THE FABRIC OF SUCCESS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO ISSUES OF GENDER
EQUITY FOR AMERICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

A Dissertation
by
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Abstract

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My research compared the paths of women educational leaders in the Southern

United States and South Africa. This study, which utilized narrative inquiry framed by a quilting

metaphor, took swatches of the stories of women educators to create one quilt or cohesive theory

of the path of women toward leadership. The premise for the adoption of a quilting metaphor

was to describe this particular form of narrative presentation. A quilt is composed of various

squares of fabric, which may represent special family memories or occasions. In the same

fashion, a quilted narrative brings the memories of women together to create meaning from

conversations and interviews woven together to support the existence of multiple realities for the

intertwining of personal perceptions. This study explored the meanings behind the individual

experiences to fashion a cohesive design from the patterns of women in leadership.

Keywords: culture, culture map, educational leadership, equality, feminism, narrative

inquiry, patriarchy, quilting

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Dedication

The work is dedicated to my grandparents, the late Jerold and Sarah McAbee; my mother, Linda Rhyne; my sister, Christy Stewart Isenhour; my horse judging coach, professor, boss, and mentor, Dr. Robert A. Mowery (Bob); the principal who took a chance and hired me to be a teacher, the late Connie Mack Hamrick; Reggie Summey; my friend Shawn Parker; and my students. My grandparents Jerold and Sarah (PawPaw and Memaw) raised me, taught me the importance of hard work, and told me I could be anything I wanted to be. My mom Linda worked and sacrificed so I could follow my passion and dreams. Bob believed in me and transformed a shy, scared little girl into a confident young lady who could make and defend decisions on her feet. Mr. Hamrick took a chance, hired me to be an agricultural education teacher, and saved my life. He always pushed me to learn and do more. Reggie reminded this "kid" that I do have a talent. I am the very best me I can be, and no one is better at being me than me. Christy and I are the only two who know exactly what we've gone through to get to where we are now. I don't know how, but somehow we survived and turned out to be pretty good people despite all the odds against us. Even though we want to kill one another sometimes, we help and support each other. Thanks for the lectures. Thanks for being my travel buddy. I want to thank my friend Shawn Parker for going to school with me and editing my papers for so many years. You would not let me quit, even when I wanted to give up. You kept telling me, "We've worked too hard to quit now." Lastly, I want to thank all of my students for teaching me much more than I ever taught them.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

The Fabric of Success: A Narrative Inquiry into Issues of Gender Equity for
American and South African Women Educational Leaders

Chapter 1: Introduction

Like master quilters, women educational leaders weave unique perspectives and characteristics into the narrative of their administrative roles. Even while overcoming challenges, women create beautifully crafted teaching and learning environments that reflect motivation and increased skill development. This chapter introduces my personal biography in order to position myself as the researcher who is also a female school leader. Next, the topic and purpose of the study are explained. The purpose of this study was to bring about cross-cultural awareness regarding women's quest to build their capacity and achieve gender equality in education. This purpose was achieved by examining and comparing the patterns of successful women educational leaders in the Southern United States and South Africa. Finally, the general research questions and significance of the study are also presented to give the reader a complete outline of the project by the end of the chapter. In addition, the theoretical framework of feminism is used to examine gender discrimination.

Overview

For centuries, women have been skilled artisans who made items essential for the home. Since their products were of great significance to their families as heirlooms, they passed their methods, like quilting, down to the next generations. Women crafted quilts from pieces of fabric filled with rich memories. The finished patchwork quilt became a collection of stories, with every piece of fabric evoking fond memories of the people who lived those stories. Today, the art of quilting is still very much alive. Master quilters, usually highly-skilled women, are still primarily responsible for teaching others the art of quilting and producing unique quilts for their families. While the purpose of quilting may differ from past generations, each quilt is still a

reflection of the family, society and world in which we live. The narratives of women educational leaders represented the scraps of material intertwined and fashioned into a patchwork design, which was filled with patterns of both positive and challenging experiences. Women educational leaders celebrated the successes they experienced while they maintained their careers, sustained their families, and still promoted equitable opportunities for advancement as educators.

Over time, many female educators sought new roles as educational leaders. They worked to meet various challenges, which included increased expectations and male gender preference to obtain administrative positions traditionally held primarily by men (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Just as quilters contribute assorted fabric swatches reflective of their own narratives, ultimately creating the quilt, women educational leaders bring unique perspectives and capital woven into the narrative of their administrative roles. Given equitable opportunities for educational leadership positions, women have demonstrated the ability to create beautifully crafted teaching and learning environments that reflect motivation and increased skill development among all. Yet, the road to these leadership positions have offered shared challenges unique to women. It is these challenges that offer insight into how some women overcome them to realize the ultimate goal of leadership within an educational organization.

This study utilized narrative inquiry with a quilting metaphor to reveal insights concerning the many hurdles women must overcome to make gains in educational leadership. By engaging in an international approach, this study offers a comparison of two distinct contexts - the southern United States and South Africa - which share a surprising connection concerning their patterns and layouts from the classroom to the educational leadership role, histories, and struggles of social injustice.

Personal Biography - My Perspective as a Female School Leader

My research interest stems from my own experiences as a female educational leader who experienced gender bias throughout my career. Due to my experience, I wanted to understand how other women educational leaders overcame gender bias specifically and successfully broke other barriers to become principals and superintendents.

At fourteen years of age, my friends invited me to join their 4-H club. I had no desire to participate in a "Suzy Homemaker" club, but, when they explained they learned about horses in their 4-H club, I joined the Gaston County Blazing Saddles 4-H Horse Club where I went on to participate in the state horse judging contest. I was driven by my belief that women could pursue any goal to which they set their minds, a core belief instilled in me by strong female role models who defied stereotypes and worked outside the home in non-traditional jobs. Because I was willing to take a risk, I placed in the top ten in the state, an accomplishment which allowed me to travel with the NC State Horse Judging Team to try out for one of four spots on the national team. It was then that I met Dr. Robert A. Mowery who believed in me and taught me to think extemporaneously, make decisions, improve my public speaking skills, and value the importance of teamwork, competitiveness, and sportsmanship--all characteristics stereotypically associated with men. This experience transformed me from a shy, scared young girl into a confident individual. I was encouraged to get a good education, emphasizing the importance of common sense.

When I was in high school, I remember sitting on the swing in the front yard with my grandfather. His wise words still resonate with me. "An education is good and necessary, but you cannot get very far in life without common sense and hard work" (J.A. McAbee, personal communication, 1995). I am a lifelong learner who has earned multiple degrees. My grandfather

instilled in me the importance of honesty, hard work, determination, and treating others as I want to be treated. Dr. Mowery and my grandfather taught me to stitch together integral swatches, which reflected my experiences to help me become a woman with a passion to pursue my dreams.

As an undergraduate animal science major at North Carolina State University in 1997, I chose to double major in animal science and agriculture and extension education. As a part of my coursework, I visited a local high school each Thursday to observe and shadow their agriculture education teachers. Each week, my supervising teacher drilled into me his belief that females had no place in agriculture education; hence, he gave me the task of washing and wrapping the potatoes he would bake each week for his program's FFA Alumni Association meetings. What I remember about that experience today is washing potatoes. This seemed to mirror society's belief in the role of women. I did not experience the level of professional learning in pedagogy, which may have resulted in a discouraging shutting of the door to my chosen field of study and career. I overcame this, however, primarily due to the earlier influence of my grandfather and Dr. Mowery. I wondered what supports other women found to overcome similar hurdles to their chosen career path.

As a student teacher, I was the first female agriculture education student teacher assigned to two male teachers at my assigned school. I worked diligently and meticulously planning and preparing lessons. While I was teaching, the supervising teachers downloaded my lessons and saved them for their future use. Though neither would openly admit it, both found merit in my ability to develop and execute valuable lessons. It is interesting to note that while I was not given credit for my work, these supervising teachers maintained a positive relationship with me. This may indicate that they did not see anything wrong with their treatment of a female agriculture

teacher. Would they have treated a male agriculture teacher the same? Are their attitudes personal or contextual?

On July 1, 2000, I began my career as an agriculture education teacher at a low income, rural high school. I was the fifth teacher hired for the position in six years. My classes were composed solely of male students. I was clearly not supported as a student teacher or valued for my contributions as a female teacher. At times, I was made to feel as though I were a burden instead of an asset. As a result, I became even more determined to pursue my dreams with even more intentionality. Furthermore, the teachers, school administrators, and district administrators referred to me as "The Little Ag Girl" and never called me by name. I did not live in or grow up in the county where I taught nor was I married to someone from that county. I was an outsider, an alien, a non-native, and I was often reminded that I did not belong. Not only did I not have the right last name, I was a female. Many people told me that women had no place in agriculture, but my stubbornness and resiliency led me to create a pattern for my own quilt. That mindset enabled me to survive fourteen years as an agricultural education teacher, modeling for my students that they could be anything they wanted to be. I wanted to be a positive influence in their lives and help them understand where their food and clothing comes from and become smarter consumers in a global society.

During my tenure as a classroom teacher, my assistant principal encouraged me to earn my certification in administration. I envisioned myself staying in the classroom with my students; however, I eventually earned my certificate in school administration and became a licensed administrator. Despite my qualification, strong organizational skills, and impeccable work ethic, I applied and interviewed for many positions before being hired. I have just begun my twenty-second year as an educator and my eighth year as an assistant principal.

Recently, I interviewed for many principalships in various school districts. However, men with less experience and education were hired instead of me. When I inquired why this was happening, the superintendent and director of human resources informed me that my role was to fulfill the duties of male principals who could not adequately do their jobs and to make them appear competent in their roles of administration. These complimentary words are two-fold: they are the stimulus in my goal to help students and teachers achieve success and discourage me by insinuating I will never be offered the opportunity to principal my own school. Sadly, I am not alone in my experience. While there are many women who now serve as principals and even superintendents, this has not always been the case and at what cost to them? How many other talented and qualified women have not achieved such career goals having been similarly dismissed and discouraged? Women leaders have been retained because they were expected to support men. I can understand the stories of women leaders since I can relate to their experiences. The dilemmas I have encountered have prompted me to delve into the issue of gender equity. Networking and sharing stories with other women educational leaders have been critical for changes to occur so future women educational leaders will not have to face such gender bias and barriers to career advancement.

Topic and Purpose

The purpose of this project was to examine and compare the patterns of successful women educational leaders in the Southern United States and South Africa. This study, which utilized narrative inquiry framed by a quilting metaphor, took swatches of conversations and interviews from the stories of female educators and connected these swatches into a quilt filled with unique yet similar journeys as educational leaders. The quilting metaphor prescribed to narrative presentation is an effective process for creating and discovering meaning. In a quilted

narrative, conversations and other data have been stitched in a way that supported the existence of multiple realities and allowed the intertwining of personal perceptions as well as experiences (Dersch-Gunderson, 2004).

General Research Questions

The aim of this study was to examine and compare the perspectives and experiences of successful women educational leaders in the Southern United States and South Africa by addressing the three following research questions:

1. What are the overarching issues of gender equity shared by women educational leaders?

2. How do women intentionally design and adapt their trajectories to the principalship in response to their context?

3. How do the lived stories of successful women leaders compare across contexts?

I anticipated that in my research of this topic, women educational leaders would develop a connection to help future generations, and that they would find their voices in order to overcome contextual and gender biases. In addition, noteworthy principals and superintendents did what was best for all concerned and served as role models for students.

Significance of the Study

Women educational leaders continue to face gender inequalities as they work their way to educational leadership positions. It is important to learn what types of gender inequalities they are facing in order to help future leaders overcome them. By acknowledging the issue, we may address it. Context is also paramount in whether or not women obtain educational leadership roles. By figuring out what strategies successful women educational leaders are using to achieve leadership placement across contexts, future generations of leaders will be able to circumvent

these inequalities in their pursuit to higher level leadership positions. This study's goal was to enable women to bring about awareness across cultures in their quest to build their capacity and achieve gender equality.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory formed the theoretical framework of this study as I examined and compared the stories of successful women educational leaders in one southern state in the United States and those in South Africa. Interviews, conversations, and stories weaved together the real-life experiences by capturing the lived stories of women principals to form this quilted narrative.

Feminism is the social movement whose primary purpose is to attain equal rights and challenge the unjust prescribed role of women in a patriarchal social system (Setlhodi, 2018). Factors such as culture, religion, and social orientation are often used to discriminate against women (Celikten, n.d.). Despite the fact that women make up the majority of the world's population, they may be treated as minorities, suffering discrimination and the negative impact of stereotyping (Celikten, n.d.). The goal of feminist theory is to challenge and change sexist thinking (hooks, 2015). A feminist, therefore, is someone who believes in the equality of men and women as human beings (Adichie, 2012). Due to the constant change of political and societal climates, feminism, which is heavily dependent upon context, must be ever-evolving (Adichie, 2017).

Women should be able to love themselves, love their jobs and not worry about others' perceptions of them (Adichie, 2017), but that is not human nature. During World War II, women began to leave their domestic confines and step out into the world with a sense of stoicism, sacrifice, noble suffering, and self-denial as the lack of men to fulfill the necessary jobs of a nation at war demanded them. In the post-World War II era, when men resumed their positions

in the factory and business worlds, women resisted the return of patriarchy, defied the norms, and busied themselves learning to read, self-educating, seeking higher education, and obtaining employment (Jain, 2011).

Feminism is a fluid, dynamic phenomenon, which has evolved in response to global and local changes in society, the economy, and race relations. This leads to the creation of new social dynamics and lifestyles (Ojong, 2019). Women learn through experience, sharing, while engaging in conversations and developing cultural perceptions of themselves, rituals, exposure, and education. As cultural subjects, women continuously explore and question stereotypes and role models (Jain, 2011).

In all walks of life, the narratives of lived daily experiences of women have been absent in the literature of school leadership (Mthethwa, Kutame, & Buthelezi, 2019). Despite cultural advances toward gender equality, educational leadership roles are stereotypically associated with men. This gender stereotype undervalues women's ability and effectiveness as leaders (Mthethwa et al., 2019). As more women emerge from their traditional roles, such as classroom teacher, to enter male-dominated leadership roles, the barriers they encounter on their journey become more prevalent. Women educational leaders may still face discrimination and exclusion from male networks, leading to harsher judgments pertaining to job performance and possible advancement than their male counterparts. Such stereotypes may result in the belief that women school leaders hold positions for which they are not qualified, regarding them incapable of resolving conflicts that arise in daily educational operations (Mthethwa, et.al., 2019).

Stereotypes are theories and beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). Contexts, prior experiences, and generalizations influence what we see and hear, how we interpret that information, how we store

it for later use, and how we create stereotypes that can lead to prejudices and unfair negative outcomes when applied to others (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996). People prejudiced by such stereotypes or biases develop negative attitudes that may lead to prejudgement of all members of a particular group (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996).

Cultural and societal gender bias norms create distinctions between the role expectations for men and women. Gender stereotypes suggest women are more helpful, kind, sympathetic, understanding, and compassionate (Mthethwa et al., 2019). Consequently, women are generally expected to continue taking care of their homes and families in addition to working. As a result, women must balance their work and family obligations. Sometimes, their duties at home hinder them from performing their principal duties and being ideal candidates for advanced leadership positions (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Since motherhood often takes precedence over work, women may have to choose between family and career. Many may even choose to take career breaks.

Other factors which hinder women from attaining leadership positions include discriminatory hiring practices and lack of mentoring, familial support systems, networking opportunities, strong female role models, and support from colleagues and administrators (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Thus, they experience a glass ceiling, an unofficially acknowledged barrier to advancement in their profession. Nevertheless, some women do advance in their careers as educational leaders, but the barriers get stricter (Celikten, n.d.). Role models, mentors, and a network of supporters are essential for women educational leaders to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017).

This project will give women the opportunity to share their stories and experiences, bringing about awareness and inciting change to the educational environment. As a result, it will

highlight the similar experiences of women from the southern United States and South Africa. The lessons learned from the women in this project may serve as grounds for future study and a possible catalyst for change for women in both cultures.

Gender Discriminiation in the United States and South Africa

The constitutions of both the United States and South Africa prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and give women empowerment and equality. Despite these protections, women in both countries continue to face gender discrimination. In South Africa, tribalism is a spatial, social, spiritual, and experiential way of life that affects and creates gender bias for many women (Setlhodi, 2018). The embedded sexist attitude and prejudices of patriarchy rooted in tribalism create a power issue in which men believe they are superior to women. The attitudes and beliefs of sexism undermine women principals thus negatively affecting teaching programs, and hindering learning and school performance (Setlhodi, 2018). The men and women who practice and hold sexist and tribalistic beliefs within the school often become hostile not only toward the female principal but also toward other members of the staff who support their female leader. Because of these attitudes, women principals often find themselves to be targets of difficult situations. The unrealistic expectations and negative stereotypes perpetuated through cultural and societal beliefs placed on women leaders place them at a disadvantage. Using effective communication and the creation of trust through professional learning communities and supportive networks for women, the challenges of discrimination, sexism and tribalism may decrease in most schools--especially those led by women principals. Women educational leaders need supportive coaches, mentors, and friends to guide and support them as they work to overcome contextual barriers (Setlhodi, 2018). This study is built on the premise that successful women leaders have found such structures on their own.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores the feminist axiom of the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes to explain the theoretical traditions used in the development of the study's framing questions. Women educational leaders across all cultures appear to face many challenges related to the unequal distribution of power between the sexes. Since everyone is impacted by the patriarchal systems of society, it is important to understand the experiences of successful women leaders and review and critique related empirical research. Therefore, culture is used as a lens in this study. Culture mapping is explained and used to analyze the study data, and gender roles are also explained. The social and educational histories of the United States and South Africa are discussed. Both are multicultural, composed of people who have nothing and everything in common, and dependent on a dominant culture's reliance on a subculture of minorities. Both are confronting the problem of racial inequality and the consequent achievement gap and are diligently working on a resolution. Effective principals are the key to schools that have had success eliminating the achievement gap. Therefore, principals and their effectiveness are also detailed. Ultimately, the literature review reveals that a patriarchal culture makes it more difficult for women to be more effective leaders, which became a guiding concern for this study.

Theoretical Traditions and Current Thoughts for Framing the Question

If humans are to continue existing and thriving as a species, then greater equality for women in the workforce, the elimination of patriarchy, and the relinquishing of taut gender roles is crucial (hooks, 2004). As a species, we have evolved, but our thoughts and ideas regarding gender have remained steadfast. Feminism is not hating men, bras, and African culture or thinking women should always be in charge. However, feminism is believing in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes (Adichie, 2012). Feminism is for everyone, both

12

men and women. In contrast to Western feminism, African feminism was developed in the African context, redefined the roles of women, allowed women a culturally attuned activism, and sought to liberate women to achieve gender equality (Moyo & Perumal, 2020).

Women educational leaders experience a myriad of struggles because of the gendered nature of society, culture, and family influences. The challenges include family commitments, verbal abuse, tribalism, role conflict, lack of community support, lack of resources, and negative attitudes (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). Women educational leaders across all cultures appear to face the unequal distribution of power between the sexes. Because of cultural gender biases, traditional beliefs and practices, and imbalances of power, women are suppressed and consigned to inferior positions. Policies and the appointment of women into educational leadership positions are rooted in the patriarchal systems within society and institutional cultures (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). Despite cultural and societal barriers and being constantly compared to men, women educational leaders continue to be interactive, creative, empathetic, strong, cooperative, compassionate, and determined to change society's perception of school leadership (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). By interacting and collaborating with colleagues and motivating school stakeholders, women strive to overcome the cultural perceptions and views placed upon them (Moyo & Perumal, 2020).

Review and Critique of Related Empirical Research

At some point, everyone is impacted by the patriarchal systems of society. In the field of education, women represent the majority of the workforce as teachers; however, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions as administrators. Therefore, we need to understand the experiences of successful female leaders (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). The access and entry of women into leadership positions is greatly impacted by gender. Women continue to face

13

discrimination and lack of administrative preparation on the basis of gender. Because of gender stereotypes and difficulties in balancing their work and home lives, women experience the glass ceiling effect (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). The most significant barrier to women obtaining educational leadership roles is the gendered expectation that women must continue to maintain their homes and care for their children while working outside the home, often forcing women to choose between having children and their careers. Discriminatory hiring practices and lack of mentoring, support systems, networking, and female role models hinder women from being promoted to leadership positions. When women do not have the support of their families, it can be even more difficult to achieve and maintain leadership roles (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Patriarchal societal systems and the devaluation of women are also barriers which hinder women from obtaining leadership positions. The experiences and characteristics of women educational leaders differ from the traditional masculine gender stereotypes. Men are stereotypically assumed to be stronger, aggressive, more emotionally reserved and detached, and manipulating instead of being seen as caring and supportive (Williams, 1991). Attempting to meet these cultural norms causes conflict and stress for women. Leadership is very context specific and is often viewed as "man's work" (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017, p. 81). The culture of associating educational leadership with male figures continues to persist and perpetuates the social perception that men are superior to women (Mthethwa, et. al., 2019).

