able to consider these additional stresses and conflicts when making decisions on how to support and mentor employees.

However, many superintendents are mothers and there are systemic barriers in place that inhibit their support of reform in this area. Ultimately female superintendents are leading in a system that was historically developed for male leadership. The pipeline to educational leadership is composed of a majority of females, yet school and district roles are held mostly by men. Female leaders have negotiated the increasingly political conventions of the job, including fiscal and board constraints in order to hold a leadership position. Having navigated the "good ol' boy network" and belief that people who work hard will be rewarded female leaders are, "now realizing that a supportive network is as significant as skill and hard work," write Miller et al. (2006, p. 19). However, there are still not enough women, particularly in leadership positions, for female networks to be a norm or effective (Miller et al., 2006). Female superintendents who are mothers may feel outnumbered by a system of people who believe sacrifice is the key to advancement, based on historical Western societal norms and the value of masculine leadership traits of assertiveness and aggression. These social structures created a worker identity for women that included sacrifice as the key for advancement (Johnston & Swanson, 2007). These female superintendents may also believe that others must overcome the same obstacles in which they faced in their leadership journey. Despite the many systemic barriers that women face in their path to leadership, ensuring the success of these women who are also mothers is critical and understanding their lived experiences and perceptions may help superintendents better support this group of leaders.

Another stakeholder group to consider in the analysis of the findings are the women who serve in both roles; mother and educational leader. Research findings highlighted the need for support and peer groups of women maintaining these dual roles to have the designated time and

space to talk about their struggles as well as their joys of being in dual roles. The research findings also uncovered the need for women to be more confident in self-advocacy and assertive when it comes to setting boundaries and negotiating the challenges that arise.

Leadership conferences or professional development and consulting firms could provide additional training and sessions for women in these areas. While educational leaders who are mothers tend to lead in with a family-style leadership lens at times, it is important for their own professional experiences to also promote that same family-centered culture to reduce role conflict and stress.

An immediate implication of this research study will occur within the school district in which participants lead. Focus group discussions led to the desire to plan a recurring, protected time to support mother/leaders in the district. This time would provide a safe place to talk and share, provide self-care tips, and promote self-advocacy and work-family balance through conference-style mini-sessions or lunch meetings. The participants agreed that before participating in focus group discussions, they had never felt they had a safe space to discuss their experiences and challenges. They also agreed that having a designated time with a support group of other mother/leaders would help with the emotional challenges experienced.

Recommendations for Future Research

Motherhood is deemed as a study of a private experience and the identity of a good mother is socially constructed and variant depending on cultural resources and constraints. Johnston and Swanson (2006) write about how mothers weave an identity that reflects their commitment to their job with their commitment to being a mother. Essentially, motherhood takes on an identity rather than a role. This research explored how educational leaders who are also mothers created their identities based on their lived experiences. While educational leaders

attempt to balance the high demands of their profession with their desire to be the socially constructed "good" mother, they begin to struggle with balance and guilt. However, it is important to also explore the mutual benefits of maintaining these dual roles. Educational leaders who are mothers adapt their leadership styles due to having the role of mother. There are specific ways in which women and mothers lead, according to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011).

Future research in these areas could be extended to the role of the father. Do fathers who are educational leaders experience role conflict? Do educational leaders lead with a different style because they are fathers? It would be important to explore these questions to better understand if the role conflict lies solely or mainly with mothers. Future research could also extend to teachers who are mothers. Do they share the same ideas for how these two roles interact? Do they experience some of the same benefits and challenges to being mother/teachers as leaders? Since education is an emotional profession that is very time intensive, it is possible that teacher/mothers may have lived experiences common to mother/leaders. Future research with women who are not mothers but serve as educational leaders could help further clarify the leadership styles of women versus the leadership styles of women who are also mothers. Do these two groups lead with similar styles or does the role of the mother additionally impact leadership styles for some? Additionally, further research could explore other subgroups of mothers who are leaders.

The intersectionality of maintaining the roles of mother and professional has been explored many times throughout history. However, future research could explore modern influences on role conflict such as social media and Covid-19. The role of social media in emotional and mental health has recently been heightened. Further research could explore how role conflict for mothers who are educational leaders is influenced by the social media posts of

the people they follow. Also, having just lived through a worldwide pandemic with Covid-19, the workplace landscape and culture changed for many working mothers and educators. Further research could explore how the ever-changing workplace and the conditions created by the pandemic impacted the intersectionality of these two roles. How did educational leaders navigate the closing of school, remote learning, working from home, and educating and caring for their children during this time? Did their perceptions of their roles change? Did their "style" as a mother or leader evolve to get through the changing environment? Further research on this topic could lead to many different results than in the past. Mothers who are educational leaders have very different lived experiences than just five to ten years ago. As education evolves as well as the role of a mother, very different perceptions and challenges emerge.

