A case study of one Iowa female elementary school principal's journey into administration

Angela J. Fowler

University of Northern Iowa

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A CASE STUDY OF ONE IOWA FEMALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S JOURNEY INTO ADMINISTRATION

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Greg Reed, Committee Chair

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Dean of the Graduate College

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December 2012
ABSTRACT

The representation of women in educational administration fluctuated throughout history from the 1900's to present day. Presently, women represent over 53% of all elementary school principals in Iowa, but documentation of their specific stories and perspectives is infrequent. I conducted this research with the intent to build upon the qualitative research studies previously completed on educational leadership, specifically to include an ethnographic account of one female's story in a urban school district.

Through a series of in-depth interviews and participant observations, I gained the perspective of one female elementary school principal in Iowa's experiences into and through the principalship. In addition to the principal, other secondary participants I interviewed assisted in providing the clearest account of her story.

For this qualitative study, semi-structured interview questions emerged, based on four research questions.

1. What are the experiences of one female elementary school principal in Iowa?
2. How does one female elementary school principal in Iowa describe her leadership style and its effectiveness?
3. How do the barriers experienced by one female elementary school principal impact her career path into and in an Iowa elementary school principalship?
4. How does one female elementary school principal in Iowa balance her personal and professional responsibilities and obligations?

The design of the semi-structured research questions prompted deeper conversations related to the leadership style and experiences. The on-going analysis of
data gathered during those conversations led to follow up questions, and additional observations in some cases. The same was true of participant observations, with ongoing analysis of field notes serving as a guide for future observations and conversations. I chose to present the research findings and discussion in a narrative structure, based on the type of data I collected with field notes, transcripts etc. It is my belief that the richness of her experiences and our conversations could best be shared through a narrative, almost storytelling, writing style.

This study provided a detailed account of one female elementary school principal’s journey into and through administration. The quality of conversations, from multiple perspectives, contributed to the rich, descriptive nature of this work. Furthermore, the research offered implication for other young women pursuing administration. The study described the sacrifices she made as a young mother and principal. Finally, the study described the leadership style of one woman elementary school principal, as a combination of agentic and communal traits. This blending of traits challenges the belief that leaders, specifically women, typically lead using communal traits.
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Approved:

Dr. Greg A. Reed, Chair

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Angela J. Fowler
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December 2012
DEDICATION

From the very beginning of this journey, my son Camden wanted to be involved, even going as far as adding his name to my original proposal signatures! On many occasions, he pulled up a seat next to me at the table to color, while I worked on the next round of edits. Then the day before my dissertation defense, he threw a penny into a wishing well, and whispered, “I wish my Mommy was done with her dissertation.” His wish came true the next morning, when his Mommy became, “Dr. Mommy.” Unknowingly, his smile, laugh, and curiosity throughout this doctoral process have motivated me, to be the best role model I can.

Thank you to my parents, Tim and Joyce, who instilled in me the values of family and hard work. For my dad, who listened to me processing my newest chapter section, with a smile on his face, even when the words I used didn’t sound quite right yet. The pride you showed made me feel that no obstacle could stand in my way of finishing this degree. For my mom, the one person that truly understood what it meant for me to finish this degree. Without your inspiration, there may not have been two Dr. Fowlers.

Brad, the “Dreamer”, your zest for life, encouraged me to persevere with this journey, because it was my dream. The “Goals” page that you and I wrote hung on my lamp for the last two years, reminding me every morning, I would never give up. Even though you aren’t close by, that plan was the visual that your support was always there.

Finally, to my grandparents, who have been a quiet support in my life for as long as I remember. Thank you for showing me what hard work can do.
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I would like to express my gratitude for all of the guidance and feedback each of my committee members provided throughout this learning experience. I have grown personally and professionally through the past several years. Special thanks to my chair, Dr. Greg Reed, who provided continual encouragement, support and always believed in me. For my writing guide, Dr. Robert Boody, the dedication you showed to supporting my scholarly writing journey, far surpassed my expectations of a committee member. Thank you to Dr. Nick Pace, for your willingness to step into a “chair” role on my committee when Dr. Reed experienced health issues. Dr. Victoria DeFrancisco and Dr. Dewitt Jones, thank you for your willingness to join my committee and provide insights that enhanced the research.

At the beginning of my journey, during our initial meetings I often wondered how far my mind could be stretched, my ideas challenged, and thinking deepened. Coming through at the end of this process I truly have changed how I think, write, approach and critique research because of the expectations you had of me, and those I had for myself.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Demographics for Female Educators</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Current Demographics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Women: What is it to be A Woman?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Examination of Barriers to Women in Leadership</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Barriers to Women</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Barriers to Women</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Barriers to Women Literature</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Theories: What is it to be A Leader?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Style: Are There Feminine and Masculine Styles?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Characteristics</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Leadership Theories Literature</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing Expectations: What is it to be A Woman Leader?</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Balancing Expectations Literature</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Literature Review</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Women: What is it to be A Woman?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Theories: What is it to be A Leader?</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Balancing Expectations: What is it to be A Woman Leader .................. 64

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 67
Purpose of the Study .................................................................. 67
Structure of the Study ................................................................. 69
Site and Participant Selection .................................................... 77
Site Description ........................................................................ 80
Participant Description ............................................................... 80
Data Collection and Analysis .................................................. 82
Limitations ................................................................................ 90

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH ............... 92
Significant Experiences: Many Roads, Many Choices .................. 94
A Snapshot: Growing Up Ann ..................................................... 94
Impacts of Early Experiences ......................................................... 96
A Snapshot: Nudging Ann Along ................................................ 100
Impact of Early Mentors on Ann’s Career .................................. 101
A Snapshot: New Colleagues and Friends .................................. 107
Impact of Colleagues and Friends on Ann’s Early Years .......... 110
Leadership Styles ....................................................................... 114
A Snapshot: It’s Not the Ann Show ............................................. 115
Impacts of Ann’s Collaborative and Supportive Style ................ 117
A Snapshot: I’m a Driver .............................................................. 122
Impact of Ann’s Drive and Work Ethic ....................................... 125
A Snapshot: Doing What’s Best for Kids .................................... 131
Impact of maintaining the focus on kids .................................. 133
Intersectionality: Impact on Ann’s Leadership Style...........................................140
What Kind of Leader is Ann?..............................................................................141
Leadership Barriers: Imposed or Self-Imposed?.............................................148
A Snapshot: So Who is in Charge Around Here?............................................148
Impact of Barriers on Ann’s Career.................................................................151
Finding Balance: Personal and Professional Lives.............................................175
A Snapshot: Ice Rink or Soccer Field: Finding Balance or Making Sacrifices...176
Ann’s Quest for Balance: Getting Better, but Still Not Great...........................177
Summary.............................................................................................................183
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.................................184
Personal and Professional Significance.............................................................186
Connections and Contradictions to Previous Research.....................................188
Mentoring, Networks, and Isolation.................................................................188
Family and Child Rearing Responsibilities.......................................................191
Practical Recommendations for Principalship Programs..................................193
Further Study Recommendations......................................................................195
Summary.............................................................................................................196
REFERENCES.......................................................................................................198
APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT...........................................206
APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS..........208
APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED TEACHER/STAFF INTERVIEW
QUESTIONS..........................................................................................................210
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leadership Characteristics Sorted by Category</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Individual Participant Data Collection Types and Frequency</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

From my adolescence I remember when both my parents entered into the elementary principalship. My mother started her career as a classroom teacher and worked her way from classroom teacher to counselor, to elementary school facilitator, then to elementary principal.

However, the career path for my father was different. He began his career as an elementary physical education teacher and high school wrestling coach. As he progressed on his path he withdrew from coaching but remained a physical education teacher for several years before moving from assistant principal at the middle school level, to an elementary principal.

Living in a home with two elementary principals, one can imagine, provided highly educationally-driven dinner conversations. Both of my parents were highly effective in their respective positions, but their leadership style and relationships with staff were very different. I heard the discussions at the dinner table, but rarely was I privy to the day-to-day experiences, strengths or challenges for either of my parents. In fact my first experience watching either of my parents was during the last month of school, when I returned home from spring college courses for summer break.

After I graduated from college with an elementary education degree I began teaching. During the course of my first year I decided I wanted to continue on to pursue a Masters of Arts in Administration. At my very first teaching assignment in an elementary school, I worked with a younger female principal, who was in her first years.
Later I went to a second building, and worked with another female principal who was older and had more experience in the field of administration.

Their leadership styles and how they built relationships were completely different. The first principal was very soft spoken and approachable. My second principal was soft spoken as well, but she had an edge, and an air about her that made her at times difficult to approach. Today, as I reflect about walking past their offices each morning, seeing them laughing with a staff member, grimacing as they stared at a computer screen, or sipping on their bottled water or cup of tea, I wonder, what made these women tick? Why did they do what they did, and how did they feel about the job they did?

As I continued on in my career I met many more women certified to be administrators or who led buildings. I began to ask myself, “What were the experiences of these vastly different women? How did they decide to enter the principalship? And if they waited to become principals what barriers, external or internal, stood in their way?” All of my experiences shaped my interest in this study.

Current Demographics for Female Educators

As most elementary school staff lists would show, a predominance of staff are women. In 2007-2008, the Iowa Department of Education reported that 74% of full-time teachers were female. Based on the criteria for licensure in the State of Iowa, an administrator must have three years of teaching experience. With these statistics, approximately three-fourths of the potential administrative candidate pool would be comprised of women. From this thinking we may expect the percentage of females
serving as elementary principals would be similar to the percentage of female teachers. However, this is not the case.

In fact, these most recent statistics may leave us wondering why there is such a drastic difference between the 74% of women who serve as teachers, compared to the 37% of women who ascended the career ladder into administration. The percentage of female administrators in Iowa has increased in the past decade, by approximately 10%, from 27.1% in 1997-1998, to 37% in 2007-2008. During that 2007-2008 time period, 7.3% of female principals were minority, and the average age was 48. In 2011 40% of administrators in Iowa were women, 2.8% were minority, and 47 was the average age. (Iowa Department of Education, 2011). Because these statistics do not differentiate between elementary and secondary it does not give a clear picture of either level but distorts both. Women are still in the minority when it comes to serving as public school principals, especially women of color who comprise less than 3% of the female administrators in Iowa. Further disaggregation of the data is necessary to show the true reality of elementary and secondary female principals.

In 2005-2006, the Status of Iowa Women report showed that 49.5% of all public elementary school principals were female. Current statistics on female elementary school principals in Iowa were not easily accessible: in fact, I was only able to obtain these statistics by manually going through the 2010-2011 Educational Directory. Women are serving in 360 of the 676 (53%) elementary school positions in the state of Iowa.

How does Iowa’s percentages compare to the rest of our country? Nationally, the percentage of female elementary school principals has risen from 51% in 1999 to 58% in
2007 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Based on the growth trend in past years, we would expect to see the current percentage of female elementary school principals to be close to 60%; leaving Iowa 7% behind the nation. During the course of my writing, the current 2010-2011 percentages for female elementary school principals from the National Center for Educational Statistics were not available.

Possible Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Current Demographics

Even though over half of all elementary school principals are female, some may wonder why there is not more similarity in the percentage of female administrators, compared to the percentage of female teachers. One consideration may be how society constructs images of women in their role as women and as leaders. These social constructions can become an enormous obstacle. Evidence of gender stereotypes often surface when men or women do not act in accordance with the socially accepted gender roles, for their sex. Sadly, these same gender stereotypes also exist as men and women continue to act in a way that is gender consistent. Gender is a term used to describe a person’s social identity. Gender roles are the socially constructed behaviors, feelings, ways to dress, etc., based on sex. Sex is a term used to describe a person’s biological identity; anatomical, chromosomal characteristics that make them male or female (Cook & Walker, 1998). One stereotype often associated with feminine behavior is to be nurturing and non-confrontational. While the opposing masculine behavior is to be authoritative or assertive. To change these stereotypes would require society to reestablish and construct new ideas of what it is to be a woman and a leader (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rhode, 2003; Rosener, 1990).
The display of gender stereotypes has shifted over the past hundred years as well. Through the 1900-1930's, gender discrimination was prevalent, and more easily identified than it is today, as many of the acts of discrimination were blatant, for example the stringent regulations that forced women to resign their teaching positions once they were married, or exclusionary organizations that allowed only male membership (Shakeshaft, 1987). Many, if not all of the early barriers to women pursuing leadership stemmed from governmental and educational bureaucracies that perpetuated socially constructed gender roles. However, the examination of barriers for women today, especially those of color, would suggest discriminatory acts are more covert.

Statement of the Problem

Although researchers have written many scholarly works on educational administration, most are about male principals or generalize the administrative experience for women, as data is not disaggregated to indicate gender specifically (Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1987). Even though over half of all elementary school principals, both nationally, and in Iowa, are women there is no substantial body of literature detailing their work, their challenges and strengths, or their path.

There are many ways to study a woman's leadership perspective. For example, in 1996, Robinson carried out a case study which detailed the day to day life and experiences as well as leadership style of one female secondary principal in Iowa. Because Robinson's work is just one ethnographic study, there is still a void in the research about women in educational leadership, which my research will help to fill. Additionally, the experiences of a secondary school women principal are different that
the experiences of a women principal serving in an elementary school. A study by Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000) took a broader look at mentoring theory as it relates to females in school leadership. In their study participants worked most specifically at the central administration level, though a few were elementary or secondary administrators. Gardiner et al.’s ethnographic work provided perspectives of 51 women, including white women and women of color, and four men, through interviews based on their experiences in a mentoring relationship. This particular study targeted one of the barriers to women in leadership, the lack of mentoring. Fennell (2008b) conducted a life history account of a woman principal; however, she never stated if she was a secondary or elementary school principal. As stated above, there is still a need to provide a clearer picture of the experiences of female elementary school principals. My research will provide an additional perspective that shows the elementary school leadership experience from one feminine voice.

While qualitative research does exist in educational leadership, there have been only a few ethnographic inquires that include the individual perspectives of educational leaders even fewer that share that perspective of a woman. The first of these ethnographic inquiries was Wolcott’s (1973), *The Man in the Principal’s Office*, which provides an account of a male’s leadership experiences. Though the experiences for men in administration have no doubt changed since 1973, one woman’s perspective will be the focus of this research. In 1996, *Passages: A Case Study of an Iowa Female Secondary Principal*, Robinson (1996) illustrated one woman’s leadership experience at the secondary level. With the addition of Robinson’s (1996) work there are still very limited
ethnographic works that discuss the individual women’s journey into and through administration. More recently, Pleming’s (2007) research served as the first ethnographic inquiry I located that provides one woman’s leadership experience at the elementary level.

The limited body of literature on this topic would suggest that the lack of representation of female leadership experiences through formal research is a problem. In Iowa, 53% of elementary school principals are female; however, the perspectives of these women are not accounted for. To date, there are no ethnographic inquiries which give voice to female elementary school principals in Iowa. Based on the lack of ethnographic inquiries to date, additional research studies would help to consistently describe the experiences of a majority of those who work in the field of elementary school principal. Many of the statistics provided at the state level in Iowa lead us to generalize for all female administrators, by stating that 37% of administrators are female. However of that 37% over half serve in elementary schools.

It is critical to continue building on the research base, by differentiating the leadership experiences to include perspectives of both men and women, as well as provided research that delineates the realms in which they serve, elementary or secondary. The intent of this research is to add to the body of literature related to women in school leadership, specifically a female elementary school administrator. The dynamics of secondary schools are different than in an elementary school. The elementary school principal often works with fewer staff and younger students than at the same district elementary schools. This research may also serve to provide a woman’s
perspective from an urban school system. Other researchers could conduct a follow up study to consider what effects urban and rural settings play on the experiences of female elementary school principals. While the data collected from this research cannot be generalized for all female elementary school principals, it will be possible to see transference to other research that may be conducted in similar demographics in the future.

For this research I will be using the work of both Robinson (1996) and Pleming (2007) as models. Both of these studies gathered the stories of one female administrator, including, but not limited to, her career path, leadership style, barriers to leadership, and experiences juggling professional and personal responsibilities. Like Robinson (1996) and Pleming (2007) my research will be an ethnographic study, that examines similar topics. Also like these two works, my research will be a deeply qualitative case study that balances participant observation with semi-structured interviews to develop a picture of one female elementary school principal’s journey into, and during, her career as an administrator. However, unlike Robinson (1996) who studied a woman secondary school principal in Iowa, my research will look at the specific perspective of a woman elementary school principal in Iowa.

**Purpose of the Study**

I will provide the reader with the stories of the journey into and through administration for one female elementary school principal in Iowa. Specifically, exploring the following research questions:
1. What are the experiences of one female elementary school principal in Iowa?

2. How does one female elementary school principal in Iowa describe her leadership style and its effectiveness?

3. How do the barriers experienced by one female elementary school principal impact her career path into and in the position of Iowa elementary school principalship?

4. How does one female elementary school principal in Iowa balance her personal and professional responsibilities and obligations?

Through this study I will seek to understand the experiences, barriers and leadership styles of one woman principals, from a leadership lens. This study will serve as an additional scholarly work in the area of educational leadership. As stated in the current demographics, over half of elementary school principals are women, though few deeply qualitative case studies exist to help scholars and practitioners to understand any of these women’s experiences. While the debates related to gender stereotypes and typical gendered leadership styles are part of the literature, the purpose of this study is to look at women’s principalship experiences from a leadership lens. Though this leadership focus, the research will provide insights for aspiring female principals, current elementary principals, as well as leadership preparation programs.
Significance of the Study

The implications of having limited works that provide a female voice to describe educational administration are that we continue to assimilate the experiences of men and women as though their experiences in the same field are identical. Shakeshaft (1995) argues the rationale for including other perspectives in research.

Studying male behavior, and more particularly the behaviors of white males, is not in and of itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behaviors are assumed to be appropriate means for understanding all behavior. (p. 141)

By conducting various types of research, we better understand the experiences of different perspectives through lenses of rural or urban system, race, gender, experiences, or culture (Hill & Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987). However, to limit this study I will seek to understand at a deep level the day to day experiences, successes, and barriers for one female elementary school principal. Conducting a case study will provide this deeper understanding, through a series of in-depth observations and interviews.

This particular case will be studied because of the growing number of women in elementary school principalship that have no representation of their stories. Secondly, during the time of Robinson’s (1996) work the Glass Ceiling Commission had recently been formed, so the barriers faced by women administrators were finally being acknowledged publically. Additional contextual elements to consider are the difference between the principalship in rural communities versus urban communities in Iowa.

Previous case studies have including one woman in a rural setting, at the secondary level, as well as an elementary principal from the southeast region of the United States. Due to the unique contexts of each case study, a great deal can be learned about the experiences,
leadership styles and barriers for one woman. These differences also make it difficult to generalize for all women in educational leadership.

Both historic and 2010-2011 statistics on teaching and administration illustrate that women have served in over half of the elementary school principalships. In the state of Iowa, 53% of elementary school principals are female, yet a very limited body of research is available that tells an ethnographic account of their journey into principalship.

It is not the intent of this research to determine if there should be a closer correlation between the percentage of female principals and female teachers, but rather to describe one female elementary school principal’s journey. This research will provide an additional body of literature about one female elementary principal’s story regarding how perceived and actual barriers impacted her career path and leadership experiences.

Additionally, this research will provide insight into what it is for a woman to be an educational leader. The study may also shed light on how one woman balances her responsibilities of work and home. The in-depth nature of interviews and observation may also provide snapshots of how one female elementary principal perceives gender roles.

Furthermore, this study will describe one female elementary principals’ perception of her leadership style, including how she views her effectiveness as a leader. Chliwniak (1997) suggested if women have a different leadership style, we should validate that perspective in research.

Working from the assumptions that women have a different voice and therefore a different mode of leadership, we need to move forward to determine how this difference brings a new and positive value and can become incorporated and accepted in our current social and cultural systems. (p. 33-34)
Through her descriptions and participant observation, this research will give insight as to how the convergence of leadership and gender roles, impacts expectations for more gender neutral, or context specific leadership.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The content of this chapter evolved from three themes that were most evident in the literature. I have chosen to describe these themes using a single question to guide the discussion of the topic. These themes are: (a) barriers for women: what is it to be a woman?, (b) leadership theories: what is it to be a leader?, (c) balancing expectations of gender and leadership: what is it to be a woman leader?

Furthermore, this chapter will provide a broader picture of what is available and missing in current research related to the topic of women in leadership. Lastly, I will summarize the impact this reviewed literature had on forming the research questions addressed through this study.

Barriers to Women: What is it to be a Woman?

Barriers to women who wish to pursue leadership positions in education and in other settings have received much attention over many decades (for example, Blackmore & Kenway, 1993; Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987). This section contains a summary of the research and literature related to the internal and external barriers that face women as well as the historic contexts of these barriers. Additionally, in this section I will discuss the impact of these internal and external barriers. The internal barriers identified are:

1. Internalization of gender roles,

2. Family and child rearing responsibilities, and
3. Isolation.

Although these three barriers are discussed separately, it is important to pay attention to the relationship among them. The discussion at the end of this section will clarify the relationship between these three internal barriers.

External barriers are another set of challenges for women. These barriers include:

1. Lack of mentoring relationships,
2. Prevalence of male dominated networks, and
3. Gender stereotypes.

To understand "what it is to be a woman" this literature review begins by examining the historic contexts of both internal and external barriers.

Historic Examination of Barriers to Women in Leadership

To understand the role gender has played on educational administration in our country, we will start by looking at teaching, a first step on the career ladder for school principals. In the 1850's men served as teachers in most of our country's public schools.

Over time as the number of female public school teachers increased teaching became a more female dominated profession. Several factors contributed to the increase in female teachers, such as loftier criteria and certification, minimal pay compared to other jobs available, and labor shortages in the field. As more rigorous criteria and certification for teachers increased, many males opted to find other jobs. Teachers were required to have more certifications, but remained minimally paid when compared to jobs outside the field of education. The issue of increased teacher certification, while continuing to provide less than competitive wages was another draw for males to leave
the profession. Based on these two factors many men decided to leave the profession of teaching, creating a labor shortage in the field.

The ripple effects of these factors made it possible for females to make their way into the ranks of teacher (Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1987). As the country moved past the late 1800's there was a shift in the number of male and female teachers. Early statistics in 1905 indicated that females represented over 97% of all elementary school teachers. Throughout the entire twentieth century, the percentage of female elementary school teachers remained at high levels ranging between 83-98% (Shakeshaft, 1987). Society deemed the profession of teaching as a natural fit for women, who needed preparation for motherhood and marriage, while the role of the principal became a logical fit for men.

Leadership was a primary role for all teachers in the early years until schools became more structured organizations in the 1850's. "As schools were reorganized from one-room centers of teaching to cost-efficient models of business, it was no longer thought appropriate for teachers to carry out all duties" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 31). The factory model imposed on schools continued to fuel society's perceptions of women's roles in the workplace. In both business and education, males were seen as the managers, while women were able to work as subordinates, either on the production line in the factories, or as teachers in the classroom. Tyack and Hansot (1982) stated,

From the beginning of the graded urban school, the feminization of teaching had been closely linked with the bureaucratization of education. Male managers controlled their subordinates in part through the greater status and power accorded men in the larger society. Educational organizations thus reflected the inequitable social relationship of gender. (p. 181)
The privileges accorded to men in the education profession echoed the beliefs of society that men make the decisions, and women nurture the family. During the times of the one-room school house, when the responsibilities of the teacher meant, not only leadership, but caring for and teaching children, women served as perfectly acceptable candidates. When a hierarchical system placed the principal at the top of school organizations, the responsibilities of leadership and decision making for the school and students, suddenly became the work of men. As long as teaching was all encompassing of leadership roles, it was a job fit for women. When restructuring schools meant placing leadership in the hands of a manager, and teaching as the role of a subordinate, the message was clear, Women need not apply.

Shifting organizational structures in schools played a large part in the feminization of teaching, and masculinization of leadership. Though another factor placed most women at a disadvantage for leadership, many women faced perceptions that they were the ones who possessed the nurturing traits needed in both the home and in schools, which shut them out of leadership positions, and kept them in the classrooms, tending directly to children (Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Despite these obstacles, between 1900-1930 some women advanced into leadership positions. Tyack and Hansot (1982), referred to this time as the “Golden Age” because of the rapidly increasing number of women filling administrative positions. At the highest point, in 1905, 61.7% of all public elementary school principals were female, but this percentage then dropped to 55% in 1928 (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).
In her work, Shakeshaft (1987) determined four factors that allowed for the increase in female administrators (a) feminist movement, specifically after the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, when one of the resolutions was the equal participation in labor market, (b) organization of women teachers, (c) rights to vote, and (d) economic advantages. Shakeshaft (1987) reported that during the 1900-1930’s, women occupied 55% of elementary principalships, 25% of county superintendencies, 1.6% of district superintendencies and approximately 8% of secondary principalships (p. 34). While considered to be a step up the career ladder from classroom teaching, many viewed the county and state superintendencies to be less prestigious. These statistics indicate a message, though women were making headway into leadership, gender stereotypes still prevailed as men served in the highest level positions.

Strong support from suffragettes and teachers’ unions contributed to women winning in school elections in the early twentieth century. Though even with their appointment to school positions, such as state and county superintendencies, the inequities for women in educational administration still remained. The more powerful, prestigious, and high paying positions were not based on public election, but rather selection by school boards. Secondary principalships and district superintendencies remained largely male dominated fields (for example: Blount, 1998; Brunner, 2000a, 2000b; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Brunner & Kim, 2010; Brown & Garn, 2008; Shakeshaft, 1987; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). After the women’s suffrage movement, the consolidated efforts by feminist groups and teachers unions lost speed.
The issues from previous years, like access to administrative positions and attitudes about males’ superiority as leaders, contributed greatly to the assumptions about who should be leading America’s schools (Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1987). Contrasting the turn for the century, the period of time between the 1930’s and 1950’s saw a decrease in the number of women serving in administrative capacities. Shakeshaft (1987) identified what she believed to be the specific causes for the decreasing number of women in administration:

1. School boards unwilling to invest time and money into “short term commitments”;
2. Laws passed to ensure that women who taught could not be married;
3. Exclusionary practices by organizations that allowed only male membership;
4. Women’s group that supported the suffrage movement disbanded;
5. Equal pay laws;
6. Economic depression, school boards argued that men had families to support, while single women only supported themselves; and
7. Increased college education for men after World War II, with G.I. Bill

Shakeshaft discusses the stagnant growth in the representation of women in school administration; however she includes the positions of both principal and superintendent.

Women have seldom attained the most powerful and prestigious administrative positions in schools, and the gender structure of males as managers and females as workers has remained relatively stable for the past 100 years. Historical records, then, tells us that there never was a golden age for women administrators, only a promise unfulfilled. (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 51)
The women’s liberation movement in the 1960’s attempted to create equality for women, to debunk the patriarchal system in America (hooks, 2000). This movement was a collective effort by women across the nation that coupled with the civil rights movement, resulted in passing The Civil Rights Act of 1964 which provided many freedoms to minorities, including equal opportunity for employment. Unfortunately, regardless of this legislation, the number of women in leadership positions remained significantly lower than hoped by the advocates that helped to lead passage of legislation for Civil Rights. In fact, Tyack and Hansot (1982) noted that although women served in 62% of the elementary principalships in 1905, by 1972 less than 20% of elementary school principals were women.

In educational systems, equal opportunity legislation did little to promote the advancement of women into leadership positions; even into the 1990’s women made up over 70% of classroom teachers but less than 27% of school principals (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). This provides staggering evidence that many more barriers to leadership stood in the way than those of equal opportunity for employment. Inequitable employment may have surfaced as just a ripple effect of the other barriers holding back women who chose to advance in the workplace. With the public legislation having limited effect, it may be concluded that other less visible factors were perpetuating the discrimination of women. However, this view that representation of female principals should echo the number of female teachers, assumes that 70% of women in the educational setting actually have the desire to lead.
Regardless of the legislation related to equal employment other barriers continued to stand in the way of women's attainment of leadership positions. Both internal and external barriers related to gender posed a threat to the women who aspired to enter the ranks of leadership. Unfortunately, over time the barriers to women in leadership became more and more subtle, especially as such practices received greater public scrutiny. In the early 1990's these barriers to women in leadership gained public exposure. Upon passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, President George Bush appointed The Glass Ceiling Commission.

This commission was comprised of twenty-one members with the mandate to eliminate artificial barriers, increase opportunities and develop experiences to foster advancement of both women and minorities. The glass ceiling, a term to define barriers to women in leadership, was used to draw attention to the drastic inequities between men and women in all avenues of leadership, including wages, family-centered benefits, and appointment to positions at higher levels of businesses and educational institutes alike.

Since that time some authors have discussed the shattering of the glass ceiling; however, included in those works is the impression that while women have made tremendous gains, jagged pieces of that glass ceiling have remained, leaving equally challenging issues for women who have broken through (for example, Hill & Ragland, 1995; Rhode, 2003; Robinson, 2003). Robinson (2003) discussed some of these challenges in her work. She stated even though the glass ceiling shattered, potential external barriers could still be experienced by women in the form of (a) devaluation of females, (b) home & family responsibilities, (c) role models, mentors and networks, (d)
pervasive bias in patriarchal educational system, and (c) gender biased administrator preparation programs.

More recently, the metaphor of the glass ceiling has further developed, or even been replaced, by some authors. For example, Eagly and Carli (2007b) describes the barriers to women as a labyrinth.

As a contemporary symbol, it conveys the idea of a complex journey toward a goal worth striving for. Passage through a labyrinth is not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one’s progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead. (p. 64)

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) extend the glass ceiling metaphor to include the entire structure that is holding back women in administration.

It’s not the ceiling that’s holding women back; it’s the whole structure of the organization in which we work: the foundation, the beams, the walls, the very air. The barriers to advancement are not just above women, they are all around them. (p. 8)

The discourse surrounding barriers to women in leadership has changed as much as the barriers themselves. At one time, it was believed that a glass ceiling held women back from leadership experiences and that a systematic set of interventions would suffice in helping them break through. The research above indicates the barriers to women in leadership are more complex than once thought.

After the appointment of the Glass Ceiling Commission, the barriers to women shifted from blatant to more covert discrimination. Hill and Ragland (1995) identified these current barriers to women:

1. Male dominance of key leadership positions;
2. Lack of political savvy;
3. Lack of career positioning;
4. Lack of mentoring;
5. Lack of mobility; and
6. Internal barriers and bias against women.

Unlike the predominant externally imposed barriers from Shakeshaft’s (1987) work, Hill and Ragland’s barriers are much more subtle, seemingly invisible. This is not to say that women from earlier decades did not face barriers, such as these identified by Hill and Ragland.

One final consideration in terms of barriers for women is the co-dependent relationship between the internal and external barriers that is so intricately linked that the effects of one set of barriers perpetuates the negative effects of the other. In fact, at times it is difficult to distinguish internally imposed barriers which manifest through women’s perceptions of self, or externally through opportunities granted or denied to women. It may be possible that internal barriers perceived by some may be individual choices to stay in the teaching realm rather than deal with the political aspects of school administration.

Regardless of the source, or transparency of their intentions to discriminate, both external and internal barriers have been equally effective in keeping women from obtaining positions in leadership (Blount, 1998; Borisoff & Merrill, 1992; Brunner 2000a, 2000b; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Curry, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Today there appears to be a dichotomy between the publically spoken,
politically correct discourse regarding women as leaders, and the actual behaviors relative to how women in leadership positions are accepted and perceived.

**Internal Barriers to Women**

Barriers are defined as any obstacles that create either real or perceived limitations or boundaries. Internal barriers are those barriers that are created intrinsically, generally driven by the socialization of expected behaviors (Smulyan, 2000). When comparing internal to external barriers, internal barriers are those that may be categorized based on the ability to overcome them with individual change. Shakeshaft (1987) argued that internal barriers may be used as a way to place fault on the women.