Culture as a Lens

Human life began on the continent of Africa. As the human population increased, people began to migrate to other parts of the world; therefore, the continent of Africa may represent the birthplace of all cultures. Culture defines the human experience; it is a socially accepted system of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of

14

time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, material objects, possessions, clothing, social habits, music, art, and interactions (Hofstede, 1997). According to Hofstede (1997), the cognitive constructs of culture are generally passed from one generation to the next. Culture, influenced by both environment and context, impacts what we think, understand, and are willing to learn about other people (Cohen, 2009). Cultural norms are meaningful, but we live in a complex world with no coherent cultural contexts in which everyone is included. We cannot remove ourselves from the influence of culture since it is revealed in the ways we tell stories, entertain ourselves, celebrate, remember the past, and imagine the future. Culture defines who we are; and, if we allow it, culture can help us see the world through others' lenses. By bringing people together through activities such as fairs, festivals, and classes, culture builds social capital, holds communities together, creates social solidarity and cohesion, fosters social inclusion/community empowerment/capacity-building, enhances confidence/civic pride/tolerance, and contributes to healthy populations (Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture Industries, 2019). Culture revitalizes communities by improving quality of life for residents, fostering social cohesion, enhancing competitiveness, supporting tourism, and engaging a sense of pride (Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, 2019). Comprising many ethnically diverse and conflicted societies, culture is fluid and the key to our interconnected world (Zimmerman, 2017).

Culture Mapping

Culture mapping involves analyzing the positioning of one culture compared to another in order to decode how culture influences one's own international collaboration (Meyer, 2014). This project required conversations with women from different cultures on two continents. Therefore, understanding the boundaries of cross-cultural communication was key in data

analysis. Since we live and thrive in an interconnected world, it is important to be familiar with contextual clues that can help us understand the cultures of the people living in various places, decode communication, and adapt accordingly. Though we share many similarities, our context can make us different. According to Meyer (2014), to understand one another, we must recognize the subtle differences in communication patterns to alleviate misunderstanding, conflict, and failure. Good communication is subtle, layered and may contain an abundance of subtexts. Therefore, the ones sending and receiving the messages share responsibility for transmission of the message. The communication styles of culture are reflected through language, and difficulty can ensue when communicating across cultures. When a person is submerged in a culture, it is impossible for him/her to see that culture clearly. Culture can be a very sensitive topic, provoking a protective instinct for the culture we consider our own. Patience, flexibility, understanding, and adapting to each other's behaviors can help bridge the cultural communication divides (Meyer, 2014). A culture map of America and South Africa is shared in Chapter 3 (see Figure 1).

Communication.

Language reflects cultural communication styles. The United States is the lowest-context culture in the world (Meyer, 2014). In the United States, people often tell others what they are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what they have told them. The communication in a low-context culture is precise, simple, and clear, often to the point of repetition. Historically, the United States is very young and has seen an influx of immigrants from various countries with different histories, languages, and backgrounds. Because of the brief shared context, citizens of the United States must pass messages as explicitly and clearly as possible. In low-context

cultures, higher educated people are more likely to communicate in clear, sophisticated manners (Meyer, 2014).

In contrast, South Africa is a high-context culture that is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered, requiring inferential thought to understand messages. High-context cultures have long, shared histories and are relationship-oriented societies in which information and connections are shared among community members and passed from generation to generation. In a low-context culture, such as the United States, the more a person is educated, the more adept the person is to speak, listen, and understand implicit, layered messages (Meyer, 2014). Thus, the educated individual is more inclined to understand what others communicate whether it is a simple message or criticism.

Leading.

On the leadership scale, cultures are ranked from highly egalitarian to strongly hierarchical. The United States is a more egalitarian culture in which the distance between the boss and subordinate is low. An American boss is more often viewed as a facilitator. In hierarchical cultures like South Africa status is important, with communication following a chain of command. Organizational structures are multilayered and fixed; individuals know their place. A leader needs to be both egalitarian and hierarchical, managing up and down the cultural scales and leading in different ways in order to motivate and mobilize groups (Meyer, 2014).

Deciding.

Cultures have different styles of decision-making. In a consensual culture, much discussion precedes a final decision. Decisions are made in groups without regard to time sensitivity in a consensual culture. In a top-down culture, decisions are generally made quickly by an individual, early in the process with little to no discussion. However, decisions may be

more flexible in a top-down culture. Throughout the world, relationships are built on trust (Meyer, 2014). In task-based cultures like the United States, trust is built through business-related activities. Those relationships are built and dropped easily based on the consistency of good work. In a relationship-based culture like South Africa, trust and relationships are built slowly through sharing meals, dialogue, and visits (Meyer, 2014).

Disagreeing.

The disagreeing scale has two sides: *confrontational* and *avoids confrontation*. In confrontational cultures, disagreement and debate are important and appropriate and do not adversely impact relationships. The converse is true with cultures that avoid confrontation. The United States falls in the middle of the disagreeing scale while South Africa is a culture that strongly avoids confrontation (Meyer, 2014).

Scheduling.

In leadership positions, time and scheduling are extremely important. Relationships are crucial to understanding the scheduling scale. The United States is a linear-time culture where the focus is on adhering to a schedule and meeting a deadline. One task is completed before the next with no interruptions. In a flexible-time culture like South Africa, the focus is on adaptability, flexibility, and fluidity. Interruptions are accepted and many tasks are dealt with simultaneously. What matters is that individuals are able to adapt to changes in the natural environment. Productivity and profit are linked to the flexibility and relationships of the person in charge (Meyer, 2014). We see the world through our own context, making it difficult to imagine people behaving differently. Only when we discover what is typical of our own culture but different from others can we begin to understand, learn, share, and communicate effectively with other cultures (Meyer, 2014).

Gender Roles

Influenced by culture, gender roles are human adaptations to environmental, political, economic, and technological conditions. Each culture defines the behaviors prescribed for men and women (Galliano, 2003). Any gender differences that exist are considered a deficiency related to women's behavior. Men do all that is considered important and valuable including ruling nations; conducting wars; controlling property and wealth; creating new art, music, and literature; innovating new technologies; and inventing new knowledge. Women, tasked with bearing and rearing children, have traditionally been considered less intelligent than men, educated solely for motherhood, social work, home economics, elementary school teaching, and other nurturing roles. Women are stereotyped as being warm and expressive with the ability to relate to others and provide physical care, emotional comfort and attachment. They are seen as being instrumental in providing instruction in social behavior and self-care, thus establishing an environment for the development of gender (Galliano, 2003).

Such gendered behavior is conditioned from birth. Children are taught to become aware of gender-typed activities and interests; personal and social attributes; social relationships; symbolic information, concepts, and beliefs; and the adoption of gender roles. Boys are socialized to avoid femininity, master the physical competencies of boyhood, encourage aggression, have autonomy from adult supervision, and rehearse the achievement and occupational roles of adulthood. Even in play, children are encouraged to play with gender-oriented games and toys and discouraged from crossing the line. An emphasis is placed on boys being better, stronger, and more powerful (Galliano, 2003). Girls are conditioned to identify with the maternal role, rehearse social and domestic roles, have a heightened awareness of physical appearance, accept a lower social status, and maintain a flexibility of gender-typed behaviors and

attitudes (Galliano, 2003). Girls are socialized to be more nurturing, caring, and kind. These gender roles/boundaries/stereotypes have enormous power, distort people and reality, and can destroy a person's individuality. Gender influences friendships and relationships (Galliano, 2003). None of us can escape the gendered universe in which we live. We must navigate how our gender differences connect us emotionally to others in order to achieve equitable treatment and opportunities.

Comparative Social History of United States and South Africa

Another facet of discovering what is typical of our own culture involves examining the past. Both the United States and South Africa are described as being multicultural, composed of people who have nothing and everything in common, dependent on a dominant culture's reliance on a subculture of minorities (Nealon & Giroux, 2012). The United States and South Africa also share a dark history.

Blacks constructed houses and buildings, tilled the soil, and produced the crops and textiles that provided trade and profit in both the United States and South Africa. In the United States, imported Africans served as slaves, while Black Africans and Coloreds were slaves in South Africa. *Coloured* is a classification by the Apartheid government for a collective of people, some mixed race, some from Malay descent, some descended from the original San people. They tend to live in better neighborhoods, have better jobs, and attend better schools than their Black African counterparts, although not as well as the Whites. In 1807, the British Empire nixed the trading and selling of slaves in South Africa (Carter, 2012). In 1808, the importation of slaves in the United States officially ended, but not until Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 was slavery in the United States formally abolished (Carter, 2012).

Although legal slavery ended in the United States and South Africa in the nineteenth century, the citizenship rights of people of color were limited throughout the twentieth century and continuning into the twenty-first by the political and economic power of whites. Jim Crow and Apartheid laws dehumanized Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians by prohibiting access to public places, white schools, and white neighborhoods. Such laws further deny Blacks equal voting rights and economic opportunities in both countries. The predominant racial and ethnic orders during the twentieth century were closely mirrored by the educational systems of the United States and South Africa (Carter, 2012). Thus, race and ethnicity were scrutinized by the U.S. and South Africa. In both countries, voter suppression continues to divide the races.

Comparative History of Education in the United States and South Africa

Racially exclusive practices caused an economic gap in both the United States and South Africa. Educational desegregation policies were created to level the economic gap and create a more equitable society through access to better schools. The United States and South Africa have different legal and policy structures regarding school desegregation despite many similarities. Both countries deal with the legacy of racial oppression and inequality, yet both see education as a means to create an equitable society. As a result of racial inequalities and a significant achievement gap, both nations have confronted the issues and are diligently working on a resolution (Carter, 2012).

Education in the United States.

Prior to emancipation in the United States in 1863, it was illegal for Blacks to be literate. During the Jim Crow era, which enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States, Blacks and other non-Whites received substandard education. The Jim Crow Era law apparently prevailed, as Blacks and other non-Whites continued to receive substandard education even after

Brown vs The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) established that "separate but equal schools" were no longer legal. Throughout the 1960's and continuing into the 2020's, Blacks and non-Whites pushed for equitable civil rights and more integrated schooling. Despite their efforts for change, they continued to receive separate and unequal educations. The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. The Board of Education* (1954) was rejected and defied by some American citizens, so the Whites began to establish private academies and non-public church schools in order to maintain segregation (Carter, 2012). In the United States, Blacks are considered to be minorities. The United States supports a decentralized approach to education with governance at the state levels and some financial support provided through federal education programs. Schools in the United States are guaranteed the basics--constant and creative opportunities for practice and growth--for a conducive and productive learning environment. However, even today, the equalization of education has not succeeded in the United States (Carter, 2012).

Education in South Africa.

In South Africa, Black migrant workers were not provided formal education and were used as cheap labor while Whites were trained and educated to manage the mines. Although some form of schooling existed, mass schooling was not mandated until 1994. Coloureds, Indians, and Whites were able to operate their own educational departments, but a central national department governed Black African education. Today, in South Africa, previously classified as White schools continue to receive significantly greater per pupil spending than Black African schools. As in the U.S., desegregation causes Black, Coloured, and Indian students to travel great distances in cars/taxis or on foot to schools in all-white neighborhoods (Carter, 2012). Students in South Africa may move across neighborhood boundaries and in rural

areas they travel great distances to attend schools. Because neighborhoods were still segregated, some legacy segregated schools still exist, although not forced (Carter, 2012). Schools in cities which served White students prior to the end of Apartheid in 1994 were vastly better equipped (Carter, 2012), and the legacy is still visible. The South African national government takes a more centralized and standardized role in education and regulates matters pertaining to curriculum. The academic resources of public schools benefit students in South Africa, but achievement disparities between previously White and previously non-White schools, and middle class and poor learners continue to exist to some extent. South African schools in townships and more remote areas lack certain basics such as chalk for blackboards, paper, textbooks, teaching aids, and school-wide heating in the winter. South Africa has approached desegregation as a way to transform and rescue its society from social, economic and political harm instead of providing equal opportunities to marginalized groups. After decades of educational segregation, discrimination, and economic exploitation, the Black citizens and their supporters in South Africa are seeking academic and economic advancement (Carter, 2012).

Principals and Their Effectiveness

Universally, regardless of nationality, an effective principal is the key to an effective school wherein students are more likely to achieve success (Rammer, 2007). Hiring women as teachers was not commonplace early in the American or South African educational timeline. However, as time progressed, the number of women teachers grew due to lack of work opportunities and their willingness to accept low wages. The question of who should teach; what information should be taught; and how teachers should be educated, hired, paid, and evaluated continues to be debated (Goldstein, 2015). Today the field is dominated by women who no longer reconcile themselves to lower-status and lower-wage jobs (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Effective school leaders must support teachers, manage curriculum, promote student learning, and foster powerful teaching. In essence, administrators must contribute strong threads that tightly stitch all pieces of the educational experience together. Therefore, principals who remain in schools for several years are more productive, thus yielding more favorable results than those who are routinely relocated. Principals should be flexible, able to adapt, and committed to student achievement. In order to weave a successful learning environment, principals must set the tone, culture, and climate of the school by involving themselves in the day-to-day routine activities of running the school and establishing a mission, vision, beliefs, and goals for the school (Spiro, 2015). They also nurture relationships with all school stakeholders and recognize that teaching and learning is the top priority of the school (Spiro, 2015).

An influential principal clearly communicates the school's vision and mission with the staff, students, parents, and community stakeholders. In addition, a successful principal provides and monitors the progress of clear goals, spends time observing teachers and helping them improve instruction, and nurtures a climate of trust (Rammer, 2007). Principals must recognize and celebrate accomplishments as well as failures, be willing to challenge the status quo, establish a strong line of communication with all stakeholders, foster shared beliefs and a sense of community, protect teachers from issues that detract from teaching, involve teachers in decision making, provide beneficial and productive professional development, establish operating procedures and routines, and advocate for the school (Educational Partnerships, Inc., 2020). Essentially, effective principals must be like many strong hands at once, sewing all the pieces together which result in the beautiful product of educated children. Consequently, successful principals share similar characteristics that reveal themselves throughout every area of their schools.

The common traits of a school principal include the following: (a) demonstrating effective leadership, (b) fostering relationship-building skills, (c) embracing meeting new people and building useful relationships, (d) organizing effective procedures and facilities, (e) dealing with multiple tasks in a single day, (f) taking on many duties and responsibilities, and (g) possessing a deep belief in the value of a high quality education (North Carolina Standards for School Executives, 2013; Get Educated, 2020). Hence, principals' roles are demanding and multifaceted. Principals must be carefully selected because their job functions are multiple and varied, as they are responsible for connecting strong yet cohesive swatches of educational segments.

A principalship requires the following: (a) developing policies; (b) strategic planning; (c) recruiting, hiring, evaluating and supervising faculty and staff; (d) attending student events and services; (e) building relationships with stakeholders; (f) overseeing accurate school records; (g) maintaining quality assurance; (h) managing the budget including purchasing and disbursements; (i) interpreting and implementing state and local regulations; (j) ensuring school safety; and (k) leading instruction (North Carolina Standards for School Executives, 2013; Get Educated, 2020). Principals must create and provide a platform for schools to operate successfully while fulfilling additional responsibilities.

Principals assume many fiscal, political, and social roles while providing a high quality education for all students (Howard, 2018). Therefore, principals need to be adequately prepared to meet the demands required of them. In order to become a principal in the United States, a person must hold a bachelor's degree in teaching, become certified as a teacher, maintain licensure, and work as a classroom teacher for at least three years (Get Educated, 2020). The individual must then apply and be admitted to a graduate program in school administration. An

applicant who already holds a master's degree in education or a related field would apply for a graduate certificate in school leadership. Both programs are rigorous and have identical coursework, internship, and portfolio requirements (Howard, 2018). However, those completing their masters will be required to take additional courses. Once candidates are accepted, they are placed into cohorts designed to develop and shape their working relationships. The practical skills of leadership are taught during the coursework, and an internship provides practical training under the guidance of a mentor principal. University principal preparation programs are the most common pathways for principals to obtain the required credentials. Together, cohorts and university principal preparation programs give aspiring principals the opportunity to share experiences and engage in small group projects (Howard, 2018). Once candidates complete the university coursework, internship, and portfolio requirements, they will become certified as principals upon graduation and applying for licensure. Newly certified principals will then interview for principal openings and will work as principals upon being hired. Of course, candidates may wish to continue their education and pursue a doctoral degree in an education-related field (Get Educated, 2020).

The context of South African schools includes socio-economic, cultural, and language diversity. In order to become a principal in South Africa, one must complete the minimum REQV14 qualification which includes matriculation, a four-year degree, seven years of teaching, and registration with the South African Council for Educators (Van Jaarsveld, 2020). The Department of Basic Education published the Policy on the South African Standard for Principalship which clearly defines the role and requirements of school principals. Shared leadership is strongly emphasized; principals are not to act in isolation. Principals are responsible for learning and managing the school and evaluating the curricula, shaping the direction and

development of the school, managing quality of teaching and learning and securing

accountability, developing and empowering self and others, managing the school as an

organization, working with and for the community, managing human resources in the school, and

managing and advocating extramural activities. Governance is vested in the School Governing

Bodies, where parents are a majority. The necessary training, guidelines, and personal and

professional development of principals is provided by the Department of Basic Education

(Motshekga, 2016). Nevertheless, the majority of principals in South Africa are men, while a

small percentage of principals are women. Despite women representing only a small percentage

of principals in South Africa and worldwide, females in principalships are more inclined to stay

up-to-date on information and methodologies concerning education.

Globally, a higher percentage of women principals are more up-to-date in their academic

preparation, attend professional development, stay abreast of current instructional developments,

have undergraduate degrees in education, and hold doctoral degrees as opposed to their male

counterparts (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Women who aspire to be principals are more willing to

invest the time and energy learning and networking with others who hold the jobs to which they

aspire. Women principals have a longer classroom tenure than men, invest more time as assistant

principals at all levels before becoming principals, and are more likely to be appointed from

within the district they are currently employed. In order to gain respect, women principals must

work longer and harder and accomplish more than their male counterparts. Despite the stressful

conditions in which they work, Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that women principals enjoy

their work, create a sense of purpose in their position, and work to bring about change with

energy and enthusiasm.

Women aspire and are motivated to become principals, but they sometimes face barriers that prevent them from pursuing their dreams. Since women are viewed by society as lacking aggressiveness and self confidence, they are more reluctant to take risks. In addition, women are still responsible for the primary care of their families and households and may not desire to take on additional stress or responsibilities. The lack of family mobility also hinders some women from seeking/accepting principalships. Boards of education often regard women as weak leaders and unqualified to handle budgeting and finances. School boards believe that women allow emotions to influence administrative decisions and often do not recruit women as principals. Therefore, women strongly believe favoritism helps certain people get principalships while it hinders others. When women are awarded principalships, they are treated differently than men and receive lower salaries (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

<center>**Chapter 3: Methodology**</center>

The overall approach and rationale for the study are discussed in this chapter. Applying a quilting metaphor, narrative inquiry was used to examine the hurdles women must clear as they strive to assume educational leadership roles. The chapter also identifies the criteria for selecting participants, participant demographics, data collection methods, interview process, validity, ethical and political considerations, data analysis procedures, procedures to address trustworthiness and credibility, and study limitations. A culture map will be shared at the end of the chapter (see Figure 1).

Overall Approach and Rationale

The purpose of this project was to examine and compare the perspectives and experiences of successful women educational leaders in the Southern United States and South Africa by addressing the following questions:

1. What are the overarching issues of gender equity shared by women educational leaders?

2. How do women intentionally design and adapt their trajectories to the principalship in response to their context?

3. How do the lived stories of successful women leaders compare across contexts?

This study utilized narrative inquiry through a quilting metaphor to reveal insights concerning hurdles women must clear toward assuming leadership roles in education. By engaging in an international approach, this study offered a comparison of two distinct contexts-- the Southern United States and South Africa--which share a surprising connection concerning their patterns from the classroom to the educational leadership role, histories, and struggles of social injustice.

<center>29</center>

Narrative Inquiry

In all cultures, humans dream, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love through narrative and storytelling. Stories and narratives are stitched into the way we see and know our culture. Stories contain feelings, goals, perceptions, and values we want to learn, know, and understand (Kim, 2016). Through stories, our experiences become humanized. Stories provide a lens through which to view an interview and interweave a narrative (Ford, 2020). Stories are powerful in conveying the effects of life events and the crucial role of education in the process of transformation.

Narrative inquiry, though time-consuming, nuanced, difficult, and emotional, allows the researcher and participants the opportunity to continue their reflections and reimaginings. Each story told within narrative inquiry has personal meanings and memories (Kim, 2016). The stories used in narrative inquiry are a reflection of the many pieces and colors of cloth which are cut and sewn together to make a finished quilted product. Narrative research is conducted by gathering stories as part of the data collection (Creswell, 2013). Interviewees in a narrative inquiry do not just tell stories; they use mechanics of language and constructions and performances of social contexts and roles (Ford, 2020). A narrative study examines the ways in which humans experience the world (Kim, 2016). The starting point for narrative inquiry is experience. Education is a form of experience. Narrative inquiry is a complex, sophisticated area of study which is interdisciplinary in origin and purpose and is a basic aspect of human life and expression (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry is similar to a quilt made out of the swatches of personal and social stories of individuals from all cultures and backgrounds. Unlike the quilt that forms a final product, however, narrative inquiry often leads to more questions than answers since it is ever evolving and redefining itself (Kim, 2016). Educational researchers use narrative

inquiry to probe the dominant stories which shape humankind's understanding of education and schooling (Kim, 2016).

After analysis of the narratives shared by my study participants, I reorganized their stories into a general framework. As the researcher, I linked all these diverse stories to create one understanding. The researcher must also share his/her own personal stories, good or bad, in order to connect fully and understand the stories of the research participants. Kim (2016) states, "The narrative mode of thinking uses stories to understand the meaning of human actions and experiences, the changes and challenges of life events, and the differences and complexity of people's actions" (p. 11). Through narrative methods, knowledge that may otherwise be silenced can be articulated.