Postlude

When I first began my doctorate studies, I was a principal in a middle school, a mother of an eleven-year-old, and a member of a newly-formed blended family. My goal for myself was to finish my lifelong goal of completing the degree. Two weeks before orientation for the program, I found out I was pregnant. I was forty years old and a little overwhelmed. I often wondered if I should even continue in my doctoral studies and how I was going to balance my demanding job, motherhood on a new level, and being a student. I took two semesters off after my daughter was born and decided to register again and take it one semester at a time. I had great encouragement from women who have always been there to support me in my career and personal life. They were continuously checking on me and telling me to keep going. Never did I imagine early in the doctoral journey that my research topic would be so closely connected to my personal struggles and life story.

Throughout my career in school leadership, I have also been a mother. I have no frame of reference for being a leader and not also having the dual role of mother. For the majority of my years as an educational leader, I was a single mother. My role as a mother was very important to me. My mother had set an incredible example of what a mother should be and I grew up watching her successfully balance work with motherhood. I also knew that as the primary parent of my child, I was not willing to miss any of his school, athletic, or other events. The importance I placed on my role as a mother often conflicted with my desire to be a highly effective leader professionally. I often felt guilty about having to choose between a work obligation and a family obligation. I dreaded asking permission to miss a meeting or school function to attend my own child's events. I felt constant internal guilt and stress.

I knew that adding another child to our newly formed family and having a district leadership role while working on my doctorate degree would only magnify this guilt as I worked to balance all of the roles that were so very important to me. As I was thinking about research topics in my qualitative research class and talking to other female leaders, I began to fall in love with the topic of motherhood and educational leadership. It spoke to the feelings that I had been fighting for years. It also made me think outside of a deficit mindset and discover all of the many benefits that being a mother has had on my leadership style. This research has truly been so therapeutic and reinvigorating for me as I continue to balance two very important roles.

While I assumed that other women leaders must also struggle to balance workloads, I did not know that the concept of mom guilt was so prevalent. The daily struggle and stress that the participants in my study experienced were eye-opening. They shared that they never knew others felt this way either and that they never felt "safe" to discuss their struggles for fear of professional judgment. This study and the findings reaffirmed my belief that women need

structures and groups of support and while maintaining the roles of mother and educational leader can be quite challenging, there are mutual benefits as well. Future research is needed to further explore how the workplace can adapt to better support mothers in a more family-friendly work environment. Mothers bring a lot to the professional table. It is important to support them and help them find a healthy work-life balance so they feel successful in both of the roles they deem so important.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM

The Intersectionality of Motherhood and Educational Leadership

Researchers: Olivia Sikes, Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership
Contact Information: sikesos@appstate.edu or (336) 244-7476
Faculty Advisor/Chair: Dr. Julie Hasson

Researcher Statement:

I am asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information to help you decide whether or not to be in the study, such as the purpose of study; the procedures, risks, and benefits of the study; how we will protect the information we will collect from you; and how you can contact us with questions about the study or if you feel like you have been harmed by this research. Please read it carefully. You should ask any questions you have about the research and, once they are answered to your satisfaction, you can decide whether or not you want to be in the study. Being in the study is voluntary, and even after you agree to participate, you can change your mind and stop participating at any time without losing any benefits from the University to which you may be entitled.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to provide a narrative of the experiences of female educational leaders who are also mothers. The study will analyze both the conflicts as well as the mutual benefits that are experienced as a result of maintaining these dual roles. The overarching question of the study examines the perceptions of female education leaders about the intersectionality of motherhood and leadership. The guiding question is what does it mean to be both a good mother and an effective administrator?

STUDY PROCEDURES

This study involves 4, one-hour, focus group sessions over 3 months where we will discuss your thoughts and experiences as both a mother and an educational leader and how these two roles interact.

The study will take place in a mutually agreed upon location of convenience to the participants that could vary from session to session. Also, if more convenient due to scheduling conflicts, the group could choose to meet virtually for any session. Session location will be flexible for participant convenience and schedule and will be determined prior to the session. There will be approximately two weeks between each session.