Internal barriers are merely camouflage for deeper societal road-blocks to women’s advancement. By accepting as fact that inequities toward women occur because of some lack of ability or action by women, we are not forced to look elsewhere for explanations, neither are we pushed to question the concepts and frameworks that conclude that the victim is at fault. (p. 84)

This perspective can change the lens by which we view the internal barriers to women. Are the barriers labeled internal actually rooted in external barriers outside the reach of one woman’s ability to change?

In the following sections we will look specifically at three internal barriers to women, (1) internalization of gender roles, (2) family and child rearing responsibilities, and (3) isolation.

**Internalization of gender roles.** Gender roles, expectations for behavior based on one’s sex, have encompassed a multitude of internal barriers to women in their pursuit of leadership positions. While gender roles are social constructions, they in essence shape, intentionally or inadvertently, many women’s perceptions of themselves in all aspects of
life. In the case of education, business and in law fields the creation and continuation of these limiting roles have come at a high cost to women who work toward career advancements (for example, Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Eagly, 2007; Rhode, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1987; Smulyan, 2000; Tallerico, 2000; Tully, 2007; Villani, 1999). Over time, gender roles have become so internalized that actions and decisions stemming from them are often concealed or go unquestioned. Eagly, a distinguished social psychology researcher (2007) discussed the challenges of dealing with stereotypes.

For most of us most of the time, stereotypes operate under the surface, not bubbling up to conscious awareness. To limit their influence, people must recognize that their stereotypes have been activated and must desire to counteract their influence, conditions which are seldom present. (p. 85)

The tremendous pressures of gender roles trickle over into other internal barriers, such as isolation, and family responsibilities, all of which pose threats to women's success in leadership. All of these barriers stem from internal beliefs and values that have been modeled then carried out by both women and men through generations. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) stated,

Sad to say, gender, racial, and ethnic bias are alive and well in America. And sadly, adults model these biases for students—not so much by what adults teach in the classroom, but by how they behave and the norms and values they embody. (p. 30)

These values and norms become what it is to be a woman. At a very young age, students observe the gender roles that are accepted for women in society, which shape many of their behaviors as they enter the work place years down the road. Stepping outside of the gender roles that have been so clearly modeled and internalized may be difficult, if not a seemingly impossible, task.
Family and child rearing responsibilities. A glimpse back at the 1960’s feminist movement provides insights into another of the internal struggles that women face, family and child rearing responsibilities. It was a collective effort of women across our nation to equalize opportunities for men and women. The labor market began showing equalization by the feminization of particular fields, such as teaching, nursing and clerical positions (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Freedman, 2002; hooks, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Regardless of advances in accessibility into the labor market, many women continued to face internal pressures with family and child rearing responsibilities.

The feminization of teaching rested upon gender ideology: women were considered well suited to work with children in low-paid teaching positions, while men monopolized the offices of principals and school superintendents. Furthermore, school teachers in the United States once had to resign after marriage, reinforcing the idea that woman’s primary work remained in the home. (Freedman, 2002, p. 157)

This historical perspective blatantly displays how the barriers of family and child rearing responsibilities prevail. While this pressure to “be a woman” came heavily from external sources in early feminist history, it has now become so deeply entrenched that it becomes a larger part of the internal, subconscious beliefs that guide thoughts, decisions, and career choices. These responsibilities and pressures are a larger part of the internalized gender roles that many women have been socialized to behave in accordance with.

More recent studies have looked at the changes in household responsibilities in the past decade. Compiled from a time-use survey conducted from 2003 to 2007, statistics indicate 84% of men and 53% of women in one-child homes are employed full
time (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2010). In addition, this survey showed an increase of shared family responsibilities, and child rearing between men and women.

Conversely, the amount of time spent by women compared to men in these responsibilities still was skewed. According to these data women still performed nearly twice as many hours of household work as men, and spent twice as many hours caring for household members (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2010, 2011). While all data was not disaggregated into full time working mother and full time working father, there were still trends that indicated up to 30% more time was spent by women doing household responsibilities or childcare.

An additional work, *Through the Labyrinth*, Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2007a) discussed time diaries that were completed by a representative sample of Americans. The results of those time diaries were similar to the results from the survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Similarities were evident in regard to child care with an increase in the time men spent doing child care tasks, such as bathing, and as indicated above the data continued to indicate that women spend more time doing these tasks. In her book *Through the Labyrinth*, Eagly and Carli (2007a) wrote,

> Time diary studies confirm men’s increasing involvement in childrearing...despite these substantial changes married women still do 2.1 hours of childcare for every hour contributed by married men. Even women world leaders at the top of their professions in government and business perform more childcare than their male counterparts. (p. 51)

These time diary studies, in Eagly and Carli’s book do not focus on comparing paid work versus unpaid work, but rather focus on time spent doing unpaid child care tasks. However, in her report, Krantz-Kent (2009) stated,
Traditional gender roles prevailed in 2003–07—women spent more hours per week doing unpaid household work than did men; however, men spent more time doing paid work than did women. Overall, the total time that men and women aged 15 and older spent doing either paid work or unpaid household work was about the same. (p. 14)

In these terms the division of work appears even, with both members of the household performing either paid or unpaid work. But women tend to sacrifice time that could be spent doing work in their career to assure that the work at home is getting done (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000; Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Rhode, 2003).

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2008) also conducted a survey of married parents. This study compared full time working mothers with full time working fathers in time spent with children, leisure time, and in travel time related to children. An average of 71% of full time working mothers spent time daily caring for children under the age of eighteen, compared to 54% of full time working fathers. The percentage of full time mothers who spent time daily with child related travel was slightly less than double for full time fathers, 40% compared to 23%.

This study by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2008) also looked at the time spent on leisure activities. Full time working mothers on average spent about three hours on leisure activities, while full time working fathers on average spent about four hours. This study also reported that full time working fathers spent approximately one hour more time at work on average than did full time working mothers. These findings were similar to the study analyzed by Krantz-Kent (2009) that stated working men did spend more time doing paid work than did women.
Family and child care responsibilities directly impact the amount of time women have available and will commit to their professions. A certain level of guilt is often associated with neglecting family commitments in order to pursue professional aspirations (for example: Catalyst, 2007; Rhode, 2003). This creates an internal struggle, decreasing time at work to compensate for time with family or decreasing family time to create more time for career. Rhode, professor of law at Stanford University, (2003) discussed this internal struggle in her book, *The Difference “Difference” Makes*.

These mixed messages leave many women with the uncomfortable sense that whatever they are doing, they should be doing something else. Assumptions about the inadequate commitment of working mothers adversely influence performance evaluations, promotion decisions and opportunities for challenging assignments that are prerequisites for leadership roles. (p. 10)

The cyclical nature of this struggle yields no winning result, but further prolongs barriers to her success. A third internal barrier to women administrators is the sense of isolation many feel when working in educational leadership realms.

**Isolation.** Pressure to conform to gender roles has continued to interfere with leadership advances, especially related to the barrier of isolation. With a demanding work schedule and many family commitments, the time left in a day to build mentoring relationships, network, and share ideas becomes limited. Many women in leadership capacities have feelings of isolation, or disconnectedness, from other women in their field.

Because of the demands of employment and family, women feel more rushed and time-crunch ed than men do. The more hours that women spend at their jobs, the more dissatisfied they feel with the amount of time they have for themselves and for their other duties, especially if they have children. (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, p. 55)
Given the choice, many women will sacrifice individual time, which for many men may be spent networking at a golf course or out for a business dinner, so that they can spend time with their children and families. Interestingly, the feminist movement, which was based on a collective effort, has done little to assist women in their feelings of isolation. In fact, some of the feelings of isolation are due to the nature of relationships between women. Because time is so limited, women often isolate themselves to meet their own professional obligations, with little time given to developing a collaborative, positive relationship in which they can support one another. Bell hooks, author of *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* sheds some insights about the lack of impact the feminist movement had on sustaining the relationships between women.

So far the feminist movement has not transformed woman to woman relationships, especially between women who are strangers to one another or from different backgrounds, even though it has been the occasion for bonding between individuals and groups of women. (pg. 50)

This viewpoint by hooks, looks at the sustainability of women's relationships after the feminist movements lost momentum. While Shakeshaft (1987) and hooks (2003) cited the feminist movement to be pivotal for the increase in women in leadership, the solidarity of those women's groups waned.

As isolation continues to be a prevailing barrier to women in leadership, it is evident that the feminist movement has done little to morph the way that women interact with one another. Feminism lacks something that allows prosperity in the same aspects of life in which many men succeed. Misconceptions about the effects of the feminist movement cloud how people actually view equality for women and men in our society, especially in leadership fields. It is often the assumption that feminists will always be
“looking out for their sisters” when in reality, this support comes and goes. hooks (2003) discussed the complexities of solidarity and support, in regard to eradicating the sexist and racist socialization that dictates how we interact with each other.

When women actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity. Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs, and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment. In feminist movement, there is need for diversity, disagreement, and difference if we are to grow. (p. 67)

For example, the feminist groups that supported the efforts to give women the right to vote lost momentum after the legislation was passed. In this instance, we can see what hooks (2003) means when referring to maintaining solidarity, not just levels of support.

On controversial topic for women in leadership has been the “Queen Bee.” In the past, and again recently, the term “queen bee” has described women serving in a leadership capacity who are unsupportive, of other women with leadership aspirations. In that context, Shepard, (as cited in Searby & Tripses, 2006) stated that “women may be their own worst enemies.” One interpretation of this comment may be that woman in top positions have chosen not to build collegial networks that support aspiring leaders because they feel their power is threatened. Though a caution to that interpretation is that women do not make that choice independent of other pressures placed on them at top levels. Additionally, it may be the women and men alike, regardless of their position in an organization treat a women leader differently because of common socialization that leaders are typically men.
Rhode (2003), a law professor and author, connected this phenomena to the exclusion and isolation women sometimes feel at the hand of other women who believed that they managed without special help, so why can’t everyone else? “These women enjoy the special status that comes with being one of the few females at the top of the pecking order and are willing to serve as proof that gender is not barrier to those who are qualified” (Rhode, 2003, p. 14). This literature describes participants who work in high power positions, or in male dominated fields, like business and law, which provides a different context than in education. Due to the contextual differences between education, as a public sector, and business and law it is critical to examine if and how the presence of the Queen Bee looks in education.

In school systems, the elementary principal, while serving in leadership capacity, is not at the top of the pecking order so to speak, but reports to central administration, and superintendent. Another consideration to make when looking at the existence of the Queen Bee, is the demographic information for elementary schools. Nationally, women hold roughly 75% of classroom teacher positions at the elementary level, as well as nearly 50% of the elementary principalships. Because so many of the teachers are serving in a subordinate role to the principal, it may be less likely the principal would feel her power threatened by a teacher, unless the teachers were aspiring administrators.

Through my own experiences as a teacher in a large urban district, I see many teachers completing masters programs in educational leadership, and actively seeking principalship positions at the elementary level. In fact, the principalship program I graduated from in 2003 was comprised of an equal, if not slightly greater number of
women. Because administrators sign yearly contracts, not continual contracts like teaching staff, this increase in the number of aspiring principals could be cause for female and male principals to feel less secure about their positions.

While some research supports the existence of the Queen Bee phenomena, other authors have contrasting views. Mavin (2008), Dean of Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University in the United Kingdom, conducted an analysis of the literature on the Queen Bee phenomena, and criticizes the use of that label for women who don’t adhere to the expectations of solidarity placed on them. “The Queen bee is commonly constructed as a bitch who stings other women if her power is threatened and, as a concept, the Queen bee blames individual women for not supporting other women” (Mavin, 2008, p. s76). As true of any employee, male or female, manager or subordinate, some are difficult to work with, and others are not.

Mavin (2008) goes on to state, “The Queen Bee concept is sexist: there does not appear to be an alternative term used to negatively label senior men in organizations and it succeeds in reproducing the gendered status quo for women in management” (p. s79). This statement of the Queen Bee as a sexist concept may be jarring for some, because it asks us to truly reflect on our own assumptions about leaders. For those persons seeking mentorship, it is easy to forget the pressure and time constraints that leaders in top positions must feel, there simply isn’t time for everything in a day.

Other literature calls for a closer look at this concept of the Queen Bee. Shakeshaft, (1989) discusses research that suggests that the Queen Bee label is not
accurate. She reflects on the findings of Garfinkel (1988), in which boards of education pressured their women superintendents to minimize the hiring of women subordinates by claiming that, “On first analysis this situation looks like the ‘Queen Bee’ stereotype” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 334). However, further interviews and observations uncovered that those female superintendents received pressure from school board members to pursue male candidates. In one instance the board eluded that one female superintendent was plenty of female representation. The final analysis of research suggested that hiring practices of the female superintendents was more about the external pressures, than the threat of working with other women.

A significant lesson from this study is the idea that each of us activates our own stereotypes, based on how our gender shapes what we read and how we interpret things we hear or see. Shakeshaft uses the language, “Queen Bee” stereotype in her analysis. The use of the word stereotype begs us to ask, in the research on women in leadership, is the “Queen Bee” a true phenomena or rather a gender stereotype we have activated based on how we perceive women in higher levels of leadership? A final thought to consider is the interconnectedness of this socially constructed phenomena and gender stereotypes.

In summation of this scholarly argument, I have to question if the concept of the Queen Bee truly fits in the realm of isolation, as an internal barrier. If a women does indeed choose to isolate herself from other women in the profession, it may he an internal barrier, however, it seems to me, that it is the perception behind that isolation that becomes an activation of gender stereotypes. Do we expect the women who lead us to adhere to the stereotypic, nurturing qualities?
Looking back at the literature regarding the internal barriers to women, we see
that a large weight rests on women’s’ shoulders in overcoming these issues. Societal
gendered norms impose external barriers for many women leaders that magnify the
internal barriers that often appear to lie within women’s control, such as developing
professional relationships, encouraging and accepting diversity, and balancing family
responsibilities.

**External Barriers to Women**

Women may be their own worst enemy, but the barriers posed are not all internal.
Limitations for women pursuing leadership come also from factors outside of their control
as well. Research in business and educational settings has cited that lack of mentoring
relationships, (Hill & Ragland, 1995; Lane, 2002; Pence, 1995; Searby & Tripses, 2006)
prevalence of male-dominated networking (Robinson, 1996; Searby & Tripses, 2006),
and gender stereotypes (Cbin, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Huches, 2007; Dasgupta & Asgari,
2004; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fennel, 2008b; Gorzig, 2008; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000)
have contributed to the disproportionate numbers of women serving in leadership
capacities at executive levels.

**Lack of mentoring relationships.** Lack of mentoring programs for, and mentoring
relationships between, women has consistently stood in the way of women reaching equal
levels of success as their male counterparts. Many researchers have looked at this deficit
as a substantial barrier to closing the gap between genders in employment in higher level
positions (for example; Gardiner et al., 2000; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987;
Smulyan, 2000). Through the isolated, competitive relationship between women we
may understand why there is a lack of such social support systems (hooks, 2000).

Mentoring is a critical barrier to overcome if women are to obtain more leadership positions. In her work, “Learning Leadership Through Mentoring,” Pence (1995) concluded,

Women administrators have additional difficulty learning their administrative role because there are conflicting attitudes about the stereotypes of what it means to be female and what it means to be an administrator... These relationships can especially be important to a women or minority who is “different” from the stereotypes image of an administrator who is white and male. (p. 125)

Women must work toward solidarity if this external barrier is to be extinguished. Relationships between and among female administrators are necessary to compete with the strong sense of solidarity that men in similar positions have established. Often this solidarity comes in the form of tightly-knit professional and social networks. This is not to say that men do not or cannot serve as mentors to female administrators, however, the research reviewed in this section targets specifically lack of strong female to female mentoring.

Prevalence of male dominated networks. Through several interviews and case studies (for example; Hicks, 1996; Lane, 2002; Valdata, 2008, Villani, 1999) it is evident that many women feel like they are their own island. The isolation of women in the leadership field is in stark contrast to the collegial networks for men in the same professions. The “old boys’ network” is very much alive in America, which presents a large barrier to women who compete against men for the same positions. It is through those networking opportunities that possible leadership opportunities can be proposed, deals made, or ideas for improvement be shared among colleagues. This literature review
discovered some strong opinions related to this topic of male dominated networks. “As Catalyst President Shelia Wellington noted, ‘at the end of the day, many men head for drinks. Women for the dry cleaners.’ Men pick up career tips; women pick up laundry, kids, dinner and the house.” (as cited in Rhode, p. 13)

Unlike the “queen bee” mentality, offered by some, men tend to work together in tight knit social groupings, to advance their careers. These “old boys” networks have worked well for young male professionals as they gain access into leadership positions. Hill and Ragland (1995) cite lack of political savvy to explain how the politics of men serving in the gatekeeper positions has significantly limited women’s chance of obtaining open positions.

People in positions of power not only frequently decide finalists for other positions, but they also quite often determine their own successors. The “good ol’ boy” network exists so strongly in many school districts that many men can tell you their number in line to the superintendency. They are just waiting their turn. (p. 11)

How does this “old boys” network impact the career path of school administrators? If the existence of this network is as powerful as many believe, the pathways for women into higher levels of leadership may look vastly different than the career paths of men.

Gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes form both internal and external barriers for women in leadership. In a meta-analysis, Chin et al. (2007) concluded, “These results suggest that individuals’ reactions to women leaders are tempered by expectations about the role of women and men in contemporary society” (p. 8). The way women lead is impacted by perceptions; the stakes get higher for female leaders when they do not act
consistent with gender roles that are deemed socially acceptable. Eagly and Karau (2002) described how gender roles can produce prejudice.

A potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles. (p.574)

For women today the overt displays of gender discrimination have shifted to more subtly concealed actions and thoughts that continue to reflect gender stereotypes as one of the prevalent barriers to women. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) discussed this change in society’s display of gender bias.

That (rarity of blatant discrimination) doesn’t mean, however, that gender inequality has vanished. It has just gone underground. Today discrimination against women lingers in a plethora of work practices and cultural norms that only appear unbiased. They are common and mundane and woven into the fabric of an organization’s status quo, which is why most people don’t notice them, let alone question them. But they create a subtle pattern of systemic disadvantage, which blocks all but a few women from career advancement. (p. 126)

Gender stereotypes and socially determined gender roles fuel many of the discrimination challenges that women who pursue leadership face.

Summary of Barriers to Women Literature

The impact of internal and external barriers in either preventing or diminishing the number of women serving in leadership positions has remained over the past 100 years. Though each of the internal barriers and external barriers were discussed separately, a theme emerged that tied all of the barriers together. After over a century of awareness, education, legislation, and activism, the omnipotent power of gender roles and socialization have continued to be central in creating barriers to women in leadership. Of the three internal barriers to women discussed in the literature review, internalization of
gender roles, family and child rearing responsibilities, and feelings of isolation, all are deeply influenced by the external barriers to women.

Shakeshaft (1987) stated,

Internal barriers are seldom more prevalent for women than for men, and when they are it is not the woman’s psyche that is at fault and thus needs changing but rather the social structure of society that is the root cause of inequities. (p. 83)

To remove the internal barriers would take a cultural shift in the expectations of what it is to be a woman; a shift of that magnitude would take every member of society, not just the individual woman that the barrier impacts. Through this thinking we can argue that changes in society’s perception of gender roles would directly impact both the external and internal barriers faced by women. Not only do gender barriers influence women’s experiences as principals, but the idea of what it is to be a leader impacts how women and their subordinates view the effectiveness of a woman administrator.

The first research question for this study seeks to find out about the experiences of one female elementary school principal in Iowa. Through my participant’s story I hope to better understand if, and how, barriers to women have impacted her experiences as an educational leader. Another essential research question that rises from this literature review is the impact of balancing personal and professional responsibilities. Family and child-rearing responsibilities were a substantial barrier in the research and literature. This research will provide an in depth description of how one female elementary school principal has achieved or struggled to balance family responsibilities with professional aspects, like networking.
Leadership Theories: What is it to be a Leader?

Over the past decade the question, “What is it to be a leader?” has been the subject of numerous research studies. Included in those studies are two critical ideas, leadership style (for example, Balch & Brower, 2005; Beck & Murphy, 1993; Eagly, 2007; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Eagly, Engen, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2003; Fennell, 1998; Fennell, 2008a; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000) and leadership characteristics (for example, Greenberg & Sweeney, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly, 2007; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2006; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). In this section I will to examine leadership, regardless of the realm in which the study takes places. While many factors influence leadership, I reviewed this literature review looking at overall trends related what it means to be a leader?

With the knowledge of these two perspectives on leadership we can look at this section of the literature review that will address two major themes in research on leadership:

1. Leadership style: are there masculine and feminine styles?

2. Leadership characteristics: are they gender consistent?

Leadership Style: Are there Feminine and Masculine Styles?

Major themes of leadership research have shifted in the past ninety years, from an organizational model to a human relations model. Beck and Murphy (1993) conducted a study of school leadership across seventy years; the results divided the essence of leadership into seven distinct metaphoric themes:

1. 1920s: Values Broker
2. 1930s: Scientific Manager
3. 1940s: Democratic Leader
4. 1950s: Theory Guided Administrator
5. 1960s: Bureaucratic Executive
6. 1970s: Humanistic Facilitator
7. 1980s: Instructional Leader

While this research was derived from an educational setting, much of the discussion related to effective leadership styles and leadership frameworks are consistent across multiple fields. Effective practices and styles aren’t separated into business, education, law, etc.; what makes a leader has little to do with where they lead, and everything to do with how they do it. Fullan (2001) stated,

Each and every leader, whether the CEO of a multinational corporation or a school principal, can become more effective, much more effective, by focusing on a small number of core aspects of leadership and by developing a new mindset about the leader’s responsibility to himself or herself and to those with whom he or she works. (p.2)

When analyzing research about leadership styles, there is a debate over if and how feminine or masculine styles evolve; however, to narrow the focus of this research we will be looking at only two. The consistent theme through this literature is that gender roles and stereotypes impact the perceptions of what it is to be a good leader.

The first perspective explains that stereotypes directly drive the perceptions of a particular gender consistent leadership style. If a gender consistent style is perceived to be most effective, than some women may choose to lead from a style that is not their leadership preference. However, this is not to say that the perceived gender consistent
style isn’t the way that many women do lead. Studies (for example; Applebaum, Audet & Miller, 2002; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Eagly & Karau, 2002, Fennell, 2008a; Pounder & Coleman, 2002) have indicated that women do tend to lead from the stereotypical gender consistent style. From the second perspective leadership styles are explained based how socialization of gender roles, has actually contributed to women’s leadership styles.

These two perspectives run somewhat parallel, making them difficult to distinguish. On one hand, there is the argument that gender stereotype, based in socialized gender roles have impacted women’s leadership style. On the other hand there is the argument that socialized gender roles, not the stereotypes themselves impact how women lead. We are left with a dilemma similar to the chicken or the egg conundrum. If socialized gender roles contribute to development of gender stereotypes, how can we separate that gender stereotypes are the specific reason for women’s leadership style preferences? If we claim that socialization of gender roles, has influenced the way that women lead, how do we avoid creating further gender stereotypes about leadership style, especially, if the typical leadership style, or characteristics used by women is not just a perception, but a reality?

Gender roles have influenced women in leadership, whether through actual leadership behaviors or perceptions of women leaders by their subordinates. Researchers typically describe leadership styles in terms of characteristics that are often associated as either masculine or feminine. While the association of leadership styles or characteristics as feminine or masculine has hindered a gender neutral view of leadership, the prevalence
of these descriptions in literature is typical. Throughout the course of my literature and research reviews authors referenced three particular leadership styles most frequently; transformational, transactional, and servant leadership.

A transformational leader gains trust and confidence, acts as a role model, encourages, nurtures and helps set attainable goals. Transactional leaders focus on appealing to employee’s self interest through rewards and positive incentives, correcting failed attempts to meet goals, and by clearly stating the employee’s responsibilities (Eagly, 2007). Servant leaders place the central focus on serving the needs of individual employees within the organization.

Although James Burns introduced the transactional and transformational leadership styles in 1978, they continue to describe models of leadership in current research. Avolio and Bass (2002) provided this explanation of these two styles of leadership:

Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible. Such leaders set more challenging expectations and typically achieve higher performances. Transformational leadership is an expansion of transactional leadership. Transactional leadership emphasized the transaction or exchange that takes place among leaders, colleagues, and followers. This exchange is based on the leader discussing with others what is required and specifying the conditions and rewards these others will receive if they fulfill the requirements. (p.1)

The different components for each style have described the behaviors and attitudes of the leader using each style.

Transformational leaders focus on (a) idealized leadership, behaving in a way that they are perceived as role models, (b) inspirational motivation, increasing the enthusiasm and motivation of their employees, (c) intellectual stimulation, through questioning
previous assumptions to stimulate innovation and creativity, and (d) individualized consideration by supporting and coaching their employees (Avolio & Bass, 2002).

Transactional leaders focus on (a) contingent rewards which are based on completed assignments or (b) management by exception which can be either active or passive. Leaders actively monitoring mistakes and taking corrective action define active management by exception. While leaders waiting for mistakes before taking corrective action define passive management by exception. While transactional leadership becomes about the rewarding behaviors to allow goals to be met, other leadership styles have a completely different approach.

In his book on leadership, Daft (2002) provides this description of the paradigm shift caused by the servant leadership style.

Servant leadership is leadership upside-down. Servant leaders transcend self-interest to serve the need of others, help others grow and develop, and provide opportunity for others to gain materially and emotionally. The fulfillment of others is the servant leader’s principal aim. (p. 214)

Unlike traditional models of leadership where the organizational needs come first, servant leaders worry first about the individual. The leadership style offers similarities to the stewardship felt within religious organizations.

In 2002, Russell and Stone, business professors and researchers, conducted a meta-analysis of the literature on servant leadership based on their beliefs that the attributes of this attractive leadership style are undefined. Twenty attributes appeared through their analysis of nearly one-hundred articles and books. The authors then categorized each attribute as either function or accompanying, based on the prominence in the literature.
Function attributes of servant leaders occurred in more of the literature and include, (a) Vision, (b) Honesty, (c) Integrity, (d) Trust, (e) Service, (f) Modeling, (g) Pioneering, (h) Appreciation of others, and (i) Empowerment. Russell and Stone (2002) clearly state that the other accompanying attributes are not secondary, but serve to complement the function servant leadership attributes. These include, (a) Communication, (b) Credibility, (c) Competence, (d) Stewardship, (e) Visibility, (f) Influence, (g) Persuasion, (h) Listening, (i) Encouragement, (j) Teaching, and (k) Delegation.

As I read the literature on servant leadership, I drew some similarities to transformational leadership, for instance, the focus on people and modeling expectations. While there are similarities in the specific attributes of servant leaders and transformational leaders, I wondered if the distinction between the two lies within the purpose of the leadership style. “Servant leadership takes place when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers” (Russell & Stone, 2002 p. 145). This is a leadership paradigm switch, as the leader takes on a subordinate role to the employees, allowing a focus to be on individual growth and needs, instead of the organization’s needs first. However, transformational leadership incorporates a greater emphasis upon production because the leader has a stronger focus on organizational objectives.

Daft (2002) discussed the focus of transformational leadership is more about the leader or the organization, “Transformational leaders have the ability to lead changes in the organization’s vision, strategy, and culture as well as promote innovation in products
and technologies....Transformational leadership is based on the personal values, beliefs, and qualities of the leader...” (p. 148). This personally focused leadership style produces results because of individual employees receive modeling and are encouraged to be creative in their efforts to reach the organizations goals. “On the other hand, servant leadership involves a higher concern for people because the primary focus of the leader is upon his or her followers” (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004 p. 356). In these examinations of leadership, the purpose of one is to serve the employees, and the other is to serve the goals of the school, through employee buy in.

Smith, Montagno, and Kuzemenko (2004) discussed transformational and servant leadership styles, “Although the concepts and the terminology may seem similar, the difference between servant leadership and other leadership models is that servant leadership may produce a different type of culture because of the underlying motivation of the leader” (p. 82). The authors created a matrix to compare the behavioral components of transformational and servant leadership and found, “Despite the overlapping behavioral components, we conclude that theoretical underpinnings and context for application of the models are quite different” (p. 89). The basis for theoretical differences comes from intellectual stimulation and valuing the emotional needs of individuals within the organization.

Servant leadership places more value on the behavioral component of valuing emotional needs, where transformational leadership places far more emphasis on providing intellectual stimulation to individuals in the organization. Based on the theoretical differences the authors concluded that servant leadership, with a strong
emphasis on individual’s self-growth over organizational needs would best serve static environments, such as non-profit, volunteer or religious organizations. In contrast, transformational leadership with a focus on risk taking and innovation to meet the organizational vision and goals would best serve a dynamically changing environment, where the stakes are higher for organizational change.

When I reflect on the changes in our current educational system, I have to wonder that while we need our employees to feel nurtured and valued as a priority, such as with servant leadership, the rigor of high stakes testing would seem to call for the innovation and risk-taking that transformational leadership produces.

While the literature on leadership largely focused on these three styles, transactional and transformation leadership styles were common topics in research about women in leadership. Several works, (For example, Applebaum et al., 2002; Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Pounder & Coleman, 2002), discussed that many women operate in a more transformational mode, and men in a more transactional mode, while still adopting some behaviors from the other leadership style. Transactional leadership, a typically masculine approach, is often characterized by strong task-orientation and autocracy. In transactional leadership there is a clearly defined subordinate. Transformational leadership, a typically feminine approach, is characterized through strong interpersonal orientation, participative nature, and democracy (Embry, Padgett & Caldwell, 2008). Analyzing the nature of power within (transformational), or power over (transactional), there is some feasibility into why women inherently may lead from a transformational style.
Transformational leadership has characterized the feminine voice of care, with an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and power within the organization. A masculine voice of rights is clearly evident in the transactional leadership style, which is often the preferred leadership style of men. Based on Gilligan’s (1982) discussion about how women tend to make judgments through concern for others, and establish and build relationships through interdependence or attachment, we can conclude that leadership style may be greatly influenced by how women tend to develop psychologically.

Helgesen’s and Johnson’s (2010) work further reflects the notion that how women lead may be a result of the relationship of care.

“Women’s domestic experience, socialization, and evolutionary development have accustomed them to monitoring emotional cues, anticipating what others might need, and making subtle adjustments in order to avoid potential conflicts. (p. 41)

These reasons would support why many women tend to be a more natural fit for a transformational style of leadership with relationships being interdependent as opposed to hierarchical.

However, Gilligan’s earlier research described as an essentialist view of gender. Another approach used by critical theorists, or feminist researchers is intersectionality. Intersectionality provides a way to analyze how including gender and other variables contribute to how and why people behave the way they do. Wing (1997), a legal scholar and critical race feminist researcher, discussed the way in which all the pieces, or layers, that represent us intersect to become who we are.

The actuality of our layered experience is multiplicative. Multiple each of my parts together, $1 \times 1 \times 1 \times 1 \times 1$, and you have one indivisible being. If you divide one of these parts from one you still have one. (p. 31)
From this frame we can begin to think about how barriers to women in leadership have much more to do with all of those multiplied parts, such as race, class, sexual orientation rather than just that of being a woman. Wing (1997) suggested that to address the problems of disadvantaged group, we must operate on multiple levels of consciousness, continually assessing the multiple levels of need. As the statistics in the state of Iowa demonstrate, women face disadvantage in terms of securing administrative positions, increasing more disadvantaged are the women of color who face even larger barriers to leadership. For those women of color who obtain leadership positions, they will face challenges on different levels than a white woman.

Though it is not uncommon that men and women may choose to lead from a style that isn’t consistent with their gender, women tend to face resistance when making those shifts. Women face the fear of being ostracized if they try to lead from a directive, assertive, transactional style, as it would not conform to what people expect from a woman (for example, Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Eagly & Carli, 2009; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Growe & Montgomery, 1999; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Rosener, 1990; Shakeshaft, Brown, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). Gender consistent leadership expectations make it difficult for women to lead from a style that is not perceived as feminine.