A story is a more intricate description of narrative inquiry and is an egress through which a person enters the world and through which those experiences are made personal and meaningful (Kim, 2016). Embedded in the social and humanities disciplines, narrative research has many forms and begins with the stories and experiences of individuals. Narratives are at the heart of how women have attempted to write and teach history and produce knowledge (Grady, Clandinin, & O'Toole, 2018). It is through narratives that we live out, share, and understand our own lives and the experiences of others. Each individual is the author of his/her own life and shares that and other stories with others (Kim, 2016).

Through a lens of curiosity and seeking understanding, we must ask for, listen to, and reflect upon stories (Ford, 2020). There is always more than one story, and stories are bound up with power, property, and domination (Kim, 2016). Storytelling allows us to travel from person to person and provides inspiration, entertainment, new frames of reference; reflects powerful relationships; improves our social cognition; and is active, organic, responsive, and reactive

(Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) defines a story as "a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a (story) structure based on time although the events are not necessarily in chronological order" (p. 8). Creswell (2013) defines narrative as "a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (p. 70). Creswell (2013) defines narrative as "a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (p. 70). While the events in the narrative are connected, Kim (2016) clarifies that the events or actions that comprise a narrative are "not necessarily in chronological order" (p. 8).

Stories, according to Ford (2020), "...invite readers to a sphere of possible contact with a developing, incomplete and evolving situation, allowing them to re-think and re-evaluate their own views, prejudices, and experiences" (p. 237). For this study, the stories about a small, purposefully selected group of individuals' lived and told experiences were collected through interviews. Like a quilt, the narrative becomes one cohesive piece although individual stories, like the swatches of fabric, can still be recognized. Just as swatches do not lose their patterns or colors when joined with others to create the quilt, these stories do not lose their individuality when part of a larger narrative. Hence, in this study, the lived stories do not lose their uniqueness but contribute to a whole understanding of the dilemmas faced by women leaders. Each woman has a story to tell. Storytellers and listeners are needed to make sense of what happens in schools and to educational leaders (Kim, 2016). Storytelling has the potential to advance educational research through understanding the lived experiences of schooling and educational leaders.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

In a narrative study, the researcher reflects on whom the participants should be based on the field of inquiry and selects them accordingly. During this study, I interviewed 19 women

educational leaders (see Table 1): 11 from a southeastern state in the United States and eight

from South Africa. I selected ten White women, and nine women of color across both countries.

All participants are current or retired principals, superintendents, or educational leaders, which

allowed me to explore the gender inequities each participant faced during her career path from

the classroom to the administrative office. Since most of these women held similar leadership

positions, regardless of country and culture, I could further examine the challenges that are

unique to women as well as strategies for overcoming them. It is also important to note that these

women are not *aspiring* leaders. At the time of our interviews, they had attained leadership

positions in which they had shown themselves to be successful and effective. This strengthened

my insight into the available strategies for overcoming barriers to success.

It was also important that each subject be willing to share their successes and the

challenges they overcame on their paths to becoming successful educational leaders. Otherwise, I

risk having data that might be incomplete or inconclusive. Having shared my specific criteria

among contacts within established networks of women in educational leadership, I was directed

to the particular subjects selected for my study. Of the eleven women from the United States,

four are retired superintendents, two are former principals, four are currently serving as

principals, and one is the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator at a community college.

Most of the participants from the United States followed the path of teacher, assistant principal,

principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

I personally know US1, US2, and US3. US1 was my colleague, mentor, assistant

principal, principal, and superintendent. US2 was one of my superintendents, and US3 was one

of my assistant superintendents. When they agreed to participate in my study, they started

recommending other successful women educational leaders for my study and put me in contact with them. I made use of a wide array of networks.

Participant Demographics

To contextualize the responses associated with each participant, I describe their race, past employment, and current employment experiences below (see Table 1).

US1 is White and currently serves as a town manager. She worked as a teacher for 15 ½ years before serving in the roles of assistant principal, principal, director of secondary curriculum, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

US2 is White and taught business for 10 years before working as an assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. US2 is now retired.

US3 is White and taught for 6 years. She was an assistant principal for 4 years and a principal for 8 years. Then, she was an assistant superintendent for 5 years, before becoming superintendent. Finally, she took a job as associate superintendent of human resources for 3 years before deciding she needed to retire and focus on her health.

US4 is Black and taught for 8 years. She was an assistant principal for 7 years before becoming a principal. She now serves as an assistant superintendent.

US5 is White and was a teacher for 6 years, principal for 6 years, central office personnel for 6 years, and superintendent for 6 years. She now leads a leadership group for women educational leaders.

US6 is Black and was a teacher before becoming an assistant principal for 8 years and a principal for 1 year. She currently serves as Director of Elementary Teaching and Learning in a school district.

US7 is Black, began as an itinerant teacher, and is going into her 16th year as a school administrator and 27th year in education.

US8 is Black and started out teaching fifth grade. She then served as an elementary, middle, and high school teacher before becoming a high school assistant principal. She then served as a middle school principal and is now the principal of an elementary school.

US9 is Black and taught for 27 years before becoming an assistant principal for 3 years. She has now been a principal for 12 years.

US10 is White and was a teacher and coach before deciding to pursue the role of an assistant principal followed by that as principal. She has been a middle school principal for 7 years.

US11 is Black and was an entrepreneur who ran a daycare center, convenient store, and mortgage lending company before deciding to go into education and serve as an adjunct professor. She is now a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator for a community college.

SA1 is White and has worked in education for 43 years. She has been a teacher, department head, deputy principal, and administrator in the district office. She is now serving as a department head in a school.

SA2 is White and has been a teacher and a house master. She is now a deputy principal.

SA3 is White and was a teacher, department head, and principal before deciding to get a job as a teacher in higher education.

SA4 is White and was a teacher. She now works as a curriculum developer and designer in higher education.

SA5 is Black and serves as a principal.

SA6 is Black and was a teacher and deputy principal before becoming a principal.

SA7 is White and was a teacher and deputy principal before becoming a principal.

SA8 is Black and was a teacher, department head, and deputy principal. She is now a principal.

In both the United States and South Africa, women of color served as classroom teachers much longer than their White counterparts; some serving 24-27 years before becoming an assistant principal.

Table 1

U.S. Participant Demographics

Participant	Race	Past Positions	Current Position
US1	White	Teacher Assistant Principal Principal Director of Secondary Curriculum Assistant Superintendent Superintendent	Town Manager
US2	White	Teacher Assistant Principal Principal Assistant Superintendent Superintendent	Retired
US3	White	Teacher Assistant Principal Principal Assistant Superintendent Superintendent Associate Superintendent	Retired
US4	Black	Teacher Assistant Principal Principal	Assistant Superintendent
US5	White	Teacher Principal Central Office Personnel Superintendent	Retired
US6	Black	Teacher Assistant Principal Principal	Director of Elementary Teaching and Learning
US7	Black	Teacher Assistant Principal	Principal of an Alternative School (6-12)
US8	Black	Teacher Assistant Principal	Elementary Principal
US9	Black	Teacher Assistant Principal	Elementary Principal
US10	White	Teacher Coach Assistant Principal	Middle School Principal
US11	Black	Entrepreneur Adjunct Professor	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator

Table 2

South African Participant Demograpics

Participant	Race	Past Positions	Current Position
SA1	White	Teacher Department Head Deputy Principal District Office Teaching (Public/Private) Teaching (University)	Department Head
SA2	White	Teacher House Master	Assistant Principal
SA3	White	Teacher Department Head	Principal
SA4	White	Teacher	Curriculum Developer and Designer
SA5	Black		Principal
SA6	Black	Teacher Deputy Principal	Primary School Principal
SA8	Black	Teacher Department Head Deputy Principal	Principal

Data Collection Methods

My initial plan was to develop a unique methodology using international focus groups and virtual semi-structured interviews. However, due to the COVID pandemic, infrastructure in South Africa, and participants' personal fears of repercussions, I had to shift my original plan to one-on-one virtual interviews. For example, US7 stated, "I definitely feel like the experiences that I've had in education have come from the male influence and things that they have said and done. I just try not to let them resonate with me, because I know how that can affect where I go next, my next stop and my goals." I was able to collate the data to identify and understand the inequities experienced by women who pursue educational leadership roles. I developed a set of questions which helped organize and guide my interviews, but I co-constructed a unique and customized conversational path with each participant, asking probing and additional relevant questions when necessary (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Kim, 2016).

My goal was not to influence or bias the responses, but to allow the research participants to speak in their own voices, express themselves freely, and decide where to start and which parts of their stories they wanted to tell (Kim, 2016). Each individual participant has a wealth of knowledge and told stories that reflected her personal knowledge and experiences (Kim, 2016).

Data were collected at convenient times using WhatsApp, Zoom, and email. The Zoom interviews were conducted in quiet, comfortable, and private locations, free from distractions so I could listen intently and purposefully (Glesne, 2016). The interview questions sent to the What'sApp interview participants were sent on various days and at varied times. Whether the interviews were conducted via Zoom, WhatsApp, or email, I was mindful of the cultural and time difference between the United States and South Africa (Glesne, 2016). The participants could answer the questions at their convenience. In addition, I offered the research participants the option of having the interviews take place over more than one session in order to alleviate fatigue (Patten & Newhart, 2018); however, only one of my 20 interviews was conducted over two sessions. Most participants wanted to complete the interview in one session so they did not forget what they had said or so they could finish telling their stories.

Weiss (1994) states, "Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived" (p. 1). I want to learn more about and join the circle of others to understand their similarities and differences, what they do, where they live, where they work, and the struggles they have faced and triumphs they have experienced. I want to be part of the meaning-making process in which the research participants and I share in the process of constructing a story (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The Zoom interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription, but these recordings were not shared or published. Recording the Zoom interviews enabled me to focus and actively listen instead of constantly taking notes and risk missing valuable information (Patten & Newhart, 2018). While reviewing the recorded interviews, I used paper, pen, and different colored highlighters to scribe notes and become more familiar with the data (Bennett, Barratt, and Helmich, 2019). Each participant was given the opportunity to verify the completeness and accuracy of the interview transcript to ensure the transcript reflected the meaning and intent of their contribution (Johnson et. al., 2020). The research participants discussed the structures, systems, culture, and climate in which they work. I tried to be an active and perceptive listener and compassionate and honest person (Kim, 2016). Through this project my hope was two-fold: I wished to better understand the inequities I have faced throughout my tenure as a woman educator and to bring attention to the inequalities many women face, regardless of cultural context. Only by bringing attention to the inequities can we hope to bring about change.

Interview Process

Following contacts within my network of American and South African women leaders, I was able to develop a list of potential participants. Initially, I reached out to each potential subject with an invitation to participate in this study, explaining the purpose and methodology of my research. Then, I sent consent letters and a copy of the proposed interview questions. Once they agreed to participate by returning the consent form, I set up a time for the interview based on their preference for Zoom, email, telephone, WhatsApp, or voice memos.

I met with US1, US2, US3, US4, US5, US7, US9, US10, and US11 via Zoom. Most of the Zoom meetings lasted approximately 1 hour. However, US1 and I actually met on two

different days for two hours each. The Zoom meeting with US5 only lasted about 30 minutes. US6 submitted the answers to the interview questions via email, and I talked with US8 via the phone for over an hour while she was traveling.

With the help of Professor Lynette Jacobs of the University of Free State in South Africa, and a former co-instructor in one of my graduate courses, I initially reached out to the South African participants by creating a female school principals group in WhatsApp. Professor Jacobs and I explained to these women that I would be collecting stories from women educational leaders in the United States and South Africa and intended to weave the stories of these brave women into a "quilt" from which other women could learn. I explained that we could meet via Zoom, email, WhatsApp, or voice memos. The interviews with SA1, SA2, SA3, and SA4 took place over Zoom and lasted for approximately one hour each. The rest of the South African participants answered interview questions through WhatsApp. They seemed eager at first, but then stopped communicating for various reasons, whether it was lack of internet service or because they were on holiday. SA5, SA6, SA7, SA8, and SA9 only provided very short answers to the interview questions and did not answer all of the interview questions. All appeared fluent in English, although this is not their first language. It is possible that linguistic nuances may have caused some discomfort.

Validity

It was important to the validity of the study that only women who demonstrated success in educational leadership through professional achievements and positions be included in order to help weave the narrative of women in leadership. Each subject also expressed a willingness to share the information-rich stories of the struggles and successes they faced and the challenges they overcame on their paths to becoming successful educational leaders. Throughout the study,

as a researcher, I maintained an open and honest relationship with these participants by sharing the benefits and burdens of the study. All participants participated in this research study with voluntary and informed consent, and their personal data was protected and not published (Glesne, 2016). At any point, participants were assured of their ability to withdraw from the study with no consequences, implied or otherwise (Glesne, 2016). Guaranteed anonymity for all participants provided the safeguards necessary to ensure that their experiences could be honestly shared without fear of backlash within their workplaces.

Ethical and Political Considerations

Ethical considerations concern the moral principles and values of the research process (Johnson et al., 2020). The stories of my participants were linked to the cultural and political contexts of their lives (Glesne, 2016). To ensure that my participants were fully aware of the purpose of the study, the letter of consent included the title of the research project, and explained the aim and purpose of the study; who was conducting the research; why they were invited to participate in the study; the nature of the participant in the study; benefits of taking part in the study; inconvenience of participating in the study; and information of how the data collected would be kept confidential, stored, and destroyed. The letter of consent also explained that the study had received ethical approval. The participants were informed by the letter and at the beginning of each interview that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no risk or penalty. The participant's signature indicated agreement with the parameters of the study.

Along with the consent letter, the participants received the interview questions prior to the actual interview to provide time for reflection and preparation. Confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants were protected during the interview sessions by providing each participant with a code name based on country of origin.

I assured the participants I would protect their identities and would use pseudonyms. The women seemed excited and agreed to participate. To further develop a sense of trust with my participants, I began interviews with simple questions before delving into the research interview questions. Furthermore, I shared the interview questions with them in advance and reached out to each of them individually. Some responded to a few questions and then just stopped responding.

- One texted, "Hi I am not well talk to you soon."

- Another stated, "Please note we are closing for an autumn break and I will only return on the 17th May 2021. Keep well & be safe." I did not hear from this participant again.

- One texted, "I thought i tried to answer your question check our conversation i think it was in February unfortunately i have deleted it due to space. Thank u.[sic]"

- A participant responded, "Evening man will definitely come back 2moro morning...m sorry fr not responding...lastime as, well as 2day." I never heard from that participant again either.

At the end of each individual interview session, I provided each participant an opportunity to reflect on her understanding of her individual contribution to the quilting project and to provide any advice that might enrich the professional lives of future women educational leaders. As the quilter, I transformed the stories and swatches of information each participant provided into a beautiful quilt that will help future women educational leaders.

Data Analysis Procedures

Coding involves sorting, defining, and linking the scraps of data collected (Glesne, 2016), helping prioritize and provide focus (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). In order to get a sense of the whole, I read all transcripts carefully and listened to all interviews a second time and some a third time. I then re-sorted the raw transcript data, listing the interview questions and putting

each participant's answer below the question. I then re-read all of the questions and answers, looking for similar topics. I abbreviated the topics as codes and wrote the codes next to the appropriate portion of the text, trying to find new categories and codes. I read the transcripts a final time to ensure the themes and patterns matched the data. Finally, I compared my findings with the information in my literature review to determine which findings were and were not supported (Roberts, 2010). It was important to become attuned to the language the participants used to tell their stories (Glesne, 2016). The validity and trustworthiness of my study was dependent upon my ability to describe properly the data analysis procedures (Bennett, et. al., 2019).

Procedures to Address Trustworthiness and Credibility

Since I currently serve as an assistant principal, my hope was to build rapport and trust with my participants through the credibility I generated due to my position. My shared experience would allow a level of empathy. This empathy would also serve me well when analyzing their remarks. By keeping a reflective diary throughout the research process, I was able to reflect on my impact on the research process (Bennett, et. al., 2019).

Limitations

Before beginning this study, I realized I would have to broaden my thoughts and accept different views of how context leads to gender bias. Like all studies, my study includes certain limitations. These limitations include only having 19 participants, although this may be seen as a strength given the nature of the methodology. Often, qualitative research focuses on far fewer participants in order to provide a rich depth of insight.

Given the physical distances and the impact of a pandemic, technology was essential to this study. I met with all interview participants via Zoom or WhatsApp. Of course, technological

issues ensued. Internet service in South Africa and some rural areas of the United States can be

unreliable. I recorded my first interview in Zoom and Voice Memo. Thankfully, I also recorded

the interview in Voice Notes because the transcription feature in Zoom did not work. Therefore,

I had to listen to the interview and transcribe the data by hand. From that point forward, I made

sure the recording and transcribing features in Zoom worked properly.

I had a Zoom meeting scheduled with SA3 and met with her at the designated time. We

could see each other, but the sound did not work. Hence, I had to send her all the interview

questions on WhatsApp. She kindly answered all of the questions promptly. I tried to conduct a

video chat on WhatsApp with SA8, but the connection was too weak for us to communicate. She

answered questions on WhatsApp until she just stopped responding for no apparent reason. Some

of the South African women did not want to meet via video at all and just wanted to answer the

questions via WhatsApp. Because of scheduling conflicts, COVID, and other factors, US8 and I

agreed to meet via telephone while she was driving home from visiting her family.

Working outside my own Southern United States cultural frame of reference, I

encountered some differences that had to be addressed prior to gaining the trust of my

interviewees. Some of the research participants and I also had to overcome cultural differences.

As the interviews progressed in both countries, I found that not all participants were comfortable

being completely transparent about their professional experiences. For example, I initially

considered including women educational leaders from Russia in my study. However, Russian

women, like the women in South Africa and the United States, continue to live in a patriarchal

society and are afraid to speak negatively regarding men in fear of severe repercussions. Many of

the US participants indicated that they did not want to say anything negative or anything that

would be a detriment to them in some way. Some of the South African participants just stopped

answering the questions, potentially because they became too uncomfortable. Although ensured of confidentiality, there seemed to be a prevailing fear of retribution among all the women when complaints about supervisors or work conditions arose. For example, US7 said,

> I definitely felt there were negative behaviors. I am a very positive person, and so I always try to count the positives more than the negatives. I definitely feel like the experiences I've had in education have come from the male influence and things that they have said and done. I just try not to let them resonate with me, because I know how that can affect where I go, my next step, my goals.

As the interviews progressed, I gleaned that, because of cultural beliefs and protocol, not all participants may be comfortable being completely transparent about their life experiences. I addressed this concern on the front side of my interviews by studying the cultural norms of South Africa through a rigorous culture map (see Figure 1, Meyer, 2014). I developed this culture map based on the parameters supplied by Meyer (2014). Through internet searches and research into South African culture I was able to apply the mapping process. This map was an excellent tool that allowed me to contextualize the respondents' answers and to understand how to approach them. This map indicates a linear progression between two extremes based on rigorous cultural studies (Meyer, 2014). In addition, my theories, beliefs, experiences, and perceptual lens naturally infiltrated my study, making it imperative for me to recognize my possible biases (Maxwell, 2013).

Figure 1

A culture map comparing the United States and South Africa.

Communicating

US   SA

Low Context   High Context
****

Evaluating

             US   SA

Direct Negative Feedback   Indirect Negative Feedback
****

Persuading

SA   US

Applications-First   Principles-First
****

Leading

US   SA

Egalitarian   Hierarchical
****

Deciding

                               US   SA

Consensual   Top-down
****

Trusting

US   SA

Task-Based   Relationship-Based
****

Disagreeing

           US   SA

Confrontational   Avoids Confrontation
****

Scheduling

       US   SA

Linear Time   Flexible Time

Legend: US = United States

                    SA   = South African

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

A description of the personal lens I used throughout the interview and data analysis process is discussed in this chapter. Next, the chapter shares interview stories and themes, including the pathway to leadership; establishing relationships; conforming to male characteristics; work-life balance; discrimination faced as an educational leader; emotional, physical, and social difficulties faced by women educational leaders; dressing differently; being a woman in educational leadership; serving as role models; and closing comments from the participants. Finally, a summary of global issues is also provided.

Personal Lens for Analysis

Throughout the interviews and data analysis process, I thought of myself as a quilter. Just as a quilter seeks out specific fabric swatches to make the pieces fit into a pattern, I purposefully chose my participants, seeking to develop a more cohesive story through comparing and contrasting the experiences of women from different cultures and continents. I then took those stories and pieced them together like a quilter stitches the swatches into an intricate design that tells a much larger and more meaningful story upon completion. At first, I was not sure if I would find enough similarities, and I worried that my quilt would become one of contrasts. However, from listening to their stories, I discovered more similarities than contrasts. These participants are all hard-working, determined, goal-oriented women who always present themselves in a professional manner and never want to be perceived as weak. Each participant struggles to find balance but realizes the importance of catching their breath so that they can be refreshed and up to the task at hand. All of the participants also hope to serve as role models for younger women who aspire to become educational leaders. Hopefully, this path will be less

rocky and fraught with the barriers faced by the generation of women I interviewed. Bringing these barriers to light through shared stories such as these may smooth future paths to leadership.

These women certainly became role models for me. Through this research, I learned a great deal not only about my subjects but about myself as well. I faced similar barriers along my journey, and these women taught me that I need to be patient and keep working hard to reach my goal of becoming a principal because that goal is realistic.

Interview Stories and Themes

Pathway to Leadership

Each of the participants I interviewed navigated their pathway to get to the role of educational leader. Most took the path of teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Some took different paths and had to work harder and longer to reach their goals. All of these participants might have traversed different pathways, but when I listened to the stories they shared, I discovered that their experiences are more similar than different. These brave women who were willing to share their stories taught me that all women educational leaders share the common bond of overcoming challenges with determination.