During the focus group sessions, we will have discussions around your experiences and thoughts on the following research questions:

1. How do women understand their identities of being an educational leader and mother?
2. What challenges do mothers face in their roles as educational leaders?
3. How do the dual roles and identities of educational leader and mother relate, influence, and benefit each other?
4. How do women balance and negotiate the roles and identities of being an educational leader and mother?

You are being asked to take part in a focus group. The group will have about 4-5 members and will last for about 1 hour per session. During that time, you and the other group members will be asked questions about your opinions and experiences with your roles and experiences as both a mother and an educational leader and how these two roles interact. Please do not share what is said during the group discussion with people who were not in the group. We also ask that you please do not share private identifiable information about anyone other than yourself during the focus group.

As a participant, you may refuse to answer any question at any time.

RISKS, STRESS, AND DISCOMFORTS

The main risk of participating in a focus group is loss of confidentiality. Although all participants are instructed to respect the privacy and confidentiality of others in the focus group, we cannot guarantee that the information you share will be kept confidential by other participants. Please keep this in mind when choosing what to share with the group.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

You will not receive individual benefit from participating in this study. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage participation. There will be no compensation for participation in this study. The benefits of this study will be academic contribution to the study of educational leadership and women's studies.

PROTECTION OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

The data collected and stored will be kept confidential. Digital files will collect the audio recordings of the focus groups. The digital files from the recording will be securely stored, password protected, and deleted upon the conclusion of the study. The recordings will be listened to by only me, as the researcher, and transcribed. Only the researcher and her dissertation committee will be informed of the identity of the participants. Regional demographic and educational level will be the only identifiers published for each participant. At no time will the researcher release the results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without written consent. The use of pseudonyms for all people and place names will allow each

participant's personal identity and the identity of anyone mentioned in the interviews to be kept confidential

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your identifiable data may be examined.

USING YOUR DATA IN FUTURE RESEARCH

The information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

RESEARCH-RELATED HARMS

In the event of study-related injury, illness, harm, or distress, participants should contact Olivia Sikes, primary researcher.

No funds have been set aside for any injury or illness resulting from this study.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, there will be no penalty and you will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have.

If you choose to take part in the research, you can change your mind at any time and stop participating.

If you agree to participate but decide later that you don't want to be in this study, please let the researcher know immediately. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as someone taking part in research, please contact the Appalachian State University Office of Research Protections at **828-262-4060** or **irb@appstate.edu**.

Subject's statement

By signing below, I volunteer for this study and agree that:

- The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me;
- I have been informed of the risks of participation;
- The study is voluntary, I do not have to participate, and I can withdraw at any time;
- I have been given (or have been told that I will be given) a copy of this consent form to keep.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions, and was able to get all of my questions satisfactorily answered;
- If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact the researcher listed on the first page of this consent form.

Signature of Subject

Date

Copies to: Researcher
 Subject

Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol Questions

How do women who have the dual roles of mother and educational leader successfully maintain both roles? First, I am interested in your path to both roles.

Please share your path to educational leadership.

Please share your journey to motherhood.

Now let's explore the challenges of maintaining both roles.

What challenges do mothers face in their roles as educational leaders?

How do women cope with these challenges?

How does one role influence the other?

Are there benefits, to motherhood or educational leadership, because of these challenges?

Next let's look at how motherhood impacts our leadership.

Does our role as a mother impact or influence how we lead or our leadership style and how?

Are we better leaders because we are mothers? How?

Are we better mothers because we are leaders? How?

What are the mutual benefits to maintaining both roles?

Are there any challenges to having these benefits?

Based on our time together and our discussions, what are the implications of this research for various stakeholders and audiences?

How do you think this research could be extended in future research studies?

Vita

Olivia Stanley Sikes was born in Elkin, North Carolina to Jack and Lucy Stanley. Olivia graduated from Appalachian State University in 2001 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics, Secondary Education. After teaching for two years, she entered Wake Forest University to obtain a Masters of Arts degree in Mathematics Education. Upon graduation, Olivia continued to teach at the high school level while obtaining her add-on licensure in Education Administration. Olivia graduated from Appalachian State University with her Education Specialist degree in Leadership and School Administration in 2017. She then continued into the doctoral program at Appalachian State University to earn her doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Mrs. Sikes has served as an assistant principal at the high school level as well as a principal at a primary school and at the middle school level. She currently serves as the Director of Accountability and Career and Technical Education. Olivia lives in Elkin with her husband, Joe, and children. Olivia has a son, Jackson, a daughter, Lucy, and a step-son, Kolby.