As women navigate their way through the double bind, they seek ways to project authority without relying on the autocratic behaviors that people find so jarring in women. A viable path is to bring others into decision making and to lead as an encouraging teacher and positive role model. (p. 68, Eagly & Carli, 2007b)
Conversely, the gender roles for men align with the stereotypical expectations for leaders, leaving little fear of non-conformity for men who lead. In fact, men who lead from a gender inconsistent style are viewed more effective by subordinates, while women who lead from a gender inconsistent style are not viewed as any more effective; however, they can be viewed as overly assertive, directive, and controlling (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Karau 2002). A preference for a transformational style of leadership has been a positive way to assert that women do possess the skills necessary to effectively lead an organization.

However, there are critical issues related to generalizing that transformational leadership is inherently feminine. By accepting that skills of transformational leaders are feminine, we are supporting the concepts of gender stereotypes (Catalyst, 2005; Chin et al., 2007; Eagly, 2007; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Rosener, 1990). Polarization of leadership styles can be a result of assigning feminine and masculine labels to models of leadership. Judy Rosener (1990) discussed what she calls interactive leadership, a model of leadership, in which leaders emphasize

1. Encouraging participation: inclusion of all people so everyone gets involved in conversations;
2. Sharing power and information: information flows freely between employees and "the boss," so that communication flows in two directions, not top down;
3. Enhancing others self-worth: Using participation to support that notion that everyone feels important; and
4. Energizing others: Spreading enthusiasm for their work.
The introduction of this style attempted to gather more concrete understanding of the specific ways that these women’s leadership style differed from the command and control model. Rosener’s recommendation was that the elements of interactive leadership were to be used more broadly as a way for leadership to become androgynous.

Widening the path will free potential leaders to lead in ways that play to their individual strengths. Then the newly recognized interactive leadership style can be valued and rewarded as highly as the command and control style has been for decades. By valuing diversity of leadership styles, organizations will find the strength and flexibility to survive in a highly competitive, increasingly diverse economic environment. (p. 125, Rosener, 1990)

Grave responsibility falls on the shoulders of organizations to transform their vision of leadership, to include a more interactive style. A paradigm shift of this magnitude would take the consolidated effort of our society to redefine what it is to be a leader.

In her case study research of one female high school principal, Robinson (1996) discusses a new leadership style, “stroft.” “The term “stroft” is a combination of two words “strong” and “soft” and represents a blend of the soft and hard skills of leadership.” Leaders such as the one Robinson studied balance their leadership characteristics and behaviors so they are tough, yet caring. Like the work of Rosener, a “stroft” style is a blend of traits. While Robinson did use the “stroft” style to discuss ways women principals lead, this style used by any leader helps to avoid the gendered leadership stereotypes.

The work of Christman and McClellan (2008) supported the blending of leadership styles based on the complexities of the episode. The women in their study moved fluidly between the gender norms at different times and in varying degrees. In their study they stated, “We argue that these resilient women administrators do not adhere
to binary gender norms and are instead morphing leadership to dynamically and fluidly sustain themselves in the complexity of today’s organizations” (p. 23).

Society will have to reconsider what it is to be a leader, so that a diversity of styles and characteristics are accepted, rather than maintaining a polarized vision of gendered leadership.

Leadership Characteristics: Are they Gender Consistent?

The second dominant theme in leadership differences come with the discussion, and assignment of specific characteristics of good leaders. Similar to leadership style, characteristics have often been “assigned” as gender appropriate based on those same stereotypes and culturally accepted roles. This section of the literature review will discuss characteristics of leaders, as well the impact of assigning specific characteristics to a particular gender.

Characteristics of leaders. Greenberg and Sweeney (2005) proposed that women leaders tend to demonstrate four distinctly female leadership qualities.

1) Persuasive style: open to multiple view points, opposite of males who may force their views rather than persuading.

2) Rebounding: Ability to use disappointment, and rejection to fuel their ambition to succeed.

3) Team oriented: listening to the team to help with problem solving and decision making, and

4) Risk taking: willingness to run the risk of being wrong in order to get things done, pushing back against regulations or rules more than male counterparts.
These qualities came from the study of distinguished male and female leaders in various companies across the UK and United States.

Essentially key findings show that women leaders are more persuasive, have a stronger need to get things done and are more willing to take risks that their male counterparts. When women leaders combine these qualities with their openness, flexibility, empathy, and strong interpersonal skills, a leadership style is created that is inclusive, consensus building and collaborative. (Greenberg & Sweeney, 2005, p. 34)

These bodies of research (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Greenberg & Sweeney, 2005) suggested these women have created a new leadership style that combines the strengths of masculine and feminine qualities.

Other research on leadership characteristics separated them into two separate categories. Eagly and Carli (2007a) used communal and agentic traits to describe the specific characteristics exhibited by leaders. Listed in Table 1 below are the characteristics associated with communal and agentic categories. One criticism I have of using two separate categories to list specific leadership characteristics, is that it could easily lead to gender assigning. The more categories of characteristics, I feel the less likely to assign a particular gender to a set.
Table 1: Leadership Characteristics Sorted by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communal Leadership Traits</th>
<th>Agentic Leadership Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affectionate</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Ambitious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Self Confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Forceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td>Self Reliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft spoken</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpersonally sensitive

Based on their research, women typically used a majority of the communal traits, while the men often displayed agentic traits.

Impact of gender assigned leadership characteristics. Leadership characteristics have been shaped largely due to the socialization of women and gender stereotypes. The nature of assigning gender consistent traits contributes to the resistance of women leaders if they choose to lead in a manner that may or may not align with what is typically thought to be feminine. A large amount of Eagly and Carli’s (2003, 2007a, 2007b) research focuses on the communal and agentic qualities associated with either gender. Her focus is on how the associations of gender consistent qualities change the perceptions of what effective leadership is.
The agentic traits are also associated in most people's minds with effective leadership—perhaps because a long history of male domination of leadership roles has made it difficult to separate the leader association from the male associations. (Eagly & Carli, 2007b, p. 66)

Issues of prejudice result from these gender specific qualities. Not only are these qualities associated as gender specific, but males and females who act according to gender inconsistent styles are not treated equally. Men who displayed gender inconsistent qualities, like warmth, or friendliness are seen no differently than when they displayed gender consistent qualities, like dominance or assertiveness. However, women who displayed masculine qualities were deemed as pushy, abrasive, or “hitchy” (Catalyst, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007b).

Chin et al. (2007) points out the difficulties facing women leaders in regard to leadership style and leadership characteristic perceptions.

Often women leaders must manage within organizational cultures that tend to be masculinized, and believe that they must adapt their leadership style accordingly. Women leaders are often bound by these perceptions that constrain them to their gender roles and influence their leadership styles and behaviors. At the same time, these same behaviors may be defined as signs of ineffective leadership. (p. 8)

Regardless of the intent, identification of effective leadership characteristics has often been associated with a particular gender rather than described in terms of the ways men or women lead. By creating gender specific characteristics and styles we are in a sense carrying out gender stereotypes.

Arguably those contending that transformation leadership competencies are largely the domain of the female leader are as guilty of stereotyping as those who would equate effective leadership with male characteristics. (Pounder & Coleman, 2002, p 128)
The recommendations of many researchers (for example, Applebaum et al., 2002; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Rosener, 1990) have been that organizations increase their flexibility in accepting a more interactive leadership style that uses both communal and agentic characteristics.

In the case of women in leadership, other factors beside gender matter. Other identities of the leader, not just gender can influence leadership style or characteristics. It is the intersection of those total parts of each individual that comprise what we see and hear. For example, an end of career woman leader who is an eldest child, and from a matriarchal household may feel more confident asserting herself in decision making.

When looking at the difference between men and women leadership styles, many factors play a part. Rhode (2003) indicated,

There is widespread agreement that gender difference does make a difference in virtually all aspects of social experience. But there is no corresponding consensus on the origins or implications of difference in many contexts, including leadership. Nor is there agreement on the extent to which gender differences are experienced differently by different groups in different contexts. As researchers have increasingly noted, there is no "generic woman," and too little work has explored the interrelationship between gender and situational forces or other characteristics such as race, class, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation (p.5). Due to the completely different experiences, or identities of each leader, it only seems reasonable that a more well-rounded, flexible approach to leadership would save women from undue gendered leadership expectations and stereotypes.

Summary of Leadership Theories Literature

While the research reviewed does not contest that there are leadership styles and qualities that are often associated with, or displayed by women or men, it does lead us to think about how we can better value leaders that blend both feminine and masculine
traits, or change their leadership style based on the context of the situation, or the
individuals with whom they work. Until the organizational, and societal expectations
about who should lead, and how they lead matches what we know about balancing
leadership styles and behaviors women will continue to be placed in a double bind.

Implications of this literature review guided one of the research questions for this
study. How does one female elementary school principal describe her leadership style,
and its effectiveness? This research will provide an additional ethnographic work to
describe the voice of one woman as she describes her leadership style. Her story may
also contribute to further understanding of ways women lead, and the characteristics of
women leaders.

Balancing Expectations:
What is it to be a Woman Leader?

Thus far in the literature review two themes have been discussed, barriers to
women: “What is it to be a woman?” and leadership theories: “What is it to be a leader?”
Unfortunately, until gender stereotypes and gender roles are extinguished women will
balance the expectations of what it is to be a woman with what it is to be an effective
leader. Through that delicate balance women will continue to discover how to answer the
question, “What is it to be a successful woman leader?” Alice Eagly (2007) describes the
ongoing struggle for women leaders when she stated,

Because of culture stereotypes, female leaders face a double bind. They are
expected to be communal because of the expectations inherent in the female
gender role, and they are also expected to be agentic because of the expectations
inherent in most leader roles. (p. 4)
This research would indicate that perceptions still impact the success of women in leadership positions.

These perceptions have continued to trap women leaders into a double bind, where adhering to gender inconsistent styles is not seen as being female and acting in a feminine leadership style is inconsistent with what is deemed as being a leader. In 2007, Catalyst, a nonprofit organization focused on women’s career advancements, published *The Double Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership*. This study confirmed that the rigid gender consistent roles have a substantial impact on perceptions of leadership.

By creating a false dichotomy between women’s and men’s characteristics, stereotypes place both women and men leaders in relatively narrow categories of style and behaviors while limiting the range of effective behaviors within the workplace overall (p. 6)

Within the leadership field women face three barriers which are rooted within the dichotomy of being a women and being a leader.

1. Extreme Perceptions: too soft, too hard, never just right
2. The High Competence Threshold: Women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men leaders
3. Competent but Disliked: Women leaders are perceived as competent or likable, but rarely both. (Catalyst, 2007, p. 7)

It appears that when women are trapped in this double bind, they can fit without duress into only one of two predominant categories, either a good leader, or a good woman. Men, however, avoid this double bind, as the socially accepted view of what makes a good leader, coincides with the socially accepted view of what it is to be a male
Curiously, as stated in the research earlier in the chapter, transformational leadership is often associated as being the most desirable, which is a leadership style often described through typically feminine characteristics. Both men and women can lead from this preferred transformational leadership styles, but how employees perceived them is different.

Women who lead from the transformational style are often deemed as less desirable leaders than men using this same style. While transformational leadership style is generally described with characteristics that are gender consistent for women, men using this style are still viewed more favorably. This presents the double bind that regardless of leadership style employees still viewed women as the least desirable leader. Not only does the double bind make leadership difficult for women, but males often benefit from acting in a style that is gender inconsistent. Women’s leadership effectiveness is consequently held to the criteria of male leadership norms (Catalyst, 2007).

Applebaum et al. (2002) support the existence of this inequity,

When women attempt to prove their competence by “acting like men”, they are considered to be less than women. When there seems to be some merit in what would normally have been considered a “female” approach, men adopt it as their own. What was seen as weak is now thought of as flexible; what was emotional now combines with the rational to bring balance. (p. 49)
Eagly’s extensive meta analysis on gender roles, stereotyping, and gender and leadership have been cited in nearly every article related to these topics. Two key principles attributed to women working through “the labyrinth” were: (a) blending of agentic with communal traits so that women are continuing to meet the expectations of gender, while extending into other agentic characteristics that tend to viewed as effective for leadership, (b) Increasing social capital through networking and balancing of family and work (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b).

The consistent finding in research on women and leadership is the societal change necessary to begin embracing diversity of leadership style and characteristics. Additionally, there is a call for women to build upon the advantage they may have with the transformational attributes often displayed, while also blending in more agentic traits. The result would be a more androgynous, or interactive style of leadership (for example; Applebaum et al., 2002; Catalyst, 2007; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007a, 2007b; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Rhode, 2003). Both men and women leaders would benefit by learning from each other, in a more interactive style.

The hope of further research is to investigate if and how these double binds are fulfilled in an educational leadership setting. Based on the overwhelming amount of literature about gender stereotypes, and barriers to women in leadership, there is no doubt still a glass ceiling for women.

Some researchers (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b) reported that those women who have been successful in leadership have seamlessly gone hack and forth between transformational and transactional leadership styles.
Summary of Balancing Expectations Literature

As women pursue leadership positions they will continue to balance the expectations of both gender roles and the perceptions of what classifies an effective leader. In the preceding research a majority of women have shown a tendency toward the preferred transformational style, yet still face the double bind when it is necessary for them to use more agentic traits of leadership. Successful women leaders have been able to balance their use of agentic and communal traits, in order to maintain the expectations of both gender and leadership.

Women have no doubt been able to serve in the elementary principalship capacity, based on the 53% serving in Iowa alone. This research prompted me to think more deeply about my research questions in regard to understanding the journey one successful women principal took in conquering the “labyrinth.”

Through my participant interviews and observations I hope to gain a clearer picture of how she balanced her personal and professional responsibilities, and overcame any real or perceived barriers that stood, or may still stand, in front of her as a woman leading today.

Summary of the Literature Review

The contents of this literature review have been broken down into three main themes, (a) Gender Barriers: “What is it to be a Woman?” (b) Gender Leadership Theories: “What is it to be a Leader?” and (c) Balancing Expectation of Gender and Leadership: “What is it to be a Woman Leader?” Analysis of this literature, suggests continuing barriers to women who have or will chose to pursue positions of leadership.
Barriers to Women: What is it to be a Woman?

Many of the researchers (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Eagly 2007; Shakeshaft, 1987; Smulyan, 2000) supported the notion that the internal barriers are actually largely based on how women are socialized. As Shakeshaft (1987) argued, these have actually become external barriers that women cannot change alone. Other researchers, (hooks, 2003; Searby & Tripses, 2006) wrote that women have a responsibility for their own internal barriers, such as feelings of isolation, because they have not maintained their relationships. hooks (2003) suggested that women need to bring critical conversations to the forefront, and not shy away from conflict among each other if that means that solidarity will be achieved.

The “Queen Bee” phenomena, (Searby & Tripses, 2006) discussed how women in positions of power have often isolated themselves from other strong women professionals, possibly due to fear of not being able to maintain their status on the top. However, this phenomena was challenged in a study by Garfinkel (as cited in Shakeshaft, 1989) which reported how women in educational leadership capacities were dissuaded by their school board to maintain a limited number of women in top positions. The results of this study suggest that women may not purposefully be isolating themselves and ignoring opportunities for mentoring, but rather are constrained by other external factors.

This literature provides insight into the relationship between the specified internal barriers, (a) internalized gender roles, (b) Family and child rearing responsibilities, and (c) isolation, and the external barriers, (a) Lack of mentoring relationships, (b) Prevalence of male-dominated networking, and (c) gender stereotypes. Specific categories identified
these barriers, though much of the research identified correlations between gender stereotypes and internalization of gender roles.

For example, the family and child rearing responsibilities may be rooted in society’s expectation for mothers to be the nurturers and men the providers. Even though times have changed, as over 50% of women are now a part of the work force, the time use surveys still indicate a discrepancy between who is caring for children (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2008, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Krantz-Kent, 2009, Rhode, 2003). Is it possible that despite the advances women have made with equal rights, many still could be impacted by decades old beliefs about women’s role in the home and workplace?

Those women who have chosen and succeeded in obtaining a leadership each have their own voices. Each woman has her own individual story to tell that describes her experiences, successes and barriers. Ultimately these stories can be a step in better understanding the nature of what is it like to be a female educational leader.

Through this research it is my hope to provide the individual story, for one female elementary principal in Iowa, adding to a limited literature base from this perspective. In conducting a case study of one woman’s experiences in her journey of elementary school principal I hope to interpret and tell the story of the different realities she has lived, through her voice.

Leadership Theories: What is it to be a Leader?

Are leadership styles masculine or feminine? Do men and women prefer or tend to lead from transactional or transformational styles? The simple answer to these
questions is yes. Some researchers (Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007a; Greenberg & Sweeney, 2005) have concluded that there are indeed traits that are more typically feminine or masculine.

Females especially are faced with a challenge, as those traits that are quite often associated with leadership, the more agentic traits, are often associated with men. From this literature review it is fair to ask, why are the particular communal traits, as Eagly & Carli refer to them, used predominately by women? Have women simply come naturally to these particular ways of leading, based on how we were socialized, or have women adapted to a typically male centered view of leadership, by balancing their agentic characteristics with more gender consistent communal traits? Regardless, of which traits women or male leaders use, or why they use them, there was strong recommendation that the most effective leaders blend these traits (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007a, 2007b; Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Rosener, 1990). 

This message of blending traits is similar to the idea of using a more interactive leadership style (Rosener, 1990); that is, a blend of aspects of both transformational and transactional leadership. Christman and McClellan (2008) reported that women superintendents maneuvered between leadership styles, regardless of gender lines, when dealing with particular situations.

...women leaders embrace or disclaim one gender norm for another to varying degrees. Rather than relocate themselves along one norm or the other, they move fluidly between them. For women however, this leadership still becomes problematic because others still expect them to behave according to social constructions of gender. (p. 21)
These notions of gender consistent or inconsistent leadership are tied directly to the barriers faced by many women, who are trapped in the socially constructed gender norms. The expectation that women should lead a particular way, using more communal traits, and participative styles impacts how they are viewed when they need to utilize more assertive leadership traits (for example, Chin, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Shakeshaft, 1987).

Much of the work described how socially constructed gender roles and stereotypically beliefs about gender directly influenced what people perceive to be effective leaders, especially with women. Leadership, the most effective leadership, should be contextual, based on the needs of the organization, but when the needs of the organization warrant a more assertive style, women are not perceived equal to men. The literature suggests that many women have been able to successfully lead in many sectors, but it does little to describe the experiences of the women as individuals.

Balancing Expectations: What is it to be a Woman Leader?

This final section of the literature review depicts most clearly the double bind (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Catalyst, 2007; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2009, Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Ridgeway, 2001) that women face. The idea of what it is to be a woman is largely shaped by internal and external barriers, which directly and indirectly impacts our perceptions of who is and can be a great leader. While there has been tremendous growth for women in leadership positions since 1910, we are still faced with expectations from society that some women simply do not choose, nor want to adhere to.
For those women who do choose a path that is different from those socially constructed gender roles the road is bumpy. Leadership is still viewed from a male centered perception. Personally, I have heard this mindset when sitting in on conversations in the teacher's lounge regarding the hiring of a new principal. During that conversation, many of the teachers uttered their preference of having male, without having any knowledge of the type of leader. As long as effective leaders are still synonymous with being a man, then women will be at a distinct disadvantage. Even when leading from a more preferred styles, and gender consistent traits, women may still not be seen as the "best man for the job."

How and why then do women enter leadership fields, like the principalship? One way to understand this question better is through gathering stories, and individual voices (Gilligan, 1982) of women principals. In her work, Shakeshaft (1989) discusses the importance of individual perspectives,

However, looking at the world as females experience it and trying to document those perspectives will help to expand the knowledge base of practice in educational administration. Observational studies of women administrators will help in documenting how women administer and how their gender helps or hinder their work. Interviews with women will help us to understand the way they think and speak about their worlds. (p. 335)

Much of the literature I reviewed did not include the individual perspectives of women in leadership. In fact, a point of frustration when conducting some of the literature review was the binary description of principal participants. Several of the resources reported survey data, or research findings in terms of male and female only (for example: Catalyst, 2007; Eagly, 2007; Greenberg & Sweeney, 2005). Like the demographic data about Iowa school principals, no attempt was made to disaggregate
based on position, elementary, middle or high school, or by specific race or ethnicity, which left data to be generalized for all women principals.

Secondly, the field of leadership, especially educational leadership seems to lack a nuanced understanding of gender, including it often as a single layer representing the barriers, or experiences for school leaders.

It is the intent of my research to document the individual perspective of one female elementary principal in Iowa, through the following research questions.

1. What are the experiences of one female elementary school principal in Iowa?

2. How does one female elementary school principal in Iowa describe her leadership style, and its effectiveness?

3. How do the barriers experienced by one female elementary school principal impact her career path into and in the Iowa elementary school principalship?

4. How does one female elementary school principal in Iowa balance her personal and professional responsibilities and obligations?
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of one female administrator’s experiences as an elementary school principal. I also wondered if and how socially constructed gender roles and stereotypes, influenced her perceptions of her own leadership. Secondly, this study provided insight into how those perceptions of effective leadership, as well as her ability to find balance between personal and professional responsibilities impacted her experiences.

Qualitative research allowed me to develop a detailed account of the behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes of my participant. The interpretive nature of qualitative research was well suited for clearly sharing the experiences that shaped my participant’s perception of herself as a leader. Due to the fact that each person develops their values, perceptions, etc. based on their own experiences, it was critical to share how she sees her world, instead of assuming her experiences to be similar to those from previous research, such as Robinson (1996). Through this understanding that experiences cannot be generalized among all administrators, including women administrators, this case study added another scholarly work that portrayed the experiences of one woman serving in elementary school principalship. This research provided another perspective for those who wish to understand the experiences of what it was like for this woman to serve in an educational leadership capacity.
Glesne states, “Qualitative research methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved” (2006, p. 4). This research provided one perspective, from the many diverse experiences of female elementary school administrators. What was it like for her as a woman in an authoritative role, and how did she feel about balancing the expectations of motherhood, and professional responsibilities?

My interest in this research topic stemmed from my experiences as a female educator working in a quasi-leadership capacity in an elementary school building. Upon completion of my administrative degree, I became interested in how gender could impact the effectiveness or perceived effectiveness of a female leader. This interest also came from my experiences as a young professional going through administrative training while working with two female administrators who led from drastically different leadership styles. Of those administrators, employees perceived one as being “sensitive” and the other a “hard-ass,” which made me wonder how gender impacted the way each of the staff perceived their leader. Secondly, through my leadership training, I did not encounter, a text book section, or a piece of literature that truly showed the perspective of a woman in elementary school leadership.

Shakeshaft (1989) discussed the importance of qualitative research that expands the knowledge base for practice of women in administration.

Observational studies of women administrators will help in documenting how women administer and how their gender helps or hinders their work. Interviews with women will help us to understand the way they think and speak about their worlds. (p.335)
As a young woman aspiring to one day lead a building, a document that shared this type of perspective would have been an asset to my principalship program. The woman principals that I did encounter through my experiences had all faced some form of discrimination because they were women. In fact, one woman shared a story of her first day at a new school, the senior woman faculty walked into her office and shared very clearly that the building had hoped for a man.

In her work Shakeshaft (1989) defined examples of the six major stages of research on women. These stages are (a) Absence of women documented, (b) Search for women who have been or are administrators, (c) Women as disadvantaged subordinates, (d) Women studied on their own terms, (e) Women as challenge to theory, and (f) Transformation theory. The approaches used to study women in educational leadership changed from stage one, where the surveys were primarily used to count the representation of women in leadership, to approaches, such as observation, participant interviews, and theory analysis, which allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of women and the effects of gender on organizations. Finally, Shakeshaft noted that in the six major stages of research on women most of it has been at the first three stages, research about women instead of for women.

Structure of the Study

Using an interpretivist qualitative approach I conducted a case study, using ethnographic methods, such as open ended interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis as my data collection tools (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Eisner, 1991; Schram, 2003, 2006; Spradley, 1979, 1980; Stake, 1994, 1995).
In their book Bogdan and Biklen share a definition of case study based on multiple authors’ perspectives. “A case study is an examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (2003, p. 54). The description of a single subject, in this case, Ann, provides a descriptive account of her experiences, and as well as how and if her experiences were similar or different from the experiences of other case study research subjects, within different contexts.

Stake (1994) shared the basis for case study research, in terms of its inability to provide generalizations.

Whereas a single case study is a poor representation of a population of cases and poor grounds for advancing grand generalization, a single case as negative example can establish limits to a grand generalization... Case studies are of value in refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability. (p.245)

For this research the use of a single case study has provided a ground for refining our thinking about women in leadership, so that future research continues to include diverse individual perspectives and challenge the “how” and “why” of barriers and leadership styles.

An interpretive approach was beneficial to understanding the complexities of the experiences of one female elementary school administrator. To move beyond a superficial case study, I used multiple data collection tools, so that I could understand the experiences of my participant, from her perspective in conversations, as well as clarifying and connecting our conversations to participant observations in multiple settings and with multiple staff throughout the research process. Through on-going interactions the
researcher can clearly understand the perceptions of the participants (Glesne, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Robinson's (1996) was the framework for this study. The structure of this study is epistemologically similar to Robinson's (1996) work, in that her study relied on different sources of data to clearly understand one principal's story. Specifically, the use of interviews provided descriptive data related to past experiences which shaped her participant's experiences as a principal. Those interviews allowed detailed descriptions of past experiences, and events that could not be replicated through observation (Robinson, p. 116).

The ontological view for this study was based on the concept of multiple realities. Stake (1995) discusses the notion of multiple realities. “Many researchers today appear to take the rationalist-constructivist view, than an outside world, reality #1 exists, corresponding suitable to our notion of it, reality #2” (p. 101). The researcher and participant will have constructed their own realities, which are separate from what Stake refers to as reality #1, the universal or outside world.

However, those constructions of reality can be altered based on the participant and researchers' discussions and interactions, so their reality becomes more sophisticated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Glesne (2006) stated, “The ontological belief that tends to accompany many qualitative research approaches portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing. What is “real” becomes relative to the specific location and people involved” (p. 6). From this interpretivist paradigm, realities are believed to be socially constructed dependent on an individual's experiences. Based
on this ontological belief of multiple realities, a qualitative epistemology would require interaction between and among the participant and the researcher to better understand those realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glesne, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Direct interaction allowed me to come to the clearest version of my participant’s realities. It was my role to act as not only as a participant in the research, through in-depth ethnographic-like interviews and observations, but also as an interpreter of how gender roles and stereotypes impact the actors’ realities about female leaders and their effectiveness. Stake (1995) wrote,

> Of all the roles, the role of interpreter, and gatherer of interpretations, is central. Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction. (p. 99)

In his work, Spradley (1979) discussed the varying degrees of participation in regard to research. The spectrum runs from non participation, through the use of one-way mirrors, or video and audio tapes for analysis, to complete participation, in which the researcher acts in the role of his participants.

As a participant in my own research I gained the most authentic observations and interviews, which allowed me to gain a clear picture of the multiple realities. A balance between moderate and active participation allowed me to become one of the group, but without totally immersing myself into the everyday actions, practices, behaviors, and experiences of my participants (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Spradley, 1979).

The rationale behind this level of participation is due to the nature that I want to build a capacity to have a genuine environment for which to conduct my study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated,
If you treat people as "research subjects" they will act like research subjects, which is different from how they usually act. Since qualitative researchers are interested in how people act and think in their own settings, they attempt to "blend into the woodwork," or to act so the activities that occur in their presence do not differ significantly from those that occur in their absence. (p. 35)

Building the capacity for honest and open communication required me to spend short, thirty minute, visits in the school site initially. In that manner, the limited duration of my visits allowed participants to get comfortable seeing me in the buildings, but not overwhelm, or create anxiety with my presence for an extended visit. After these shorter visits, I was able to join the staff, as a participant observer for extended periods of time, and in multiple contexts, even helping out with lunchroom duty!

Another approach that ensured a genuine environment for my research was to build a rapport of trust by speaking with school staff about where I was coming from and my role first as an educator, then later as a researcher. There were several moments that teachers in the hallway stopped me to get my opinion on student work, or the book study topic for the year. Through allowing the school staff to feel comfortable with me in the capacity as a fellow elementary educator, they were able to feel open seeing me through the lens of educator and researcher. Over time, as I built a sense of trust, the duration and frequency of my observations increased, before I opened the door to conducting interviews. Using these methods to create a genuine environment to conduct this study, I was able to spend time at the school site during the course of several months; some visits were in frequent intervals, while the initial observations were more sporadic.

As Robinson (1996) found in her experiences, having a common background to draw from, in her case, an understanding of high school culture, and the principalship,
made it participant interviews easier. Through my research, I found the same to be true; Ann and I shared a similar understanding of the elementary school culture, experience working toward higher education with small children, and a love for teaching. In many ways, our “interviews,” felt more like a mentor giving advice, or telling stories, to her mentee.

Additionally, all participants in the study knew that I would be reporting these results under pseudonyms, so they could speak openly and truthfully about their experiences without feeling apprehensive about someone from within the district, or school site knowing what they had shared. Any participant, school site, or district name reported in this research is a pseudonym used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

The aim of this research was not to provide over arching law-like generalizations about all women in educational leadership, but instead to provide a narrative of what and how my participant experienced being a female in educational leadership. However, this feminine voice and perspective added a detailed account of one woman’s journey. Other women principals may learn about potential barriers to administrations from looking at the experiences of these research findings. From an intersectional viewpoint, which suggests that the intersections of each person’s group identities impact their experiences, it is critical to note that this study uncovered one woman’s story. For this research the perspective of one woman included the identities that make her who she is, and impact her as a leader, like being a woman, a mother, a daughter, a strong Catholic. Another
woman, with other group identities could be studied to provide an additional perspective, as well compared to the experiences portrayed in this research.

Stake (1995) described that aim is not to discover the universal reality, reality #1, but to construct a clearer reality from simple experiences, reality #2, and a more sophisticated reality that uses our ability to rationalize integrated experiences, reality #3 (p. 101). In my research I used the perceptions of multiple participants, and the multiple data collection methods to construct a clearer reality of what my principal participant perceives about being a woman in educational leadership. This research is not about discovering the one universal reality for all women in educational leadership, but to understand the reality of how she constructs her world as a principal (Glesne, 2006; Stake 1995).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated, “The variable and personal nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents” (p.111). It is through these interactions, that we come about knowing the multiple realities of our participants.

During this research process I conducted a series of observations and initial interviews with the primary participant, that helped me to begin to develop an outline of who she was and what her experiences were. From those initial interactions I was able to learn about topics that she was comfortable sharing, those which I felt I had the clearest picture. Through those same interactions and conversations I was able to plan more targeted observations, conduct additional participant interviews, and develop more
clarifying questions about experiences that she shared. The multiple perspectives, or realities shared by all of the participants, collectively added to the clearest picture of my primary participant’s administrative journey as possible. My interactions with the primary participants and all other participants ebbed and flowed until I felt that I had captured the essence of her individual experiences.

These ethnographic-like interviews and observations provided me a structure that was flexible, by allowing me to conduct observations and interviews based on the responses of, and interactions with the participants. For this particular case, a structured interview format would not have allowed me to utilize the interactions of the participants to guide next steps.

Stake (1995) stated, “The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). Based on the ontological belief of this study a set of semi-structured interview questions guided our conversations. Most of the conversations with took place at an offsite location designated by the participant, with the exception of the primary participant’s first interview, which took place in her office after school. The other participants and I met face to face at various coffee shops, or cafés around town. Open dialogue, rather than structured interview questions, allowed me to listen for perceptions of leadership influenced by gender roles and gender stereotypes. Not only did those open dialogues allow me to listen for perceptions, but participants felt comfortable bringing up other topics that I had not anticipated. The relationships fostered through conversations rather than interviews allowed participants to feel more open in speaking truthfully about their
experiences with their current administrator or as the administrator herself. On many occasions, conversations lasted far longer than just one cup of coffee, or scoop of gelato!!