Traditional Pathways

Most, but not all, of my participants, followed the traditional pathway to becoming an educational leader. They served as teachers before deciding to climb the leadership ladder from assistant principal to principal, assistant superintendent, and, ultimately, superintendent. Their stories of their trajectories are as follows:

US1 said,

I served as a principal, I think, for two years. It was from July of 2005 to the end

of October in 2007. I was assistant principal for two years. I taught for about 15 ½

years. I left mid-year to go to C. Middle School. I was a teacher, assistant

principal, principal, and director of secondary curriculum. Then, I became a

principal immediately following that job. From 1986, when I began teaching, then

I became a principal in 2005. From an educational standpoint, I went to college

and wanted to be a teacher. I don't view it as a negative like some may think as

they go into teaching that they ultimately want to be a principal, but I didn't. I

wanted to be a teacher. I began teaching, and I would say I anticipated that I

would retire as a classroom teacher and loved that idea because I loved teaching. I

did take on some leadership roles. So, I started teaching after I finished my

bachelor's degree.

This participant conveyed first her love of teaching. This was not unusual in all of

the participants. Teaching became a foundation for their educational leadership. This is

reflected in the findings that most stayed in the classroom for much longer than their

male counterparts. This was similar in both countries. Across all participants, the shortest

amount of time in the classroom was six years with the longest being 27 years.

Not only did US1 want to be a teacher she was also pushed by her principal to

continue her education. Again, she was not alone in this experience. She commented,

Mr. H. really pushed me, along with maybe three other teachers…He was really

pushing us to go back to school and get our master's degrees. And so, I started

that process during my second year of teaching and completed that at C. College.

I have my Master of Arts in Teaching with a focus in secondary math.

In relaying this experience with her principal, US1 further shared the many leadership

roles imposed upon her by her principal when she was a classroom teacher. Many times, these

extra duties were not externally rewarded. More than one South African participant shared similar experiences of being given leadership roles with no additional pay. This continues to be an issue in American schools.

US2 has been recruited to do several things since retiring. However, she describes her pathway to educational leadership as follows:

I was [a] principal for six and a half years, almost seven years. And that was two schools…. . I was an AP for two years. I was a principal for four and a half years. And then I was a principal again in a different school for two years and then superintendent. I retired. Yeah, I was an assistant principal, like I said, for two years, and then I was an assistant superintendent for three years before becoming an assistant superintendent before becoming a superintendent…. Before that, I taught business for 10 years.

Although US2 entered through teaching, she was more intentional in her path toward leadership. She sought to be a change agent. She realized that change had to come from beyond the classroom. She did not credit support or encouragement from male supervisors or administrators. She brought to her leadership role many of the lessons of a classroom teacher such as stressing individual relationships and visibility. I found this to be true across most of my participants.

US3 is currently retired. She explained her pathway as follows:

I was a teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent, and superintendent. It depends on the district itself. When in G. County, for example, I understand they used to have—a while back—a deputy superintendent. And then they changed to an assistant superintendent structure.

When I came to G. County, there were six assistant superintendents and then three retired, and so the three that were left got the other three's work, and so we got the title of associate superintendent.

Her pathway is unique in that she moved from being a superintendent back to being an associate superintendent. The reason for this is that she believed she could do her job more proficiently in the secondary role rather than face the gender bias of a school board who believed she was too feminine in her approach to school issues. This is also common among women education leaders. Like US1, her passion remained in the classroom. She brought that passion into her leadership roles. US3 explains this as follows:

I was a teacher for six years. I was in AP for four years. I was a middle school principal for two years, a high school principal for six years, assistant superintendent, superintendent for five years, and associate superintendent for three years. I think in each one of those positions I found tremendous joy in certain aspects of it. For example, when I was a teacher, I taught science, and when I taught sixth grade science, I loved it because you could see the enthusiasm for experiments and exploration and opportunities to test hypotheses, etc. When I started teaching 10th grade biology, I thought you know these are just kids in bigger bodies, so how can I try to help them get that enthusiasm back, and you know, maybe it was playing Jeopardy for test prep or, you know, allowing them to go outside and do experiments. I think because I'm so passionate about public education, every job that I've been in is my favorite one, if that makes sense. When I was a middle school teacher, I thought, gosh, I don't want to be a high

school teacher. Then, when I was a high school teacher, I loved those kids just as much. Then, I was an AP at a middle school, and I loved that, and then I was an AP at a high school, and then, you know—so, every role I have truly loved, so I don't think I can pick a favorite one, and I'm so sorry.

US3 even enjoyed the extracurricular activities that came along with teaching and administration and did not view it as an additional burden or as a pathway to leadership. She viewed it instead as part of the job. She said,

I loved it. I loved every minute of it and the excitement, and, you know, all the things that the kids are missing now from the prom, you know. People would say, "You've got to be kidding, you enjoy the prom?'Absolutely. As a principal, you're going to stay there and help clean up after the prom. I mean, you know, I enjoyed everything: all the games and the Beta Club and the National Honor Society and the orchestra.

US5 was a teacher for about six years before becoming a principal. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Masters in School Administration, and an Ed.D. in English. She then worked in the central office as an assistant superintendent and superintendent for six years each. Now, she is the executive director of two education consortiums. She oversees an organization that gives women educational leaders a place to connect, network, and grow professionally. Although she began her path in the classroom like most of the other participants, her career ended in a different trajectory beyond the superintendent's office. In addition, she recognized the lack of networking currently among women leaders.

US6 was a classroom teacher, a state Teacher of the Year, an assistant principal, and a principal. She was a Principal Fellow and split her internship experience between elementary and middle school and two different school districts. Toward the end of her final semester of her internship, one of the superintendents announced that the leadership team at the middle school where she was doing her internship would be moved to the high school the next school year. As a result, US6 was named assistant principal at that middle school before the end of that year. Three years later, the principal she worked under accepted an international leadership position and announced his resignation. US6 was named interim principal and served there for a year before transitioning to a new school system. She now serves as a director of elementary teaching and learning.

US8 served as a teacher and an assistant principal at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. She described not being accepted by the students, the staff, or other members of the administrative team when she was a high school assistant principal. Because of her race, she was purposefully left out of administrative team meetings and was often referred to as the "Black Striped Zebra Bitch", which she somehow managed to look past, noting instead that she continued to love school and remained determined to do her very best for the faculty and students every day. Unlike her White colleagues who ostracized her, she felt like she needed to consistently present herself as the constant professional. Now, as an elementary school principal, she continues to hold herself to the highest standards.

US10 was a physical education teacher at a rural middle school for eleven years. While teaching PE, she served as a lead mentor and coached young teachers. Each teacher had an assigned mentor, and US10 made sure that all their paperwork was turned in to the principal and/or the district. She also helped out with different meetings, served as a mediator between the

mentor and the teacher if an issue arose, and assisted with peer observations. In addition, she served as a liaison between the district and the principal, which piqued her interest in school administration. US10 coached three sports and served as an athletic director. She was an assistant principal for five years and has been a middle school principal for eleven years.

SA1 went to college in 1977, where she obtained a four-year education degree in history and math. While she has never taught a history lesson, she insisted that she has always loved and taught math. With a four-year degree, she was able to get a teaching position, but she was not on the same pay scale as the male educators. Men were given a higher pay scale and had a greater chance of obtaining a permanent job. This was also experienced by American women and represents one of the barriers to leadership that women have long faced. Inequity in pay and opportunity was a persistent barrier in the pathways of all the participants, regardless of country.

SA1 shared that in her experience, if a woman married, she lost her post. Her husband had to provide a letter giving her permission to teach. This does not occur in the United States. At the time, in her culture, men were considered the breadwinners and, therefore, were expected to determine what was best for women. It was not until Nelson Mandela became President of South Africa in 1994 that this began to change. It was then that men and women were put on the same salary scale. Unfortunately, in the United States, men and women may still not be on the same salary scale beyond the base salary.

SA1 started teaching in the 1980s and taught math for five years before being promoted to head of the math department. She then applied for a deputy principal position and did not get it. A man got the position, presumably because he was a good sports coach. She then applied to the district office and worked there for five years before experiencing burnout. SA1 went back to teaching math in private schools and later took a post at the university, where she trained math

teachers. In 2015, SA1's husband passed away, and she took a job as a math teacher at a high school that was less than a half mile from her house. She said the post came as a blessing.

SA2's path to teaching contrasts sharply with that of American participants primarily due to the culture. Because SA2's parents could not afford to send her to university, she had to apply for a bursary, which is an amount of money given to students based on financial need and academic achievement; it is equivalent to a scholarship in the United States. SA2 was granted a bursary and allowed to study for four years. She explained that since she was a bursary student in Apartheid South Africa, she had to go wherever the university located her in the last semester of her final year. When she was assigned to a township school in one of the Black impoverished areas, her father panicked because she was a White woman, who would have to drive through township areas that were not safe for White people. It was not just the challenge of teaching, but the challenge of teaching in adverse conditions during Apartheid. SA2 told her father that she could not pay back the money if she did not teach in a township school, therefore, she would have to go to the township school unless she got a job teaching elsewhere. She then started sharing her *curriculum vitae*. In those days, there was no internet, so she had to physically drive around and drop off her *curriculum vitae* in order to apply for a teaching position. She managed to get an interview in a school that was not in a township. The principal told her she was brave for coming. Because she was going against the system, this represented a real risk for her in that she may have forfeited her scholarship and job.

She "had gotten dressed up and learned the history of the school." The principal asked her why she was interviewing since she had already been placed in a township school. She "did not know whether to cry or ask him what he meant", but she persevered through the interview. She was given the post and taught Afrikaans, English, mathematics, and geometry. This level of

risk taking and determination emerged as a thread in the theme of pathways to leadership by these women.

After teaching in that school for several years, SA2 then took a hospital post in a town about 15 kilometers away from her home. She taught there for three years before transitioning to a private Greek school, where she taught mathematics to seniors for seven years until she gave birth to her son and found traveling so far to work difficult. She was "leaving very early in the morning and returning late at night, and her son did not recognize her." So, she and her husband had a conversation and agreed that she needed to find a teaching position closer to home. Before they even finished the conversation, she got another call asking her to be a math teacher. That is the school in which she now works. SA2 said, "deep down in my heart I knew that God really looked after me because I had only ever had three interviews." She taught math for four years and was then asked to be the head of the department of mathematics. Six years later, she was given a management position as a house master at an all boy's school. In a house system, students are able to connect across classes and grades, given the opportunity to create friendships, and have access to a more family-like culture at school. SA2 served as house master for three years. When her principal heard that she had interviewed for but not been offered a principal position at the sister girls' school, he offered her the position of head of discipline. SA2 said, "I doubted my abilities and asked if it would be better to put a male in the position, but I accepted." Like many of the participants from both countries, SA2 lacked confidence in her abilities to lead, deferring to males in those roles.

She is now an assistant principal who supervises all the academics, including policies, procedures, problems, new developments, and training, for 12th-year students. SA2 said, "I do not like to burden my staff with work that I know I can do." Up until last year, her teaching load

was light, but it has increased because of the Covid pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, her school operated according to a remote blended model. SA2 was responsible for training the students, parents, and staff in online learning procedures. She observed that everyone was burning out quickly. Reflecting on her educational career, working from the bottom up, she said, "I understand how the staff feel and how the school runs. It is important for administrators to understand the daily struggles of their staff."

SA3 talked about teaching in a rural school for a year before getting married. When she got married, she and her husband moved to a more urban area, and she began teaching in a school of 1400 students, which is large for South Africa. She said, "hard work was soon recognized by the principals, who started giving me management tasks, even though there were not any department head positions available." When a post was advertised for a department head, SA3 applied and was shortlisted and then appointed as department head. However, a dispute was raised by another candidate. SA3 learned, "I had the top scores in the interview, but they still recommended the man for the position." When the appointment was reviewed, SA3's appointment was withdrawn, and the male candidate was appointed. SA3 filed a dispute, and the principal wrote a letter to the department on her behalf. Since another department head was retiring, the principal requested the department appoint both SA3 and the male candidate. They did. SA3 was soon appointed examiner and internal moderator for provincial grade 12 papers and believes this helped her career.

Like US1, SA3's principal encouraged her to take leadership responsibilities. However, when specific leadership posts became vacant, she became a victim of gender bias, as less qualified males were chosen over her. Nevertheless, SA3 continued her pursuit to gain a

leadership position despite this barrier. This seems to be a common thread for many of my participants.

After working as department head for seven years, SA3 applied for the position of deputy principal at a neighboring school. She was again interviewed and shortlisted, but then she was offered a position as deputy at another school. She said that after seven years in that position, she got bored and applied for two principal posts. Her first choice was the school where her father had served as principal. Although she wanted the job for sentimental reasons, the school was located in a rural region where the culture remained very patriarchal, so, she said, "I did not expect to hear from them, and when I was invited for an interview, I thought it was to give the locals easy competition." She said, "It was not unusual to have women as primary school principal, but it was very rare to have a woman as a high school principal, especially an Afrikaaner-speaking woman." She got the post and later learned that the school officials had gone from farm to farm showing the parents her curriculum vitae but covering her name. The parents agreed that SA3 was a good candidate for the principal post before they learned that she was a woman. Under her leadership, the academic performance and discipline of the school improved. Then, SA3 said, "I really felt that the people in the community accepted me as a principal." She has been a principal there for the past six years.

In this case, her experience supports the gender bias faced by women, not only in the ranks of school officials, but in the public's eye as well. Parents and community members can determine the success or failure of an educational leader, often based on such biases. In this case, they were willing to accept her qualifications, but not her gender.

SA5 and SA6 followed similar paths. SA5 and SA6 followed the traditional trajectory of classroom teacher to principal. While they did not share the depth of challenges faced, neither

were able to enter the principalship as quickly as male counterparts. It was not until 2010, several years into her career, that SA5 got a principal post. In 2014, she completed her masters degree, which focused on working with students with disabilities. SA6 is the acting principal of a school in the North West Province of South Africa. She was a teacher for 32 years before becoming a deputy principal in 2013. In 2020, she became the acting principal. This tends to mimic the trajectory of the American subjects as well.

SA7 completed grade 12 and then attended a college of education to obtain her senior teachers' diploma. She majored in Afrikaans, English, and career guidance. She then attended university to study for an advanced certificate in education with a specialization in special needs. SA7 passed her honors degree in education management, law, and policy. She is still trying to get a scholarship so that she can register to get her masters degree in social studies.

SA7 has worked in schools specializing in special education since she entered the profession. She stated, "My passion for working with special populations is due to the fact that my brother is autistic." In 2012, she got a head of department (promotional post) PL2 at a hospital school where she worked with students who were hospitalized. Each day, she collected students from their ward in order to teach them. She taught the bedridden students in their rooms. There were even times she would go to fetch her ward, only to find they had passed away. She said it was a very stressful and demoralizing job, but the students had to be taught regardless of their situation. In 2013, she moved to a larger school that specialized in special education, where she served as head of department. She spent five years there and acquired a lot of managerial experience. She reported establishing parent support groups, partnering with various special needs associations, and getting involved in the Special Olympics South Africa sports organization. In 2017, SA7 was appointed as deputy principal at a special school, where she

continued to support students and parents just as she had at her previous schools. In 2019, she was passed over for a position as a principal and then later appointed principal at a secure care center, where she worked with the justice and social development departments.

SA7 said, "I started a school from scratch, developing policies, putting systems in place, and appointing teachers and a school governing body. The school is now in place and fully functional." She works with behavioral learners who are in conflict with the law, social workers, clinical psychologists, and care workers, and learners from various backgrounds and socio-economic situations that have led them to be in prison. The children stay in dormitories, and care workers take care of them during the day. The school offers three curriculum options to meet or cater to the needs of each and every learner. There are currently 65 learners in the school. They have issues ranging from ADHD, bipolar, mental illness, aggressiveness, anger, bullying, drug issues; and some have just dropped out of school. Some have committed serious crimes, and they are not easy to work with. Because of her experience and passion, SA7 can accommodate them in terms of offering curriculum they did not receive at other schools and offer adequate support. The system has failed these children. The curriculum offered focuses on vocational skills like welding, consumer and hospitality, nail and beauty, woodwork, agricultural studies, and office administration. SA7 reported, "I can better serve children with special needs than can 'normal' children." She is currently trying to get a scholarship so that she can get her masters degree in social studies with a specialization in juvenile justice so that she can assist learners with behavioral problems.

SA7 faced many of the challenges the other participants did. Like other participants in this study, she persevered to excel in her career path by taking on managerial roles and

continuing to learn and grow educationally and professionally. This thread of persistence is common among participants.

Another example of this thread of persistence was conveyed by SA8. From grades 10-12, SA8 attended a girls-only Roman Catholic school hostels operated by Roman Catholic teachers. SA8 passed her matric (grade 12) and then went to the teachers' training college, where she earned her primary teaching certificate. She then went to the university and passed her first two years, but she decided to leave her studies when serious strikes began to occur and some students were killed and arrested. A year later, she enrolled at a different university and finished her bachelor's degree. She then registered at another university and earned her honors in education, completed her leadership management certificate, earned a counseling certificate, and took some computer courses. SA8 has 38 years of teaching experience and reports truly loving her career.

The love of teaching is another thread woven throughout the pathway to leadership. The participants emphasized the love of teaching that gave them the courage and perseverance to go into leadership despite the barriers of gender, inequities, and safety. Over and over again, the participants emphasized they chose teaching despite the hardships. They chose leadership despite the challenges.

After grade 12, SA9 attended college and earned her teacher's diploma. She then studied at university and earned her Further Diploma in Education (FDE), specializing in learners with barriers. Next, she earned her honors in management and obtained certificates in leadership and management. In 1995, she started working as a primary school teacher, beginning with first grade, moving up to third grade, and eventually returning to first grade. After seven years, she was promoted to head of department at another school. Six years later, she was promoted to deputy principal at another school. After another four years, she became principal at the age of

44. She said, "Being the head of the school was not an easy task and staff members often challenged me."

Alternative Pathways

With the exception of one, the Black participants' pathways followed a different course in that they held marginal jobs for longer periods of time. Two started out as itinerant teachers, one started out as a teacher's assistant, one did not want to be a teacher, and one began as an entrepreneur before getting a position in higher education. Their experiences illustrate an all too common path to leadership followed particularly by women of color. This path was fraught with lower paid jobs and more job insecurities.

US4 explains her journey to the role of educational leader as follows:

I was a teacher for eight years. I was like an itinerant…. In my first four years of

teaching, I taught at M.V.R. Elementary…before it became M.V.R. Elementary. I

taught at C. Elementary. I call it New Hope. Those were those schools at the time,

you know. They don't exist now. So, I taught at those and then, when they

combined C. Elementary and New Hope—not necessarily M.V.R. Elementary,

because they came later, right—I went to R. Middle, and I was there for four

years before I became an AP. I moved to P. Elementary as a principal. I was there

for six years. Okay, yeah, I did six years there and, then, I remember Dr. M. and

Dr K. coming to P. Elementary, and it was another crazy time I had. So, I was at

P. Elementary and was saying that Dr. M. and Dr. K. came up there to go over my

mid year. I had just applied for my doctorate, and so, I was like, well…. You

know my life is crazy. Sure, let's add one more thing…. But I had to keep my

transition to another school quiet because there were some other things that were

going on and some changes in the district, and you know how things can happen in the district. You work there, so you know. And, it was so sad because I had been there six years, and I really couldn't tell my faculty that I was leaving until we got out for the summer and most of them had left. All I know is they were like but we're family. It was just, oh gosh, terrible. I would never recommend that for anyone. I never really got to say a proper goodbye. I was going into C. Middle, where there had been, you know, some significant changes.

I am the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, so I'm in my fourth year here, and I still live in R. County, but I drive to H. City. It's a good drive, and meditation is awesome in the morning and then in the afternoon—when I do get to leave before dark—but I have really enjoyed every minute of it because I stayed in R. County for 28 years. That's where I taught, was AP, principal, and director at the high school for the summer jumpstart program…. I did that for, gosh, almost 11 years, and my family kept me there… Everybody was there, but I knew when it was time to make a career change that I needed to step out, you know, on faith, and that's what I did. Things are going really well.

US7 is going into her 16th year as an administrator. She began her career as an itinerant art teacher and later took a job as a full-time art teacher at a high school, where she worked until she got her Master's in School Administration. She then went to the School of Technology. She described her transition to administration as significant. She went from a school where most kids lived in poverty to a school where most students came from middle- or upper-class families and were trying to figure out their career paths and which college they were going to. She was then appointed as assistant principal of a

different high school. She was appointed principal of an elementary school and returned to her roots of working in a school where a significant number of the students lived in poverty. Throughout her 27 years, she has worked with all grade levels. She is now the principal of the alternative school that serves grades 3-6. She described her career as follows:

> I have a long history. I was an itinerant teacher. A lot of principals don't give us credit, because I wasn't a core teacher of the four major subjects. I was an art teacher. I started out in a terrible elementary school during a terrible time in the South. It was like an intermediate school. That was my first year teaching, and it was terrible. I got a little bit of experience working with exceptional children in my first year [of] school, and then, after that, I went to W.H. Elementary. I was really close to my former art teacher. We worked at D. Town schools for a long time, so she called me up, and she was like, my school is going to be hiring a second art teacher. I wanted to be used, and so, at that point, I took that art job. And I worked in the high school until I went and got my Master's degree for School Administration, and I started that in 2005. Yeah, I taught at the School of Technology. There was a big difference in the type of students I was teaching from students who were impoverished to students who had high academic standards and were trying to figure out which career path or college they were attending. I went to F. High School as an AP. I've had a vast variety of schools that I've worked at. Whenever I went to my first school of my own, it was FH Elementary, so I was back with the same population I started with. However, it was the elementary school, and so I did a little bit of that. I had one year of middle

school prior to getting the 6-12 school. My least amount of experience was with

middle school, but I had that one year at SW Middle. I've had pre-K all the way

to 12th grade experience.

So, this is my 27th year total. Not a lot of people get the opportunity to have pre-

K students, and when you're a pre-K principal, you have to be certified

differently. You have to actually, not really, but you have to go through some

different kinds of paperwork and. Just reading through some things and signing

off to do pre-K as a principal. I mean pre-K to 12 grade certifications and working

out of those environments…I have had a lot of experiences.

Even though others saw US4 and US7 as less than because of their role as

itinerant teachers, the participants did not view themselves that way. They continued to

have a passion for teaching and learning that led them to seek leadership positions.

US9 started her career as an elementary teacher assistant. She then became an elementary

school teacher and taught for 27 years before becoming an assistant principal for three years. She

is now principal of a school that serves grades 2-6. She feels that her job as an administrator was

a second start to her career. She has now worked in education for 43 years. Many times these

participants see the leadership role as a secondary career to teaching. Teaching provided the

foundation for their pathway. US9 said,

I've been a principal for 12 years. In the educational area, I started out as a teacher

assistant from August until December. Then, I became a teacher at QH

Elementary School. I taught school for 27 years. After teaching for 27 years, I

became an assistant principal for three years, and then I became a principal. This

is about 42 years. I think they clocked me in February. I think I was clocked at

65

about 41.8, but I say 42 years because I had done that much time in the classroom and then this opportunity came is sort of like a second start. I think this would probably even go back to just being an assistant principal. I really think it was just me thinking that this is something I'm really doing because, honestly, this wasn't anything I planned to do, so I think it was just—the challenge would be just accepting, hey, this is really happening.

While the majority of my participants went from the pathway to the leadership role, two of the participants took different pathways. They experienced some of the similar challenges of the other participants, such as gender bias. It would be a mistake to believe that a specific pathway is the same for all women although recognizing shared barriers. It is not the positions they held that are important but the struggles they encountered as they moved forward and how these struggles were overcome through persistence.

US11 did not begin her career in education. She transferred her experience of being an entrepreneur to being an educational leader. She now serves as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at a local community college. US11 developed a campaign called Champions of Care. She layers the imagery of being on a winning team to introduce what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean on a college campus. She enlists people to become champions of care on several different little projects to help build momentum, excitement, and energy. She wants the students and staff to understand they are letting go of things from the past that were negative and systemically racist and freeing themselves to embrace a very progressive, forward way of thinking. US11 stated, "We can no longer continue to operate in a prejudicial, discriminatory, or bias frame, because that's not promoting inclusiveness, equity, and differences."

SA4 grew up in a rural town in eastern Free State in South Africa. Her pathway was not initially intended to be through the classroom, but over time she began to love teaching. She did not really know what she wanted to do with her life, but she was certain that she would never become a teacher. Her whole family was in the teaching profession. During the 1930s and 1940s, her grandmother actually started a school on a farm because the children were so far away from town. SA4's mother, uncle, and two sisters also became teachers. SA4 studied and received a four-year degree in agriculture but ended up going into the teaching profession as well. She got a job at an aggregate school and taught math. SA4 went back to school and got a post-graduate diploma in teaching. She fell in love with teaching but never settled in a location, because every time she started to settle in, she and her family would move to another town. Her husband was an international banker, and his job determined where they lived. SA4 taught science at one school for over 10 years, and she was the chief examiner for the science olympiad for the Free State Department of Education. During our interview, she joked, "I did everything at the school except drive the bus." Then, she explained, "I did the marketing for the school and all the management surrounding physical and natural sciences." SA4 discussed the tremendous toll teaching took on her due to the extra workload. Due to this toll, she resigned from her post as a teacher in 2015 and took a teaching position with the university.

SA4 stated, "What I am supposed to do in my new role is different from what I actually do. I am supposed to be a curriculum developer and designer. When I applied for the job, I did not have a clue what it was; I just looked at the advertisement and thought I wanted to work in higher education and further my studies." She applied for the job, got it, and had to figure out exactly what she was supposed to be doing. Under apartheid, Blacks and Afrikaners did not get the same type of education as Whites. If their grades were good, they could become teachers, but

they would not have the same qualifications as Whites. The Department of Education now says

that is not good enough, so SA4 develops educational programs to bridge the gap and help

teachers who only have a two-year qualification increase their qualifications.

Establishing Relationships

Upon becoming principals, many of the participants tried to meet with people

individually or in small groups. Some participants sent out a communication letting people know

that they looked forward to meeting and working with them. In the same communication, they

offered times for people to come in and talk. Many participants asked the people they spoke with

to tell them what was so wonderful about the school and to discuss opportunities for growth. In

addition, some participants tried to make time to be visible in the hallways and in classrooms

because establishing relationships was important to them. Many of the participants also

identified other important practices for building relationships. The elements that all of these

practices share in common are community visibility and engagement.

As superintendents, the participants went to the schools, introduced themselves, talked to

the faculty, shared their vision, and let them know who they were. Student advisory councils

were also important to give students a voice in what was happening in the schools. Many of the

participants talked about joining Rotary clubs, other civic organizations, and sororities. Some

visited the local chapters of the NAACP and other clubs in order to be fully engaged in the

community. Furthermore, several of the participants talked about getting out of their comfort

zones and going to different churches to let the people know they valued them enough to give up

that precious weekend time. US3 asked, "How do you establish credibility if you're not fully

engaged?" US5 said, "The first thing you should do is meet people; you get out there with the

people and start building those relationships." The participants listed churches, Chambers of

Commerce, YMCAs, United Ways, neighborhood association meetings or groups, and the local

Dollar General as places they went to meet people in the community. The participants felt they

were the face of the school district and they were hired to build relationships and establish

business and community partners.

Observing other teachers helped US1 establish relationships. Providing

instructional leadership is one of the most important jobs a principal or superintendent

can do. It is during observations that educational leaders have the opportunity to see

teachers instruct students. After the observation, feedback is then provided to the teacher

as a way to improve instruction. US1 described how she used observations to build

relationships,

> As I began as an assistant principal, I got to observe. In the course of doing my
>
> job duty and evaluations, I longed to have a classroom again. I would sit there and
>
> think, 'Gosh, I never thought of that and would like to try that.' Observing is not
>
> telling someone they are not a good teacher or they are not doing well at this. It is
>
> so much more. We all can learn from each other. I loved being in other people's
>
> classrooms once I got that opportunity.

Teachers appreciate the visibility of the principal and superintendent in the

building, because this gives teachers the opportunity to converse with their leaders.

Having served as a teacher, US2 understood the importance of being visible in order to

build and maintain those relationships. She expressed the following:

> I know deep down to my toes that that's where the important work happens. I
>
> mean, the closer you get to your purpose, that's where the most important work
>
> happens—not that everything else is unimportant. I feel like I could make your

job easier. I could put things in place that moved us forward, you know, professional development vision, expectations, all those things that you can do, creating that culture of collaboration. I could go on and on, but the bottom line is the important work was happening in the classroom. And my view is, as principals and superintendents, that's how we show value to the real work, that's how we share our vision…. Where, you know, I used to call it, you know, putting your feet under the table. You know, not just sitting in the office and planning it and shooting it out, but really being there. That's the only way I know how to do it, because how do you know what's really happening? To me, leadership is about relationships. And so, I can't have a relationship with you if I never see you, if we're never face to face, and I'm never in your world. People can't come to the central office, so I had to go there [meaning, the schools]. I tried. I hope, I hope, I hope that just my leadership, maybe, inspires people.

Since many of the participants began their careers as classroom teachers, they indicated a belief in the value and importance of establishing quality relationships with students, teachers, principals, colleagues, business leaders, and community members. When stakeholders feel valued, appreciated, seen, and heard, they will most likely work harder and contribute more to the schools. The participants established relationships by listening, communicating, observing, being visible, and sharing their vision for improving schools.

Conforming to Male Characteristics

Several participants discussed trying to fit into the male world so they would be more accepted. US1 stated, "The males accept you more if you are willing to accept them. You cannot

flinch or care when males drop curse words. If you are in it, you have got to be in it with them. They have got to know that when they say or do that, you cannot be offended, even if you truly are." The participants stated that they had to prove that they could perform the expected masculine behaviors exhibited by male principals. They said that they had to give it as good as they got it. However, the participants also indicated that men are sometimes much easier to get along with than women; with women, they said, the problem tends to be jealousy. US3 felt, "Success comes from listening first and doing everything you can to understand where the other person is coming from, whether they are male or female." Overall, the participants felt that when a woman becomes a principal or gets a leadership role, she is held to a much higher and different standard than men are. People may not necessarily address the female leader directly, but they will criticize her behind her back. The need for women leaders to conform to male leadership behaviors is an important aspect of women in leadership that is promoted by the views of society.

Challenges to Leadership

From time to time, the participants I interviewed faced challenges to their leadership. As women, we tend to be immersed in the context of our societies. Unfortunately, this context may include lowered expectations for women. These expectations may become part of our self-perception. Therefore, we do not style ourselves as victims. These included returning to their home school, being a woman, lack of confidence, being a woman of color, and working with children suffering from poverty and illness.

Returning to Their Home School

The greatest challenge US1 faced in becoming a principal was going back to the school where she had been a student herself and then a teacher for over 15 years. Some people had been

her teachers, and now she was serving as their principal. It created changes in relationship dynamics that are particular to women. One person in particular had been US1's teacher and assistant principal, and when US1 became the principal, he was still serving as the assistant principal. She said she had to learn to navigate in a different way than if she had gone to a totally new location where people did not have any preconceived ideas about who she was or how she might lead. When women return as leaders to the schools in which they attended and/or taught in, they find it difficult to maintain the relationships they once had since the teachers do not respect their authority and leadership.

When US1 became superintendent, funding was lagging, and the school system was in the midst of a great recession and beginning to experience the effects of the lack of funding; the horizon did not look good. Her predecessor told her, "It will be bad for a year or two, and then everything will pick back up." It never really did. Prior to her leaving the superintendent position, the school system was finally beginning to come out of the recession and things were starting to get better. Then, Covid happened and affected every budget cycle. When seeking funding from county commissioners or state legislators, she was always told, "We are experiencing the worst recession possible." Thus, she was continually having to find ways to cut and be more cost effective. At the same time, everyone expected the school system to be more innovative and better than they had ever been.

The greatest challenge US6 faced in her educational leadership journey was becoming the principal for the school where she was the assistant principal. The relationships she had built with the staff as an assistant principal changed in her new role. Luckily for her, the relationships she had established contributed to her success in the role, because they did respect her and relied on their shared history.

Being a Woman

Several of the participants felt their greatest challenge in becoming an educational leader was being a woman. US2 had to wait until a woman left her position before she could get a leadership role. US3 was the only female in a cohort of five. All four of the male cohort members got a job; she did not. SA1 participant said, "I did not get the principal position because the job was given to a man who was a good sports coach." SA3 was already doing the job as the department head and had the top scores in the interview process, but the job was given to a man. Over and over again, the participants, whether American or South African, cited gender imbalance within the school system as the reason they did not get a job they applied for and were told that men were better suited for the role.

US2 stated, "My greatest challenge in becoming a principal was waiting on a woman's job. It was so frustrating." She would interview and be one of the finalists and would not get the job. Another challenge was serving as an assistant principal for a principal who was retired on the job. She was required to do everything since the principal was never there. She served as the administrator on the school improvement team and the parent teacher association (PTA) board while also being in charge of instructional leadership. She said, "I had a ball. The experience really prepared me for a principal position. I believe in leading from where you are, and I did just that."

US3 said, "My greatest challenge when becoming a principal was being new to a school district and being the only female in a cohort of five assistant principals who were working on their doctoral degrees. The four men were all promoted to principal positions before I was." She also said, "I do not know if it is bias or not, but when people know other people better, they are more comfortable hiring them." She also described a loyalty factor that comes into play when

individuals have been in a district for a long time. The greatest thing she had to overcome was the attitude toward hometown favorites.

SA6 stated, "My biggest challenge was getting a department post because of the gender imbalance within the system. One must be experienced and fully equipped to accept the position because getting a post at one's school of choice might require a multi-year process."

SA9 said, "The path to educational leadership was not an easy one for me." When she was nominated to act as the deputy principal, she faced many challenges. Some members of the management team felt that a man would do a better job; they even said this in front of her. However, despite their feelings toward her, she persisted. SA9 went for an interview and got the post. She said, "At first, they pretended to celebrate with me, but things quickly changed." In the interview, she indicated, "It was tough to work with an unsupportive team and be responsible for academic affairs, but I just loved what I did." There were Post Level I educators who were supportive and gave her the strength to carry on. Her main objective was to see the students learn, so she ignored the management team. She was not angry with them and even planned with them through silent resistance.

SA9 explained, "What challenged me the most was being sidelined by other women." She enjoyed teaching as well and always made sure she got a 100% pass rate in the subjects she taught. She hoped to lead by example and never failed one child. Her love of students helped her to manage in that kind of hostile environment. She went to school and worked on Saturdays and Sundays to make sure everything was in order to start the week. SA9 said, "It was not an easy way to balance my life." In 2007, she was again selected to act as principal when her principal retired. She went for the interview and got the post by a big margin. However, union fighting and staff discontentment caused problems. There were men who felt they deserved the position

instead of her. SA9 said, "I have enjoyed my career in education, but I believe that women do not support each other enough."

Lack of Confidence

Lack of confidence was also listed as one of the greatest challenges faced by the participants in this study. One of the participants stated, "Even though I knew I was capable and knew I had the abilities to do the job, I just was not giving myself credit for what I knew and what I was capable of doing." Another just did not feel like she was ready. The participants said it was difficult to get the experience they needed to qualify for the leadership positions they wanted. Managing paperwork and understanding budgeting is not something most teachers and assistant principals have experience doing. Each woman also acknowledged that she eventually realized that she could not do the job all by herself.

As an assistant principal for curriculum and instruction and human resources, one of the greatest challenges US3 faced was getting the experience she needed. She said, "Understanding budgeting at a different level than the school level was difficult because there are different pots of money system-wide."

The most challenging aspect of becoming an educational leader for US5 was applying for leadership positions and having the confidence to do the job or feeling like she was ready. Her biggest challenge was making decisions about which jobs to apply for.

US7 said, "My greatest challenge was myself." She often thought about what she could bring to the table and what people wanted her to do. She knew she was capable and had the abilities, but, she said, "I just did not give myself credit for what I knew and was capable of doing. My greatest challenge was knowing it was the right thing to do at the right time." US7 said, "My current challenge is being the fourth administrator to lead an alternative education

school within 18 months, because the faculty and staff at the school are not used to consistency, goals, and working together to promote change for the good of the school. Thus, it is difficult to build relationships, develop trust, collaborate, and construct a team." She said, "The school is currently experiencing a culture crunch, and it is not pretty. Even though there is a lot of resistance from the staff, I want to grow the students, and that means change is coming. The culture is tough, but I am slowly earning the trust of the students, staff, and community."

SA2 said, "If I had not been pressured I would have never climbed the way I did. Sometimes you need that kind of pressure, but it does not sit well with the staff. The staff also want an opportunity to get interviews and go through the same process." At her school, she has helped change the hiring process. SA2 has made interviews open to everybody, because someone with better ideas could be better for management. She accepts buy-in from the staff, understands their challenges, and maintains an open door policy. She said, "If you don't, then I think that you are just ignoring the problem and saying 'you are not important'." She says, "The biggest learning curve for me has been putting myself in the shoes of my staff members and understanding where they are coming from."

SA4 stated, "My greatest challenge is accepting that I cannot do it all by myself. In higher education, there are all kinds of people who work together to make a project happen. However, everyone works in silos, in silence. No one knows what the next person does, but everybody has to connect and integrate in the end."

Being Women of Color

For the participants who were women of color, regardless of country, their race was their greatest challenge. US11 stated, "Historically, it is difficult for African American women to break into higher education." In addition to the stereotypical oppressive micro-aggressions

related to race, they also had to work alongside openly racist and demeaning colleagues. They were also breaking barriers, thus it was difficult for them just to learn how to navigate the system. For example, US8 was often intentionally left out of administrative meetings. Similarly, some participants did not have family or friends to rely on to help them understand how the system works. As the first person in their community and close family and friend group to obtain leadership positions, they do not have access to a network of peers to turn to when problems arise.

Working with Poverty-stricken and/or Ill Children

A couple of the participants listed working with children living in poverty as their greatest challenge. Many of their learners were from disadvantaged families in which the parents were unemployed. The South African participants described the difficulties of working with so many children whose parents were killed by HIV and AIDS, situations in which the older siblings became the head of the family. US10 stated, "Really, when you get attached to a group of kids, and you see how they're treated; sometimes, it really does break your heart. We're limited on what we can do with that."

The greatest challenge for SA8 was working with learners from disadvantaged families. Most of the parents were unemployed. South Africa has a high unemployment rate, so it was very difficult for the learners to cope with a lack of food at home. Eventually, some school feeding programs were introduced. Many parents were killed by HIV and AIDS; so, many families were child-headed. Poor teacher performance results also affected her first school. In the second and third schools SA8 worked in, 40% of the parents worked, but they had a lot of issues with drugs and violence. Nevertheless, the school received good results and was noted for its quality teaching in math and science.

Work-Life Balance

When I asked the participants how they maintained work-life balance, some laughed, and others told me they failed miserably. US2 told me, "Work-life balance is work." SA4 asked me what that was. US8 said, "School and work are my life." Several others said they worked to the detriment of their health and marriages. US1 recalled, "I would say that being a high school principal, I stalled out. I couldn't manage classes, motherhood, and the dissertation. It was just going nowhere."

US2 said, "I failed miserably at work-life balance, especially in the beginning. was a workaholic and put in way too much time until I realized something had to change. I realized I was not doing things the right way. I started weaning herself from spending too much time at the school." US2 would look up at the clock; it would be 11 o'clock; and she was still sitting at her desk. So, she asked the school custodian to come into her office at 8:15 p.m., pull her sleeve, and tell her that he would be leaving in 15 minutes. She demanded that he not leave the school without her. She did not want to keep him from his family, so that made her start leaving at 8:30 p.m. Gradually, she would work towards her next goal of leaving even earlier. When she became principal at a new school, US2 learned that her predecessor had left everyday at 5:00 p.m. because her husband demanded that she have dinner on the table by 6:00 p.m. US2 decided that if her predecessor had left every day by 5:00 p.m., then she could leave by 6:00 p.m. That became her new goal, and that is what she did. She reported that this schedule made her feel better, more balanced, and whole. When she became superintendent, she started setting an alarm to make sure she and all of her staff were out of the building by 5:00 or 5:30 p.m. Eventually, US2 realized that was what her male counterparts were doing all of the time. She said, "Male principals arrive late and leave early. Women are terrible at this. Women feel like they have to

work all the time. I decided to implement some strategies and adopt the male model of work hours." US2 said, "Men were cool as cucumbers. They weren't stressed. They were happy, back-slapping, and having a good time. Somehow, they were making the same money and doing fine." In contrast, the women "were stressed out, working all the time, tired, and looked half-dead." US2 did not necessarily want to be just like the men. She felt they were not as focused on change and improvement, but the men were not as stressed out, overworked, tired, and burned out. According to US2, she finally learned to delegate and let other people have a chance to lead so that she did not have to do it all.

US3 reported, "I had no work-life balance and often worked to the detriment of my health because I always felt that I had to prove something. I wanted to prove that I could do my job just as well as a man." US3 shared, "I've seen a lot of women administrators struggle with that and be the workhorses. The men would be gone, and the women would still be there working. Now, I don't know if that is from intrinsic motivation, or what; it is that drive to do your best and always be prepared. But, for me, I always thought that women had to do more to get the same results."

US4 said, "I used to set aside an hour every evening to walk and exercise, but I have not been able to do that since I became a caregiver." Prior to her cousin passing away, US4 visited her every Wednesday to watch Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy. She said, "I was able to get some release and comfort from sitting there watching television with my cousin." US4 loves to read and watch Hallmark movies. She is a simple romantic that likes feel good stories. Those stories make her smile and laugh. Now, US4 reported, "I have started to travel, go on vacations, and take days off, all of which seem to help me and which I would not have ever considered prior to the pandemic."

US5 said, "I have never done so well with work-life balance. When I became a school superintendent and was not directly tied to a school, it was easier for me to take a little time off without too many people noticing. It is imperative to have the right people in place and have the day-to-day operation of the schools up and running before you can even think about taking some time off." Now, US5 has a dog that requires daily walks, which helps her get outside and make time for exercise. In addition, she intentionally plans trips every three to four months so that she always has something to look forward to.

US6 stated, "I did not handle work-life balance very well. However, I am happy with the way I balance the people in my work and personal life. In many cases, my work friends become personal friends, and we do things together we enjoy. In other cases, I keep work and personal life separate." US6 is not married and does not have children. Therefore, she tends to spend more time working throughout the week, but intentionally takes time for herself on the weekends. She also reported learning how to put work down and take intentional and necessary breaks to help keep her sane. She said, "In recent years, I have created a reminder on my phone to disconnect and take a 'me' time out."

US7 is now raising her grandson, which she said required her to find a balance. She reported prioritizing family, then friends, and then school, and she does her best to keep it in that order.

US9 said, "Because the work is never done, I try to prioritize and make lists. Then, of course, I sometimes do not even know where the lists are." US9 reported pacing herself and doing what is most important first. She admitted,

> I have to get my mindset right and have worked many weekends and long nights
> because, otherwise, it just would not have worked. It's just making sure that you

balance that out and try not to neglect your family. As much as possible, keep

them involved with what you're doing and let them know what you're doing,

what your plan is, and prioritize [them]. I think that's what's been helpful for me.