Site and Participant Selection

The qualitative research conducted with this study focused on learning about the experiences of one female elementary school principal with the hope that the rich, detailed experiences may help researchers, aspiring administrators, and master’s degree programs better understand what women may experience on the road into and during principalship, as compared to men. By using an ethnographic-like study, this research became more for women, than about them. This research was about providing a scholarly work that allowed school administrators to learn about successes and challenges faced by one woman, in hopes that it could impact future practices of aspiring administrators, or allow a platform to discuss how the notion of gender impacts individual women in the field. Her story is not meant to generalize the experiences for all women, any more than previous studies should generalize for all principals, because of the vast intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. that influence each person’s journey. As Patton (2002) shared,

While one cannot generalize from single cases or very small samples, one can learn from them—and learn a great deal, often opening up new territory for further research, as was the case with Piaget’s detailed and insightful observations of his own two children. (p. 46)

Because of the nature of this interpretivist research, I used purposeful sampling. Purposive sampling requires the researcher to specifically select samples, in this case, a school site, and a primary principal participant, which allow a more authentic study of the research questions. Michael Patton, author of *Qualitative Research and Evaluation*
Methods (2002), discussed the belief that one of the largest differences between quantitative and qualitative research is the type of sampling methods used. He shared:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, this the term, purposeful sampling. (p. 230)

Based on these beliefs I selected a school site that was part of a larger urban district, which had a larger population of female administrators to select from. The district that I selected, as many surrounding districts has increased accountability for principals based on the No Child Left Behind legislation. Currently, the district has many elementary schools that are under the sanctions of Schools In Need of Assistance (SINA) because of failure to make expected progress. Though designations of SINA schools have caused central administration to increase the work load of principals drastically, including taking over a large amount of the professional development. This district has also experienced an influx of students and their families from inner city Chicago, which has contributed to the increased free and reduced lunch designation and the overall increase in minority populations in each building. These contextual factors are far different from the experiences of the principal in Robinson’s (1996) case study.

Robinson’s (1996) work follows a principal from a more rural setting, so it was important to add to the scholarly works about women principals, but also from a urban setting. During the time period of her study, No Child Left Behind was not a factor for schools, not were the sanctions from being designated a School In Need of Assistance (SINA). The initial step for building selection, once I selected the larger urban district,
was compiling a list of all the elementary buildings that had an acting female administrator who served in that capacity for at least three school years, from the district web pages, available to the public. The rationale for selecting a female who had served at her current school for at least three years is that she gained experiences through her first years, as well as developed relationships with the staff. For an outsider to observe interactions between participants, a level of trust between those participants will be necessary. Without staff having developed relationships of trust with their administrator, the observations may not see typical rapport and interactions as accurately.

Secondly, I wanted to make sure the school site had a mid-career woman leader, because I wanted to rule out creating undue stress, which would be possible if I had selected a participant who was new to the position. Once I compiled a list of schools that meet both selection criteria I contacted the administrators directly, and met with those who were willing for a brief twenty minute informal discussion.

Those informal discussions allowed me to select a participant that was receptive to this style of research. The nature of this ethnographic-like research meant that I would be closely involved with her, because I would be having conversations with her, and other staff members or family members, as well as conducting several observations. It was necessary to select a participant with whom I felt I had begun to develop a rapport during that conversation. As Patton (2002) discussed, this type of purposeful sampling allowed me to select a primary participant that provided an information rich case.

Before beginning this research I contacted my university's instructional review board, with a formal proposal to conduct this research, which they approved. Secondly,
prior to beginning research with a site staff, the administrator gave consent to have me observe her interactions with teachers in her building, as well as interviewing teachers in her building. Often the observations between principal participant and the teachers helped determine which teachers I selected for individual interviews. All participants in this research signed consent forms, and the anonymity of those teachers was kept from the principal participant to the extent possible.

Site Description

Clinton Elementary School is an urban district in Iowa that serves over 250 students, ranging from preschool to 5th grade. Like many schools in Clinton's district there were drastic changes in student population over the past ten years. One of the most significant changes has been the increase in families from low socio-economic status. Of the current students, over 70% received free or reduced meals. In addition to preschool programming, English Language Learners account for about 10% of the students at Clinton.

The staff at Clinton is comprised of about 50% veteran teachers, and 50% beginning, or early career teachers. Of the veteran teachers, most have taught at Clinton their entire career. As the literature review indicated, women make up the majority of elementary teaching staff. Over 80% of the teachers and over 90% of the entire staff at Clinton are women.

Participant Description

For this study, there was one primary participant, Ann, the school principal. She began her journey into education as a college student, graduating in just three and a half
years, and going directly into her first classroom assignment. Upon finishing her first year in a very rural town in Iowa Ann relocated because of her upcoming wedding, to a larger urban school district, where she taught at Taft Elementary for her entire, thirteen year teaching career. After leaving the classroom, she became the facilitator at Taft, then shortly after, Ann took her first principalship job. During her time at Taft Elementary she served as a teacher in most grade levels, a facilitator, and finally the principal. Her next career move was to Clinton Elementary, in the same school district as Taft, where she has served as the building principal for the past 11 years.

Ann finished her administrative degree the same year, that she began the role of facilitator, and continued on with her schooling to earn an advanced certification in superintendency. Like many young women in education, Ann worked through her Masters and advanced certification programs, with young children at home, and while working full time.

Ann is mid career principal, in her mid-forties. She has two sons, one a college freshman, and the other finishing his last year in high school. She and her husband have been married since she began her career in her current district.

To develop an inclusive story of her experiences, as well as to compare any themes I saw in my interviews and observations, I also observed and interviewed other employees at her school site. The site selection criteria previously reviewed allowed me to select the administrator. However, the secondary participant selections met two criteria, (a) I had documented an interaction, or observation between the teacher and the principal, and (b) They received principal permission and recommendation. Those
selected helped to clarify the themes, and add another layer to the detailed account and experiences related to the primary principal participant.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Emergent design is a typical characteristic used to describe qualitative research. This form of research design suggests that predicting a specific research design prior to conducting the research is difficult, due to the unpredictable nature of qualitative research. Morgan (2008), stated

> Emergent design involves data collection and analysis procedures that can evolve over the course of the research project in response to what is learned in earlier parts of the study. (p. 245)

The notion of emergent design was critical to my flexibility with interviews and observations, as well as additional participant selection. Throughout the different interviews and observations, I was able to provide a deeper story of Ann and her experiences because of the information that additional interviews led me to revisit or bring up with Ann. The analysis of these multiple realities, lead to sophisticated discussions and deeper questioning, which created a richer account of Ann’s reality as an elementary school principal. With this type of interpretivist research there was no certain way of predicting how the study would progress in terms of numbers of interviews and observations until I saw how they developed from the setting.

In terms of the observations there were several considerations I made to ensure I saw authentic interactions and experiences. Observations took place a minimum of twice for each staff participant. These observations took place with the principal, although not necessarily with other staff participants. For example, teacher participant three and two
were present at a team meeting with the school administrator, but the counselor was not
at that particular meeting. Other observations included an impromptu hallway
conversation between one participant and the principal.

The time of day and time in the month also played a part in the number of
observations, as I intentionally included observations from both before and during the
school day. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) noted in reference to time sampling, “Similarly,
the morning routine in the class can be quite different from the afternoon” (p. 61).
Bogdan & Biklen suggest carefully selecting the time of day based on the interest of the
research. Because this research hoped to share in as much completeness as possible
about the experiences of one female elementary school principal and how she viewed her
leadership style, it was critical to gather data from times in the day in which she was
directly working with teachers and students so that I understood more about her as a
leader.

In doing multiple observations during contact time with teachers and students I
had several opportunities to look for patterns, which allowed me to ensure that her
interactions with both students and teachers were typical, not contrived for the purposes
of the observation. Secondly, based on the completeness of data collected I am confident
that I have gained a clear understanding and picture of her leadership style based on these
interactions. Upon completion of each observation and data analysis, more questions
surfaced that deemed further observation. Again with this research based on emergent
design I was flexible to change the time and frequency of my observations, so I could see
more about themes that were coming about through my data analysis.
I used semi-structured interview questions initially to ground the conversations with the participants. Knowing that each participant brought their own experiences, and perceptions of reality, it would have been difficult to gain a complete understanding if a structured list of questions were the primary data collection tool (Stake, 1995, p. 65). The flexibility of open ended questions to guide the ethnographic-like interview process allowed me to ask descriptive questions, clarifying questions and other questions targeted to elicit thoughtful reflections from the participant.

The common question types came in the form of “Grand Tour” and “Mini Tour” questions, which allowed the participants to make both generalizations about their experiences on a larger scale, as well as more specific information about particular events (Spradley, 1979, p. 86-89). For example, “Describe for me what it is like being a teacher in your school,” or “Describe how the leadership in your building impact student learning.” I conducted all initial interviews with Ann’s staff offsite, at a location determined by the participant. Two of my interviews with Ann were in her office at Clinton, and the remaining interviews conducted were offsite. I conducted follow up interviews on several occasions to help clarify questions I had and gather more information about topics that other participant interviews uncovered. Upon arrival at each initial interview, participants signed consent forms and gave permission for me to conduct an audio recording of the interview.

Another important element to the semi-structured interview questions was asking both “Grand Tour” and “Mini Tour” questions that specify the identities that shape them, or what group membership, for example, “What identities do you bring to your job as a
leader?" As mentioned in the previous chapter, each person is not simply a sex, or a gender, or a race, but an intersection of all their identities, so to uncover why and how they experience their world, it is critical to understand what groups they identify with (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Loubier & Richardson, 2008; Wing, 1997).

Field notes and a field journal provided both my personal interpretation on the data collected as well as direct quotations from the participants themselves. The field journal notes conveyed the personal thoughts, frustrations, questions, clarifications and interpretations I made and in turn redefined how I analyzed my research questions and findings. In his book, *The Ethnographic Interview*, Spradley (1979) shared the importance of using field notes to record specific documentation during the interview, which he calls condensed accounts, which help when creating an expanded account of the interview. The second form of field notes are the expanded field notes, written soon after ending the conversation with the participant.

For this research I used a field notes journal with direct observations, quotations, descriptions of mannerisms, body language, environment and anything else that helped to maintain a clear snapshot of what I saw, heard, or felt. During the course of this research I filled two journals, every line and margin had questions, comments or observations filling the pages, even the front cover was a home for plenty of colored post it notes with key questions and clarifications needed for the day’s observation or interview. Along with those descriptive elements I used a colored pen to indicate my thoughts, reflections, biases, or questions that came about either during or after the observations. Those colored coded, expanded fields notes (Spradley, 1979; Wolfinger, 2002) allowed me a
deeper analysis process, helped refine questions that I still needed to ask, and allowed me to monitor how my values and biases could potential impact and influence the research process of I wasn’t aware of them.

I spent a great deal of time referring back to my field notes journal to reflect on how the descriptive and interpretive elements of this data collection took on different contexts after additional interviews and observations. Questions I posed in the interpretive portion of my field notes journal often made more sense, after I had conducted further interviews or observations. One indicator that my research was nearing completion was when many of the anecdotes in the field notes journal began circling back to the central themes in my analysis. Bogden and Biklen (2003) referred to that point as “theoretical saturation”, the point in which the theory, or theme on which the researcher is focusing has been exhausted with the constant comparative method (p. 67).

However, there are conflicting views on the most effective use of field notes for interview purposes. Specifically, although Spradley (1979) suggested taking condensed accounts during the interview process, it is my belief that it would cause less anxiety and a more open conversation if I serve as an active listener. In the hope of creating a less formal environment, with more insight into the culture of the building and experiences of the participant, I rarely used my field notes journal during interviews, except to record a critical word, thought, or sentences fragments from our conversation that struck me as very significant. All other field note recording took place after the interview had concluded.
The focus of the interview should be on the act of listening and questioning to clarify, rather than furiously taking notes, or tape recording (Stake, 1995, p. 66). As human beings, we are inclined to speak more openly when we feel people are listened to us. My position on field notes was to spend the conversation as a listener, without the pressure of taking condensed accounts. However, to help give me a more complete expanded account, as Spradley (1979) called it, I tape recorded and fully transcribed all parts of the interviews.

As much as possible, I immediately transcribed the interview recording the same day that I conducted the interview. If I was not able to begin transcribing the same day, I spent extra time, recording notes in my field notes journal, so that I could use those notes to fill in the gaps, or questions I might have about what I was thinking when I conducted the interview. However, within a few days of the actual interview, I completed all interview transcripts.

Secondly, I tried to refrain from conducting any additional interviews, until I had time to transcribe my most recent interview recording, and begin preliminary analysis of that data. This allowed me to stay clear with the person’s intentions, as much as possible. The process allowed me to feel confident that I understood the responses of the participants. It also allowed me to uncover additional questions that I would want to go back to ask with previous participants, or those I had not yet interviewed. At the beginning of each of my follow up interviews, I began with clarifications I needed, and also a summary of what I believed the participant shared at the last interview. To conduct a thoughtful analysis of this data, required many repeated exposures to our
conversations. Those repeated exposures came about through completing full transcription, and multiple readings of the transcripts to form follow up questions or clarifications.

I used a constant comparative method, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) as a process for data analysis. Their more broadly approachable description of data analysis allowed me to be flexible in my analysis process, not bound by a set of specific steps, as is more typical with quantitative research.

After beginning with shorter observations, and an initial primary participant interview, I began looked for distinct themes, that either came about from the semi-structured interview topics, or from preliminary observations or conversations. I used my interview transcripts, field notes, and my field journal to determine my next steps. I spent a great deal of time, going back to the individual participants to follow up on comments made, or with questions that stemmed from other data analysis. After each new piece of data, I looked to see how it fit with already established codes, or if the data led to an additional code. After an exhaustive amount of comparison between data, I was able to determine larger themes consistently shared throughout multiple sources.

Once I had determined the most critical themes, I went back again to follow up on questions or clarifications that would specifically give me any additional insight. Throughout this process I used a color coding system to help visually represent the codes I had established from the data I had collected. With the constant revisiting of data, and addition of new data sources I was able to distinguish themes from the array of connected codes, which again I organized on colored post it notes on a large bulletin board in my
office. This color coded bulletin board became a story board, so to speak of Ann’s experiences through my data findings.

As discussed in the previous section, my analysis determined the number of observations and interviews I ultimately needed to further clarify themes. Through repeated exposure to the field notes and transcripts I developed a stronger sense of the multiple realities. The interpretive nature used in my data analysis drove the emergent design of this research study, so that the outcome reflected, what Patton (2002) called, an “information rich” story of one female’s experiences as an elementary school principal. Bogden and Biklen (2003) stated, “The constant comparative method, although it may rely on descriptive data to present the theory, transcends the purposes of descriptive case studies” (p. 68).

The chart below indicates the final number of participant observations, primary and secondary participant interviews, as well as the number of participants selected. The first column lists the participants, including the primary participant, Ann, followed by other family and staff participants. To maintain anonymity of the teacher, to the degree possible, the grade or particular position is not included. The primary participant recommended several teaching staff, only those below were actually selected. The second and third columns reflect the total number of observations and interviews for each participant. Finally, the remaining column indicates if the type of documents reviewed, if any.
Table 2: *Individual Participant Data Collection Types and Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Document Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1: Ann</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Emails, Staff bulletins, Meeting handouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s Husband: Dan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary: Penny</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor: Sarah</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1: Ted</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2: Helen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3: Amy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This teacher participant list changed based on the notion of emergent design and the unpredictability of this type of deeply qualitative research, from including only three teachers in the preliminary plan, to five staff, and the primary participant’s husband. This case study research, in many ways went to the depths similar to an ethnography, with the constant analysis and revisiting or clarifying of questions until a account of Ann’s principalship journey became so detailed, that it was almost as though I had experienced much of her career with her.

**Limitations**

This descriptive case study included the perspective of one female elementary school principal in Iowa. Hence, one limitation of this study is that it cannot be generalized to represent the experiences of all women administrators. This study
provided a detailed account from the context of a larger urban district in Iowa, so
principals serving in rural Iowa districts may or may not have similar experiences. The
third limitation considered is that urban districts in Iowa may or may not be similar to
urban school systems in other states, or countries. Finally, it is important to note this
study described the accounts from the perspective of one woman, including her particular
racial and age group identities.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH

The nature of qualitative research is descriptive, especially when the predominant source of data comes from in-depth discussions and participant observation. As I grappled with presenting the findings of this research, it became clear to me that to maintain the essence of Ann’s experiences I would be using a descriptive narrative style.

The organization of this chapter is to intentionally provide narrative accounts, snapshots that led me to my conclusions and findings regarding the research questions proposed. The observations and interviews with Ann and the other participants are the basis for these snapshots. Finally, in each larger section of this chapter I tie the findings back to one of the four research questions.

During the many conversations with Ann, it became almost like gazing in a crystal ball, seeing what might lie ahead if I chose a path to administration. Through more and more discussions and analysis, I came to the realization that the path I chose for higher education and her path to become a principal had some similarities. It was like I was walking on a parallel path to Ann, only a decade behind her. When she began her principalship she was the same age I was when I began this research journey. Both of us had young children starting down our respective paths.

It was that thinking about paths that led me to use a famous poem by Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken. One common interpretation of this poem is about a person who wishes they had chosen a different path in life. However, the more I read the poem I
realized that depth of each stanza, mirrored the complexities of the research findings. The common interpretation ignores many of the insights, embedded in the rich language of the stanza, and only with many readings did the meaning come through. Quite like my initial interpretation of this poem, the findings of this research required me to read and think in a different way. The remainder of this chapter will not only tell Ann’s story, but connect her path, and the four research questions to the metaphoric “Road Not Taken.”

“Two roads diverged in the yellow woods, and I,  
I took the one less traveled by,  
and that has made all the difference.” – Robert Frost

This quote, from the poem, The Road Not Taken, resonates with me, every time I reflect about personal events. And though I have read the verses again and again, each time the words bring light to different mile marks in my life. At the beginning of this research journey, I came to these diverged roads and made a choice. Walking and sometimes stumbling down the path, I still appreciate the choice I made, though as I come to the end of this journey, the landmarks on the road are not what I expected to find.

However, as I was writing this narrative it occurred to me how well the poem fit the journey Ann, who traveled on her own road, to become a principal. Throughout this chapter I will share her stories through analysis and reflection based on the four major research questions: (a) her experiences, (b) her leadership style, (c) her barriers as a leader, and finally (d) her balance between personal and professional life.
"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, 
and sorry I could not travel both 
and be one traveler, long I stood 
and looked down one as far as I could." — Robert Frost

Many experiences were significant to Ann’s development as a principal, some long before she realized the road she would ultimately choose. The section below is not meant to be an exhaustive list of Ann’s countless experiences that shaped her as a leader; however, the experiences I have chosen to include represent pivotal experiences or relationships that had profound impacts on her career. Growing up, her family and community shaped the person she would become. Gentle nudges down a particular road from mentors. Support from a group of new colleagues and friends.

A Snapshot: Growing Up Ann

The story of Ann starts with the early experiences that shaped her life, before she came to the diverging road, before she made the choice to become a principal.

As the church doors open signaling the end of Sunday Mass, Ann, her mother, Jackie, her father, Dan and six siblings head home for a leisurely afternoon. In their small rural Catholic community, in Western Iowa, this is a typical Sunday morning. The aroma of buttery fried eggs and crispy, smoked bacon fills their kitchen as Jackie prepares a hearty brunch. The children all find their places on the bench seat by the dinner table; assigned seats are a necessity for amicable meals in a large family. This Sunday spread is a change from weeknight dinners, where the notoriously watered down meals are an attempt to make things stretch for her family of nine. Church services and brunch begin the morning, but before a leisurely afternoon, chores begin.
Twenty-five clean, white blouses sway from the clothes line, along with all six jumpers, several pairs of pants, some socks and all the other laundry, except of course underwear, which is the only item that is allowed in the dryer at Ann’s house. Ann, her six sisters, and one brother all attend the Catholic school, so spend the day getting the week’s school uniforms ready. Each sister has one jumper, worn all week and five blouses, one for each school day. Sunday is ironing day.

With the sun setting, brunch digested, chores complete, and visit to grandma’s over, a familiar medley of magical tunes, like *When You Wish Upon a Star*, makes way for the soothing, grandfatherly voice of Walt Disney introducing the Wonderful World of Disney Sunday night movie. In Ann’s family, this is the ritual that sets off the beginning of another busy week.

As Ann and her siblings charge through the screen door after school, Jackie plays uniform police, giving warnings about keeping the one and only school jumper clean. For those who heed her warning, and quickly change into play clothes, a creamy peanut butter and banana sandwich awaits them. During the week day, Jackie, like most mothers in their community, stays home ready to greet the children, prepare dinner, and carry out other household duties. Every weekend, she and Ann’s father, Dan switch roles, so Jackie can work the three to eleven p.m shift as a nurse. There is comfort for Ann and her siblings to come home from school every day with mom, and of course a snack, waiting for them. However, this slow-paced afterschool routine drastically changes as Ann enters high school.
One of 400 hundred students at the Catholic high school, Ann begins her weekday with school. A strong student innately, studying is a priority, but is not as strenuous as for her younger sisters. Volleyball matches, basketball games, and cross country meets fill her afterschool time, but that doesn’t stop Ann from juggling other family expectations.

At 10:45 p.m., Ann finishes wiping the sticky beer residue off the counter at Godfather’s Pizza, then pulls the string on the neon red Open sign and watches it blink off before finally walking out to her car. Shortly after 11:00 p.m., Ann pulls into the drive at her home, anticipating not her soft bed but the hard cover of her text books waiting for an hour of evening studies. Ann has been a long time employee of Godfather’s, a mom and pop business, working her way from dishwasher to front counter. Ann has worked there since she turned fourteen, upholding her father’s strong work ethic. Taking after her father, a truck driver for the local feed company who works long hours to support his family of nine, Ann juggles school, sports, and work. Deep down, she knows if it was up to her mother she wouldn’t have been so hurried to have a job all this time, though Ann doesn’t mind the demands of school, sports and work.

Impacts of Early Experiences

This snapshot into Ann’s early years helped to give clearer understanding about what experiences shaped her as she came to the first major divergence of the road in her life, her college career. Based on analysis from Ann’s own stories, we could draw the conclusion that her early experiences with work and family ingrained a strong sense of independence, work ethic, and faith.
Raised in a family with seven children, Ann was the second oldest child, the oldest girl. Ann attributes her independence to being a part of a large family. As she shared being the oldest girl in her family meant taking on responsibilities. “I was the oldest girl in the family, so I was constantly changing a diaper, or babysitting for the two heads that were behind me.” These and other responsibilities helped her feel more comfortable acting as a responsible adult out on her own.

Ann’s family, like other families regardless of size, shared some of the household chores among the children. As each child reached high school age where other commitments took precedence, the younger children took over additional chores. It was the understanding in Ann’s family that everyone should be responsible for their own jobs and pull their own weight.

On the converse Ann noted, that her youngest sister, Leia, never had the chance to be independent because she was always the baby who was taken everywhere; she never was able to just do nothing. Ann recollects that Leia was always around all these kids and different activities. Growing up, Ann, as the one of the eldest children had time to be alone, with less distraction from other siblings, and more time with just her parents and older brother.

Upon leaving high school, Ann displayed her strong sense of independence in her decision to go to a large college in central Iowa. There was pressure from her family to go to a Catholic college closer to her home town, that her older brother attended, but Ann was adamant about getting out on her own. She based her decision not solely on the distance from home, but the program of study offered at the college she would attend.
Through her stories about leaving home it was clear to me that not only did Ann crave a level of independence, but the environment at home after she left supported her choice. In one story she said that, “I went to college, and once you left our house you didn’t have a bedroom anymore, they overtook your bedroom, your space. Once I left for college, my first summer back I was home, but after that I never went home.” Being the oldest girl, second oldest child in a large family, I anticipated that some of her level of independence would come from having greater responsibilities growing up, to which Ann agreed. Ann shared how she was never home in high school, making sure she got to school, sports practices and her job.

From her college age, Ann’s sense of independence allowed her to successfully enter a college setting and make gains on her road as an educator. The idea that her home was no longer really “home” created a definite need for her to be able to plan out her life and move forward without the support of living with her family. For Ann, there was no turning back, only continuing down the road that she chose.

That same work ethic and ability to juggle many critical tasks, that she exhibited in high school was necessary for her to support herself through college as she juggled rigorous college academics and work. As a full time student, Ann not only maintained excellent grades, but worked as well. She spoke about the summer after her second year, when she rented a room from a woman who worked with her at the food service center at her college.

In later interviews, Ann shared with me that she completed her educational program in only three and a half years. When she shared that information I questioned if
in Ann's constant push to move forward she missed some of the "landmarks" along the way down her road. The desire to work, work, work, can come at a cost, and I wondered what price Ann paid to finish her schooling early. At one point, she shared an aside about her son, Mark, who is currently in college near her hometown. Mark is considering studying abroad at some point in his programming and Ann and her husband, Dan, have differing opinions about that choice. Dan believes it costs too much money, but Ann says that she doesn't care about the cost. She openly shares her regrets about missing out on those experiences.

I mean I graduated in three and a half years. I graduated early, in hindsight, I wish I had not done that. I wish I would have taken an extra semester and gone somewhere, studied somewhere, or gone over seas to teach, 'cause part of it is I was too chicken. I am not a risk taker in that way.

While Ann maintained the strong work ethic, and an almost competitive drive to finish a task, she evidenced that sometimes, even early in her life, opportunities passed her by. Even with this small bit of regret, however, she would never say it was a wrong choice.

Along with her exceptional work ethic she has an equally strong faith. In fact, in times of distress, or uncertainty, I often hear Ann say "The man upstairs has a plan for me." Ann's community growing up was about 80% Catholic, she would say, "All my friends were Catholic, we all went to the same school, and the same church." In fact, her entire school experience, other than Kindergarten, was in the Catholic system, which was much larger than the public school system at the time. In one of our final interviews Ann shared that religion was a huge part of her life growing up. She also shared that her
mother still attends mass every day. Ann's strong religious upbringing ingrained a deep faith that became the core of who she is and how she lives her life.

A Snapshot: Nudging Ann Along

It was a new town, a new job, a new beginning for Ann, who was just two months into her 5th grade classroom teaching position at Taft Elementary School. What a relief it was to leave that small town, Spring Lake, where she took her first teaching job as a 5th grade teacher. It was one of those towns where you couldn’t even keep that day’s lunch a secret. Thinking about lunch, Ann chuckles as she thinks about the crowning achievement of that tiny, but proud, community, an award winning barbecue.

Interrupting Ann’s thoughts of last year, her teaching partner, Joannie, saunters in with a Diet Coke, ready to plan instruction for next week’s math. The idea of having a partner to plan and learn with is a welcome addition for Ann. In her previous school there was a single section of each grade level, leaving Ann to learn the ropes of first year teaching on her own, or from the guiding phone calls from her future mother-in-law. With the predictability of a married couple, the two teachers gather around the kidney shaped table, as they do each Thursday after school, and plan out the math activities for next week. At 5:15 p.m., looking a bit like a Santa Claus stuffing his sack, Ann loads her canvas bag with piles of papers, resource books, and pens, until it looks too full for her petite figure to possibly carry. Balancing her canvas tote and purse she heads toward the parking lot, where she sees her principal Leroy Stone, which reminds her that Monday is her first observation meeting with him.
Monday morning, Ann knocks on the metal trim of Leroy’s office door. He smiles and waves her in. They discuss all of the successful elements that he observed in her classroom visit recently. Leroy, even after watching Ann’s dedication and work ethic for only two months, has pegged her potential as a teacher leader. So far this school year, he has already asked her to serve on several committees and serve as a trainer for a district professional development initiative. At the conclusion of their meeting, he strongly suggests that Ann pursue administration for her master’s level course work.

A few years later, Ann is still serving in the teacher capacity, and has just finished her master’s degree in administration, but there have been several changes. Leroy Stone retired and the building facilitator has accepted a job at another building as school principal. And the current building principal, Frank O’Donald, has approached Ann about accepting the now open facilitator position. For a second time, Ann feels some slight pressure from her administrator to take on more administrative, leadership roles. With some anxiety about moving into the facilitator role, Frank has offered a safety net for Ann: stay for one year, and if you don’t like it, back to a classroom. “The man upstairs has a plan for me,” Ann thinks as she makes her decision to join Frank as his facilitator for the upcoming school year.

Impact of Early Mentors on Ann’s Career

Based on the strong work ethic modeled in Ann’s family, I was not surprised to hear her story about her interest in pursuing a master’s degree, though how she chose to select administration didn’t mesh with the head-strong independent decision maker I had
learned to know. Within the first five minutes of our first interview, Ann expressed certainty in knowing her career path.

I always knew I was going to be a teacher, Angela...there was no question. I mean I didn’t look at anything else. I mean I knew I was going to ______ because that was where the teaching school was, it was like I had it all planned out. There weren’t any qualms about that.

Working with Leroy. Ann did maintain that certainty as she became a career teacher at Taft. Her experiences varied from 5th grade, to multi-age classrooms, to alternative education programs. Though as Ann began entertaining the idea of continued schooling, she was less than certain of her direction. On several occasions, Ann discussed a specific conversation with Leroy that ultimately nudged her to choose the first of many roads leading her into administration. At her first evaluation meeting of the school year, Leroy had asked Ann what she was going to pursue a master’s degree in. At the time Ann was undecided, and shared that with Leroy, who responded directly, “You’re going to get it in administration.” During my initial conversation with Ann, reflecting back on that day she shared her reaction to Leroy’s nudge, “So it was kind of like, well okay, whatever, so I did and those opportunities just availed. And as soon as I was done...the facilitator position at Taft was open...”

Based on what I had learned about Ann I was curious about how someone, who had such certainty about teaching, would consider moving into a degree program which would ultimately lead her out of the classroom. Even more interestingly was that Ann had never ever thought about administration as an option before her conversation with Leroy. Listening to Ann I realized the magnitude of this conversation on her career
pathway. On multiple occasions, Ann spoke about how things might have been different if Leroy hadn’t pushed her.

I don’t know. I mean if Leroy wouldn’t have pushed me to get my masters in administration I would probably would have gotten it in reading or special ed, but he said, “You’re going to do administration” he was there to support me and he gave opportunities along the way to support me.

On another occasion, I asked Ann directly if she would have gone down the same road if Leroy hadn’t suggested administration.

You know, I don’t know if I would have gone the same route, at the time, I didn’t know what I was going to get my masters in. I could have got it in curriculum. I think the fact the he gave me those leadership opportunities probably pushed me into it a little more.

Throughout all of her conversations about Leroy she always refers to him as “pushing her.” That language alone, coupled with her seeming appreciation for the opportunities he provided really led me to believe that in Ann’s particular case, she was open to change, but maybe needed a push to make a decision. Even though Leroy saw her as a good candidate for administration, it made me wonder about Ann’s confidence in making her next steps and seeing herself as a teacher leader. Sometimes our own confidence is boosted when our skills are recognized through other’s belief in us.

Although Ann saw herself as a good teacher, maybe that push was something she needed to see her own leadership potential.

It was clear that Leroy trusted Ann as an exemplary model teacher and leader in the building based on the numerous opportunities that she received. In follow up interviews, I started to wonder what type of mentor Leroy was to Ann as she moved forward with her administrative training. In my initial interviews I assumed that he was a
strong mentor for her as a principal, because she frequently referred to the conversation leading her into administration, as well as the multitude of opportunities that he provided for her to gain leadership practice. What I found was that while she valued him for the role he played in providing learning opportunities, she did not see him as a mentor in terms of leadership style.

...when I first came to Taft, Leroy was my first principal and he gave me, he helped me to push those leadership positions but as far as emulating that administrative style, he was kind of his way, he was ready to retire kind of when I came in. So he wasn't one that I emulated, it was Frank.

Working with Frank. Her second principal, Frank, not only served as her principal, after Leroy's retirement, but also as her most trusted mentor. Shortly after Ann completed her administrative degree the building facilitator position opened, and Frank asked her to consider taking the position. Almost from the beginning Ann and Frank had a close working relationship, based on a strong mutual trust. That asset of trust proved to be one of the most powerful elements in making their team work. In a leadership position, Ann was a great candidate for Frank because she knew the first hand the strengths and weaknesses of the staff, but was distant enough from any close friendships on staff, other than Joannie. Even in her early teaching career Ann didn't have close friendships with many staff outside of school, which allowed her to present a neutral stance when speaking with teachers. Ann's ability to stay neutral, supporting both teachers and leadership decisions, built a large capacity for trust.

In situations of conflict, or stress, Ann would often respond by problem solving the situation with teachers. As she said, after awhile the teachers stopped coming to her with complaints about their job because she wouldn't pity them or console, she would
just say, “Okay, let’s just problem solve how you are going to do this” In fact, in the beginning, Ann was almost shocked to have teachers coming to her with complaints about what she viewed as just part of the job. She discussed how she dealt with other conflicts as well. “As a facilitator, they want to tell you, but with Frank and I they learned very quickly that is wouldn’t go anywhere. I’d shut them down and say, “Is this something you need to talk to Frank about?” Ann’s responses in difficult situations not only allowed Frank to trust Ann as his right hand, but gave her insight into the type of trust a leadership relationship had. They both knew and trusted that either of the team would back up the decisions they made jointly, or decisions that Frank needed to make on his own.

Collaboration was the second critical element in this mentoring relationship. Their collaboration built on their mutual trust. The power of her experiences came with her ability to be a part of decision making as a team effort. Other than major personnel issues, Frank relied on Ann as part of the decision making process. “There wasn’t anything we didn’t decide together. There were very few things that we didn’t do, be it professional development or whatever it be, we really were a team.”

Unlike much of the research on women in administration that indicates loneliness as part of the job, Ann felt a great sense of collaboration serving in the facilitator leadership capacity. That collaboration seemed to be important to her and really defined the leadership style that she valued. That desire for a close collaborative team showed up with her teaching partner, and remained in her work with Frank. Even though Ann was a
part of the staff, and was still often included in the teaching group as a facilitator, she was selective with whom she formed close trusting and collaborative bonds.

The mentoring and modeling Frank provided gave Ann a chance to learn about herself as a leader, in terms of the characteristics and traits that she really valued. The trust built between a collaborative team became critical to Ann as she moved forward in her career and eventually served as principal at Taft upon Frank’s unexpected retirement.

When he left I would still be calling him, and saying, “Okay, give me advice on this and give me advice on that”, but we worked so closely together that it was pretty seamless when he left.... when Frank left it was like, I was stepping into where we were.

Frank had a significant impact on Ann as a leader. Each time I spoke with her about experiences in her early years, it was evident she truly admired him as a leader when she spoke about emulating his practices. Not only did Ann learn from his strengths, but his weaknesses as well. Ann shared this about his leadership strengths:

His style of how he interacted with other people, his style in the fact that he was on duties, the man was always visible. In fact, I had a parent in last week who said, “I just love the fact that I always see you in the cafeteria, I see you in the halls, I see you at recess, my principal is never ever in the cafeteria and never at recess, and only sometime in classrooms.” So that made me feel like that piece was important to this parent, and Frank helped me see that.

Though Ann respected Frank a great deal, she learned about things she would do differently from watching him too. She noted,

....in fact when I took over I had everybody to evaluate, everyone, he didn’t do anyone, so that was not a strong point, and I knew that about him. So that was a piece that I knew I had to follow through with that paper piece.

Ann described her gratitude for their relationship “I mean Frank and I were such
an amazing team, I mean I thank God everyday that I had him as my mentor, I learned so much from him and we truly were a team."

And as Robert Frost’s poem goes, “...and sorry I could not travel both, and be one traveler, long I stood”, Ann decided to choose the road of administration, knowing that she would leave the road of the teacher, doubtful to return.

A Snapshot: New Colleagues and Friends

Honey colored wood panels line the walls of the Board Room at the Educational Service Building where Ann and Karen laugh as Marnie shares a conversation that she overheard between two kindergarten students while covering recess duty the day before. Ann, Marnie and Karen are involved in a mentor group for first year administrators, facilitated by Peter Gregs, the director of elementary school principals for their district. Though the trio of women meets formally only once a month, the relationships they have forged through this mentoring group, extend well beyond this setting.

At 4:55, the large oak door creaks a bit, as Peter walks in five minutes before the scheduled meeting start time. While Peter’s principal meetings have a defined agenda, this meeting is more of a support group than a work session. Over the first few months, the group’s topics have covered personnel issues, communication with community, student discipline, and professional development for staff. Today’s hot topic is the upcoming computer roll out that will influence professional development days and the already limited space in the buildings. After an hour or so of discussion and problem solving, the colleagues call it a night. Ann, whose school is just blocks away, plans to head back to work to stop in on the parent group that is meeting at school tonight at 6:00.
Ann counts on the monthly mentoring group meetings, but also knows that she has other opportunities to process about the job throughout the week.

Ann walks in through the garage door and greets the family dog, Abbie. Nobody is home, but the dishes in the sink tell her that Dan and the boys have eaten and are off at soccer practice. Ann glances at the clock before she picks up her walking shoes from the foyer. The white Nike shoes are faded and scuffed, and the soles are nearly flat from the hours and hours of walking that have worn the treads almost to nothing. This is part of her evening ritual, a way to relieve the stressors of a long day, her nightly walk with Karen. It wasn't long into her job as principal that she realized how lonely the job of principal could be. While Ann's walking has always been a pastime, she now finds her evening walks to serve more than just a health purpose. The conversations between Ann and Karen during their nightly walks serve as a therapeutic outlet for both of the new principals to process their days.

Tonight, Ann and Karen start their walk at a feverish pace, with their conversations matching. "What would you do with this situation?" "How did you handle that?" "You'll never guess what happened today..." "I don't know what to do!" This rapid string of questions and statements are just as much a pattern of this nightly ritual as the pace of their walk. Within three blocks, the women are two dancers synchronized, their arms pumping at their sides and feet smacking the concrete. Undeterred by the fast pace, their conversations flow as easily as if they were two friends, swapping gossip on the patio over a glass of wine. However, in time, as with most other nights, sometime between the first and second miles, the pace slows slightly, and the conversations become
less intense and school related and more about family and aspirations. Ann and Karen finish their walk, and both head home, rejuvenated and ready for the beginning of another workday, just ten hours away.

Just out the window of her grey Dodge minivan Ann can faintly make out the moon, as yellow rays of the rising sun begin to push the night away. With the car’s headlights shining, she follows the notoriously dangerous curve on the interstate, and slowly takes the exit ramp that is blocks away from Taft Elementary School. Pulling into a parking spot in the horseshoe in the front of the building, the automatic shut off dims her headlights, and she walks into the building the sun still not all the way up. Ann starts her day early, knowing that she faces another long night with a principal’s study group right away afterschool from 4:30-7:30.

Right away this morning, her voicemail light blinks red as she walks into her office and drops her bag and purse on the floor under her desk. The message is Marnie, who has a question about how to she might want to handle a touchy situation between two staff members. Of course, Ann knows that is far too early to reach Marnie at school, who’s more of a saunter in at 8:10 with a fountain Diet Coke gal than an early riser like Ann. Instead, Ann opens her calendar, and looks ahead at the day, for a second time, once before she even left the house this morning. Ann opts to get a head start on some evaluation paperwork that she will use for observations she has planned for later in the week. Only forty-five minutes after starting, she has a question about how to complete a section of the form; she glances at her clock and picks up the phone. After only a few months into the job, Ann already feels a comradery with many other principals in her
urban district. She calls several other female principals frequently for advice and suggestions. This morning, it would be Nan.

At 4:30, Nan’s house is buzzing with the laughter and conversation of the principal’s study group. Quietly coming in the front door, Ann scans the room to see Laura, Nan, Karla, Karen, Marnie and Becky, her go-to gals. This is the opportune time for new principals, like Ann, Karen, and Marnie, to ask questions about their job without feeling stupid. As the clock turns 7:30, Ann is still sitting on the couch next to Karla, picking her brain about how to handle a situation at Taft. At 8:00, Karla and Ann have moved their conversation to the kitchen to include Nan, as they help her clean up the kitchen after all the other principals have left for the night.

Impact of Colleagues and Friends on Ann’s Early Years

Throughout her first years in the profession, Ann built relationships that allowed her to feel connected and safe enough to ask for suggestions, feedback, or support. Purposeful collegial networks, as in the mentor group led by Peter, fostered some of those relationships, while others came about through opportunities to connect with other principals, during principal study groups or monthly principal’s meetings. Regardless of how these relationships and networks transpired, they provided Ann a positive climate to learn about the challenges and celebrations of her new profession. As for much of the research on women administrators, the journey of the principal can be lonely, and full of missteps. In Ann’s situation, she not only had professional colleagues to lean on for support and to guide her before she made mistakes, but she also developed some close friendships as well.
During the course of our interviews, Ann discussed how Peter served as a mentor to her as a new principal. From her first weeks throughout her early years as a principal, it was clear through his commitment to organizing the mentor group, and with the frequent conversations, that Peter recognized Ann as a leader, and would make certain that she was successful.

He was so helpful when I became (a principal); he hired me. He had a lot of stake in making sure that I was successful. He set up a mentoring program for new administrators, so Karen, Marnie and myself were all hired right at the same time, so we did a lot of mentoring things with Peter that first year, umm, just helping develop ourselves as principals...really there was a lot of learning and asking questions.

One of the attributes Ann appreciated so much about Peter- as a mentor, was his ability to listen, and avoid jumping right to answers. Through many conversations, Ann strengthened her decision-making skills and confidence by calling Peter with a problem. While it was a valuable attribute, sometimes Ann, being the Type A personality, could get frustrated when she called just wanting to know what to do. When I spoke with Ann about Peter she chuckled when she recollected her phone conversations with him. I got the impression that many of the phone calls, ended up with Ann doing most of the talking. “He was a good listener. He would never give me the answer, he never EVER gave me the answer. He would make me come to my own conclusions, but at least he would let me talk it through.”

In speaking with Ann about her mentor group, it was evident that through a safe coaching environment, she, Karen and Marnie felt a strong sense of connectedness to one another as a group of professionals new to the position. While Ann never directly spoke
about the importance of her relationship with the friends she made in the mentor group, I felt that the group was far more than a pre-requisite to an initial principalship.

In fact, Ann spoke with me about the frequent calls they made to each other, and how Karen became a friend outside of work. Several years into her principalship career, Karen left the district and moved out of the state, and Marnie retired. Ann spoke about how the loss of those friends and colleagues changed her connectedness. “Karen and I used to walk all the time, and we would do a lot of bantering back and forth while we walked, but now that she’s gone I don’t pick up the phone as much as I used to. It’s a different feel.”

In the case of Ann, Karen and Marnie, who began the principalship road together, they all encountered similarities in terrain. While their individual leadership styles influenced their job, there were more similarities than differences for these women becoming first time principals. Through their similar experiences, they shared common interests in working with staff to prepare students for success, as well as common goals and aspirations for themselves as leaders. Whether or not they agreed on leadership style, the women in this group relied on each other for that solidarity. The relationship she developed through her mentoring group had a profound impact on her as an administrator because she never had to feel she was facing something alone, she just picked up the phone. While Karen and Marnie were two people she spoke with frequently, she also depended on a larger network of women principals.

One of the most fascinating insights I had into Ann’s experience was the close knit community that she established with a large group of other women principals, all
ranging in age. As the relationships have changed so have the venues in which they meet. What began with events like professional book study has morphed into monthly poker nights and trips around the United States.

I asked Ann about the topics at their monthly poker nights, “You know what, the rule was the first twenty minutes you could talk school, but after that there was no school talk.” Being from a family of educators, whose dinner conversations always had a way of revolving back to school, I wasn’t surprised to see Ann’s husband smile when I brought up the “rule.” He said, “They always end up talking about school, it doesn’t matter. You put them in a room together, what else are they going to talk about, so, regardless of whatever they are doing, it always comes back to school.”

Of course, right away I thought about my own experiences, as I began teaching and my parents were both principals. My dad would try his damnedest to impose a similar rule, reminding, “Now mother, that’s enough, let’s talk about something else. We were there all day.” Apparently, much like my mother and I, the topic of school just inevitably comes back up for Ann and her group.

Ann’s experiences in developing strong networks and relationships were a large part of what made her road into the principalship so positive.

I have been so fortunate because the people when I entered were so incredibly helpful... I think about when I came in you know, all these people that were willing to help new people, and we had study groups together, and Peter really set it up for us to be successful.

Those people Ann referenced most in our conversation about early experiences in the principalship were women, Karen, Marnie, Becky, Nan, Karla, and others. Ironically, when I asked Ann about who her mentors were as she began her administration journey,
both she spoke about were men, Frank and Peter. Throughout my data analysis, I wondered why Ann seldom named any of the women in her obviously tight professional network as mentors, even though our conversations indicated that she valued these women’s opinions and advice.

When I spoke with Ann at our final interview, I asked her again about her mentors.

Karla, Marnie, Karen, and Nan. Like now, that’s where I am feeling the loneliest this year, because such a big group left. So like I’ll call Lori or Tammy, but I don’t have the same network that I used to have.

What I noticed when I spoke with her this final time was that there wasn’t really just a mentor or two, but rather a group of people, women and men that supported her, either as a mentor, or as a colleague in her early career. Until her network started shrinking, Ann maintained those early relationships.

**Leadership Styles**

“And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back” — Robert Frost

Just as in Frost’s poem, while the roads appeared similar, there would be no way of knowing what the road taken, or the road not taken, would look like beyond our sight. Ann, like the person in this poem, faced uncertainty, even though the traits she possessed would remain even if she chose a different position. In fact, many of the traits that helped make her a successful leader of teachers had been critical to students’ feelings of success in her classroom. Those consistent qualities displayed who she was; her kind
spirit and supportive nature manifested regardless of her position as a teacher, a facilitator, or a principal. She had no way of knowing how those qualities would impact the challenges or successes she would face as she traveled down the road into the principalship, only that as a principal she would have a greater capacity to affect the students’ and staff’s experiences based on her style.

Throughout conversations with Ann, many staff members, and her husband, it became clear her leadership style was rooted in her collaborative and supportive nature, work ethic, and focus on children. In the findings and analysis below I will discuss those specific characteristics of Ann’s leadership style through her perception and those she works with, as well as how Ann perceives the effectiveness of herself as a leader. Finally, this section will discuss the complexities of Ann’s leadership style.

A Snapshot: It’s Not the Ann Show

The décor in Ann’s office is not something you would see on the cover of an interior design magazine, but each knickknack, book, and photo tells the story of what she holds true. Along the left wall, a white metal bookshelf lined with professional literature, like No Disposable Kids, and the most recent Professional Learning Communities title. Displayed on the top of the bookshelf is a small card in a plastic sleeve, decorated with a ladybug that reads, “I am precious in HIS sight.”

The vintage metal L shaped office desk has a lone shelf, speckled with photos of Ann, her two boys, and their family in assorted frames. Below the shelf, at the far back corner of her desk is a figure of Jesus, tucked away from plain sight, but close enough to the computer monitor that Ann would only need to glance up to be reminded. A canvas
Scholastic teacher’s bag overflows with books, an incentive Ann uses to motivate students to keep reading. Ann is sitting at her desk; the only sounds are the clicking of computer keys as she fires off another email and the dull buzz of the overhead fluorescent lights.

The first sign of life in the school other than Ann and the morning custodial engineer arrives when Sarah, the school counselor, rolls into school around 7:00 am. With a contagious grin, and a Diet Coke in hand, Sarah pops her head in the doorway connecting Ann’s office to the secretary’s office space.

“Good Morning.” she chirps, “what’s on the agenda today?”

Ann, looks up from her computer smiling, “Well, we are going to have to tag team today a bit. There is no sub assigned for music today, so I’m heading down there this morning. Can you cover my breakfast and lunch duties?”

“Sure, I can do that. Can you still cover my afternoon recess duty? Remember, Mrs. Smith asked if we would be able to start that recess group today, so I need to meet with Jonas and the other two boys about our plan.” The conversation runs like a negotiation, with Ann and Sarah arranging and rearranging their schedules to be proactive with the situation for the day. This morning check-in is part of a daily ritual for Ann and Sarah.

Ann’s long strides don’t match her short frame as she walks quickly down the hall and up the stairs. Her lively pace jingles the lanyard holding her name badge and keys, and when she turns into the classroom, the teachers greet her with a smile; they hear her coming before she arrives. Two trapezoid tables are pushed together to form a hexagon,
Ann sits down at the far table and waits for the team to begin their meeting about upcoming Iowa Assessments. As the meeting begins, each teacher shares what worked and didn’t work the previous year to prepare for the Iowa Assessments. For a majority of the meeting Ann sits quietly, asking clarifying questions occasionally, or nodding her head in affirmation. At one point, a question is posed to Ann, “What should we be doing with this new test prep material this year?” Ann grins a bit, then says, “It’s not the Ann show, it’s not just about what I want you to do. What do you all think we should be doing to help our kids?”

Impact of Ann’s Collaborative and Supportive Style

Even after my first day of observations, it was clear to see how much Ann truly acted as a supportive and collaborative leader. It is no secret when you speak with Ann that removing barriers for teachers is central to what she believes. Her proactive approach to removing or preventing barriers for teachers came through in her frequent classroom visits, visibility at breakfast, lunch, recess and afterschool duties, discussions with teams, and conversations with individual teachers. I said to Ann one day as we were walking to our next duty in the café, “I can’t help but notice, you have this innate ability as a servant leader, watching you with teachers, paras, café staff, parents and kids.” Ann responded,

I think that is my role. If I can’t make them better, then we can’t make the kids be more successful, so I see that as a support role. That is my primary job, get the barriers out of the way of teachers so they can do their job, because if they can’t teach, then they can’t get to the kids job.

While the charge of instructional leadership has become greater in times of high stakes testing, Ann makes certain her teachers have a voice in the decisions related to
instruction in their building and classrooms. As with any good leader, she has the ability
to evaluate what is working and what is not, then formulate a plan to include the group or
individual with the changes necessary to improve instruction. On several occasions, Ann
takes that instructional leadership role as far as covering classrooms when there are sub
shortages. Not all principals will take on that role. “I wouldn’t want to do it every day,
trying to rearrange people’s lesson plans, but I think that helps keep me fresh in how I
can support teachers.”

Supporting her teachers to improve their instruction is often difficult, because it is
so personal. Ann makes sure her teachers, whether as individuals or the whole staff,
knows that she will support them. She verbalizes it frequently, “This is what we need to
get done. How can I support you? What do you need from me to help you get that
done?” However, because of Ann’s soft-spoken nature, teachers can sometimes have a
difficult time placing a finger on the type of support that she provides. “I don’t think she
always stands up for us in a way that we can see it directly, but I know that she is right
there, and she has our backs,” says Amy, one of the teachers I interviewed during my
research.

Amy spoke about her first years with Ann as a principal. She was a relatively new
teacher, who was struggling with classroom management. After some observations and a
parent contact in the late fall, Ann sat down with Amy and had a conversation with her
about management. Even though the conversation was extremely painful for Amy, after
a few months of classroom support, she praised Ann for helping her see things that
needed change. “…you’ve got the support you need when you need it, and I think that
can be frustrating to some people because they don’t necessarily see the support they are getting, but you know that if she thought you needed more support, or I know at least, that if I need more, she would be there to do that. That is not a strength you can put a specific name on, but that is what I would want to make sure I had, more than anything."

I compare Ann’s support to the poem in the opening paragraph, “And both that morning equally lay, in leaves no step had trodden black the paths...” While Ann’s outward appearance looks the same to all her staff, past their sight and sometimes even the teacher she is supporting, what she provides is sometimes not easy to see, like the paths with undisturbed leaves. Ann continues to use that silent support with her teaching staff, as she did with the children in her classroom, providing them with whatever each needed to be successful, sometimes without their knowledge of what she was doing.

Even in highly personal situations, the bottom line for Ann is that she is there to support her staff. During our meeting sessions, Ann discussed a situation where a teacher at her school faced an Operating While Intoxicated charge. While it was hard for the teacher to come to Ann with the incident she felt comfortable enough knowing that Ann would support her through it. In her conversation with me about the situation Ann stated, “We will just support. We are your support person. What are you going to need to help you get through this, and yes this too shall pass, but for a while you are going to be under a microscope.”

Both of the teachers discussed felt supported by Ann, yet it wasn’t as though she was just going to swoop in and fix the situation for them. She balances her supportive
nature, so that staff does not view her information gatekeeper, by supporting people as they collaborate to find their own outcomes, or solutions to problems.

Ann’s collaborative nature supports her belief about using the best teachers to lead change. When looking at a necessary change, Ann finds a person or persons on a team, and collaborates with them, so they can in turn build that change from within the team. One such example was the shift to using a different management system during leveled reading small groups. Ann met with one of the primary team members and proposed the idea of a new management system in place of traditional centers. That teacher went back, read and implemented the system and found great success, and in doing so gained the interest of her teammates. The team’s collaboration then centered on how each teacher could modify and use that system to help students become more independent during class. Ann determined that management was an area of concern, standing in the way of teachers getting to quality instruction, so she used this collaborative approach to facilitate change. Not only does Ann rely on individuals within the system to build the capacity for change, but she uses the collective power of teacher leader groups.

One collaborative team Ann works with is her building leadership team that is comprised of grade level representatives. She sees one of her largest strengths as her ability to be collaborative, so the staff feels like they own the work.

I don’t like to be out in front of that piece, I think I am more of an inclusionary kind of leader, where we build up that leadership team. Like it’s not me, I am constantly saying to the leadership team, “This is not the Ann show here guys, let’s talk about this.” Yet I give them some direction in terms of ways that I want to go, but at the same token, help them develop their leadership skills.
Another typical collaborative situation involves Ann's complete grade level meeting, which meet weekly. Sometimes maintaining that collaborative nature can be hard for Ann though. She shares this experience about working with teacher teams,

I think that's where sitting in on those PLC (grade level teams) can be awkward sometimes because they look at me like, 'What do you think? How do you think we should proceed?' I am like, 'You guys, I don't have the answer to that. Let's work it out together.'

Ann's relationships with her secretary and counselor are extremely collaborative. For Ann those collaborative relationships developed out of a deep trust and similar belief about children. All three women have a strong faith, which is one of their strongest connections. Sarah shared the ease of their collaborative relationship, as it has grown in time.

It's day to day checking in, she'll come to my office or I will go to her office... we kind of tag. It's kind of come natural that we don't even have to talk, but at the beginning of the day we'll check in, saying what have you got going on?

It was interesting to see how much each of the pair talked about the relationship with the other. Sarah sees her relationship with Ann as a partnership, where they are both willing to take on similar responsibilities regarding children in the building. For instance, in the case of office referrals, both women use a similar language of processing and counseling with children, not a view of punishment. However, Sarah is also open in saying that while they are a team, some aspects are very much Ann's responsibility alone. This happens especially in the case of teachers looking for input on decisions needing to be made.

Ann compares the difference between being Frank's "right hand" when she served as facilitator to her relationship with Sarah as her "right hand." While there is a
great deal of collaboration, the relationship is different. Ann describes her relationship
with Sarah,

Similar, but different too because I still can’t share with her, the things that Frank
and I were able to share with my role. I trust Sarah explicitly and she is
confidential. I can’t share personnel issues...and we are so philosophically the
same.

Ann’s collaborative leadership style also has a large affect on her secretary, Kim.
Ann and Kim both shared how different their relationship is than most principals and
secretaries. Kim truly feels like Ann works with her, “The thing that I so appreciate
about Ann is that she doesn’t ask me to do anything that she wouldn’t do along side with
me. So I just think a lot of her for that.”

Even though collaboration is important to Ann, there are times when she and her
staff admit that she is reluctant to pass things on to others. Ann often said, “I like to have
my hand in all the pots.” It’s my opinion this difficulty in letting go has a large part to
do with another aspect of her leadership style, her strong drive and work ethic. One of
her staff members said, “She knows if she does it herself it will get done well.” At times,
the two leadership style characteristics compete with each other, and sometimes cause
self-imposed stress on Ann. She seeks to maintain a collaborative atmosphere, but at the
same time, feels a strong desire to have tasks completed correctly and in an efficient
manner.

A Snapshot: “I’m a Driver”

Lunchtime for Ann, like many administrators, is not always a priority when
dealing with all of the unknowns that come with the job each day. However, in the past
few years, Ann has learned that if she doesn’t come prepared with healthy on the go
lunch choices, she will eat a handful of junk food on the fly, or simply nothing at all. Today she cracks a V8 juice can open and takes a sip, before she turns to check email. Before school, during her lunch, and after school are the only times of day that Ann checks her email, because she doesn’t like the feeling of being tethered to her desk, she would rather be in classrooms.

Amidst emails, she spins her chair to continue her lunch, the once chilled V8 is now getting warm. Ann grabs a handful of Wheat Thin crackers from the box under her desk, and pulls a bite size round of cheese from her lunch bag. She takes another sip of her V8, then turns back to her computer monitor with cheese and crackers in hand. Her eyes glued to the screen reading the most current email, she fumbles to remove the red casing from the cheese round. In her blind attempt to open the cheese, she undoubtedly drops the whole thing on the floor. Instead, she starts munching on her remaining crackers, then again without even looking up, reaches over to grab her three quarter full V8. This whole working lunch takes her no longer than fifteen minutes, and then she is back on the go, heading for classroom walk throughs.

The sun sneaks through the half drawn blinds in the meeting room, reminding the staff, “Look it’s beautiful outside and you are inside working.” Around one table are three veteran teachers, all dressed in black pants but with an assortment of floral printed rayon tops. The fourth table member is a man, dressed in light denim jeans, and a pink-collared Ralph Lauren shirt. There are four open chairs at this table, while the other table is already full with some of the newer staff members, who are dressed more casually in dark jeans and short sleeve cotton tops. All the teachers can hear what Ann’s fondly calls
her cowbell, her lanyard of keys, ringing at the end of the hallway as she is coming up to start their meeting.

This meeting is a typical early dismissal agenda, jammed packed with plenty of content and collaboration time. Recently, Ann met with the district professional development coordinator about a new process that Ann will be introducing today. Only a few of the buildings have started this process of identifying student learning targets and the various developmental milestones that students need to learn before the target can be attained. After the first ten minutes of explaining and modeling the process Ann can already see the arms fold across the chests and feel some of the teachers’ digging their heels in. Others on the staff are at the front of their chairs or already flipping through their collaborative team binder, looking for the materials they might use when work time starts.

Ann understands that not everyone on the staff will respond the way she did, with a drive and excitement to move forward with new ideas so quickly. She knows that she will need to be clear with the expectation that, “Yes, we are going to do this work. That is not an option.” Simultaneously she will have to share the message, that I understand the anxiety this might cause some of you, “What do you need from me so you can do this work? How can I help you?” This understanding of her staff and their personalities, helps Ann balance the intensity of her drive, so she can determine once the expectations are given, who is ready to ride on their own so to speak, and who will still need the training wheels.
Impact of Ann’s Drive and Work Ethic

A phrase I heard often from Ann was, “You know I am a driver.” She has an intense work ethic and drive that pushed her though college in three and a half years and keeps her going one hundred miles an hour from sun up to sun down. With her drive came an ability to know which people she could push to go fast and for which she would have to slow down.

The forward movement of the building in terms of staff learning was another area impacted by Ann’s strong work ethic and drive. During this research, many staff members shared with me the incredible amount of work that Ann put into professional development, or other aspects, to keep staff moving ahead. Her excitement to continue trying new things was also critical in staff learning.

Finally, Ann’s work ethic and drive affected her professionally, as she continued to attain further education. In our conversations, it was evident that Ann’s advancements in education had little to do with social or monetary reward, but were about her love for learning. She is an example of how an intrinsic drive can motivate people to do great things.

When to go slow, when to go fast. Leaders, like Ann, who exhibit a strong desire to keep learning and moving forward at a quick pace, help staff experience success when they remember how to meet them where they are at. A tremendous amount of self-awareness and emotional intelligence factor into knowing how to challenge people, without causing so much anxiety that they shut down. Throughout her leadership experiences, Ann learned how to move her staff forward, first by assessing the building
needs and staffs’ skill level and then by planning strategically how to support teams and individuals based on what they need to make that move.

Ann discussed how she utilizes one of her support staff to help with that balance.

You know I push, but I kind of watch to see how hard that I can push and when to back off. Rich and I are a pretty good tag team in that way, we need to move this little forward, then nope back this off and give them that support and back it off, and give them the support to get to that next point. But I don’t let them off the hook, I guess that’s the thing, we still keep moving

That support staff shared this anecdote about Ann’s work ethic and drive.

She is much more of a soft sell, than someone who is a hard sell, and I think that’s probably, it’s easily the best philosophy in our building. With all the demands it’s good that she can back off, in terms of somebody always trying to put pressure to the gas pedal.

Even though many staff, like this teacher appreciate her work ethic, it can be intimidating for some who feel like they don’t or can’t keep pace. One staff member shared:

I think sometimes some of the staff members are intimidated by her a little bit, not that anybody else isn’t hard workers too, but I mean I think she expects so much of herself, she expects the same of her staff. I think for most people that’s fine, but there are those people that that’s a little intimidating.

When I followed up with this comment, the context changed slightly, maybe that instead of being intimidated, staff were almost jealous of Ann’s ability to get so much done, that they could never do her job, because they couldn’t keep up with her.

Often perceptions of self, and the perceptions of those around us, are not necessarily the same, but Ann and the staff members I interviewed were similar in their perceptions. A common message I heard was while Ann’s strong drive and work ethic are always moving her and the staff forward professionally, she expects hard work from her staff, without being unrealistic. Amy noted,
I think she is usually on the end of that, (her professional development), and that she is willing to say, “We’re not quite ready for that”, “We are going to do that next step before we move on”. She’s good at gauging where we are and what we are comfortable with.

From the quotations above you can hear a similar message from Ann and two of her staff members. Her ability to bridle her own desire to “go, go, go” allowed her to help staff move forward without undue anxiety and resistance.

Throughout my data collection and analysis, I saw Ann as highly intuitive to her teachers’ strengths and weaknesses. One of the aspects about Ann’s drive that I thought was most fascinating to me was her ability to maintain her strong, intense drive and work ethic, and model that to her staff without forcing them to perform or be like her. As a person with a strong drive, I see myself getting frustrated with teachers around me who aren’t performing at the same pace that I do. Something I learned most from Ann through this experience is to find a way to accept the pace and manner in which people get to the expectation that is laid out.

Not only was Ann able to balance her own drive with realistic expectations of staff, but she was also served as a mentor for staff with similar work ethics. When speaking with Ann she was very modest about the type of mentoring she provided others. However, during an interview a staff member shared how well she mentored them in learning to accept other’s drive, while maintaining their own. She shared how Ann coached, often reminding her, “Not everybody is a leader, you are ... but we are all on different skill levels” when they became frustrated with staff who were struggling to advocate for themselves with their teammates.
Staying on the forefront. Ann frequently collaborates with her instructional coach and other principals or district staff so that she has a deep understanding and confidence when covering professional development content. Those who work most closely with Ann see her empathy for the teachers and all they do on a daily basis. While it became clear that her close network saw behind the scenes of what Ann did to move staff forward, I wasn’t sure that all the teachers were privy to that, especially in terms of professional development.

However, during interviews one teacher said, “When it comes to PD [professional development], she works so far ahead of time, that she seems very confident in what she wants to do and why, even when we are not.” In terms of any type of information she is sharing with staff, policies, new curriculum materials, or professional development, Ann makes sure she is well prepared. Penny, Pam’s secretary, sees her preparation first hand, because of her close proximity to Ann on a daily basis.