US10 starts her mornings at 3:00 a.m. She reads/answers emails and gets her paperwork done while it is quiet and free of distractions. She goes to bed at 8:00 p.m. US10 said, "I created this habit so that when I arrive home from work each day, I can devote that time to my home, family, or whatever I want to do."

SA1 recalled a time when one of her children was ill and she and her husband took him to the doctor. The doctor gave him some medicine and then addressed her, telling her that she had to stop and slow down. SA1 was referred to a psychologist who told her that she had to learn to set boundaries. The psychologist asked her to make a list of everything that stressed her out. He told her to look at the list and asked her what she could do to change it. SA1 told the psychologist that she could do nothing to change it. He told her that worrying about the things on the list was making her ill. SA1 said that it was honestly just her nature to work hard and try to fix things. She said, "That is just how I was brought up."

The Most Challenging Aspects of the Work-Life Balancing Act

Time, trust, delegating, prioritizing, and friendships were listed as things that helped the participants overcome the challenges of the work-life balancing act. It is difficult to trust and learn how to delegate well. However, the participants stated that leaders must set expectations and really believe in the people they work with. They must keep up with what is going on and support work, but they should not feel like they have to do it all themselves. According to the women I interviewed,women are the worst at this because women tend to be perfectionists who often believe their way is the only right way. Thus, women make life really hard on themselves.

The participants also pointed out that leaders should establish friendships with other educators who are also subject to public scrutiny and understand the importance of being private and discreet. Finally, they indicated that leaders learn to prioritize and decide what gets done when and why. While they all acknowledged that there is never enough time to get things done, they also highlighted that what gets accomplished in a span of time can be controlled. For educational leaders, there is no timeout. There is always stuff that needs to be dealt with.

Support Systems

The research participants felt that strong support systems were extremely valuable and critical to their success. They emphasized that working in education requires a support system; however, they also acknowledged that their support systems changed significantly when they transitioned from being a teacher to being an educational leader. Not all teachers and educators support others' moves to leadership positions. Finally, they emphasized the importance of setting aside time for a hobby or just to relax in order to prevent burnout.

Principals and District Office Personnel.

US1 was encouraged by her principal to go into administration. She said,

Mr. H.…[f]requently urged me to go into administration, and I resisted for a long time. Not that I didn't value the principalship. I just didn't see myself in that role. The other thing, I used to tease him, and it's been a pretty good joke so far, because I would tell him, "I wouldn't have your job for a million dollars." And, then, US1 said, "I think I took it for $58,000 per year. I followed him in that role, and that was not really my path."

When US1's former teacher, colleague, and friend found out that she had enrolled in an administration class, he walked up to her and said, "I can't believe what I heard today. That

you're in an administrative program…. I just never figured you for an ass kisser." That is when US1 realized that she had to have a strong support system. According to her, after she changed roles, her colleagues and friends would scatter when they saw her walking down the school hallway. In contrast, she highlighted the critically supportive relationship between her and the principal who first hired her to be an assistant principal. Even now, she feels that she can pick up the phone and call him for advice. US1 stated, "I think you always need someone that you can seek honestly for feedback, and I was blessed mostly to always have someone who I could look to in that way."

US3's principal was also instrumental in getting her to consider going into administration. She recalled,

> I was teaching sixth grade science, and my principal at SSC called me one day
> after school and, you know, I thought, this can't be good. And, so, she had some
> paperwork, and she said, 'This is the Principal Fellows Program…. I'd like for
> you to take a look at this, because I think you'd make a really good administrator,'
> and I said,'what do y'all do but walk around and drink coffee?'. I had absolutely
> no understanding of what administrators did unfortunately. So, it took me a year,
> but after a year I was ready to apply, and I got the Principal Fellows and went to
> the university and started learning what all administrators do.

Unlike US1 and US3, US2's principal did not encourage her. She was a high school business teacher, and when she told her principal that she wanted to become an administrator, he discouraged her, telling her she needed to think about the many long hours involved in being an administrator since she was a single mother. The district placed US2 in another high school but would not allow her to do her administrative internship there. Instead, she had to travel across the

county to complete her internship. It was during her internship that US2 finally found some support. She worked with a female principal who practiced collaborative leadership and shared decision making. US2 completed her principal internship and started working on her doctoral degree. Her neighbor, an older African American woman and retired attorney, helped her edit her dissertation. This neighbor held US2 accountable and was very supportive of her work. Ultimately, she said that she felt that the district became more supportive of her once she finally got an assistant principal job.

Before US4 was hired as a teacher, she had to take a math test to prove that she could indeed teach algebra. She scored higher than any of the other applicants and was given the job as an itinerant math teacher who had to travel to three different schools. Since US4 was Black, the district paired her with one of the only other Black teachers in the district. Although she acknowledged that their decision was probably racially motivated, she said that having this other teacher as a mentor was a true blessing. One day, US4's principal noted that she did not have any discipline referrals and asked her if she had ever thought about going into administration. US4 said she laughed in response. However, her principal and district office personnel encouraged her to apply for the Principal Fellows program. Eventually, she applied to a part-time university program. Her principal allowed her to leave school early so she could travel to the university for her classes. Before she completed the program and graduated, she became an assistant principal at a middle school.

According to US7, she often saw a principal or some leader within the district doing some good things outside of the classroom. When US7 was serving on the alternative education committee, as well as some other committees, the directors asked her when she was going to become a principal. She said this question was when she realized it was time for her to start

doing something different. Four years later, she went to her principal and discussed the possibility of becoming an administrator. US7 said, "My principal was very supportive and encouraged me to go back to school to get my administrator certification." He told her, "If you can walk forward without tripping, you can do it." She and two other male teachers from the school district went back to school, received their degrees, and moved on to administrative positions at the same time. She emphasized, "It was the encouragement from other people who saw leadership abilities in me that made the biggest difference." Now, US7 encourages teachers to further their education and go into leadership positions.

US9 said, "My former principal was responsible for me becoming an educational leader, while my family was my support system. They encouraged me by reminding me that I did not want to miss a crucial opportunity and regret it later." US9 said, "I always felt comfortable reaching out to teachers, department heads, and others within the school system for advice. My colleagues and peers have always been there to rally around me and share and bounce ideas off one another." US9 said, "Most importantly, you have to be willing to listen to what others have to say and value the relationships and interactions you make along the way." Her family and church members serve as her support system. US9 said, "When you surround yourself with good people, you know they will care about and be genuinely happy for you. They want to see you do well and succeed."

SA1 was a math teacher; because of that, she did not have a difficult time finding a job. She said, "No matter where in the world one goes, math teachers are always needed." Nevertheless, SA1 considered herself to be very fortunate to work for a supportive principal at her first post. She said, "We had a close relationship, and he treated male and female staff members equally." When she was trying to get her district post, Mandela had come into power.

Four provinces plus three different races had to merge to create the new education department. The marketing of the Department of Education started in January 1996. In June 1997, SA1 got her district post and was working in many of the townships. Her husband, her dad, and her sister all supported her. SA1 said, "MY mother was a teacher and a strong, independent woman who my father always supported. I married late in life to an atypical Afrikans man, and my mother-in-law often asked if my husband gave me permission to work." SA1 responded by telling her mother-in-law that she did not ask his permission; he knew she was working. Even though her husband came from a very conservative household, he was still her biggest supporter.

SA3 had a very good department head who really acted as a mentor. Her department head assisted her a great deal as a subject area teacher. SA3 also acknowledged the great support of her husband. He always helped her at home with the kids, the cleaning, and the cooking. When she served as a principal, her husband helped out by looking after the school grounds to make sure they were neat. SA3 received many compliments about how the appearance of the school improved during her term as principal. Sadly, her husband passed away last year, and, she said, "His passing nearly crippled me as a manager." However, she said, "The current school governing body is always supportive. Whenever I want to improve something, the funds are made available."

SA8 emphasized, "Not all educators are supportive of one other, but those who are supportive are very hardworking and produce good results by raising the standards. The school governing body plays an important role in helping resolve parent issues." In addition, district officials provided staff development that helped SA8 to become a more productive leader.

SA9 has a strong support system from her district office and teachers at her school. Her family members, her husband, and her children often serve as a shoulder to cry on during times of distress.

Mentors.

In 2004, US3 became the first female high school principal in her district. The superintendent assigned US3 a mentor, a retired principal from a neighboring county, because he knew she would need someone to talk to. US3 said, "Having that mentor was invaluable." During one of their first meetings, US3 recalls the mentor telling her to understand that she did not have a wife. The mentor said, "Male principals have wives to take care of their dry cleaning, buy their groceries, and prepare their food for them, so you've got to make changes to make sure things are taken care of for you." The mentor knew the importance of putting some things in place for simple convenience because of the amount of time spent at school. So, US3 arranged for the dry cleaners to come to the school to pick up her and the rest of the staff's clothes for laundering and dry cleaning. They even received a discount. She also arranged with the grocery store for her and the staff to have access to purchase their groceries early, before the store opened. US3 said, "It was always important to think about the little things both my staff and I needed." In addition, she reported, "The friendships and tight bonds I formed with other administrators served as my support system."

Peers.

US1 had some friends in a Master's in Administration Program who encouraged her to take a class with them. However, it was the inappropriate actions of a colleague that helped her determine she needed to join her friends. She told the following story:

I would say there was one critical event on my pathway that really got me into the classes, and you would probably remember this as well. We had a colleague who brought a weapon into the classroom, actually into my homeroom…. I wasn't aware at first. It was an odd situation where he kept referencing something. It took me a little bit to realize what he was saying. He was carrying a gun that day, because he had been threatened by a student. So, that was just an awful experience for me, because he was a dear colleague. I considered him a friend, and he considered me a friend. It was a terrible situation, but I remember at the time thinking that I didn't understand. Not that I didn't understand that he shouldn't have had that, but I knew that he had completed like a BLET course and that was right when there were beginning to be laws that were much more stringent about weapons on campus and things. And so, the very first thing I did because of that frustrating and sad thing that happened was take a school law course. I just thought that summer that I needed to get some CEUs.

She said it was then that she caught the administration bug. Next, she took a school finance class, and that led her to where she is today.

US3 was encouraged by one of her friends to pursue her doctorate. She said, "One of my really good friends, who was a principal fellow with me and also worked in U. County said, 'Let's work on our doctorate'." I said, "You are crazy; there is just absolutely no way." I said, "Man, listen, I want to get my doctorate, but I'm scared that if I don't go on and do it now while I'm in the habit of not sleeping, getting up at the crack of dawn, working for a little bit, then getting ready and going to school, and spending all day Saturday and Sunday doing it, I

won't do it." It took some convincing, but we were accepted immediately after we finished the principal fellows to start working on our doctorates. It was a good decision for me, because I don't think I would have struggled to go back, because once you're in it, the amount of hours you have to put in wear and tear on you.

US5 said, "My peers and colleagues were my greatest supporters and served as my mentors. I felt like I could call on them at any time." This sentiment reflected the feeling that many participants shared.

Family.

US1 stated, "I could have never become an administrator without the support of my husband." Her husband was never resentful of the fact that she was using money in the family budget to pay for classes. She was gone at night and had to do her school work on the weekends. On the nights she attended class, her husband and daughter had daddy/daughter date nights. US1 was not allowed to participate in those activities. Her daughter told her, "Daddy and I are going here, and you can't come cause it's just the two of us today." Her daughter has fond memories of doing things with her father and probably getting a few extra prizes. Her daughter does not look back and focus on what she did not do with her mom. US1 also stated, "I had tremendous support from my parents and sisters." If she could not pick her daughter up, someone would always step in until she or her husband could get there. US1 said, "Family support is the key to being a successful educational leader."

When US2 was a principal, she did not have any support at home. She was a divorced single mother. One week before she became assistant superintendent, she remarried. Her husband went to the grocery store, found them a house to live in, and did the laundry. US2 said,

"I could have done it without him, but he was very helpful. People liked my husband, and he worked and became part of the community in which we lived. That was very helpful too."

US4 said her family was her biggest support system. Without them babysitting her children, she would not have been able to attend school.

US6 was very fortunate to have lots of support systems while becoming an educational leader. She has always had a strong family unit that supported her in everything she did. US6 started her career as a teaching fellow, which gave her an instant cohort of friends and professors with whom she continues to maintain relationships today. She also has a core group of friends from college who are her long-standing support group. She calls them her "girl tribe." Throughout her career, US6 intentionally built relationships with fellow educators who kept her grounded and current on educational issues and trends. She calls on them any time to support her continued growth and development. She said that when she makes friends, she tends to keep them. Friends are like family to her.

US7 is currently divorced and has custody of her grandson. Her sister serves as her main support system outside of school. She said that if there is something going on, she talks to her sister. US7 is also a person of faith, so she prays about her concerns and turns them over to God.

US11 said, "My husband is my big anchor. My children also provide incredible support." She is also part of a diversity, equity, inclusion network that meets on a regular basis and talks about current issues. US11 says, "My pastor and fellow church members serve as a positive and healthy support system."

SA2 relies a lot on her parents when it comes to her children, since she is divorced. Her parents transport her children to and from school and know where they are supposed to be at all times. Her mother does a lot of the cooking in the evenings, because many nights SA2 is at

school doing presentations, contacting parents, and making sure everything is taken care of there. She says, "I am blessed to have two boys who are exceptionally good academically and well balanced in sports. I wish someone would have told me early on that I needed to focus on a hobby." Someone should have told her, "If you don't have a hobby when you're in this position, you never know when to shut down, shut off, and just relax." SA2 said, "It is not just physically doing the work all of the time; I become so focused on work that I do not always see what I am doing to myself and everyone else around me." One day, her kids told her that she is much nicer when she is at home on holiday. That was a big wakeup call for SA2.

SA4 said, "There are people in life that I listen to and respect." Her sisters and her two daughters serve as her support network. In addition, she has colleagues whose opinions she values. SA4 says, "Reading a lot also helps. My parents contributed to that."

SA6 stated, "My parents paved the way to education." Her support system consists of internal support, her husband, other educators, the administrative staff, state offices, her community, friends, family members, members of the teachers' union, and the school governing board.

Hobbies.

While she served as superintendent, US1 ran two marathons. She trained and ran, but she said, "the running group was kind of like my salvation." Some of the group members were educators, and some worked at the community college. However, the group members established rules early on that no one could talk to US1 about school-related stuff during their morning runs. So, they talked about family and everything else. US1 felt a great sense of support in that. She did not need those folks to talk to her about work. She needed them to just let her be herself. US1 says, "I still run, but the group quit running together during Covid. I was gifted a Peloton bike

and now work out at home." US1 found that she could not go to the local gym, because people would want to talk to her about school while she was on the treadmill.

Support Systems that Would Help Women Educational Leaders

When asked what type of support systems would help women educational leaders, US2 reported, "We do have a different life. I mean, we do still take the primary role of home and child rearing, and we look at the world a little differently. Why don't women connect as much as they can?" The participants felt that it is necessary to develop a network of forward-thinking women educational leaders. However, because everyone sees things through a different lens, a mixture of women leaders are needed to help other women see things from a different perspective. The participants felt it was important to have good strong relationships with other positive women leaders. US6 believes, "A strong 'girl tribe' is critical. Women educational leaders need a circle of friends who are non-education related but understand the professional space women are in to be their proverbial rock."

Because there are fewer of them and they are more spread out, women tend to network more with men. The participants felt that men developed networks naturally through golf or sports or coming up through the ranks together. Men grow up playing little league together; they teach together, coach together, and serve as athletic directors together. Then, the men progress through the pathway of being assistant principals, principals, and on to the superintendent's office. Breaking into the network of men is difficult. US31 stated, "Women are just less connected." US5 stated, "Women are also more competitive with one another and have many more emotions. Women take things personally, whereas men do not. Women are professionals and need to learn that other women are not a threat." US3 believed women should be able to bounce ideas off each other and just listen to one another. She said, "Women need to be gut-level

honest and have dialogue with each other, because no one should experience isolation." For a woman, the job of an educational leader can be lonely, especially if she does not feel comfortable asking for help from men.

When US1 traveled out of town to superintendent meetings, she had to make sure that she had left food and clean laundry for her husband and told him what to do with the dogs. She said, "I was still doing all of that wife and mother stuff and busting it to get out of town, leaving my job the way it was." Men would show up to the meeting and say, "I'm pissed at my wife; she packed my wrong shoes." US1 said, "Literally, I said to them one time, 'I need a wife'." The men were busy complaining about what their wives did or did not pack them, while US1 had to bake a casserole and leave her husband and daughter enough food to eat for three days. Women educational leaders still have more pressure at home than their male counterparts. US1 said, "I do not want to stereotype men, but their wives were keeping the home fires burning, because their job was demanding. Maybe, I was doing more than my family expected." However, US1 still felt like she wanted to be the wife and mother she had been before she started down the path of educational leadership. She and other women put a lot of pressure on themselves. People would comment to her husband, "I bet you don't get to see your wife. I bet you don't get a home-cooked meal much." She said, "No, he actually did. That's part of being up at four to go running and then starting the crock pot. You know, all the crazy stuff you do to make things seem kind of normal."

US3 said, "When I look back on my career in terms of the hours I put in I know I would not have been a good spouse." Many times, she heard criticisms about female administrators who were divorced. She never heard the same criticism of male administrators.

Discrimination Faced as a Woman Educational Leader

When I asked the participants, "What types of discrimination have you faced as an educational leader?" most were either hesitant to answer or denied they had ever been discriminated against. However, as they continued to talk, they shared how they were discriminated against.

SA4 responded, "It's an issue. It's a society issue. I think education needs to address it, but how are we going to address it when the roots are so deep?" She went on to say, "As an individual, you cannot do much about it. I think we need to make plans on how we are going to reshape society."

US1 described a time when she was still teaching and went for a job interview. The principal she was working for told her to go do a good interview and get the experience. He then tried to prepare her, "He's not going to hire you. He's not hiring another woman. He just had one who left, and that was a bad experience." US1 responded, "So, I don't even have a shot because I'm a female before I walk in the door." Her principal tried to encourage her by telling her, "No, but don't go telling him I told you that, but go to impress him. He may tell somebody else about you who is looking next time." US1 was mad, hurt, and exclaimed, "I'm not going!" The principal explained, "If you don't go, they'll never call you for another one at any school. You go for this interview, and you give it your best." US1 said, "It was hard to swallow and hard to take." She did not get hired; a man was hired. US1 felt, "The hiring principal had had it with women and felt more comfortable with a man. He did not have a particular man in mind, but he was going to and did hire a man."

US1 said, "Most folks were helpful, and that's all they meant to be." However, there were times when she would be sitting next to a man at a meeting and she felt a hand going under

the table and landing on her leg. She said, "I felt that was more harassment and a power play than discrimination." One time, she actually stopped one. She looked at him, pushed his hand off at once, and told him to get his hand off her leg. She said, "This is the last time I'm going to tell you." After the meeting, other men who had been sitting around the table told her, "That's the only way to deal with him. He does that to women. He's flirty. He touches too much and all that. You stopped him in his tracks." US1 said, "I always dressed and conducted myself in a professional manner. I wanted folks to make sure they knew I would be friendly, professional, and not unfaithful to my husband in any way."

US1 said, "It was made very clear to me that if I wanted to become a superintendent I would have to earn my doctorate." She claimed,

> Women generally come through the curriculum pathways instead of the operation
> side. Women have to earn the doctorate, or they will not even be considered for
> the superintendency. A woman with a master's degree is not going to even get to
> apply. If a woman without a doctorate applies, she will not be taken seriously. On
> the other hand, there are still a lot of male superintendents who do not have their
> doctoral degrees.

US2 conveyed, "It's really hard sometimes for people to accept leadership from a woman. It is mostly the older males, but, sometimes, it's been the women." US2 has memories of community members calling her and talking to her like she was a dog. She said, "They would have never done that had I been a man. Some men even threatened to have me fired." In her experience, women and Black people are treated differently. US2 said, "That is why it is so important to build relationships. Women definitely experience discrimination, but they have to figure out how to manuever through it."

Just like US2, US4, US5, and US7 said, "Being a female administrator was extremely difficult." One gentleman told US7, "I want to see the real principal." She replied, "I am real, sir." US7 believes, "Male counterparts often think female leaders do not have good ideas or a voice. Many times women will have to tell them; and when it becomes the men's idea, they accept it." US5 said, "I have been asked things that would have never been asked of male administrators and have had inappropriate comments directed towards me." US7 said, "Male staff members often have issues taking directives from me. In the male-dominated world in which we live, women must stop and acknowledge the men in the room before moving on to take care of business." US4 recalled being discriminated against because of her gender and race. She said,

> I had to get a tough skin. I can't tell you the times that I was cursed out and called
> certain names and then had to learn to smile and say, 'well, whenever you decide
> that you can talk to me in an appropriate manner, then you can call me back. In
> the meantime, I want you to have a good day.' Of course, what would they say,
> "She hung up on me." I had to learn to get a tough skin. I was a young Black
> female too. I would run into that quite often more so because, when people
> thought of principals at that time, they were always thinking of men. And then, it
> was white men. If not, it was a white woman. I had to deal with that from, you
> know, all races.