When she goes out to present she does her research, and if she doesn’t understand she gets on the phone right away and calls whoever has the information. She makes sure she understands it well…I wish we could be in somebody’s shoes for not just a day, or a week, you need to be in their shoes for a couple months, to see what it’s like good or bad. I see the work she puts into things, and she’s a very hard worker.

Many of Ann’s staff appreciate her work ethic and drive. Her proactive thinking allows her and the staff to be prepared for new things, avoid potential problems and to impact student learning quickly.

She’s always, she’s so on top of things. She knows what is going to happen weeks before I even notice it’s on the calendar. She’s got things planned, so I think she likes us to be kind of on the forefront, you know the first ones to sign up for new initiative, or something like that, which I think is good that we are trying to move and make ourselves better.
Continuing to move staff forward means a commitment on Ann's part to be present and visible. Because Ann is so dedicated to her staff and students during the day, she talked about how the paperwork piece becomes something that she tends to be compliant with, but not give a high priority. Hence, Ann chooses to dedicate time outside of the school day to complete those tasks, which leaves her working long hours to stay ahead. Her after school hours can include activities like preparing agendas for upcoming meetings, scheduling activities, running reports to monitor student achievement, or mentally rehearsing for a team meeting the next day. When Ann discussed with me her usual work day, it was evident that her drive to be the best she can carries often into most evenings.

I am usually here by 6:15 or 6:30 in the morning and on a good night I leave here by 5:00, but most nights it’s usually 7:00. But I even have gotten to the point that I do some of that (emails, paperwork) at home. I have my laptop at home and I’ll do that sitting in front of the tv, or you know after my workout.

During the days I spent with Ann it was rare that we were in her office for more than a 15 or 20 minute stretch, because she is always on the go, working with students, going into classrooms, meeting with teachers and doing her lunch and recess duties. When we were in her office she was researching, or contacting district staff or other principals about professional development. In fact, at one point, she enlisted my help to go through reading progress reports with her for an upcoming staff meeting.

Ann’s work ethic and drive serves her in the role of an instructional leader, who is current with content, curriculum, and practices, because she is always eager to learn new things. Her visibility in classrooms and throughout the school, where she prides herself
on knowing every student by name, reflects her desire to be a great principal. Ann’s enthusiasm and excitement about her job came through in one of my interviews with Sarah,

Both of us feel like, what’s the new think. Yes there are so many new things coming down, that at some point you feel like oh man, what are we doing, and then it’s “Let’s try this”, so she’s still at that point, we still have enthusiasm and excitement about, “This could work, this could be a neat thing we should try.

With Ann’s intensity come positives, like the enthusiasm for learning, and drawbacks, like the anxiety of staying on top of it all. As I stated in the previous section, her intense drive and work ethic make it hard for Ann to let things go. Ever diligent in removing stressors and barriers from her own teachers to support them in their work, she takes on additional stress trying to stay on top of everything, including those tasks that she could delegate. As one teacher shared, even though it’s hard for her, she has made those attempts, especially in the nature of providing leadership experiences to others, like Frank and Leroy did for her.

I guess the thing that she did for me that was maybe the most helpful is that she allowed me to do some of those things. She allowed me to have some of those ideas, try them out, and not say necessarily, “No, I can’t or No, I’m not comfortable having you do that.” It was harder to, the things I wanted to lead, I could tell it was harder for her to let me, but she did, so that confidence she had in me, really helped me to feel more confident in myself.

There were other examples during my interviews of how Ann is able to let go, often after making certain that the completion of the task is correct and efficient. Once she does let those things go, it is typical for her to want to check in periodically so she stays up to date.
Reflecting on Ann’s current leadership style, it seems that learning to better delegate tasks would decrease her stress and increase the confidence of teacher leaders in her building, as it did for the teacher above.

**Driving forward professionally.** As a leader, Ann continues to better herself in terms of her own education. She models her drive for continuous learning to her staff and her sons as well. From the time her first son was born, Ann began her masters’ program, and then continued into the superintendency program. Ann joked with me that she couldn’t even remember who talked her into going to the initial cohort meeting, because they dropped out of the program, and she did it anyway. For Ann, it had nothing to do with a climbing into a higher position; rather it was about the enjoyment of working hard, continuing to learn, and having new experiences.

I loved the course work. I loved the cohort experience. I loved meeting new people, and taking those classes. I mean there is no way in hell I would be a superintendent and I can tell you that. That will never happen, but I loved the course work.

Ann’s work ethic showed up in conversations she had with me about her career now and into retirement even. Truly, her passion for education makes the hours she spends less about a job and more about doing something she loves.

I said, “I love to work” and so he (Ann’s husband) doesn’t understand that. I say, “I enjoy that piece”... I love professional development, but I don’t love organizing it, begin a part of it, going to conferences. So you know when I retire, I think like one of those people who go and present that professional development. I think I would enjoy that.

**A Snapshot: Doing What’s Best for Kids**

Across from the bulletin board covered with positive office referrals, Ann is standing in the middle of the hallway by the main entrance when the morning bell
sounds. The children pour in the doors like ants swarming in on a picnic. As they come in, Ann’s mouth turns up into a smile, and she greets every child by name. Many of the children who walk by stop for a hug, and generally receive the comment, “Let’s make it a great day!”

Shuffling down the hallway, with his backpack hanging from one shoulder, a young boy, probably only in second grade stops briefly to smile at Ann.

“Good morning, Daijon, let’s…” Ann stops short mid sentence, “Oh, I am so sorry I did it again. I told you yesterday that if I called you by your brother’s name again I would owe you a pop! Good morning DeAndre. I will see you afterschool for that pop.”

Ann values the relationship that she builds with all of her students, because she wants to make sure they know that she cares about each of them. Knowing every child’s name is one of the ways that she does that.

Ten minutes later Ann stations herself in the back of a classroom, sitting on a tiny, plastic student chair. A quiet cough and the rustling of thin, manila workbook paper are the only sounds that break the silence, while students wait in anticipation for their teacher to begin the lesson. Mrs. Ramsey, picks up the pen for the electronic white board, turns sharply to face the class. “Who can tell me which one of the words in this example is an adverb? Raise your hands”

Immediately two hands shoot up and wave frantically, while several other hands rise slowly across the classroom. Mrs. Ramsey calls on one of the students, then follows this same protocol for three more examples. Preparing to begin small group reading, she
writes the workbook page assignment on the whiteboard, then sits down at the kidney shaped table at the front of the room that is smeared with pencil marks. Ann thinks to herself about how she would be teaching this lesson, but then remembers that Mrs. Ramsey gets wonderful results from her students. The bottom line, it's about the children's success, not about her personal teaching preference.

Impact of Maintaining the Focus on Children

It would be an assumption that every educator would say they focus on children. Teachers often focus on what children need to learn, how they will teach it, and often re-teach things that are misunderstood; they focus on children. However, when I say that Ann's leadership style is rooted in her focus on children, I am talking about her manner of putting the social-emotional, developmental, physical and academic needs of all children at the forefront of decisions. In difficult situations, Ann is the first one to reflect about why children are struggling and how she and the teachers can change their behaviors or instruction to accommodate the needs of the child. Ann deepens teacher conversations around instruction and assessment by asking, "What can we do to help our kids succeed?" Staff and students alike become better as individuals and collectively because of the respect, modeling, expectations, and support Ann provides students.

Through the eyes of the children. During my research, I observed Ann on many separate occasions, after each I would go back and reflect on the things I saw, and how her interactions showed what she truly valued as a leader. At each of my observations, it was evident that building solid relationships with all of the children in her building was a top priority to her. She described to me several children who were struggling to be
successful during the day. It lightened my heart, to hear her talk about how she used her relationship with the each of those children to make their days run more smoothly, so she could avoid seeing them later in her office.

Ann’s background in her previous job helped prepare her for working with children who struggle to succeed in school, especially behaviorally. In her first principalship at Taft, Ann worked with a challenging clientele, many of the children, almost 90%, received free or reduced meals, many had one or both parents who didn’t have the emotional or financial means to support them. In her current school, Clinton Elementary, over a decade after leaving Taft, children here face similar obstacles that make it difficult to succeed in school. Nearly 80% of the student population received free or reduced meals, and the building has an ELL (English Language Learner) program that serves 35 students. Just as with the children at Taft, it would be easy to blame the system, bad parenting, or laziness for their failure in schools, but instead Ann is constantly looking at all the ways to remove barriers for individual children so they can learn.

One student, Austin, with whom I watched Ann interact with on multiple occasions, has been in and out or the psychiatric ward at the local hospital, and absolutely cannot be unsupervised. By 8:40 on the first morning I observed, café staff called Ann to investigate a suspicion that he had items in his pockets. She said to me on the way down, “What do you do with kids who just shut down?” It was evident Ann empathized with him, but she was also unsure of what else to do to help him other than provide what she had been, a positive relationship, expectations, meaningful consequences and support.
Ann shared how often Austin’s response to an inquiry was very unpredictable. Instead of going straight into the café and asking Austin right away, she circulated around the tables, often sitting to chat with other students about their new glasses, or the baseball game they had last night.

When Ann finally got to Austin, he was so eager to have time to talk to her that he spilled into a story about the night before; Ann smiled, laughed and nodded her head. After several minutes, breakfast ended and Austin left toward the hallway, where Ann met up with him, put her arm over his shoulder, and whispered to him, “I need you to show me your pockets.” This time, Ann’s relationship with Austin helped him feel unthreatened and valued, so that he was okay sharing the contents of his pockets.

Consistently during my observations I noted a large percentage of interactions with children were positive. Even during times where there was a need for redirection, she handled it in a positive way. For example, when she needed to sit in on a music class, Ann didn’t come into the room with the “I’m watching you” vibe, but rather, she meet the class at the door, greeting them, and introducing the guest teacher. She said, “Thank you for coming in so quietly. This is Mrs. Noble, she was gracious enough to help us out for the rest of the school year. I was telling her that Mrs. Martinez’s class is awesome, so don’t let me down.”

Ann proceeded to sit with the students, playing along with the music game, Uncle Joe. I watched her so engulfed in the moment, laughing, singing and generally having fun with the children that all other responsibilities waiting in her office vanished. This is the joy she has for children, the whole reason she comes to work each day, those 40
minutes of interacting with teachers and students. At the end of the class, Ann lined up with the students, then stepped out of the line, smiled and said, “I heard some awesome singing today, and it’s not just one kid. Thanks for making me honest.” These examples of Ann’s interactions with an individual student and a group of students are only two of the countless demonstrations of Ann’s belief that all kids can succeed if we put their needs first.

If I were to estimate the percentage of time, during my observations that Ann and I spent interacting with students, either at lunch or recess, or in their classrooms, it would be well over half of each day. Ann stated, “I like being in classrooms, that’s the part I enjoy the most, so it’s prioritizing.” Her priority to be visible at recess, in the café, and in the classrooms, does mean that she isn’t always available in the office, which she has sensed can be frustrating for staff who send children for discipline referrals. However, Ann truly believes getting to know the students, and working with them to resolve conflict before it escalates not only helps them, but keeps her available for classroom time, rather than in the office reacting to problems.

It’s proactive. I can either deal with it (problems) then, or after the fact, and it’s a different way to see the kids too. And if I am out and about I know all my kids, if I am in my office I don’t know them.

Conveying the message to teachers. Her beliefs about how to treat children and do what’s right for them regardless of how difficult, is a far contrast from excuses that sometimes come with frustration or being overwhelmed, like to blame the system, bad parenting, or even laziness for the non-success in school. While Ann recognizes the emotional and financial baggage that many families from her school face, as well as the
tightening curriculum mandates from the district, she doesn’t let that sway her expectations that all children can be successful. By recognizing those barriers to student success, she validates how teachers feel, as well as prepares them to move forward regardless of those limitations. Ann spoke with me about the shift in district emphasis on test scores over the past five years, and how she has maintained keeping kids at the heart of what they do.

I kind of got to the point that if we know what we are doing is right for kids and we are looking at data and looking at the kids, and looking at differentiating and strengthening that core, the rest will come, but it’s not an overnight thing, that takes work. I mean learning to differentiate is hard, and knowing your kids and being able to be a master teacher and improving the core is hard. That’s not going to be an overnight thing, it will get better.

As a former classroom teacher, I understand the difficulty in looking at your own craft for answers about why children are either succeeding in school, or struggling. Often with the rapid pace of the instruction and assessment cycle, that is commonly tied to curricular materials, teachers analyze data that shows that students are either getting in, or that they are not. Teachers in Ann’s buildings are no different, they work hard and do the best they know how to do, though even the best effort and intention are not enough. As a leader, Ann continues to push staff to ask themselves the hard questions about why students are still not making progress.

In fact, in many ways Ann was before the district in asking some of those questions when she brought data to the table, and asked teachers to look closely at what students didn’t understand and why. Now, her district has done substantial professional development on Professional Learning Communities, so for many the light bulb turned
on, and they now understand more about the philosophy she was coming from. Ann described that situation to me,

I laugh because I was trying to do some of that stuff two years before the PLC conference and the staff would just look at me like I was nuts... We would go to these meetings and they were just furious with me, and then when they went to the PLC conference they were like, “Now we get what you were trying to get us to do.” But until they were understanding, I was trying to lead a ship that wasn’t going anywhere.

In this conversation, it was evident that Ann was showing her belief in doing what’s right for kids, but in the collaborative manner that she also deems important. Ann knew her staff needing to start looking at the data to see what students were learning, and what they weren’t, as with any conversation that is difficult, there is usually resistance. However, in this case, the districts’ support in providing opportunities for shared knowledge building, helped Ann’s teachers recognize what she was doing and why it was important.

The collaborative process was something that most of the teams in her building have really internalized. In fact Ann often shared with me about the successes some teams have had working in a more collaborative nature to increase student achievement. “There are a few other teams that that’s what they do, that’s how they operate, and even if someone else walked in they would continue doing that because that’s the way they do business.” The building culture in part builds upon Ann’s leadership style, her collaborative nature that allows teachers and other staff to feel she considers their voice regarding decision making in the building. However, with that collaborative culture, Ann still has to maintain that some items are non-negotiable. When I asked Ann to give me an example of something that is non-negotiable for her she shared,
If it comes to what are you going to do for kids, you are going to do this, whether you like it or not, and you may not like it but you are going to do this. For example, a child who needs a plan, you may not like the fact that they need a plan, but you are going to do a plan for them. Whether or not it’s how I would do the plan, you get to design in, but you will do it. So I think those pieces are non-negotiable.

To maintain a positive work environment in the building Ann has to be flexible in her thinking and evaluation about the way teachers work with students.

I think that’s a piece I kind of look at, “Is it harming the children?” That’s always my first thing, there are some things that it’s not my way of doing it, but it’s not the wrong way. They’ll get there, that’s where I have to balance.

For the people that work with Ann, it is clear how much she really cares about children. This comes through in how she models that way she treats them, like giving positive redirections, and creating close relationships with the children. Not only does Ann’s belief about putting them first come through in how she acts, but in the expectation she has for them to provide whatever support the child needs. That expectation comes through in her staff meetings, and during her professional development, like on differentiation, as well as through the questioning she provides during grade level team meetings.

Ann is empathetic the challenges teachers face with a changes in district initiatives and a huge shift in building demographics, as more children with greater emotional, academic, and financial need are coming to school at Clinton. Regardless of these changes and new challenges Ann’s job is to ensure the staff accept each child where they are and that they commit to do whatever it takes to help children succeed. For staff that means while she can empathize with them, those challenges cannot become excuses, her bottom line, is kids come first.
So those kinds of things are changes, but as a whole, the job itself, there are still kids regardless of the change, it’s all about the kids. And that’s the piece I always try to keep in mind when I am pushing the staff. When I am pushing to move forward, the bottom line is it’s about making these kids to be more successful. And I think that’s the one thing that staff know, that I am kind of a _, but I’m also a human and I care about them and I will support them, so even though I am pushing them I know how hard and how fast and sometime we go a little faster.

Intersectionality: Impact on Ann’s Leadership Style

When we watch and process from an intersectional view, Ann is more than just a leader, she is a woman, a mother, a sister, a friend, a strong Catholic, and a wife. Each of those hats she wears comprise why Ann is the type of leader that she is. When she comes to her job each day, she cannot separate, and compartmentalize those other groups that she is a part of, so they affect how she leads each day.

One of Ann’s greatest assets as a leader is her collaborative and supportive nature, which is something that stretches beyond her life at school. As I completed my data analysis I started thinking about what contributed to the development of Ann’s supportive nature. Two themes that I consistently found were her strong faith and the much-appreciated support she received from others in her life, and throughout her career.

Without Ann sharing with me the impact of her faith, I could see that in the first two minutes of sitting in her office. Though Ann spoke freely about her strong faith base, saying frequently, “The man upstairs has a plan for me.” When I asked her about what makes her strong, she said,

I think my faith too, that’s a strong part, growing up with a strong faith and continuing that, even some of the people that I associate with at work share that….It’s how you live, how you demonstrate how you interact with people, it demonstrates it even though you don’t say it.
Ann received a great deal of support, as she said many times from many people in her life, as she chose to become a teacher and then a principal. Ann spoke of many of those people, in this particular case her husband, Dan:

I could not have done the job without Dan... He was always very supportive of what I wanted to do, when I wanted to keep taking classes, basically I went to school from the time Zachary was born. I mean, I was working on my masters when he was only two, finished it when Aiden was born, and then I worked on my superintendency licensure on weekend, so it was like, he was always very supportive of that, he never complained.

As is evident, Ann’s roles as a wife and strong Catholic have, and continue to affect her as a principal. I tried to imagine how difficult it would be to attempt the long hours that Ann works, if she didn’t have the type of relationship with her husband that she does. My guess is that something would have to give, either the hours at work, or her relationship, regardless, as Ann indicated, without a supportive spouse she would not be the same type of leader. The same would apply if Ann’s strong faith were not a large part of who she is. Her faith guides her silently through her treatment of children, staff and parents. Wing (1997) stated, that each of us has many parts, and when those parts are multiplied $1 \times 1 \times 1 \times 1 ...$, they become one indivisible being. Undoubtedly if those two parts, or any of her other parts, like being a mom or a sister were missing, she would be a different person. It is through this understanding of intersectionality that we see how so many levels and experiences come into play when thinking about Ann’s leadership style.

What Kind of Leader is Ann?

Complex. This single word describes how difficult it would be to place Ann’s leadership style in a box, calling her a transformative leader, or a transactional leader, in fact even the term used by Rosener (1990) to describe a more androgynous style,
interactive leader, doesn’t fully describe the kind of leader Ann is. From an intersectional view, it feasible to understand why defining Ann’s leadership based on one style is difficult. A multitude of factors, such as lived experiences and group membership, contribute to who a person is, how they behave and why (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Wing, 1997). Ann’s leadership style reflects a fusion of her different characteristics, that are based on her various experiences and the groups she identifies with.

In previous research (Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007a, 2007b) women’s and men’s preferences for leadership typically came from communal or agentic characteristics. Through this process, I saw Ann’s interactions and heard her conversations that aligned with many of the communal attributes, for example gentle, soft-spoken, kind, affectionate, and helpful. It was interesting to see how she displayed some of the attributes, like affection, more predominantly with children, than her staff. It was typical for Ann to be much more outwardly affectionate with children by hugging or giving acknowledgments individually, than she did with staff.

Through my observations, I didn’t see Ann as a touchy feely person, unless kids were involved, but that isn’t to say that I didn’t feel a gentleness and kindness in her interactions with staff. During my staff interviews, many of them described Ann as kind and supportive, though several described Ann as more professional than other administrators they had worked with. One staff member shared, “I can picture her with a suit on in a court room because she is more business-like.” There was a definite sense that staff members, other than those she was closest to craved more of that affectionate
trait that she showed children readily. Ann’s actions and language with staff consistently reflected the other communal traits that she displayed; gentle, soft-spoken, kind, and helpful.

At the same time, Ann displayed agentic characteristics too, like her ambition and self-reliance. It’s hard to say whether the staff reactions to her leading with these agentic traits, was because of the traits, or whether it had to do with the concepts of gendered leadership that were examined in the literature review. The consensus of many researchers was women who lead from a gender inconsistent style, i.e., using agentic characteristics, would face resistance or discomfort from employees (Catalyst, 2007; Chin et al., 2007; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007a, 2007b).

When looking through at the predominantly discussed leadership styles in the literature review, transformational, transactional, and servant leader, Ann was neither one, nor the other. In fact, in some cases, it seemed that her transformational tendencies, allowed staff to be more open to the agentic or transactional traits. Previous literature described transformational leadership as a style that is typically feminine and transactional as a style that is typically masculine. As the research also shared (Pounder & Coleman, 2002), it is every bit as harmful to classify a particular leadership style as feminine or masculine as it is to gender stereotype based on characteristics.

In my findings Ann would not fit into either of the styles completely, which does give support to the claim that many effective leaders, blur the lines of particular leadership styles, embodying characteristics of many styles. Christman and McClellan (2008) stated, “We argue that these resilient women administrators do not adhere to
binary gender norms and are instead morphing leadership to dynamically and fluidly sustain themselves in the complexity of today’s organizations” (p. 23). While Ann does display more of the transformational leadership attributes and beliefs, she certainly did lead from a transactional style at times as well. I think due to her transformational leadership strengths, she was able to develop a relationship with staff so that they accepted when she needed to be a more transactional leader.

Ann’s strong task-orientation and ability to give clear and specific expectations for employees are typical of transactional leaders. When I think about the leadership characteristics discussed in previous sections, collaborative nature, work ethic and drive, and focus on children, I see specifically how her work ethic and drive lend themselves to her task-orientation. Every person that I spoke with about Ann as a leader expressed how her hyper-organizational skills helped her tremendously to perform the managerial duties of the job.

The characteristics associated with transformational leadership evident in Ann’s leadership were her participative nature, support for teachers, and democratic view of decision-making. However, the inspirational or charismatic attribute typically prevalent in transformational leaders, isn’t an attribute that describes Ann. She shared with me,

I more model what I want them to do, verbalizing I can kind of just put it out there to share, but I am not that charismatic leader that people are like, ‘WOW, I just gotta follow her!’ I try to think of people like Jim, was more of a charismatic leader. When he spoke he was just so eloquent in how he said it, and how it came out, and I am NOT that way.

She also shared, “I don’t like to be out in front of that piece, I think I am more of an inclusionary kind of leader, where we build up that leadership team.”
As I said before Ann’s leadership style is neither transformative nor transactional. While many of the communal attributes are similar to the transformational characteristics, and agentic similar to transactional, Ann’s style is her own. At times, those characteristics that serve her well are also the ones that cause her the most stress, like her work ethic and drive. Those traits that she is most comfortable sharing with students and parents, she is less comfortable displaying with staff, like her affectionate nature, through individual compliments or a pat on the back.

Throughout my field notes, I would often write the phrase, “Servant leader” in relationship to how Ann placed her staff, students, and community as top priority. Her true willing to sacrifice her own needs, and at time the organizations, spoke to me, when she discussed how she helped support her staff through difficult issues, like one teacher with a police matter, and another staff member whose husband and son both had dealt with cancer in the past two years.

Other examples of Ann’s servant leadership qualities came through when she discussed the importance of her faith in the way she treats children. While Ann would often admit, that she wasn’t the charismatic leader, that everyone just follows, she often said, “I wouldn’t ask them to do anything I wouldn’t do alongside them.” Due to that phrase that she lives by, many staff find themselves, stretching to do better, or be better, because of Ann’s example. Stone et al. (2004) share this facet of servant leadership that Ann represents.

The motive of the servant leader’s influence is not to direct others but rather to motivate and facilitate service and stewardship by the followers themselves. It is a humble means for affecting follower behavior. Servant leaders rely upon service
to establish the purposes for meaningful work and to provide needed resources. It is a characteristically unique method for stimulating and influencing the behavior of others” (p. 356).

Even though Ann exhibited many of the qualities of the servant leader, I never felt she compromised the goals of the school. She could give a person a break, if they were having a rough day, but only to a point. Then she said, “You’ve still got a job to do.”

Initially, I wondered how her soft-spoken, gentle nature would allow her to facilitate change. What I continued to learn about Ann is that she is masterful at softly suggesting, and selling ideas to individual teachers first, then letting their success build momentum. What Ann refers to as her “soft sell” requires a great deal of awareness for a person who is so highly motivated, because as the previous research suggests, the agentic traits of ambition is often included with other traits like, dominant, and forceful (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Ann’s soft sell becomes an opportunity for the collaborative leadership that she values so much.

Though Ann is more of a soft sell, does not mean that she is a pushover. As she shared with me, and her staff shared, Ann is not afraid to have those difficult conversations if something is affecting children. She shared with me her feeling about dealing with conflict.

I don’t like confrontation, but I am not afraid of it either, and I have gotten better. When I first started Angela, I didn’t like it, but now I can pretty much say it in such a way that both parties can save face, but we are going to address this. I am not afraid to go up to you and say, “I heard this and it’s making me really uncomfortable that this is what I am hearing.” I can do that too, but then there are some when I pick my battles.

I also found it interesting that even though Ann talks about how she can handle conflict directly, she doesn’t share the collaborative approach to conflict resolution she
expects from staff, before she steps in to mediate. Penny, Ann’s secretary, shared her perspective,

As far as any conflicts between staff members, she really wants them to work it out, you know talk to that person and then if there’s still conflict we’ll have a meeting. And I think that staff over the years, they know you don’t come to her right away with a problem that you can solve...I think they are much better at the trivial things, you don’t go there until you’ve worked on that. But anything as far as academics, children, she really is a principal that wants to know what’s going on, especially with the kids, and she does.

Frequently during my analysis, I asked myself if the idea of gendered leadership styles influenced why staff felt the need to negotiate everything, sometimes even the non-negotiables, or staff’s perception of Ann’s leadership strength of being self-reliant, as her inability to let things go. I had to remind myself that the purpose of this research was not to prove that this phenomena of gendered leadership exists, but to tell the story of Ann’s experiences and describe her leadership style. What I was able to determine is that Ann is a leader who exhibits a multiplicity of traits, from both communal and agentic categories, in varying degrees depending on the person, or group with which she is interacting. Ann is a leader who collaborates with staff to put children at the heart of what happens in schools, but isn’t afraid to give parameters to help her staff move forward.
Leadership Barriers: Imposed or Self-Imposed?

"Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same," — Robert Frost

As with this poem, what was perceived to be a less taken road at first glance was actually equally as worn as the road not taken. The first impression of what lies in front of us can be deceiving, as are the barriers we perceive that we may encounter along our path. When I started this research, I had an idea of what the types of barriers that Ann might have experienced in her role as principal, based on the literature I had reviewed. However, what I found through this process was that Ann and the other participants seldom directly discussed the barriers to leadership defined in previous research, but more often if those barriers did surface it was through comparative analysis of their stories and comments. In some cases, the notions of these barriers were unfounded in Ann’s situation, like in the realm of mentoring support, or internalized gender roles.

I also heard about barriers that I had not considered at all, like Ann’s age, or her self-imposed barrier of her work ethic, which also served as one of Ann’s largest strengths as a leader. This section will discuss the barriers that Ann did face, as well as possible differences in Ann’s situations that turned those barriers, which many other women faced, into opportunities for her as a leader.

A Snapshot: So Who is in Charge Around Here?

Ann shuts down the sole window air conditioner in the library, then turns her attention to the three rows of computer screens. A third of the computers still have a
glowing blue screen, even though she repeatedly reminded the afterschool program kids to shut them off before they left. An artful multi-tasker, Ann begins rehearsing the SINA meeting for tomorrow morning in her head while swiftly weaving up and down the rows, shutting the computers off.

For just a moment Ann sinks back into her faded, navy office chair, contemplating the type of voicemail awaiting her just beyond the harsh red light that’s blinking to indicate a new message. If only she knew the voicemail that awaited her was just as harsh. Ann hangs up the phone, after listening to a curt message from her PTA president about her discontent with Ann’s decision to decline the addition of another fundraiser during the first trimester. Ann glances down at her watch, 6:46, she will already miss the first part of her son’s soccer match, so she hustles to gather her laptop, purse and keys. A discussion with the PTA president will have to wait until tomorrow. On the way to her car Ann thinks to herself, *Thank Goodness Dan takes the boys to soccer, or they would never get to a game on time!*

Hoarse from cheering on the boys at their soccer game and dressed in her comfy pajamas Ann crawls into bed, she glances at the clock and double checks the alarm, 9:45. *Wow, late night!* The house is quiet, just the sound of Dan breathing next to her, but Ann can’t fall asleep. *Did I remember my laptop? I think I forgot to send the updated agenda for tomorrow’s meeting.* Ann slips out of bed, without waking Dan, who leaves for work at 5:00 a.m. Uncharacteristically slow, Ann walks down the oak stairs, careful not to wake Dan or Abbie, their dog, to send the agenda again, with another reminder of tomorrow morning’s meeting.
At 10:33, she climbs back into bed to go to sleep. After only a few hours of sleep, as is the pattern with most nights, Ann leans over to the pad of paper on her bedside table and scribbles down an idea to share with a teacher regarding student engagement in the classroom. Confident sleep will find her now, with a clear mind, Ann squints at the clock, 3:15, the red blinking light of her clock reminds her of the flashing voicemail indicator on her phone. Ann spends the next forty minutes laying in bed thinking about what she will say to the PTA president tomorrow to diffuse the situation and stand her ground. Sometime around 4:00am, Dan climbs out of bed to get ready for work and Ann finally falls back to sleep.

Tired, but prepared Ann sets all of the handouts on the hexagon tables in the meeting room. As part of their SINA plan, teams are going to be working on developing differentiated writing blocks, with their grade level team and the assistance of the instructional coach. This morning Ann has elicited the help of another staff member, who has received the district training on expository writing, to conduct the second of four professional development sessions. Staff are getting paid to come in early today at 7:30, so they can have an entire hour of training.

Using a power point presentation, Ann reviews the norms for staff meetings, as well as outcomes for the content of the session. If she didn’t know better Ann would think the two ladies in the back of the room started their morning with a breakfast of lemons. Their lips pressed, and eyes squinted, two of the veteran teachers at the back of the room are sitting slouched back in their plastic, kid-sized chairs, arms crossed firmly
across their laps. Ann is anticipating the vocalization from at least one of the two women before the end of the morning.

With 15 minutes remaining Ann shares the district vision for writing as well as expectations for the implementation of this writing professional development, a grade level peer observation of the co-planned lesson. It is important for Ann to make sure teachers are able to attain what is expected, so she states as usual, “Let me know what you need so you can make this work for you. Let’s plan on talking about these observations at our next early dismissal.” From the back of the room, one of the veteran teachers unfolds her arms, and condescendingly asks her neighbors, just loudly enough for Ann to hear, “Who the hell made this decision?” Some of the staff members around her immediately look uncomfortable, scooting their chairs away, coughing nervously. This just wasn’t something people said to principals, so they all waited anxiously for Ann to respond. Without yelling or getting angry, Ann walks over to the woman, who is sitting smugly, as though she pulled off a mighty feat, looks right in the woman’s squinty eyes and responds quietly, “Since, I’m the principal, I guess that would be me.”

Impact of Barriers on Ann’s Career

When I began this research, I had an idea of the barriers that other literature had identified for women principals, some of them imposed by external forces, and others that were internal, or self-imposed. The aim of my research was to add to the limited base of scholarly work that shows the experiences of one woman principal at the elementary level. While Ann’s administrative journey will not define the experiences of all women, I believe this detailed ethnographic-like research may provide lessons or
insight for other women who look at going into this field. Previous research suggested that barriers have and do exist for women in administration, and I hoped to find out what type of barriers Ann faced along her journey. The joy of research sometimes comes more from finding something that you don’t expect, than affirmation of what you do.

During this research, there were several unexpected findings, which contradicted what previous research indicated I might see through Ann’s journey. For example, the lack of mentoring relationships, the feeling of isolation and family and child rearing responsibilities that stem from internalized gender roles, were not barriers for Ann on her journey.

Ann described that her lack of barriers into and during her years as an administrator was probably due to the strong network of people when she started, as well as the support from her husband. The absence of barriers like internalized gender roles, allowed her to focus a tremendous amount of energy on her profession, without the guilt of maintaining a household too. Ann’s strong mentors and professional networks allowed her to feel comfortable learning the ropes of her job with the support of many, instead of on her own. While the absence of the barriers typically associated with women in principalship allowed Ann to perceive herself as having few barriers, through the research other challenges she faced and continues to face were evident.

One such challenge that didn’t surface in the literature I reviewed was the intersection of her gender and age early in her career as she interacted with veteran staff. In Ann’s particular case, the greatest difficulty came from the women on staff who were veteran teachers. A second challenge to Ann has been her stress level, which coupled
with her strong work ethic has created internalized pressure to perform. While her strong professional work ethic was often classified as her largest asset, she may internalize the stress level of her job more than other administrators with a less intense drive. A final challenge to Ann lies within the final research question, how she finds balance between professional and personal responsibilities. Some of Ann's stress level I felt was intensified from the difficulty she has balancing the two aspects of her life. Ann often took work home, and though she wasn't physically at work, she was never really able to disengage from what was happening tomorrow or the following week. She seldom, during the week really ever allowed herself to decompress, and after over a decade of putting the needs of school before her own well being, she has developed health issues.

**Mentoring.** In the case of this ethnographic-like research, mentoring relationships was a prevalent theme. However, unlike the literature I reviewed there was not a lack of mentoring relationships, instead an abundance of mentoring relationships that Ann experienced. As I discussed in previous sections, Ann's early experiences provided her not only pre-principalship mentors, like Leroy and Frank, who she worked with closely before she was hired, but also a larger network of women administrators that met regularly for professional study groups. In Ann's district, a mentoring program was in place for new administrators, where she developed a tight knit relationship with Karen and Marnie, two other new administrators.

Ann spoke of the support she received even before making the decision to move into administration, from both Leroy and Frank. “Leroy said, ‘No, you’re going to do administration’ he was there to support me and he gave opportunities along the way to
support me.” While Ann didn’t emulate Leroy’s practices she valued him for the support and opportunities he provided her as a teacher leader.

Frank, who became the mentor she spoke of in the highest regard, the one she emulated many of her practices from, was also pivotal in helping Ann feel comfortable transitioning from classroom into leadership, with her early experiences as his facilitator.

Frank came to me and said, ‘Ann, would you please consider doing this?’ and then when he gave me that safety net of if you don’t like it, I’ll promise, I promise, I will put you back in the classroom.’

As Ann entered her first year as building principal, she relied on the support from a largely female professional network, and close friendships she developed as part of the mentoring group. When she started her job, she felt comfortable speaking freely with Frank, who was retired, or her professional network. She readily shared how blessed she felt working with the people in her district. “Well that’s where I feel like coming in when I did, there was a core group, I mean like, Nan, Karen, Marnie and Kathy because we came in at the same time.”

Not only did Ann feel the support of her colleagues in her professional network, she felt strongly supported by Peter, another mentor, who hired her for her first principal position.

He was so helpful when I became, he hired me. He had a lot of stake in making sure that I was successful. He set up a mentoring program for new administrators...we did a lot of mentoring things with Peter that first year, umm, just helping develop ourselves as principals.

For all of those women studied in previous research that experienced limited mentoring and professional networks, Ann had the opposite experience, which made a difference in building her confidence and skills as a leader.
Unlike the Queen Bee phenomena (Rhode, 2003; Searby & Tripses, 2006) that cites women in upper level positions avoid any responsibility in fostering other women who aspire to leadership, the veteran women principals in Ann’s network felt a strong alliance to each other, and provided a great deal of support to each other, or those principals new to the group. This finding from Ann’s experiences aligned more with the idea that increased mentoring minimizes that queen bee effect (Hill & Ragland, 1995). In fact, I had to ask myself if this relationship between women professionals, which was strong when Ann entered the field, and is still a strong professional group today, supports previous research that maybe the queen bee phenomena is just a form of gender stereotyping women in leadership positions (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Admittedly, Ann did share that she has felt lonelier in her job this past year, as her original network has dissolved with retirements and relocations to new districts in other states. Even with smaller networks and relationships that are not the same, she spoke about how she continued to feel comfortable connecting with other principals. She has now transitioned from a mentee to mentor. Ann served as a mentor to new principals in the district and her past three counselors as they went through principalship programming. She mentored one of her counselors from the start of her master’s programming to her first year as a building principal. Ann is the antithesis of the Queen Bee phenomena, as she truly believes in supporting and providing opportunities and guidance for women seeking leadership roles.

One last consideration regarding mentoring was the critical importance of the district mentoring program and cohort group meetings with principals that happened at
least monthly. These forums created a climate of collaboration for principals in her
district, making it easier for Ann to ask for advice early in her career, as well as now.

This mentoring theme was predominant from the early stages of our
communications, as Ann opened up a great deal about her experiences. I was surprised to see how a barrier identified across education, law and business, became one of Ann’s strongest experiences as a principal. Though a lack of mentors was not a barrier for her I found it ironic that her earliest mentors, even in a district that had a large representation of women leaders, were all men. Leroy, Frank and Peter were all the mentors she spoke about often in our conversations about her early years.

I had to ask myself, was this typical of women leaders? During my literature review I had read about the old boys’ network and the advantage such networks have for young male professionals (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Is it possible that women may connect with male mentors, intentionally, or inadvertently for this very reason, to support career moves? While this wasn’t something I found in my research, or heard at all, I wondered about that question as I saw that all three of the people she readily described as her mentors were men. Even though she spoke highly of the support that women in the principal group provided, she did not actually label them as mentors, instead often referred to them as colleagues, like Karen and Marnie. That being said, regardless of what Ann called them, mentors, colleagues, or friends, they all served a similar role her, a support system to grow as a leader.

Family and household responsibilities. Another anomaly that I encountered when I was conducting this research had to do with an internal barrier commonly cited in
previous research, pressure from family and household responsibilities. During the first interview, Ann shared with me that her two boys were very young, only one was school age, when she accepted her first principal position. Because she was about my age now, early thirties, when she started, I was curious to hear about how she balanced being a mom and a principal. I found out that she never felt pressure to do the household pieces, liking getting dinner ready or picking up the kids from daycare. She was very upfront sharing that it was because of her husband Dan that she never felt that pressure. Keeping in mind how much people internalize gender roles based on what we grew up with, and experienced, the shift in the typically accepted gender roles in her partnership with Dan intrigued me. Ann spoke about how proactive they were in making decisions about this large shift in household responsibilities.

I didn’t feel it because he took it on, and we talked about it before I took the job…I have my other life, where this is my life, and he knows that about me. He knew that when he married me. I was a worker all the way through, so when this opportunity came, he knew a few changes were going to have to happen because obviously I was not going to be home, and he was like, that’s okay, and we talked about it, okay household chores, so we hired somebody to help with that. I said, ‘Okay, you have a choice, I can either hire somebody to help, or you can help with that’, and he was like, ‘Ohh, let’s hire somebody.’

Even as the boys got older, and were involved in significant activities, he continued to relieve that barrier for her.

I could not have done it without Dan, because really he took on that household piece, since his job is done at 3:00, it was his job. He was the chauffer to get them to practice, he picked them up and made sure, like at a middle school event, where I could not have possibly been out of school, they were doing a game when I was in session.

In the literature review, several sources (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Eagly & Carli 2007b; Krantz-Kent, 2009) discussed the substantial inequities of household
work and child rearing responsibilities between women and men. For example, regarding travel related to children, women spent double the hours as their husbands. As I found quickly, those statistics were opposite, if not even more lopsided in Ann’s household, with Dan doing almost 100% of the driving to and from activities, daycare, etc. However, as the boys got older and sports’ schedules tighter, Ann described her weekends as “tag-teaming” with Dan so the boys each got to their games and practices.

During several of our conversations, Ann shared, “I would say Dan did a lot of the child rearing during those elementary years, cause I was at work.” This was different from the research (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2008, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007b) that I had read previously indicating, that even with changes in households over the past decades, women spent more time, between 30-50%, as care-givers for their children, while maintaining a full time job than did men. As with the mentoring relationships, Ann’s experiences with child and family responsibilities did not align with previous research findings.

By avoiding this significant barrier that was common to many women in leadership, Ann gained precious hours to spend at her job, without the guilt of feeling like she wasn’t meeting other family responsibilities. In early conversation with Ann’s, she shared how well this arrangement worked well for her and her family.

That’s what they know. We’ve talked about that being boys they wanted to be with Dad growing up...it’s funny because Dad does the home cooked meals, not mom. They are just used to that. Mom’s not usually home, so they’re okay with that. But I make sure I try to get to every event of theirs that I can, so I do rearrange if I have to. Like soccer games, I made it to every single ones, I might have been late, but I made it.
Much of the research in my literature review showed that ingrained gender roles related to child-rearing and household responsibilities impacted women professionals. For example, the research by Catalyst (2007) and by Rhode (2003) discussed the guilt some women associated with taking time away from family and children to pursue their careers. The meta analysis of Eagly and Carli (2007a) noted the findings from time diaries in which women still spent 2.1 hours of childcare compared to each hour that men spent. Those findings were consistent with the research completed by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics as well.

My first reaction to her experiences of role reversal with these family responsibilities was that Ann gained a great opportunity as a leader, which many of the women in previous research studies did not have. Through my experiences with women professionals in my building, it was typical for the mothers on staff to leave shortly after 4:00 so they could pick up children from daycare, and run them to practices and lessons. I knew what was typical in my school for mothers who were teachers, but I was interested to see Ann’s perspective on how typical or atypical role reversals in terms of household responsibilities were with female administrators that she knew.

I think of the people that I hang with, the men do most of the cooking at their house. The other ones don’t have families…if you don’t have a spouse that is willing to help you carry out all those other roles, there is no way you could do this. I don’t know how I would have done it. I couldn’t have juggled it all, where as I think with Frank, as a watched him as a mentor, when he had to go, he went. He left.

When I look the experiences of Ann and the friends that she talked about, all of their husbands were supportive and willing to take on many more of what society has deemed as typically female gender roles in terms of household responsibilities or child...
rearing. Throughout my analysis I tried to be cognizant of avoiding the continuation of
gender role stereotypes, by noting that while the expectations of these roles in earlier
years was placed solely on women, over time the distribution of these responsibilities has
included men. As with any stereotype, it is critical to maintain the understanding that
typical does not mean generalizing for all women or men.

The intention of the terminology, role reversal, is not to perpetuate expectations
that women maintain a majority of these household responsibilities. However, as
indicated in the preceding sections, several scholarly works and research (Bureau of
that women continued to take on these household responsibilities, up to double the time
that men did. In Ann’s situation however, Dan took over those roles that research
indicated women completed twice as frequently, like child rearing or transportation of
children.

At the end of one of our many conversations, we started talking about the women
principals in her district. During our discussion Ann was able to place most of those
women into three categories of family dynamics, those whose husband took over many of
the household responsibilities, those who had no children, and those who are now
divorced.

However, though Ann shared these anecdotes about her experiences with family
and child rearing responsibilities as well as the experiences of her close friends, she did
comment that in her opinion those were not typical experiences of many women
principals.
Intersection of gender and age. One of the findings that resulted from this research was how the intersection of her age and gender impacted Ann’s career. Initially I thought maybe in Ann’s situation there was no gender barrier for her, but the deeper the conversations went with Ann and her staff I began to see that her challenges were twofold. Ann’s journey was not challenging because of a lack of mentoring or support, or due to pressures from family responsibilities, but from being a young woman who served in a leadership capacity.

Ann dealt with issues related to her gender, like having to negotiate with staff about some of the same decisions that male administrators around her had simply made without staff resistance. I believe deeply engrained expectations about women and how they should act influenced the staff’s expectations of Ann as their principal. As previous literature has discussed, the glass ceiling, as it was once known, has been shattered (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b; Robinson, 1996). However, just because the overt stereotypes that women faced have nearly vanished, it doesn’t mean that gender stereotypes and expectations have disappeared, rather now they are subtle, often not even actualized by women who encounter them. In Ann’s situation, being a woman meant having to approach things differently than the men principals she knew.

Her age created another dimension of challenge, not only did she have to do things differently as a woman, but she had to draw boundaries for veteran staff who were hesitant to follow the path chosen by a much younger educator, even though she was their principal.
Ann faced those gender and age challenges, even at Taft, where she started her career as a teacher. In fact, Ann felt confident going into the principalship at Taft, assuming the role of her predecessor, Frank, because she knew the staff’s strengths and weaknesses, and they knew her in a leadership capacity. However, as a young woman in the job, she had to draw lines in the sand, even though the staff knew her, as a colleague, and as a facilitator. Ann recalled one particular teacher, who Frank had hired, and had no encounters with at all.

I would give her a direction and she would do almost the exact opposite, I had to call her in and say, “Listen”, and I wrote her up, “you need to be following, that’s insubordination, and if you do not comply with directions I am giving then we will have a problem.” I think it was more of that you know you had to do that...you know she was a veteran, veteran. She thought, “Here’s this young person and I don’t need to... I mean I think she was testing to see, here’s a youngie, and I am older. It was like once I set those boundaries she was fine.

Another incident that took place, which Ann was hesitant to discuss, was with her facilitator, Rita, who was a much older woman, that was hired by Peter during Ann’s first year. Throughout the year Rita would be supportive and agreeable when discussing building decisions with Ann, but then would undermine those decisions when staff approached her to complain. While Ann never talked with me about how her age and gender impacted Rita’s actions, I would doubt that Rita would have acted in that manner, with Frank, a male principal, at the end of his career.

This situation reminded me a bit of the challenge she had with the veteran teacher that Frank hired. Through our conversation is was apparent that Ann felt, her age made a difference with more veteran staff. However, in this case, Ann had no knowledge of Rita’s behavior until after she left Taft. With the other veteran teacher, the resistance to
her as a young leader was visible, so Ann confronted the problem, so that it didn’t continue. The situation with Rita wasn’t something visible to her, so instead of being able to address the problem, Ann ended up feeling blind-sided.

I spoke with Penny, Ann’s secretary at Clinton, about how the veteran staff challenged Ann as a young female principal, it was as if they felt, “I can do this job, I don’t need to listen to her.” Penny shared:

I think women are harder on women, than men are on women. I think, I don’t know if it’s the staff members feel like they can do the same job too….I think there were some older staff members because she was younger, and I think that to me was almost more than about being a woman, but about her age.

This conversation with Penny made me question if Rita thought she was just as qualified to do Ann’s job. Though I wondered about this possibility, I could tell from Ann’s demeanor during our conversation about Rita, she was not a topic I would delve into further. As Ann shared, “...it was crushing, it was probably one of my most disheartening moments, here I thought this was my right hand person.”

After a few years at Taft, Ann transferred to Clinton Elementary, where she continues to serve. However, as with any new principal, before Ann came, there was some apprehension. The teachers at Clinton were accustomed to end of career principals, the previous three administrators having retired there. Ann was coming to Clinton, as a new career principal, having worked at Taft for only three years. Not only was she new to the career, but she was very young in comparison to the three previous Clinton principals. Colleen, the only other woman principal at Clinton in the past was Ann’s predecessor. After the announcement of her assignment to Clinton for the upcoming school year. Ann spent a great deal of time with Colleen, and the staff starting in May.
Both she and others I interviewed felt that the transition went smoothly, because of the visits Ann made in the months before school let out, and with Colleen’s commendation of Ann. Even though Colleen openly shared her excitement for Ann joining the Clinton staff, many teachers were still apprehensive of her age, and the enthusiasm that came with it, as one staff member shared:

Colleen was retiring, so at that time, I think no one quite knew, you know that anticipation of a new principal is difficult. But when they found out it was Ann, I think a lot of people were a little worried too at the same time because the last three principals we had were going into retirement, probably the last 5 years. Ann was much younger, vibrant and ready to go, not that they weren’t, but they were just at different places in their careers, so I think everybody was a little worried.

Different from her experience with Rita, the grumblings from veteran teachers were less personal, but both created challenges moving the staff forward. When Ann started at Clinton, a large percentage of staff members were close to retirement and had been career Clinton teachers. The veteran women teachers were those who posed the greatest challenge to Ann in her early years at Clinton. With a large population of veteran women on staff, it was hard to move the change process forward when their responses ranged from outwardly criticizing, to non-verbal disagreement with her decisions.

I asked Ann to talk to me about a time where she felt her age was a barrier as a leader. Ann recalled this instance, during her first years at Clinton, with a vocal veteran staff member:

Ohh yeah, one comment where someone, when I had made a decision about something. “Well, who the hell made that decision?” and I said, “I guess that would be me, because I am the one who is making those decisions and when you get your administrative degree you can make those decisions…she backed off, and you know that’s what I needed to do with her.
Ann dealt with other outward disagreement from her PTA president during her first year as well. In the past, the PTA was given a great deal of freedom to make decisions without administrative approval. As a young woman, Ann faced a challenge trying to change an existing structure and assert more authority with the group. The PTA president had been vocal about her dislike for the new system, and was not hesitant to let Ann know it. There were several incidents where she did not agree with a decision Ann had made. During one of our interviews, Ann described one conversation that took place after several incidents;

Finally I just said “You’re not running the building” at one point she said, “And who’s making that decision” and I said, “Since I am the principal here I guess that would be me” it kind of put her in her place, and by the time she left we had worked through some things.

As the principal, it’s often the most vocal complaints you hear first, though other staff members who work in the building are privy to conversations, or see things that the principal might not see or hear. Being a building secretary, someone who feels the climate in the building, and often hears about everything, Penny shared the following anecdote;

I think maybe some of our older staff, just thinking of some of our staff meetings in the past. A couple of our older staff, shaking their heads as they were leaving a staff meeting, those non-verbals, a little grumblings of, “I don’t know, this is a change”. I’d say most of them, it was not about her the person, but it was her coming in young, with all these ideas and we’ve always been doing this and we don’t want to make those changes.

Over time, as many of those veteran staff retired, and the other staff members developed a relationship with Ann, they better understood what type of leader she was and what she expected from them. Ann shared, “When you are young, when they think
who are you to say. I think that's a piece that you work through. It's all about relationship building, it is, to the kids, the staff, the parents, everybody.” In fact, when the group of teachers who were vocal in disagreeing with Ann’s leadership left, the direct comments decreased. For the most part teachers that remained began to appreciate her collaborative style.

Ann’s collaborative leadership style allowed teachers to feel like they had a voice in decision making, which was positive, yet in the early years frustrating for Ann. It took time for teachers to understand the boundaries Ann set. During her first years, Ann was frustrated when teachers felt entitled to negotiate every decision.

When you look at a whole elementary, it’s mostly women, and they just don’t respond the same way to a man as they do a woman and I watched that with Frank. They would respond differently than they would with me. If he said something it was just said, and it was done. If I said that same thing there had to be a conversation about it. They just took it for face value when he said it, and when I would say it we had to have a conversation to debate it, whereas with him this was just how it would be, and that’s the way it is.

Because of the frequent meetings with her large principals’ network, Ann often heard about concerns principals in other buildings faced as well as how her colleagues solved difficult situations with staff. She shared some frustration being a woman principal when dealing with difficult situations,

I don’t know if we work twice as hard, but we have to do things differently. I think some of the things men can say and get away with, if I said those things the union would be all over my case, but if a guy says it it’s “whatever”. So that’s a piece that sometimes is frustrating.

At both Taft and Clinton, the negotiation was part of building her credibility and letting the staff know what topics were up for discussion. Over time, as Ann shared, there was a change in this completely democratic mentality.
It's probably changed a bit now that they know me, and they know which things are the non-negotiables, and what things we can have a question about, a conversation about. They know which ones, that Ann says it and that's the way it is, and other time we can have a conversation about that. And I let them know that and it doesn't bother me, there are some things that are open for debate, but there are some things that are not open for debate.

Reflecting on Ann's collaborative leadership style, I kept returning to comments she made about having the do things differently as a woman. Has Ann's leadership style changed to fit the gendered expectations for women leaders? Do women leaders continue to be challenged if they try to make autocratic decisions, even when those type of decisions become necessary to move forward?

Several of the staff members I interviewed had worked with both the men and women principals at Clinton. One staff member did not see gender solely as a major difference in the effectiveness, or perceived effectiveness of Ann and the principals before her. However, she did indicate through our conversations that age and gender played a part in some of the challenges Ann faced.

During one interview, when we were discussing how gender and age might impact young women leaders, like Ann, she rather sheepishly shared, "I hate to say this but I think it would be easier for that man." Again, this made me question how engrained the gender expectations are for women and men, if this staff member still maintains a belief that when a young candidate comes into the profession, their gender ultimately affects how staff perceive them as leaders.

Even though gender alone was not a prevalent barrier to Ann, or those staff members I interviewed about her, many of them mentioned through their own opinions, feelings, or beliefs that women and men have vastly different experiences. As I listened
to them, I often caught myself thinking, does that statement come from a belief that is
driven from gender expectations, or are there truly some differences in personality that
impact the way that women and men lead.

Some of those comments like,

“Men are better at delegating…” or

“I hate to say this but I think it would be easier for that man,” or “I don’t know if
we have to work twice as hard (as men), but we have to do things differently.” and,

“I think that if I look at the ranks of our men, when 4:00 hits or too far behind
4:00 they are out of there, if they don’t have an event.”

It was through those comments, and anecdotes that I have concluded that even
through Ann didn’t directly pinpoint gender as a large barrier to her as a leader, the
effects of gender expectations and stereotypes do still play a part in the leadership
experiences, or beliefs about men and women leaders. During the process of data
analysis, it was through multiple readings, and further interviews that I saw the
intersection of Ann’s age and gender as important factors to describe the challenges she
faced during her early experiences. It was through an intersectional lens that I could
more clearly understand how the combination of multiple facets created her leadership
experiences. Uniquely, Ann’s story is not like the findings in the literature I reviewed
because it uncovered the intersection of gender and age.

Stress: External and Internal. While stress itself is not a barrier to Ann being an
effective leader, it ultimately had a profound impact on her professionally and personally.
External expectations from the state and district have created a climate where Ann felt
under a microscope, bound with deadlines, and unrealistic performance expectations.

Those pressures are similar for any administrator across the district, state, or nation, but Ann’s internal drive to do her best for her students and staff intensified her stress level. It is that same work ethic, and drive that has served as one of her greatest assets as a leader, that also caused her some of the greatest challenges.

As I learned about Ann, she has high expectations of herself, and similar expectations of her staff, students and school community. Ann believes Clinton can be one of the best, so every hour she spends is devoted to helping children become well-rounded and successful young adults. Ann talked about one of her largest challenges as a principal now,

It’s the stress level, it’s always constant, and even the professional development, years ago the principals didn’t do the PD it was more low key. And we had the facilitators, which we don’t really have anymore that did those PD’s.

When Ann started in her district at Taft, there were curriculum facilitators for reading, math, social studies, and science, who organized and provided professional development for staff. In recent years, budget constraints have caused elimination of those positions, which as she shared has caused a major stress for building administrators.

Clinton Elementary has faced School In Need of Assistance (SINA) pressures, like many other schools in the state. During many observations, Ann shared how proud she was of all the hard work her teachers did, and how they were making a difference for kids. Though Clinton has seen remarkable improvements in the building and classroom assessments, the local newspaper ran an article ranking schools across the district. Ann knew before the article was printed, so she had to spend time figuring out how to share
the news with her staff ahead of time because she knew it could have a demoralizing effect. Later in one of our conversations, she talked about this unflattering media attention,

I think about the expectations right now, like in the paper, Clinton is at the bottom, that is a stressor for me, and I took at the progress we are making, and we are not going to de-rail, but it’s frustrating to get that slap in the face. Nadine (another administrator) and I were talking, and it’s like all those great things are happening and we are moving in the right direction, and we know we are doing the right thing for kids, but we don’t get that from the media. [the morale, they worked so hard] yep, here we go again, but in the same token, we know that we have work to do, to me it’s that internal drive, that we should not be behind all those other schools, we are better than that.

As her comments showed, Ann holds herself and her school to high expectations, so it is feasible that her internal drive to be better compounded the stress from external pressures. For Ann just getting something done wasn’t an option. Many of her staff, including her secretary, praised Ann for being so on top of things. In fact one staff member I interviewed called her “the goddess of the managerial, day to day stuff” because Ann is always proactive, often times Clinton is ahead of other buildings in terms of new initiatives or programs. While staff talked about how they appreciate her ability to stay on the forefront, it takes a toll on Ann.

I think I feel like I am on a treadmill all the time, it’s like keeping all the plates in the air. My desk right now is just piles of different things I have in the works. My to-do list of what I have to do between now and May 31st is huge. And then what happens before August, just keeps growing and growing, and I may check off one thing, but then add five things more. And so, I think that’s probably the biggest barrier, no matter how early I got in, or how late I stay that list just doesn’t go down.

When Ann spoke to me about the demands of her job, and the busy schedule she kept I couldn’t help but wonder, how many of those things on her to-do list need to be
done, and how many of those things are things that she wants to have done. However, there is no doubt, after watching Ann in action during my observations, that the pressures of the district are great. In a given observation I saw Ann dealing with the expectations for testing, classroom observations, walk-throughs, professional development planning, and developing curriculum knowledge.

Many of the obstacles placed in front of Ann by the district or government mandates did create a great deal of stress, especially when her staff put their hearts and souls into doing the best for children. As I learned about Ann, nothing seemed to satiate her drive to do better, or keep improving. I truly believe that even if Ann’s school topped that newspaper’s rank order list, she wouldn’t slow down. Her drive to go, go, go is an asset because staff knows she will persevere for them and with them.

However, through my analysis I continued to hear how that same drive intensified her already high stress level. In her efforts to keep ahead of the deadlines, press forward with new initiatives, and keep all the plates spinning, she sacrificed her own health.

I have high blood pressure now, and my doctor is monitoring me. But I think stress has impacted me in a way that I have to start thinking about taking better care of myself. Like I said, that working out piece. I have to for my health...I’ve got to get better about how I can utilize the great people I have. I still have a little of that I have to be a part of everything, and I can’t be.

In another anecdote, Ann shared the efforts she has made these past few years to leave school at a reasonable time, like those nights when she doesn’t have after school commitments, like IEP meetings. Though she has started shutting down the computer and walking away from her office sooner than in the past, her mind stays on school even at home. “I don’t sleep at night. I wake up in the middle of the night at 2:00 in the
morning, and sometimes it’s 3:30 before I fall back asleep, so I have a pad of paper by my bed now.”

Brad, a staff member at Clinton, shared Ann’s dedication to her job:

She’s very, very driven, a common philosophy that she will do whatever it takes to get the job done. And I’ll look at emails anything from 3:40 in the morning, cause she couldn’t sleep or 8:10 at night, in terms of that impeccable work ethic, which exceeds the other principals that I have had.

Brad is not alone in seeing the work ethic of Ann in comparison to other principals. On several occasions, Ann mentioned how some of her colleagues can just check out at 4:00 and leave the stress behind, while she lingers far after the school day has ended. Ann spoke about the stress level in her job, and always feeling pressured to cross things off her list.

In one of our later interviews, Ann talked about the differences between women and men leaders in terms of lightening their own stress levels. The ability to delegate tasks is something that can lower stress levels, but for others, not being in the middle of everything causes stress too. While she did generalize about men and women, she was also clear that specific men in her district were not at all this way.

Men delegate better. I think about Paul (another principal), he surrounds himself by good people and he delegates. I am a control person. I delegate, but I want the control too. I want to have my hand in it all, I think women want to have their hand in it more. If I think about the colleagues that I work with that are women, we have a tendency to want to have or pull something, where the guys hand it over to someone that they think is qualified, and let them have it. I might let them have it, but not really (laughs). But what is that about? It’s a difference in style, or also trust, maybe trust, or control. It’s about control, maybe it’s that women feel the need to make sure they have it all. All the plates spinning together, where men are more willing to give it up.
As Ann stated, she likes to have her hand in it all. Some of her staff members felt the same way about Ann’s hesitation to truly let things go, though at least two have found that when she did start delegating, it took more things off her plate. Sarah, Ann’s counselor shared about the taking over the responsibilities to run behavioral referral reports.

I don’t know if she didn’t trust me, but after that second year, I said, “You know other counselors have that.” And I was cranking that out, and I was surprising her and it was great, she didn’t have to do that.

Both Ann and Sarah immediately talked about trust as a reason why delegating might be difficult. Obviously, from Sarah’s comments, she felt good about being able to shift one of the many responsibilities from Ann to herself. Like other staff members who gain responsibilities from Ann, Sarah checks in with her regularly, so that while Ann isn’t having to do the work, she can stay in the loop. Even though Ann doesn’t really like to hand things over completely, the periodic check in is far less stressful than having to do it all herself.

While discussing building leadership capacity among staff, another staff member I spoke with, shared this anecdote;

I think that she’s very, I don’t if nervous is the word, but very reluctant to pass things on to people. I feel like she feels a lot of pressure and that if she does it herself she knows that it will be done right. And I totally understand that, and I don’t fault her for that at all, I think it’s hard and there are things that she might you know, over the years, that if it’s a certain kind of thing that she is comfortable letting go of, like this type of project she’ll give it to this teacher, and that’s the one it’s going to go to, and this type of project will go to this teacher, or to me, so you can kind of tell the one’s she’s willing to let help.

Once Ann was confident in this teachers’ level of understanding, training and
ability, she was willing to relinquish more control, for this teacher that meant more opportunities to help lead some professional development hours.

Through my interviews and observations, my interpretation is that Ann internalizes a great deal of stress, from both external and internal pressures, as she strives to be the best at her job and stay ahead of the pack. In fact, in her resolve to be an effective and exceptional principal, she is sacrificing her own health. While the external stressors of the job, like federal and state mandates, and district initiatives, and professional development responsibilities have increased exponentially since she took on the principalship roll, Ann intensifies that stress by placing such high expectations on herself professionally.

From what I have learned about Ann, “good enough” seldom is. Ann wants her staff, students and parents to be a part of a superior school community, where academics standards and social emotional needs are not just met, but the capacity of each individual maximized. It is that pie in the sky vision that makes Ann a tremendous visionary leader, however that great asset, her intense drive, contributed to the personal and professional challenges brought on by stress.

Even though Ann did not feel the stress often caused by the challenges of family and child rearing responsibilities, her internal belief that she wanted to do her best for her school, caused a different stress for her. The professional work ethic Ann displayed reminded me of the literature about the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli 2007a, 2007b) that women in leadership often feel. The double bind is the idea that women are held to two sets of different standards, being a woman and being a leader.
There were three barriers that women in leadership find themselves. (a) Extreme Perceptions: too soft, too hard, never just right, (b) The High Competence Threshold: Women leaders face higher standards and lower rewards than men leaders, and (c) Competent but Disliked: Women leaders are perceived as competent or likable, but rarely both. (Catalyst, p. 7, 2007).

Ann never said that being a woman was a barrier for her, but when I continued to analyze observations, field notes, and interview transcripts for themes, she clearly felt pressure to succeed, stresses in balancing her personal life, and clearly the actions of the veteran women on staff at both Taft and Clinton indicated differences between how they treated Ann compared to previous principals. Because this research was not about confirming and proving the existence of a double bind in elementary principalship, it is acceptable that I would conclude that Ann’s drive to be highly competent as a leader has caused her a great deal of stress. Whether Ann’s drive stems from external pressures for her, as a woman, her personality, or a combination of both, this research has shared the story of how one female principal’s stress has affected her.

Finding Balance: Personal and Professional Lives

“I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference” – Robert Frost

When Ann began her administrative journey fifteen years ago, she made the choice to leave the classroom, knowing that down the road, as an administrator, she would have other experiences and opportunities. The professional celebrations along that
road in many ways were still the same, celebrating children and the growth they made, but as an administrator, Ann could impact more children than when she stood in a classroom teaching twenty-five. While the end to Ann’s administrative road is still not in sight, the experiences gained and lessons learned along the way will guide her next steps.