As a young African American leader, US6 faced immense discrimination. Because of her small stature and youthful appearance, she was forced to prove herself and her qualifications for the different positions she worked over the years, because people did not always see her as "experienced" as she actually is. As a result, US6 said, "I attempted to make myself appear older,

received public speaking training to improve my inflections and tone, and completed my doctoral degree at a young age to secure credentials that would set me apart from my peers." US7 was also racially discriminated against. She said, "Parents would come into my office mad and would say terrible things." While, she acknowledged, they might have only been mad about the issue regarding their child, they often made their complaints about race too. Once the parents expressed their feelings and stated the root of the problem, the comments regarding race disappeared. According to US6, "Educational leaders must become resilient, maintain a professional attitude, and work through it." However, she added, that does not mean that she will ever forget the initial sting of discrimination and how she was treated as an individual.

US10 worked in a racially diverse middle school. Because she was White, she said, "I was often accused of being racist. It took a while for the students and parents to realize I treated everybody the same, no matter who they were." She talked about the importance of treating everyone fairly.

US11 develops racial, equity, and inclusion programs for community colleges. Many times, she has developed programs only to have white males take all of the credit for her work and take her position away from her. She claimed, "Men are afraid of me and mischaracterize me on a regular basis. They believe I am too aggressive and too forceful, and I will start a Black Lives Matter Movement on the community college campus."

Emotional, Physical, and Social Difficulties Faced by Women Educational Leaders

Not only have the participants been discriminated against, they have also faced various emotional difficulties. These emotional difficulties include not being taken seriously, having to fire long-time friends, feeling defeated, and experiencing insomnia, mild anxiety, pressure, and the stress of having a very high-profile, political, and high-accountability position as a female

leader. The participants were often criticized for putting their jobs before their children, spouses, and other family members. However, the most difficult part of the job was seeing educators not put kids first. As educational leaders, these women eat, sleep, and breathe their jobs. Sometimes, they expressed, they just need a minute to step away from the roles that consume their lives.

US1 described being perfectly fine and then feeling like she was dying and needed to get down on the floor. Then, by the time her doctor's appointment rolled around, she was symptom free and felt fine. She could not figure out what type of weird stomach virus she had that lasted only eight hours. She did not know what was going on, but she kept having these attacks. She remembered conducting interviews and thinking she was going to be sick. Once during a school board meeting, she said, she got physically sick and had to leave. She said, "I had never seen a superintendent leave a school board meeting before, but I knew I was going to vomit." The next day, she called her doctor, who happened to also be the school board chair. She told him, "When I walked out of the meeting, it was not really to go grab a folder I had forgotten." He responded, "I thought you looked bad; I thought you looked ill. I was a little worried about you, but you came back and played it off fine." So, she described what had been going on. At that point, she learned that she needed to have her gallbladder removed. However, she refused to leave work to go get the surgery done. She kept putting it off. A woman she knew saw her and said, "You look terrible. Is the stress from the job getting to you? Is it more than you can handle? Did you bite off more than you can chew?" Instead of being supportive and encouraging, she looked at US1's physical appearance and assumed the job was wearing on her. US1 tried to explain that she had been "a little bit sick," but the woman dismissed her by saying, "No. It's probably the stress, the job. The job isn't for everybody." US1 waited to have her gallbladder removed because she did not want anybody to think that she was too weak to do the job or that the stress was getting to

her. She tried to hide her illness. Finally, one day, her assistant walked into her office and found

her stretched out on the floor behind her desk because she had an hour between meetings. Her

assistant told her to go home, but US1 refused. The assistant called her doctor and told him what

was going on. The doctor fast-tracked the surgery, telling her she could not put it off any longer.

US1 let her health deteriorate because she did not want anybody to have the perception that she

was too weak to do the job or that the job was killing her. US3 also reiterated that being

dedicated and working hard definitely took a toll on her health. According to her, the stress of

the job negatively affected her physical health.

US7 stated, "Community members sometimes believe that women educational leaders

will support them even when they are wrong, but it is just not that way. The typical administrator

works hard to do what is right, because they deal with so many students daily."

US5 said, "The amount of privacy I had to maintain was difficult and it was important to

know who my real friends were." In her experience, women educational leaders sometimes find

out the hard way who they can and cannot trust. US4 said, "Sometimes I did not know where I fit

in." US3 was reprimanded for trying to bring joy to others. She recalled,

> I had tremendous joy in being able to send notes to APSs and administrators every
>
> month, because you guys were in the trenches. I'd been there, and I knew what it
>
> felt like, and you have your people, you know. You develop those relationships
>
> more with the students and your staff than I think you do when you're at the
>
> district level, so I can understand that. But, you know, even as a superintendent, I
>
> would go and work in the cafeteria or do bus duty, because I think in every
>
> position you have an opportunity to be the person that you are. Sometimes it can
>
> get a little constraining. I'll just give you an example, sort of off the record. I

always donate to W.S. School because it's just a special place and incredible. I

bought all of you guys raffle tickets for W.S. School's fundraiser. Well, we had a

couple of board members get upset because I did that. I did it anonymously and

sent the raffle tickets out to you all. Of course, the superintendent had to talk to

me about the board members being upset. It's a funny thing when you're in a

position to be able to say, "This is who I am and I'm not going to change." It gives

you a tremendous amount of freedom, because I have always said that if I lost my

job for talking about who I am as a person in terms of my faith, then it was time

for another job. And then, of course, the closer you get to retirement, and when

you can go, there's a tremendous amount of freedom in that as well. For me, I

always had to be who I was as a leader.

Participants were also frustrated because some felt that they had to attend a different

church where no one knew them. They said that if they attended their home church, people

always wanted to discuss school issues at church. To avoid this altogether, some participants quit

attending church. They just did not want to be in a position where people expected something of

them when they were not at work.

Dressing Differently

While I had not originally thought to discuss how the participants dressed and the

expectations that go along with their daily appearance, the majority of the participants from both

the United States and South Africa mentioned the requirements of their attire. The participants

felt that people judged them from the moment they walked into the room. They felt that making a

good initial impression was of utmost importance. Men wore full suits. Therefore, the

participants felt they had to look the part by also wearing suits. US3 said, "I didn't feel right if I

didn't have on a pair of heels. That's just not who I am, but I would have been more uncomfortable had I not been wearing heels." SA1 stated, "When I walk out on the corridor now, I have to look respectable." A woman once told US1 a story about how her daughter put on a suit and came into the room saying, "Hey. Look. Don't I look powerful like [US1]. I feel all powerful. I bet [US1] does when she puts on her suits." US4 was encouraged to put on lipstick, because she needed to speak as a woman. She was told that they would be looking at her mouth; therefore, she needed to make sure there was nothing in her teeth and to wear lipstick. US4 was also told to make sure she smelled good at all times. She said, "Men always wear ties, so I felt I needed to start wearing scarves. Women always have to think about dressing, while men do not. Women even have to think about the shoes they wear." According to US4, "We were taught to dress to impress, because you don't know who's looking at you." The participants emphasized the importance of presenting themselves professionally and having others recognize their seriousness. Even when going to the grocery store, the participants felt they had to look and dress a certain way. One participant commented, "The minute you go out looking kind of not put together, you're going to run into parents or some board member." US3 noticed over the years of being an educational leader that men were able to dress down, while women educational leaders never felt they could dress down. Since the beginning of the Covid pandemic, the dress code for women educational leaders has changed; it has seemed to relax. Now, these women reported, they might wear dress pants with a nice cashmere cardigan or something that matches the level of the formality of the job.

Being a Woman in Educational Leadership

Being a woman in educational leadership is one of the greatest challenges the participants faced. Both the United States and South Africa are very paternalistic societies. The number of

women educational leaders has definitely changed in recent years, but women remain the minority. It is even more challenging for Black women to get leadership positions. US5 discussed there being more women in education, but she pointed out that they are in the classroom and not making it to leadership roles. Preparation programs educational leaders are very general and generic. Because women bring a different perspective to the table, they approach situations, including conflicts, differently than men. As they attain higher leadership positions, they are going to face more complex situations to which they are expected to respond in certain ways.

US6 felt, "I needed to be more qualified, more successful, and closer to the status quo than others interested or sitting in positions that I was more qualified for." While women feel they need to work harder, SA4 said, "Men just want to do sports. They want to do sports. They want to be out on the rugby field and with other teams." US4 said, "Limits are put on us. We have to break the glass ceiling. It has been a journey. Women must work smarter and try to prove their worth at all times. It's exhausting." According to these women, people often do not have confidence in female teachers taking managerial roles. US1 said, "We talk about these great leaders, because they are firm or passionate. Men are passionate about their work. Women are emotional." US1 said, "I don't think anyone though I was a wilting wallflower would ever describe me as a wilting wallflower…. There are women who will turn on the tears to make a male authority figure go easier on them. I'll let you cry and hand you a tissue, but if there's a reprimand coming, it's coming." Since the dynamics do not work the same, some people do not want to work for women. As a woman, people have to see that you are tough enough to do the job. SA2 said, "We've got to learn to stand our ground." According to US2, women have to

constantly fight against societal influence. The more women are effective in those roles, the more they cultivate the land for the next group of women.

Serving as Role Models

Being an educational leader is a difficult job. Nevertheless, the women I interviewed want to be seen as role models, coaches, and friends. [US1]told me, "If you want this job one day, you need to know what it's like." US1 described it as follows: "It's hard. It's awful. You have to take a breath. There is somebody like little alligators nipping at you all day. It's like you're trying to keep the duck that's gliding across the water smoothly but paddling furiously beneath the surface." Her example emphasized a point made by others that it is important to always present a calm appearance, which is one of the many expectations that is different for women.

US1 thinks that serving as a role model is how she can best support and help other women educational leaders. She hopes everyone looks at what she did and her interactions as examples. She hopes they believe she acted in an ethical manner and in the best interests of the students she served and the staff who made the magic happen. US1 recounted a time in which her principal asked her to mentor me. I was in my first year of teaching agricultural education then, but I had a great deal to learn about classroom management from a math teacher. She said,

> He [the principal] was a really big encourager of all of us, and you too…. I
> remember when you came, and you were a young teacher. He came to me and
> said, 'Will you let Cindy come and observe your class and let her look at
> classroom management styles?' That's something that people talk about now.
> Getting people in other teachers' classrooms. I don't think anyone was telling him
> to do that. He just knew. That was a good way to, you know, build relationships

between the two of us or have a veteran teacher help someone who is just starting out how to see certain things in practice.

US1 also thinks that being authentic and talking directly instead of putting on a facade of perfection is important. She tried to be very professional and compassionate, but there were times when she walked into her office, closed the door, and burst into tears because she had to do something she hated. US1 never wanted anyone to see her cry or react emotionally. She said, "Although I am not much of a crier, there were things that were emotionally draining and absolutely frustrating. If a man gets up, if a male superintendent cries in a discussion, people find that endearing. If a woman cries, she's weak." Therefore, she said, "It is important for a woman to fake it until she makes it." She wanted to make sure I knew exactly what she was saying, so she clarified as follows: "I think there was maybe a little more comfort with fake it until you make it in some ways. It's very important too that you do speak with the voice of authority, but when you're having to own that, it doesn't matter how well you thought you were ready to do it." She told me, "If you move into a principalship, you can call me later and say, 'I just experienced what you were telling me. I thought I was ready. Then, I woke up this morning and thought, 'Oh my gosh, what've I done'." Faking it until you make it, she said, is not really to fool other people; it gave her the confidence and courage to go into a room and do what needed to be done.

Since retiring in 2010, US2 has been recruited to do several things to help aspiring educational leaders. She explained,

> I'm leading a principal leadership program. It was one of the leadership academies
> that was funded through Rise to the Top. You remember all that money that came
> through, and it was all about preparing principals. So, it was a year-long, full-time
> internship in executive coaching. It was really full time. It was an alternative

licensure program, so you didn't have to go through a university to get licensure.

We were able to license through the academy. It's a whole new concept, and I'm

still doing that work. Currently, I'm an executive coach for PEERS, which is a

principal executive program. It is a full-time internship that prepares principals in

a new and better way with coaching and full-time, year-long internship. With a

mentor principal learning at the elbow kind of thing. So I'm doing that now. I'm

teaching some at the university. I've been doing that for about four years in the

EDS program and supervising the EDS internship, which is year long. What else

am I doing? I have my own LLC, and so, one of the things that I'm doing right

now in that aspect is facilitating a principal and assistant principal academy with a

lens of equity and cultural response of leadership…. So, really, I'm working with

leadership and principal development in a lot of different ways. I'm working with

schools and districts and doing a lot of coaching. Most of what I do now is coach

and help people grow to get to the next level to meet their goals, like what I'm

talking about here with you. I now get to do the fun part of what I've always done,

but I don't have to do the parts that aren't fun anymore. I get to just do the fun part

and help other people.

US3 wants to be a phone friend. She said, "Whenever someone is having an issue, they

know that I'm not going to share it with anyone else." She felt, "Building credibility in

relationships allows people to blow off steam. People do not need your opinion; they just need an

outlet to be able to say how they feel without feeling like it is going to cost them."

US5 wants to create a connection by bringing women who are currently in high-accountability roles together. She wants women to give back to other women and try to break the glass ceiling from both sides, going up and down.

US9 and US11 both identified trying to be true to themselves and helping other women see that it is okay to be their authentic selves. They want to help people be able to feel good about themselves right where they are and strive for even more, which includes saying the right things and conducting themselves in the right way. They acknowledged that they have made mistakes and have shortcomings and weaknesses, and, they said, they want other women to know it is okay to make mistakes, own up to those mistakes, and admit what they do not know. US9 and US11 say, "The most important thing is doing the very best you can with what you have and are given." They believe that women educational leaders should put their heart into what they are doing and show love and compassion toward others. They feel it is important to show you are genuine.

US10 and SA2 both feel it is their duty to build leadership within their schools. It is their job to identify potential leaders and push those individuals to believe in themselves. They feel it is their job to help support potential leaders.

Closing Comments from the Participants

My participants really appreciate what administrators are doing for kids right now. They said they hoped and prayed that the situation would improve soon, because kids are missing out on a lot. They encourage other women to learn all they can and develop relationships throughout their careers, because education is a small world. US2 said, "You're going to run into people again, and you don't want to burn those bridges." Women need to call upon one another. Women should give back to other women and make sure there is a diversity of perspective during

decision-making processes. All of the participants believe that women should help and encourage other women rather than hurting them.

Summary of a Global Issue

While sorting through the many swatches of stories provided by the participants so that I could arrange the pieces to be sewn into a beautiful design, I discovered they had many more similarities than differences. The participants from both the United States and South Africa said that being a woman was the most challenging aspect of being an educational leader. They felt they had to work harder, longer, and smarter to obtain a leadership position than their male counterparts. They also all felt that they were always being judged for their appearances and actions. Some were married, and some were not. However, all relied on family, friends, and colleagues as their support systems. In order to maintain balance, some booked and looked forward to trips; others ran, took walks, and exercised. At some point in their careers, each participant faced some type of gender bias, discrimination, and social/emotional/physical difficulties. None of the women wanted to appear weak in any way. All of them longed to be a part of a group of women who supported each other. US4 said, "Working smarter and trying to prove your worth at times has been exhausting." The job is often lonely for them. All of them have hope for a brighter future in which women help one another gain leadership roles. As SA4 stated, "Gender bias is a society issue that education needs to address."

While race was not specifically identified as a barrier by any participant, I did notice that in their stories, Black women tended to start at lower paid and lower entry level jobs and remained there for longer periods of time. This may suggest that race is still an issue in both cultures. All participants were reluctant to identify race or gender as a hindrance to their

progress, because they fear retribution. However, the data I collected and analyzed strongly

suggest that both of these factors play a role in the attainment of leadership positions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the perspectives and experiences of successful women educational leaders in the Southern United States and South Africa by addressing the following questions:

1. What are the overarching issues of gender equity shared by women educational leaders?

2. How do women intentionally design and adapt their trajectories to the principalship in response to their context?

3. How do the lived stories of successful women leaders compare across contexts?

This chapter concludes this study by reflecting on the answers to the above questions, exploring the implications of those answers, and identifying directions for future research. This study utilized a quilting metaphor to reveal insights concerning the hurdles that many women must clear as they work toward assuming leadership roles in education. By employing narrative inquiry in an international approach, this study offered a comparison of two distinct contexts—the Southern United States and South Africa—that share surprising connections regarding their histories, struggles for social justice, and patterns for how women rise from the classroom to their educational leadership roles.

Overarching Issues of Gender Equity Shared by Women Educational Leaders

Being a Woman

Many of the participants stated that being a woman was their greatest challenge in becoming an educational leader. Leadership is very context specific and is often viewed as "man's work" (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017, p. 81). Therefore, gender impacts women's access to and entry into leadership positions. Women continue to face discrimination and lack of

administrative preparation on the basis of gender. Gender stereotypes and discriminatory hiring practices hinder women from being promoted to leadership positions (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Some of the participants in my study were told that men were better suited for leadership positions than they were; therefore, they were passed over and had to wait longer to get an educational leadership role.

One would assume that since women dominate the teaching profession, there would be more women educational leaders. However, that is not the case. Men tend to gain and hold educational leadership positions at a much higher rate than women (George & Tolan, 2022). In addition, it is even more challenging for Black women to get leadership positions. US2 and US3 reported having to wait on a woman's job. SA3 was already doing the job of department head, but the formal position was given to a man. Because of gender imbalance within the system, SA6 had a difficult time getting a department post. Moreover, women in school leadership positions must negotiate for appropriate salaries. Even though salaries are public record, men continue to be offered and paid more money than women in the same positions. Women must work harder and smarter to determine their own career development path. It is lonely at the top, and women constantly struggle to fit in, be accepted, and maintain work-life balance. US4 stated, "Limits are put on us. We have to break the glass ceiling. It has been a journey. Women must work smarter and try to prove their worth at all times." The culture of associating educational leadership with male figures continues to persist and perpetuates the social perception that men are superior to women (Mthethwa, et.al., 2019). Therefore, the successes of women should be celebrated, and women need to support and serve as role models for other women who desire to rise in educational leadership (George & Tolan, 2022).

Lack of Confidence

Another challenge women face in gaining educational leadership roles is that they lack confidence. They grow into women who create their own barriers and hold themselves back by lacking self-confidence, lowering their expectations, continuing to do the majority of the housework and child care, and compromising their career goals for spouses and children who may or may not exist (Sandberg, 2013). Women are less likely to apply for jobs and perform more poorly during job interviews (Criado Perez, 2019). Furthermore, while women dominate entry-level positions in the workforce, leadership positions continue to be held overwhelmingly by men (Sandberg, 2013). Meanwhile, working women are often termed "bossy" or "aggressive" while male counterparts are viewed as "assertive" and "taking charge" for many of the same behaviors.

Women leaders struggle to balance their careers and personal lives. Even though the fears of not being liked, making wrong decisions, creating negative attention, overreaching, and failure hinder many women from seeking leadership positions, working women have greater financial security, more stable marriages, better health, and greater overall life satisfaction than women who do not work (Sandberg, 2013). Nevertheless, "[o]ur culture remains baffled: *I don't know how she does it*" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 24). Women educational leaders are no exception, and most just do the very best they can with what they have (Sandberg, 2013).

The participants cited lack of confidence or lack of certainty about the jobs for which they should apply. Some participants questioned whether they were doing the right thing at the right time. Others were not given the opportunity to get the experience they needed to climb the leadership ladder. Patriarchal social systems, the devaluation of women, and gender stereotypes hinder women from obtaining leadership positions and cause women to experience the glass ceiling effect (Williams, 1991). Gender stereotypes have enormous power, distort people and

reality, and can destroy a person's individuality (Galliano, 2003). The participants said they finally had to tell themselves that they were capable and could do the job all by themselves. US5 said, "I did not have the confidence to do the job or feeling like I was ready." US7 stated, "I was my greatest challenge… I knew I was capable and had the abilities, but I just did not give myself credit for what I knew and was capable of doing."

Work-Life Balance

Because of gender stereotypes, women face difficulties balancing their work and home lives (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Women, tasked with bearing and rearing children, were traditionally considered less intelligent than men and educated solely for motherhood, social work, home economics, elementary school teaching, and other nurturing roles (Galliano, 2003). Therefore, a gendered expectation that women must continue to maintain their homes and care for their children while working outside the home exists, often forcing women to choose between having children and their careers (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Over and over again, the participants said they failed miserably at work-life balance. US3 expressed, "I wanted to prove that I could do my job as well as a man. I had no work-life balance and often worked to the detriment of my health." Like US3, SA1 said, "It is honestly just my nature to work hard and try to fix things. That is how I was brought up." She, too, worked to the detriment of her health. US8 said, "School is my life." The participants listed time, trust, delegating, prioritizing, making lists, and friendships as things that helped them overcome the challenges of the work-life balancing act. Since there is always work that needs to be addressed and never enough time, the participants indicated that leaders need to learn to prioritize and decide what gets done when and why, set expectations, and really believe in the people they work with. Because women are perfectionists, they tend to struggle the most with finding balance between work and home.

Discrimination Faced as a Woman Educational Leader

Throughout the world, women are better off than ever before because of the women who marched and fought for the rights many of us now take for granted. Nevertheless, in some countries, women are still denied basic civil rights, receive little or no education, and are considered to be the property of their husbands, who can legally rape them and cast them out of their own homes (Sandberg, 2013). As Sandberg (2013) emphasizes, "Men still rule the world" (p. 5). Ultimately, according to Caroline Criado Perez (2019), "The lives of men have been taken to represent humans overall. Because when we say human, … we mean man" (pp. XI-XII). Although many accept it, it is the social perception of the role of women that relegates women to low positions, not the women themselves. Girls continue to outperform boys in the classroom, but girls are discouraged from taking risks and advocating for themselves.