Through this research Ann was able to tell her story, though the road is not traveled completely yet, and provide lessons that could potentially guide the next steps for other women leaders.

A Snapshot: Ice Rink or Soccer: Finding Balance or Making Sacrifices?

A gust of chilly wind, surges upon Ann, as she pulls open the heavy door at the ice arena. Through her black fleece head warmer, Ann can hear, “Mrs. F, Mrs. F!!” and “Look Mom! Mrs. F. is here!” Tonight is the PTA night at the ice arena, and though Ann has not been home all week before 7:00, she greets the students with a smile, a hug.

Ann circulates around the tables, finally sitting down next to a group of parents to talk. A few minutes later, the mascot, a bulldog, comes out from a side door and no less than sixty of Clinton’s finest swarm around him. In all of the commotion, Ann takes an opportunity to glance down at her watch; tomorrow is a big soccer tournament out of town and she has to be up early. Before she leaves for the night, Ann laces up some skates and steps onto the ice for one lap. She looks like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, a line of children following her the whole way around. At 7:45, Ann heads to her car, ready to start her weekend.

On Monday morning Ann arrives at school at bit early, 6:00 am, she has quite a few things that need her attention this week. This week is going to be hectic too, IEP
meeting tonight, PTA board meeting on Tuesday, and a music program on Thursday night. Lately she has been considering all of the extra meetings, or events she attends, because she knows many of her friends, and colleagues don’t even attend PTA events that aren’t at school. For the past 6 years, she has gone to all of the events, on school grounds or not, but looking at her schedule this week she knows that something has to give.

**Ann’s Quest for Balance: Getting Better, but Still not Great**

The final research question I wanted to look at was how Ann found balance between the demanding professional and personal responsibilities. As I started in the previous sections, Ann didn’t feel an overwhelming pressure in her personal life to maintain the family household, or as the primary parent in charge of child-rearing during the work week. However, Ann did talk about how as the boys got older, and her hours at work changed when she left Taft to come to Clinton, she made an effort to be to all their really important events. Through this research, the balance between professional responsibilities and personal became less about how she found the time to meet commitments to her family while still working full time. I found out quickly when talking to Ann, that because of her intense work ethic and commitment to her role, this research question would be more about her ability, and desire, to find a way to separate herself from her job.

From the very first interview, when I brought up the subject of how she maintained a balance between her professional and personal life, Ann grinned and chuckled a bit.
I would say when I first started I was not a good balancer. I did not have any good balance and Dan would say that too probably, and he would probably say now I still work. I don’t have any hobbies.

Right away, I started seeing a connection between how she was able to commit so many hours thinking about her job, being at her job, and preparing for her job. For Ann, her job was her hobby. She shared with me the only things that she really does much are reading, shopping, and walking, but during the school year, leisure reading takes a back seat to professional materials.

Ann often spoke about how much her husband Dan had so many different talents, and hobbies, like cooking, quilting, bike riding. In fact, Ann even attempted to pick up the hobby of quilting, when she was just out of college, when Dan’s mother helped her make her first, and, as she was quick to add, only quilt. I got the impression from Ann that sometimes it was hard for people, even her husband to understand how she could commit so many hours to work, and so few to her personal life. During one of my interviews with Dan, he compared the difference between Ann’s hours as a teacher, and her hours when she became a principal.

She probably had a little bit more free time, or I don’t know free time, but she was home earlier when she was a teacher. Versus now, there seems to be a lot later night meetings and stuff. She goes to a lot of stuff that she doesn’t need to. I’m like, “You don’t have to be there.” “Yeah, I have to be there.” “You don’t have to be there”. So she can have more free time if she wants, she just chooses not to, that’s just the way she is.

When I asked Ann more about her first years as a principal, she shared that she just felt she needed to be there for everything. Just like a new teacher, learning the ropes in their first classroom. Ann needed to spend time getting comfortable with her new position and all the new responsibilities.
I think it took a while for me to get my confidence before I was willing to back off a little bit of that, maybe as I became one of the veterans that it’s okay to do that, to back off, but I’m still not good at it.

One of the areas that Ann started making decisions about was her after school time commitments. When she started at Clinton, Ann used to attend every PTA function, whether it was school sponsored or not, but she let some of those commitments go. “It used to be that I went to everything. I went to Skate Land, the ice rink, now if it’s a PTA event in the building I am here, but if it’s out of the building, “Nope, you don’t need me there.”

She let go of the afterschool PTA commitments when she could, but often like many of us, once she started something, and went uninterrupted, time slipped away, until before she knew it was 7:00. “I am usually here by 6:15-6:30 in the morning, and on a good night I leave here by 5:00, but most nights it’s usually 7:00.” During the school day, Ann committed to being visible and available to staff and students, which meant that there was little time for completing the things that require office time. Even on the rare occasion that she was in her office working, inevitably, something would come up that required her attention, like changing a wet diaper from a preschooler who was having a temper tantrum in her office or talking with a student about a positive referral. Unlike some principals, she made a concerted effort to be available and in classrooms a majority of her day, which meant finding time outside of the school day to catch up with the paperwork, emails, the “crap” as Ann called it. While some principals in her district were leaving at 4:30, she was just starting the other part of her job.
Another effort Ann made to spend more time in her personal life was through her vacation leave. “During my first years in the principalship, I never used my vacation days, I still don’t use them all, but this last summer I actually used quite a few of my vacation days.” Over time, Ann started to rely on those days as a way to rejuvenate her spirit and relax. Even though she started using her vacation time, she is still hesitant to do it during the school year. Ann believed that her vacation time should be spent when students and teachers were not there. “I don’t know, you know I still feel like I was hired to be there during that time and I have the summer time to do that, and that’s how I look at it.” Ann’s commitment to her professional life is so strong that even with a once in a lifetime trip, she maintained her beliefs about vacation days.

You know for my sister’s 40th we are going to Cancun. Josie, and Rhonda who is also a teacher, said ‘we’ll go, but it has to be in June or July’ And the teachers are like yes, well go, but the others can work around.

Ann’s guilt about being gone during the year, I think directly stem from her strong work ethic, and sense that her staff and students need her at school to help keep things running smoothly. For Ann, like she said, when she took an afternoon off to go to her son’s out of town soccer game, “it will be fine, things will keep moving without me…I need to just get over it.” She has to be willing to let go of her job, so she can enjoy things in her personal life that she might otherwise miss.

Over the past years, Ann’s relationships with her friends have allowed her to find time to separate from her job during the school year and in the summer. In addition to their monthly poker nights, Ann spends other time with her friends as an outlet for relieving stress. “We also travel, you know a group of us, and we try to do a trip
somewhere and like this last year we went to Vegas together....it's just kind of those times to get away.” Because of the groups' history together, they often plan trips to visit women who have moved out of the state to other positions, like a recent trip to Florida to visit a friend who left the district last year. Even though all but three of the women in the group have since retired from the school district, they provide Ann not only professional support, but personal connections too.

Dan recognized the importance of Ann’s time with her principal friends, even though school often comes up. “It’s a fantastic outlet for her. Just as a sounding board, and just to find out that she’s not by herself, that these people are going through the same thing.”

Ann also spoke about her desire to emulate the practices of one of her friends because of her ability to maintain a personal life, while still working hard as a principal. “There are people, like Karla, when she was done, she was done. I always tried to be like her. She had a healthy balance of work and fun; I haven’t gotten there yet, but I have gotten better.” Clearly, even though Ann sometimes struggles to find that balance, she has an idea of what that balance looks like for others who have achieved it, and what she wants for herself.

After her fifteenth year as a principal Ann shared, “I do have better balance now because I learned it doesn’t matter. The work is still going to be there and ten more things will get added to it, and it will get done.” As the years have passed Ann has been more able to find those moments of personal time, even though she still works many long hours. During one of our final conversations, she reflected on her earlier years in the job,
I think there are pieces I wish I would have figured out with balance because I think about all the neighborhood association meetings I was at, I wouldn’t have had to be at all of those. You know all those pieces, every little thing, you know life would have went on without me.

The pressure to balance her career with child-rearing wasn’t something that Ann felt during her career, but into our final interview I asked her about the choice to start the principalship so early:

I don’t know if I would have started as early. I think I would have waited. I can feel it. I can feel it. I think about the years I gave up with the boys, even though Dan was so good, I missed a lot of things, that if I would do over, that even if I had this position I would have made an effort to say, “You know what I’ve got my family obligations too.

Ann’s administrative journey started so young, that she is in a position, unlike many of the women administrators in her group, she has years left to perfect the balance that she wants and needs for herself.
Summary

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference

Like Robert Frost's poem, this research started from the choice to go down one particular road, to pursue a doctoral degree. Even a short way down the road, I began to see surroundings that I never expected when I chose my research topic. A walking companion accompanied me down this road, someone who shared her stories with me. Her stories made me laugh, wonder, and even question her experiences on the road she traveled before our paths crossed. Now at the summation of this research I have finished this road, and have told Ann's story, with the hope others can learn lessons, or gain insight from her experiences.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The summation of this research provided findings that are important to me personally and professionally, as well to individuals considering pursuing a principalship position. Additionally, the finding of this study can provide insights for those who work directly with administrative preparation programs.

The purpose of this study was to add more research to the limited base of scholarly works about women in elementary administration. As women have continued to maintain over 50% of the elementary school principalships, it was critical to understand that feminine perspective better. The implications of having limited works that provide a female voice to describe educational administration are that we continue to assimilate the experiences of men and women as though their experiences in the same field are identical. Shakeshaft (1995) argued the rationale for including other perspectives in research,

"Studying male behavior, and more particularly the behaviors of white males, is not in and of itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behaviors are assumed to be appropriate means for understanding all behavior." (p. 141)

Not only did this research provide a feminine voice, but it also includes the intersections of her age and possibly even her religion and marital status as it applies to being a principal. After beginning this research, it was clear that this work would give a perspective that included more than just gender. Ann’s journey is the story of one mid-career, Caucasian woman in her early forties, who has served as an elementary school
principal. While the findings described through Ann’s journey into and during administration may or may not be generalized, this research served as a powerful qualitative study that allowed assumptions about leaders, specifically women leaders to be analyzed, and in some cases supported or challenged.

In order for Ann to share about her journey into and during administration I had to gain her trust and build rapport, which was done through ethnographic like methods like using participant observation. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated,

If you treat people as “research subjects” they will act like research subjects, which is different from how they usually act. Since qualitative researchers are interested in how people act and think in their own settings, they attempt to “blend into the woodwork,” or to act so the activities that occur in their presence do not differ significantly from those that occur in their absence. (p. 35)

The use of semi-structured interview questions was also vastly important, because while they gave me a starting point, it allowed me to use emergent design and the constant comparative analysis to modify and change questions, and even add other participants to help clarify themes, or other questions I was having.

As a participant observer, it’s impossible to truly separate myself from Ann. Our conversations ran smoothly, not like an interview at all. In this way, I was able to gain honest and thoughtful insights and stories from Ann. Now after finishing this research, it’s strange to imagine that I won’t have any more meetings with Ann, at my new favorite coffee and pizza shop, which was a few blocks from her house. During our last interview, I asked her to give some advice for a young woman questioning when to pursue administration. She thought about it for a minute, then said;

I would say to think it carefully, think about it carefully. I mean it’s a great job; it’s a great career. You have to weigh the pros and cons because if you have the
skills to do it now, you will have the skills to do it in 7 years, or whenever that might be, you know, maybe even more so at that point.

This research has captured as closely as possible the reality of Ann and her journey into and during administration. Her story is not one-dimensional, but gathered through the multiple realities of Ann, the staff members I interviewed, and myself as a participant observer. Those multiple realities guided the construction of one more sophisticated reality of Ann’s experience, which could only come about through constant and frequent interactions and conversations, among and between the participants and the researcher. This product, based on this notion of constructed realities, is the story of Ann’s journey and her experiences as a young, Caucasian women serving as an elementary school principal.

Personal and Professional Significance

Frost writes, “I shall be telling this with a sigh, somewhere ages and ages hence” to describe his feelings on taking the road less traveled. The act of a sigh can be out of remembrance or regret. To understand the nature of the sigh in this poem depends upon what the person was looking for, and expected taking the road less traveled. However, in life regardless of the road we travel, be it the one taken, or not taken, we will always look back at our choices with remembrance and regret, because each choice to follow a path simultaneously means a choice not to go down another path.

As I sit here typing my findings, I think with remembrance and pride about a choice I made six years ago to pursue this degree. Yet I also know in making the choice to go down this path, I ultimately chose to turn away from the other. Even though the lessons learned about myself as a scholar, future administrator and educator were many,
the time and energy spent on this intensive work caused me to sacrifice other opportunities, like joining my son in the basement as he laughed over his newfound love for glitter glue. Ultimately, I know the road I chose was the right one for me because it has led me to where I am today, and though I might wonder what was down the other road, like the poem says, “I doubted if I should ever come back.” So too for Ann.

As a single mother of a young child, throughout this research process I often struggled to think about the sacrifice of time for a young parent, serving as a principal. During the final semester of this past school year, principalship jobs opened in my district, and one Friday morning a colleague approached me about applying for one of the open postings. Knowing that I was getting closer to completing this research I strongly considered applying for them, and I weighed the pros and cons. That same weekend I conducted my final interview with Ann, and she shared openly for the first time the sacrifices she made as a mother.

I think I would have waited. I can feel it. I can feel it. I think about the years I gave up with the boys, even though Dan was so good, I missed a lot of things, that if I would do over, that even if I had this position I would have made an effort to say, “You know what I’ve got my family obligations too.

I didn’t think much about the principalship positions again until Monday morning, when another colleague asked if I had turned my application in. I went into my office, and did some soul searching about what that choice would mean for me personally.

Unlike Ann, I didn’t have a spouse at home to be there with my son, so I knew that meant he would spend longer nights at daycare, or with his grandparents. For me I knew it was a sacrifice I wasn’t willing to make yet. While there are many mothers, like Ann and my
own mother, who raised a family and served as a building principal, I had to make a choice for myself.

Connections and Contradictions to Previous Research

The significance of single case study research is that it can provide a basis for challenging theories. Stake (1994) shared,

"Whereas a single case study is a poor representation of a population of cases and poor grounds for advancing grand generalization, a single case as negative example can establish limits to a grand generalization. . . Case studies are of value in refining theory and suggesting complexities for further investigation, as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability." (p.245)

This study provided findings that challenge previous theories about the barriers to women in leadership, especially lack of mentoring, and family and child-rearing responsibilities.

Mentoring, Networks and Isolation

Mentoring, networking, and feelings of isolation were three barriers typically cited for women pursuing, or entering leadership roles (Hill & Ragland, 1995; Lane, 2002; Pence, 1995; Searby & Tripses, 2006). Specifically, the lack of those relationships creates a gap in women’s employment in higher positions. Not only was there a lack of mentoring, but the mentoring networks that typically existed were largely structured to include a traditional view of white males, seeking a younger version of themselves. (Gardiner et al., 2000).

Proceeding with this research I was most curious about how Ann decided to enter the profession. After our first interview I began to hear inconsistencies between past literature, and this study. Unlike what many women in leadership typically face, Ann built strong mentoring relationships with not just one principal in the field, but three!
Also contradictory, was that her senior, white male principal, singled her out as a potential building leader. During the time Ann worked for Leroy, there were other younger men on staff, which based on the theory of the “old boys network” would have been a more logical choice from Leroy to groom as a leader.

Beyond her mentoring relationship with Leroy, who led her to an administrative path, Frank served as a mentor to her as she began her leadership journey as a facilitator. Ann and Frank maintained their close mentoring partnership, even after he retired from the district.

Ann’s experiences with mentoring ran parallel to the experiences of Sue, the principal in Robinson’s (1996) dissertation. Like Ann, Sue had a strong mentoring relationship with a male mentor, whom she referred to as the godfather (p. 215). In Ann’s situation, she often mentioned how she relied on Frank. It was interesting to see how both of these successful women administrators, from different contexts, had the most meaningful connection with a male in their field. Sue, the participant in Robinson’s (1996) research served as a rural high school principal in the mid nineties, during the period of time when the Glass Ceiling Commission was formed. Ann served as a urban elementary school principal, over a decade later. Yet, regardless of the span of time, both women, unlike many of the other women in leadership literature avoided the typical lack of mentoring.

This parallel may lead to questions about the role male mentors play in providing support and opportunities for women in the leadership. If two highly successful female principals both relied heavily on the support from males, what are the male mentors
providing that women in the same field may not be able or willing to do? Is it possible that men in some districts still truly are the gate keepers to more senior leadership positions? And if that is the case, have women aspiring to leadership figured that out, and sought out mentoring relationship accordingly? Beyond individual mentoring relationships that both Ann and Sue relied on to support learning the skills necessary for a new career, Ann also relied on a tight collegial network.

Throughout her early career, Ann, unlike the typical women in leadership research built and sustained mentoring relationships, and collegial networks that supported her while she learned about her new position. While the formation of the close network, was atypical, the results of her networking, reminded me a bit of the exclusive “old boys club” where all veteran male staff work to promote new comers. Ann’s principals group was a mix of women with vast experience, and they depended on each other for problem solving, encouragement, and friendship. In terms of close relationships, it was pretty clear that any golf retreats of the “old boys club” had nothing on the poker nights of Ann’s gang.

Not only did Ann’s maintain close mentoring relationships and professional networks, but seldom felt feelings of isolation typical of many women in leadership positions. The feelings of isolation Ann experienced when her strong network left the profession, either to relocate or retire. Interestingly, these close relationships reminded me very much of bell hooks’ (2003) concept of solidarity and support from the literature review chapter. It is the idea that while a person’s support for another can be given and taken away, solidarity between individuals requires a sustained, ongoing commitment.
The solidarity of the larger network of women that Ann connected with was similar in some ways to the two first year principals, Karen and Marnie, that comprised her mentoring group, but in other ways it did not include all the women principals serving in similar capacities throughout the district. So while the level of solidarity was true for that particular group of women, it would be interesting to know if the other women serving in the district felt that same level of solidarity, as a group of women with a “community of interests, shared beliefs, and goals around which to unite” (hooks, 2003).

Family and Child-Rearing Responsibilities

A second glaring discrepancy between the literature reviewed and the findings of this study came forth in terms of another barrier to women in leadership, the family and child-rearing responsibilities. While the typical findings were that women experienced pressure to maintain an inequitable amount of family and child-rearing responsibilities, compared to men Ann faced very little. In Ann’s particular situation, her husband Dan took on a majority of the child-rearing responsibilities when Ann was at school. This type of “role reversal” was not typical in the literature. Before she entered the job, she and her husband discussed the long hours she would take on as a principal, and they mutually agreed that their family could handle her commitment to the principalship.

In terms of household responsibilities, Ann and her husband discussed the options of hiring a housekeeper to take over the job that Ann would not be able to complete working in her new position. Again, this was not typical. Much of the research shared the heightened stress and pressure women felt to balance the roles of balancing a
household and a full time career. While Ann did continue to contribute to these responsibilities, it was predominantly on weekends, which minimized her pressure.

Like the parallels between Ann and Sue, Robinson’s (1996) participant, with their mentors, the two women both experience high levels of support from their spouse as they chose to enter the administrative field. Both women and their husbands discussed the possible implications and changes that becoming a principals would have on the family. Unlike Ann however, who moved to her husband’s home town, Sue’s husband and family relocated to follow her to a new job. The barrier of family and child-rearing responsibilities did not hinder either woman in her choice to become an administrator.

This discussion elicited the potential for other research, how many women who enter the principalship are married or divorced, and if they are divorced, did their career affect their relationship and how? Another topic to research could be how the balance of personal and professional responsibilities influences the effectiveness of a woman principal who faces a life challenge, for example, being a single parent, or a caretaker of an elderly person, or being accepted as lesbian, bi, or transgender person.

I used Robinson’s (1996) work as a model for this study and through this process have found parallels between the experiences and leadership style of the two women. As I discussed in the previous sections, neither woman faced barriers related to mentoring or family and child-rearing responsibilities, which was atypical from other research about women in leadership. Other parallels exist between these two female principals that make me consider if these traits and experiences they have in common could be essential in understanding better the journey and world of leadership for women.
Each woman’s upbringing impacted them as they entered the principalship. Ann discussed the influence her father had on her work ethic as he worked long hours to support their family of seven children. Sue, Robinson’s (1996) participant, was also a product of her father’s work ethic as well. Sue discussed the time she spent on the farm working long hard hours with her father. Both women openly shared with the researchers, the impact of their father’s hard work ethic on them.

Ann and her colleagues often described her as a leader with an intense drive and strong work ethic, but yet a collaborative, kind nature. Even though she disliked conflict, and appreciated collaborative leadership, Ann stated, “I’m not a push over.” Robinson (1996) used the term “stroft” to describe Sue’s leadership style, a mix of assertiveness and compassion. The idea of “stroft” leadership described Ann’s leadership in many situations. Both women adapted a leadership style that balanced the stereotypical gender consistent leadership behaviors, like nurturing and compassionate, with the stereotypical gender inconsistent leadership behaviors, like assertive or authoritative.

While not generalizable the similarities between these women’s journey into and in the principalship may lead other researchers to examine if trends or patterns exist among other women principals.

**Practical Recommendations for Principalship Programs**

As has been stated repeatedly in this paper, this study represents the story and voice of one woman, and her experiences. The findings of this study cannot be used to make assumptions about all women, or principals. However, this research did reveal that the choice to become a principal is filled with sacrifices and rewards. The impact of this
research on principal programs is to ensure that any potential students going into the position need to be better prepared to identify how much, and what they are willing to sacrifice, as well as how they can maintain some level of balance. Prospective principals need awareness that with the rewards of the position may include sacrifices to family, health, relationships. The bottom line is that regardless of age, sex, race, class, all principals make sacrifices.

For some administrators the sacrifices are too great. In fact the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) found that over 10,600 public school principals who served during the 2007-2008 school year, left the profession the next school year. While the data did not specifically account for retirements, it shows that approximately 40% of principals who left the profession were age 50 or older, leaving 60% of to be well below a typical retirement age. Also interesting, the percentage of White, Black, and Hispanic principals who left the profession was the same 11%. The findings I have included in this research may provide scholars or aspiring leaders a clear account of how the stress of the job impacts individuals who serve in a demanding career.

One way to help increase that awareness is through a variety of literature about administration. Leadership course syllabus are often filled with a litany of text books on leadership, systems thinking, finance, and change, but seldom is there a book, or even a section of those texts, with the sole purpose of providing descriptive account of what the day in the life of a principal really is. Even during the internship and practicum hours, students seldom see the reality of the job.
Further Study Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to provide a rich account of the experiences of a woman in elementary school principalship. As a whole, the topic of women in educational principalship, or leadership does not include many descriptive accounts, which this scholarly work provides. While literature on women in leadership does contain debates about topics related to specific leadership styles based on gender, and the barriers to women, based on gender stereotypes, those debates look to understand from a leadership lens. Further research, could begin examining the many perspectives in gender studies that are relevant to expectations of leadership.

Based on the strong mentoring that Ann received, other research could examine how women principals go about building, or securing those mentoring relationships. Additionally, it would be appropriate to examine the different experiences of women who serve in districts with no formal mentoring program. Lastly, in the area of mentoring, Ann was a young female, not actively seeking administration. What are the experiences of women of different ages and experiences who are actively seeking administrative positions?

Another qualitative study might examine the perspectives of children, or now young adults, who had a mother that served as a principal. Throughout Ann’s journey, her husband took over many child-rearing duties, so that she could be a principal. The research often talked about the internal pressure put on women to maintain the balance of family, but are children as affected as we think they might be?
Finally, this research was a pioneer in its discussion of the intersection of age and gender as it relates to the school principalship. It may be helpful for other studies to research more specifically the intersection of age and gender as it relates to young men and young women entering the profession of educational leadership. Based on my analysis, through the comments and underlying beliefs of those I studied I anticipate the experiences of a young male starting his administrative journey would be drastically different that those experiences of a young women. A case study of a young male principal’s and a young female principal’s experiences during their first year of administration would add greatly to a research base on gender and leadership by considering an intersectional view.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide the picture of one female’s journey into and in the principalship at an Iowa elementary school. The collection of her experiences provided rich descriptions about the role of one woman serving as an elementary school principal. Included in this research were discussions about barriers, both external and internal, as well as her leadership style. Finally, the participant discussed how she felt about her ability and desire to balance family and professional responsibilities.

Ann often described herself as a driver, yet collaborative with regard to building teacher capacity in her building. Ann often wanted ideas to come from within the group, looking for individuals who could motivate teams to move the group forward. Even as a soft-spoken leader, she provided clear expectations that children come first. As a leader who does what’s right for children, Ann wasn’t afraid to confront issues to impacted
children. Even though Ann's leadership style could be assertive at times, her teachers knew that she cared.

In Ann's situation many of the external barriers described in the literatures, did not hinder her journey into administration. Ann developed close mentoring and collegial networks that helped her develop her leadership skills. A large barrier for Ann was stress, both external from district, state, and national mandates, and internal, stemming from her intense work ethic. In some instances Ann's desire to be the best she could be for her school, caused her to internalize and place unrealistic expectations on herself. Other instances, like the increasing accountability in her district, caused Ann to feel pressure to make sure student achievement was continuing to increase.

Finally, in this study, I thought I would learn about how a woman would balance her two worlds, home and office. Ann described her experience as having little pressure to balance the responsibilities faced by many women who are raising a family. Through open communication and strong spousal support, Ann was able to become a principal, without feeling the pressure to pick up children, get dinner on the table, or complete other household chores. However, the results of this study did lead me to the conclude that it is difficult, if not impossible to perform the duties of the principalship without personal sacrifice.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW
INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: A Case Study of One Iowa Female Elementary School Principal’s Journey Into Administration

Name of Investigator: Angela Fowler

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. Participation in the study is voluntary and may be discontinued at any time.

The purpose of this study is to develop an additional body of research that clearly depicts the experiences of a female elementary school principal. Your participation in this study will be through interviews and observations. The content of these interviews and observations may include the experiences, career path, leadership style, and balance of personal and professional responsibilities for a female elementary school principal. As part of this research study, you will be asked for names of colleagues, family, or building staff who could be interviewed, with your permission, to help gather a more complete picture of your experiences.

This research study will follow a set of procedures. Interviews and observations will be the data collection tools for this study. Because this is a qualitative study, ongoing observation and interviews are necessary, until themes can be drawn, and a clear, whole picture of the administrator’s experience can be accounted for. The length of participation in this study will go on for no more than 6 months. Both audio and video recordings may be used to document interviews and observations. Video & audio recordings will be used to help with cross checking your responses to field notes. Upon completion, and throughout analysis of data, you will be contacted for clarification by the primary investigator if necessary.

Your name will be changed to increase confidentiality. The primary investigator will be the only party that conducts interviews, listens or views audio or videotape recordings,
reads field notes, or looks at coding information. The tapes will be stored with only pseudonyms and destroyed upon commencement from the degree program. School site selection will also remain confidential as any information that would cause individuals to know the specified school site will be removed. Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. Although every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed. The summarized findings with no identifying information will be published in an academic dissertation, and may be presented at a scholarly conference.

If you have questions about the study you may contact Angela Fowler (319)-265-2599-home, (319) 651-5056-mobile or Greg Reed, the project investigator’s faculty advisor at the Office of Student Field Experiences, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-310-5917. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)  (Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)  (Date)

(Printed name of investigator)

[NOTE THAT ONE COPY OF THE ENTIRE CONSENT DOCUMENT (NOT JUST THE AGREEMENT STATEMENT) MUST BE RETURNED TO THE PI AND ANOTHER PROVIDED TO THE PARTICIPANT. SIGNED CONSENT FORMS MUST BE MAINTAINED FOR INSPECTION FOR AT LEAST 3 YEARS]
APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your school
   a. Describe the successes that your school has celebrated.
   b. What would you describe as your school’s challenges?

2. Tell me about your leadership experiences throughout your career.

3. Most administrators develop a mentoring relationship, early on with someone in their aspiring field. Who were you mentors as you began to pursue administration and how did they help you create your vision of leadership?

4. How have your previous leadership experiences and mentoring relationship influenced the type of leader you currently are?

5. Tell me about your leadership style
   a. What are your strengths?
   b. What, if any, areas do you feel you would like to improve in?

6. Situational leadership is a commonly used term; describe how your leadership style adapts to the different populations that you lead?
   a. Staff populations
      i. Male, female
      ii. Certified, classified
      iii. Veteran, new staff
   b. Parent population

7. Tell me about how you develop teacher leadership capacity in your building?

8. Each of us are more than just an educator, we might also be a mother, a wife. What identities do you bring to your leadership?
   a. How have those different identities shaped what you do?
b. Are there some identities that have changed? How has that impacted you, personally and professionally?

9. You may have heard the saying, a woman has to work twice as hard, be twice as smart to be taken seriously. What are your thoughts on that?

10. Gender roles and stereotypes have been a constant part of our society. How have you observed this manifested in education?

   a. District level
   b. Building level
   c. Classroom level

11. How does your communication and leadership style change dependent on the gender of the staff member?

12. What factors do you believe impact the teacher’s perception of your building vision, or leadership?

   a. What is your response to these different perceptions?

13. Previously you have talked with me about your mentors as you entered administration. Tell me about some of the mentoring opportunities you may have provided for other females in your field? For male professionals in your field?

14. What advice would you give to another female who is pursing administration?
APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED TEACHER/STAFF PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your school
   a. Describe the successes that your school has celebrated
   b. What would you describe as your school’s challenges?

2. If I wanted to know the culture and climate of your building, what three words would you use to describe it?

3. Tell me about some of your experiences with your current administrator
   a. Describe how your experiences with your current administrator compare to previous administrators
   b. What do you attribute those differences to?

4. Building teacher leadership capacity deals with how members of the school feel a sense of voice, in leadership decisions. Speak to me about opportunities for this leadership in your building.
   a. Specifically, describe your experiences as a teacher leader
   b. What is most successful, and what do you make those leadership opportunities successful
   c. What is a challenge in developing that shared leadership capacity? How does your administrator address those challenges
   d. How does this concept “gel” with how your administrator leads?

5. Describe the vision at your building. How does your administrator and other staff collaborate to work toward this vision?

6. Define for me the word leader
   a. How does this word leader fit with what you expect from a school principal?

7. Describe for me the “ideal” administrator
   a. What would be the strengths?
   b. What challenges might the “ideal” administrator face if they started in your building?

8. If I wanted to know about your administrator, what three words would you use to describe her?
   a. How do you feel others on the staff would respond to this question?
   b. How do these attributes fit with your description of the “ideal” leader?
9. Tell me about your administrator’s leadership style
   a. What are the strengths
   b. What, if any, are the areas you feel could be improved?

10. Situational leadership, if a term commonly used to describe an administrator’s ability to adapt their leadership style to the different situations or population with which they work. Describe how you see your administrator using situational leadership?
   a. Staff populations
      i. Male, female
      ii. Certified, classified
      iii. Veteran, new
      iv. Minorities
   b. Parent populations
   c. Situations
      i. Beginning of the year
      ii. SNA, lowering scores
      iii. Change in staff
      iv. High stress times
      v. Successful times
      vi. Other adversities (flood, closing schools looming etc.)

11. Gender roles and stereotypes have been a constant part of our society. How have you observed this manifested in education?
   a. District level
   b. Building level
   c. Classroom level

12. Describe how communication styles may change dependant on the gender, or other factors of a staff member, or parent that you are interacting with?

13. How do you believe the gender of your administrator impacts the building vision, or leadership?
   a. It is often said that women must work twice as hard and be twice as smart to be taken seriously, or seen as successful. what are your thoughts about this
      i. How might this perception impact your administrator?

14. Describe to me the perceptions regarding leadership in your building. What factors impact those perceptions? How does your administrator’s gender impact those perceptions?
   a. If there is a difference between administrative perceptions and teacher perceptions of leadership, how does your administrator respond?