The attitudes and beliefs of sexism undermine women principals, thus negatively affecting teaching programs and hindering learning and school performance. Because of these attitudes, women principals often find themselves targets of difficult situations (Sethodi, 2018). US2 conveyed, "It's really hard sometimes for people to accept leadership from a woman. It is mostly the older males, but, sometimes, it's been the women." US5 said, "I have been asked things that would have never been asked of male administrators." A gentleman told US7, "I want to see the real principal." US4 and US6 faced immense discrimination because of their gender and race. US4 said, "I had to get a tough skin. I can't tell you the times that I was cursed out and called certain names and then had to learn to smile and say, 'Well, whenever you decide that you can talk to me in an appropriate manner, then you can call me back. In the meantime, I want you to have a good day'." US4 attempted to make herself appear older, received public speaking training to improve her inflections and tone, and completed her doctoral degree at a young age to

secure credentials that would set her apart from her peers. US7 was also racially discriminated against and said, "Parents would come into my office and say terrible things." US11 claimed that men are afraid of her and mischaracterize her on a regular basis, because they believe she is too aggressive and forceful.

Emotional, Physical, and Social Difficulties Faced by Women Educational Leaders

Because of the gendered nature of society, culture, and family influences, women educational leaders experience a plethora of struggles. Despite cultural and societal barriers and being constantly compared to men, women educational leaders continue to be interactive, creative, empathetic, strong, cooperative, compassionate, and determined to change society's perception of school leadership (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). The participants have faced various emotional, physical, and social difficulties. The participants were often criticized for putting their jobs before their children, spouses, and other family members.. US1 let her health deteriorate because she did not want anybody to have the perception that she was too weak to do the job or the job was killing her. US3 reiterated that the stress of the job took a toll on her health. US3 was also reprimanded by her superiors for trying to bring joy to others by sending positive notes to assistant principals and principals. US4 said, "Women educational leaders sometimes find out the hard way who they can and cannot trust." She struggled with knowing where she fit in. The participants also struggled with shopping and attending church in the communities in which they lived and worked because people expected something of them even when they were not at work.

Working with Poverty-Stricken and/or Ill Children

Working with children living in poverty was another challenge the participants faced. Many of the students my participants serve come from low-income homes with unemployed parents. US10 stated, "It really does break your heart; we're limited on what we can do with

that." In South Africa, the participants also had the challenge of teaching children whose parents had died of HIV and AIDS. Since females are socialized to be more nurturing, caring, and kind (Galliano, 2003), it is difficult for the participants to see any student struggle because of hunger, disease, or lack of other resources.

Returning to Their Home School

Gender influences friendships and relationships (Galliano, 2003). Returning to their home school upon becoming an administrator changed the relationship dynamics that some participants had established as a teacher. US1 said, "I had to learn to navigate in a different way than if I had gone to a totally new location where people did not have any preconceived ideas about who I was or how I might lead." Luckily, the relationships US6 had established as a teacher helped her find success in her new role, even though the dynamics of those relationships were altered.

Women Intentionally Design and Adapt Their Trajectories to the Principalship

In the United States, an individual must complete a bachelor's degree in teaching, become certified, maintain licensure, and work as a classroom teacher for at least three years before applying to a principalship (Get Educated, 2020). The individual must then apply, be admitted, and complete a graduate program in school administration. If the individual already holds a masters degree in education or related field, they apply for a graduate certificate in school leadership. In both programs, individuals must complete coursework, an internship, and portfolio requirements (Howard, 2018). Once individuals complete the requirements, they will become certified as principals upon graduation, may apply for licensure, and will then be able to apply and interview for principal positions. Some individuals may wish to continue their education and pursue their doctoral degree (Get Educated, 2020). In South Africa, individuals must complete the minimum REQV14 qualification, which includes matriculation, a four-year

degree, seven years of teaching, and registration with the South African Council for Educators (Van Jaarsveld, 2020).

More so than their male counterparts, women educational leaders are more up-to-date in their academic preparation, attend professional development, stay abreast of current instructional developments, have undergraduate degrees in education, and hold doctoral degrees (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Women principals are more likely than their male colleagues to have longer classroom tenure, invest more time as assistant principals at all levels, work harder and longer, and are more willing to invest the time and energy learning and networking with others (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Most of the participants in this study took the path of teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Two of the participants began as itinerant or assistant teachers before becoming teachers. They had to work longer and harder to reach their goal of becoming an educational leader. SA4 did not want to become a teacher at all. US11 was an entrepreneur before starting her career in higher education. Many of the participants shared their love and passion for teaching and expressed that teaching was the foundation for their educational leadership. US3 exclaimed, "I loved it! I loved every minute of it"! This love of teaching gave the participants the courage and perseverance to choose teaching and go into leadership despite the barriers of gender and race inequities and safety.

Lived Stories of Successful Women Leaders Across Contexts

When I began this study, I thought I would find both similarities and differences in the lived stories of the successful women educational leaders in the United States and South Africa. However, I found these women were much more similar than they were different. The participants shared a passion for teaching and stated that being a woman was the most challenging aspect of being an educational leader. They worked harder, longer, and smarter to

116

obtain their leadership position than their male counterparts. Each participant faced some type of

gender bias, discrimination, and social/emotional/physical difficulties. They felt their

professionalism, appearance, and actions were always being scrutinized. Family, friends, and

colleagues provided the support they needed to persevere despite the challenges. The participants

failed to achieve work-life balance, and some worked to the detriment of their health. US8 said,

"School is my life." US1, US3, and SA1 continued working despite health issues, because they

did not want to be perceived as weak. However, hobbies, travel, and exercise helped some

maintain some type of balance. US1 met with a running group and ran a marathon to help her

maintain work-life balance. US4 and US5 set aside time to walk and exercise. Since the job is

often lonely, the participants wanted to serve as role models for other women and longed to

belong to a group of women who supported each other. US5 oversees an organization that gives

women educational leaders a place to connect, network, and grow professionally. Because of fear

of retribution, the participants were reluctant to identify race or gender as a hindrance to their

progress, but the data I collected and analyzed suggested both of these factors play a role in the

attainment of leadership positions. The participants do have hope for a brighter future for women

and believe that women should help and encourage one another.

Additional Findings

Current Climate and School Cultures

When I asked the participants to discuss the current culture and climate of their schools,

participants from both the United States and South Africa described their schools as challenging

and stressful with significant poverty. They all work or worked in schools that contain diverse

populations of students and struggle to address issues of equity and racism. Everyone noted that

school leaders are expected to be forward thinking, supportive, and collaborative change agents

117

with high expectations. The participants also talked about how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the role of schools extended beyond what people think of as education. In addition to education, schools are now tasked with caring for the social and emotional well-being of students. The current job of schools requires that they ensure kids are fed and have the resources they need in order to succeed as a student.

Structure of Schools

According to the participants, because of priorities, culture impacts structure. US6 stated, "The culture of the district at this time is changing, for the better, because of the work we are currently doing around equity and accountability." US2 further stated, "It is important that society and schools emphasize equality and equity among gender and race. There has to be a cultural shift to break the barriers." For instance, without the right people on your team, the structure of school work is almost untenable. According to the participants, the principalship is a very powerful position in regards to the official wording and the positional authority prescribed to it. They described a high school principal as like none other, suggesting that the power of the principal is vast; the influence is unique. A principal must not only manage the school and the staff, but must also find the time to be visible in the classroom and clearly communicate with all stakeholders. Participants indicated that there are clear expectations for reporting and performance and stressed that everything that happens at the school starts with the principal and trickles down to the assistant principal, office staff, teachers, and other staff members.

Support Systems

Quality support systems are essential to the success and well-being of women educational leaders. Many stated that their family members served as their support system and were there to help raise children, prepare meals, and find housing. US1 stated, "I could have never become an

administrator without the support of my husband. He was never resentful of the fact that I was using money in the family budget to pay for classes." US4 said, "My family is my biggest support system." SA2 relies on her parents to transport her children to and from school and know where they are supposed to be at all times. Friends with a listening ear were also cited as one of the many support systems. Women educational leaders need good friends who can talk about something other than school, take their minds off their job, and provide a sense of normalcy. US5 said, "My peers and colleagues were my greatest supporters and served as my mentors. I can call on them any time." Principals and district leaders have encouraged my participants to further their education and go into administration. They have also provided important professional development and mentors to help participants realize their full leadership potential. Hobbies and travel plans also gave my participants something to look forward to. US7 said, "My principal was very supportive and encouraged me to go back to school to get my administrator certificate." SA3 had a really good department head who acted as her mentor. Women educational leaders need supportive coaches, mentors, and friends to guide and support them as they work to overcome contextual barriers (Setlhodi, 2018).

Serving as Role Models

While men are usually good at establishing relationships, women have a more difficult time networking with one another. Lack of mentoring is one factor that hinders women from attaining leadership positions (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Women tend to be jealous of one another. Role models, mentors, and a network of supporters are essential for women educational leaders to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). The participants stated that women need a support system of forward-thinking educational leaders. Women need a "girl tribe" to share ideas, perspectives, and dialogue with, because only women

understand the experiences other women have gone through. By interacting and collaborating with colleagues, women strive to overcome the cultural perceptions and views placed upon them (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). US1 believes, "Serving as a role model is how I can best support and help other women educational leaders… Being authentic and talking directly instead of putting on a facade of perfection is important." US10 and SA2 believe it this their job to build leadership within their school by identifying potential leaders and pushing those individuals to believe in themselves.

Establishing Relationships

The participants discussed the importance of building relationships. One said, "The first thing you should do is meet people; you get out there with the people and start building those relationships." It was recommended that educational leaders meet with their staff, get out in the neighborhoods and communities, visit the local businesses to establish partnerships, and attend local churches or civic organization meetings. As leaders, these women agreed, it was important for them to let the people know they valued them enough to give up their time. Educational leaders are the face of the school and the school district. They are hired to build relationships and establish business and community partners. To be an effective leader, women must nurture relationships with all school stakeholders and recognize that teaching and learning are the top priorities of the school (Spiro, 2015). According to US2, "Leadership is about relationships."

Conforming to Male Characteristics

Women educational leaders are held to a much higher standard than their male counterparts. At the same time, they must fit into perceived male characteristics by appearing strong, talking about sports, and not flinching at curse words. Men do all that is considered important and valuable, including ruling nations, conducting wars, controlling property and

wealth, creating new art, music, and literature, and inventing new knowledge. Boys are encouraged to be better, stronger, and more powerful. Women should be warm and expressive with the ability to relate to others and provide physical and emotional care (Galliano, 2003). When women leaders take on male characteristics, they are often described as being "bossy" or "bitchy". The participants cited that even though they must figure out how to fit into the male world, men are often easier to get along with and less jealous than other women. US3 stated, "Success comes from listening first and doing everything you can to understand where the other person is coming from, whether male or female." Since women are evaluated differently and held to a higher standard than their male counterparts, they feel they must always be better, do better, be stronger, and be more professional at all times.

Dressing Differently

Girls are conditioned to have a heightened awareness of physical appearance (Galliano, 2003). Probably because of this cultural expectation, the participants were aware of their physical appearance at all times. They felt making a good initial impression was of utmost importance and were concerned that people judged them from the moment they walked into a room. US3 said, "I didn't feel right if I didn't have on a pair of heels. That's not who I am, but I would have been more uncomfortable had I not been wearing heels." SA1 stated, "When I walk out on the corridor now, I have to look respectable." US4 was encouraged to wear lipstick and smell good at all times, because she was told people look at your mouth when you speak. She said, "Women always have to think about dressing, while men do not. Women even have to think about the shoes they wear."

Figure 2

A quilt square representing the elements the participants identified as informing their leadership practice.

The quilt petals are labeled: Dressing Differently, Returning to their Home School, Lack of Confidence, Persistence, Being a Woman of Color, Discrimination, Working with Poverty Stricken &/or Ill Children, Role Model, The Patterns of Women Leaders, Work/Life Balance, Love of Teaching, Support Systems, Encouragement from Others, Emotional, Physical, and Social Difficulties, Gender Bias, Inequalities, Being a Woman.

Implications

Worldwide, most teaching positions are occupied by women. However, the majority of the educational leadership positions are still held by men. Women, especially women of color, have to work harder and teach longer before even getting the chance to climb the leadership ladder. This is a societal issue that needs to be addressed and can only be addressed through education. Women need to know that they belong in educational leadership positions. Even

though leadership can be scary, uncomfortable, and unwelcoming to women, they must believe they belong in those positions. In order for this to happen, women need to advocate for their beliefs and for one another. Together, women can work toward identifying and removing the barriers that have prohibited them from holding educational leadership positions (George & Tolan, 2022).

Women matter. From an early age, we should let girls know that they matter and that they have something meaningful to contribute to society and can serve as change agents. Instead of putting limits on girls, we should teach them that the sky's the limit and that they can be whoever or whatever they want to be. Instead of being silenced, girls should be encouraged to speak up and have their voices heard. When given the confidence and opportunities, women can follow their occupational dreams and become valuable, insightful, and compassionate leaders. Women need to embrace the journey of their pathway to educational leadership and learn from and support one another.

Since the majority of the teachers around the world are women, university teacher training programs should develop and implement courses that meet the needs of female teachers and encourage their interest in and knowledge of educational administration. They should also have leadership programs specifically tailored to meet the needs and characteristics of women leaders. Furthermore, school systems should develop and implement professional development that centers the needs of the women who comprise the majority of their workforce.

The participants discussed the challenges of fitting into a man's world. Instead of women feeling like they have to not flinch at curse words, talk about sports, appear strong, and fit into the 'boys' club,' maybe these characteristics should go away and leaders should start to conform to the characteristics of female leadership. In addition, the participants greatly feared being

perceived as weak in any way. This past fall, a student at my school was shot and killed. It was a

terrible tragedy. When my male principal met with the faculty and staff to let them know what

had happened, he cried. I immediately thought that he needed to dry his tears and be strong, and I

knew that if I had been the one delivering the news to the staff, I would have been seen as weak

if I were to have cried. "Leaders are supposed to be solid, steadfast, and calm during a storm"

(George & Talon, 2022, p. 28). However, even good leaders can be passionate, happy, sad,

motivated, and fired up (George & Talon, 2022). Leaders are human and should be allowed to let

their guard down, show emotion, and connect with others. Life happens, and people, including

leaders, are taken more seriously when they are authentic and genuine. There are times in which

we all struggle, and it is okay to be transparent, let our personalities shine through, and show that

we are struggling too (George & Talon, 2022).

Because of jealousy and competitiveness, participants also claimed to have been more

supported by men than by other women. How do we determine why women in leadership

positions are more jealous than men? Do women leaders act more jealous than men leaders

toward potential female leaders because they view them as their competition, whereas men who

occupy leadership roles do so with the privilege of knowing that 95% of the time they'll always

be chosen over a woman, so they don't feel the same sense of competitiveness in relation to

them? How can that problem be solved so that the other, better characteristics that women bring

to the table can shine through? "It is time to start breaking through the walls, glass ceilings, and

gender roles that exist in education. Alone, this fight is difficult. Working against one another,

the task is practically impossible" (George & Talon, 2022, p. 57). We need to change our ideas

of what professionalism is and start incorporating the concerns, ideas, and opinions of others.

Furthermore, we need to change the way in which we view women's capacities and overcome

stereotypes. Women can do things, even difficult things. Sometimes, women just need to know they will be supported. US5 has worked hard to put together a cohort of women leaders who she hopes will help women educational leaders build networks. Each month, this cohort meets and discusses a topic related specifically to women's needs. The women in this cohort teach other women. More groups like this one need to be put into place. "Think about the possibilities if all women leaders in education supported other women" (George & Talon, 2022, p. 57). Like the participants in this study, women educational leaders can serve as mentors and role models for other women. The work of women at all levels of educational leadership should be celebrated. We can all support and encourage each other by building healthy and productive professional relationships. "Women need each other to increase diversity and raise female voices" (George & Talon, 2022, p. 73).

Future Recommendations for Research

While conducting this study, interviewing the participants, hearing their stories, analyzing the data, and piecing together the information, I truly felt I was a quilter stitching together patterns of valuable information in order to develop my own theory of the contextual, societal, and cultural barriers for women who aspire to the leadership roles taken for granted by their male counterparts. Each participant shared a wealth of knowledge and truly wants to see women educational leaders succeed. Throughout the process, I noted areas that require further research. The questions include the following: Why do women not support one another? Is it because they feel they are in competition with one another? If so, why? Another thing I found noteworthy about my participants was their marital status. Why is it easier for male educational leaders to marry and remain married than women in those same positions? It would also be interesting to bring these women together to discuss their similar experiences as a group.

Replicating this study with women from more diverse cultures, such as Russia, may also be a recommendation for future studies. While there are more similarities than contrasts with American and South African cultures, this would not be true with Russia or a more formal culture.

Several participants discussed how their faith provided a support network and helped them overcome the challenges of their jobs, while others avoided going to church to keep from having to talk about their jobs. It would be very interesting to see how many leaders attended church versus how many did not and discover why. A couple of participants stated that exercise helped them maintain their work/life balance. A study could be conducted or professional development could be provided to educators related to the benefits of exercise and how to effectively incorporate it into an already hectic lifestyle. Finally, it would be interesting to see how many of these women have won awards or scholarships over the course of their careers.

Final Thoughts

Despite the world's advancements toward gender equity, women who aspire to leadership roles in education face an unwelcoming, unjust challenge. In both the United States and South Africa, they experience social injustice. Women educational leaders from both countries share indistinguishable patterns and layouts in their progression from the classroom to educational leadership roles. Our narratives are sewn into the way we see and know our culture; thus, using narrative inquiry with a quilting metaphor for this study unveiled the hurdles women must overcome to become successful educational leaders. Through individual interviews, this study examined the overarching issues of gender equity experienced by women educational leaders, regardless of context. It compared the lived stories of successful women principals across two continents to uncover how women intentionally designed and adapted their trajectories to

126

leadership. This study embraced women as educational leaders, allowing the study participants to share their stories, expose the challenges they faced in their pursuit of principalships, and incite change in the male-dominated educational leadership environment. The patterns established in this study tell us there are still many pitfalls that women educational leaders face on a regular basis. By knowing what the established patterns are, we can begin to address these issues. This study has meant a great deal to me and taught me so much about myself, education, and leadership. I am honored to have met with and heard the stories of these remarkable women.

While interviewing these women, listening to their stories, analyzing the data, and stitching together the quilt pattern across cultures of information, I had the opportunity to interview for several principal positions. I did not get the jobs for which I interviewed. Like many of my participants, I was passed over for men with less education and less experience than me. I was even told by district personnel that I was needed to help the men look good and do the job they could not do. This situation made me angry and sad, but my participants gave me hope. They encouraged me and told me that my time would come if I continued working hard, caring for my staff and students, and, above all, being true to myself. I hope that one day my story will serve as an inspiration for others. After all, the leadership journey of women is like a roller coaster with highs, lows, twists, and turns. It is best when enjoyed and shared with others. The shared experiences and connections of women should be celebrated and used to improve ourselves, our schools, our society, and our world (George & Tolan, 2022).

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Participants will be contacted individually based on recommendations by Drs. Howard and Jacobs. Each participant is recognized as a successful woman principal. At the beginning of the interview, the study will be explained and the participant will be given the opportunity to discontinue participation at any time with no consequences. All interviews will be conducted virtually for a minimum of thirty minutes. Due to cultural expectations, each interview will begin with the appropriate amount of small talk and chatting. The interview protocol will be piloted with a friend in order to see how the questions are working and how long it takes. If the interview is 90 minutes or more in length, the questions will be asked over two interview sessions.

Role and Path to Becoming an Educational Leader

1. What is your current role?

2. How long have you been a principal?

3. What positions in education did you hold prior to becoming a principal?

4. How many years of experience in education did you have prior to becoming a principal?

5. What was your greatest challenge in becoming a principal?

6. Could you describe your pathway to becoming a principal?

Climate and Structure

7. Talk about the current climate and culture of your school system.

8. Describe the structure in which you work.

Relationships and Support Systems

9. When you began your pathway to becoming an educational leader, what support systems did you have?

10. Tell me about your relationships with male teachers.

    Tell me about your relationship with other principals, especially males.

    Describe your relationships with community members/organizations and business leaders.

11. When you began your career in education, how did you become acquainted with the school, the staff, and the community?

12. Please explain how you balance your work life with other areas of your life.

13. What are the most challenging aspects of this balancing act?

14. Do you have a support system outside of school or at home? Describe.

15. What types of support systems would help women educational leaders?

16. Explain how you serve as a role model for students and other women educational leaders.

Contextual Challenges

17. What types of discrimination have you faced as an educational leader?

18. Describe what it's like being a woman in this profession.

19. What have been some emotional difficulties you've encountered as a woman in this profession?

20. What have been some physical difficulties you've encountered?

21. What have been some social difficulties you've encountered?

Vita

Cindy Darlene Stewart was born and raised in Gastonia, North Carolina to Bobby Glenn Stewart and Linda McAbee Rhyne. Cindy graduated from North Gaston High School in 1995. After high school graduation, she attended North Carolina State University and earned Bachelor of Science Degrees in Animal Science and Agricultural and Extension Education. On July 1, 2000, Cindy began her career as an agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor at East Rutherford High School. In 2003, she earned her Masters of Agricultural Education from North Carolina State Universtiy. She attended the University of North Carolina at Charlotte where she received a Master of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language in 2007 and a Post Masters Certificate in School Administration in 2012. On August 14, 2014, Cindy became assistant principal of South Point High School. She earned an Education Specialist degree from Appalachain State University in 2016. In 2018, she was placed as an assistant principal at North Gaston High School where she served for three years.This Spring, Cindy will graduate from Appalachian State University with the Educational Doctorate and a Graduate Certificate in International Leadership. She is National Board Certified in Career and Technical Education/Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood and currently serves as an assistant principal at Hunter Huss High School.