

THROUGH THEIR LENSES: EXPLORING UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN  
HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my loving family. My best friend and husband, Steve, who has always believed in me, supported, and encouraged me. He always cheered me on and listened to me throughout the roller coaster ride of the doctoral program. I will always “love you more.” To my daughter, Shanelle, who amazes me daily with her caring spirit and unbelievable work ethic. She inspires me to be a better person and mom each day. I hope I have made her proud, helped her understand anything is possible, and to always believe in herself. Girl Power! To my father, Nader, who singlehandedly raised two strong willed and independent daughters. He was my first role model. I am thankful he taught me the importance of education, and that he always promoted gender equity. He made me believe I could do anything the boys could do.

My family is my support, my strength, and my motivation. I would not be the person I am, without their sacrifices and belief in my dreams. I am forever grateful.

## ABSTRACT

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. Moreover, this work is situated within the larger movement of educational leadership for social justice, with a focused application of a feminist theory lens and Social Role Theory. The two research questions that guided this study were: (1) How do select high school principals who are women describe their lived experiences in the principalship? and (2) What do these select high school principals who are women believe contributes to the underrepresentation of women in high school principal positions?

### **Methodology**

A phenomenological approach was chosen to explore the lived experiences of seven current high school women principals in Texas. The transcendental phenomenological research approach proposed by Moustakas (1994) was employed. Transcendental phenomenology has been summarized by Moustakas as “a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness” (1994, p. 49). Women principals who have led at their current school for at least three years were the focus of the study because they have demonstrated an ability to navigate the leadership role. Data in the form of background questionnaires

and individual interviews from seven women high school principals were collected and reviewed.

### **Findings**

Each participant described specific experiences, as a woman, serving in the role of high school principal. In this study, four common themes emerged: (a) Servant Leadership, (b) Facing Barriers, (c) Support Systems, and (d) Advice. Moreover, participants described the challenges they faced during their tenure as high school principals, and strategies they used to overcome the challenges. Additionally, participants expressed gender bias, a glass ceiling, and family responsibilities as most damaging to women for career progression, and thus underrepresentation in the high school principalship.

**KEY WORDS:** Equity, Principal, Secondary school, Underrepresented

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

In existing research studies, scholars have suggested that the underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership is a worldwide problem (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Lazzari, Colarossi, & Collins, 2009). The underrepresentation of women leaders can be noted in the corporate sector, the military, in politics, in law, and in education (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Catalyst, 2015; Hoyt & Murphy, 2015; Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). Although some research has been conducted regarding women in educational leadership, fewer studies have been conducted on female school principals at the high school level. The majority of teachers in the field of education are women; however the majority of high school administrators are men (National Center for Education Statistics-NCES, 2013). As female administrators seek to fill high school principal roles, they frequently are faced with gender stereotyping that can hinder career decisions and professional advancements (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Kellerman, Rhode, & O'Connor, 2007). The absence of women in educational leadership positions has continued for many years, despite advancements that have been made through legislative actions and social movements. Such legislative actions as the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the policy driven by feminist movement have worked to attempt to rectify the lack of women in leadership roles (Hyle et al., 2008). Furthermore, this research is framed by various feminist theories and Social Role Theory.

### Statement of the Problem

Women represent the majority of U.S. teaching professionals but are considerably absent in the role of high school principals. Seventy-six percent of the education

workforce consists of women, yet the number of women in secondary leadership positions are a fraction of that statistic (NCES, 2013). According to the National Center for Education Studies (2013) women account for only 30% of high school principal positions throughout the United States. Likewise, Larusdottir (2007) stated the “hegemony of masculine values over feminine values in educational administration is not new. Educational administration as an academic field is a little over a hundred years old and for most of this time women have been largely absent from the field” (p.263).

The underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship also has been identified as an international issue (Coleman, 2005). Qualified women applicants are often discouraged from leading high school campuses due to their gender (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). The idea that women do not fit the image of a leader is illustrated by Heilman’s (2001) lack of fit model and Eagly and Karau’s (2002) role congruity theory of prejudice toward women leaders.

Although some studies have examined the underrepresentation of women in school leadership (Celikten, 2010; Choge, 2015; Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengston, 2013), limited research exists on women in secondary school leadership, in general, and women’s experiences navigating the challenges of high school principalship roles, specifically. Further exploration into the lived experiences of high school principals who are women might provide valuable information to understand better why women are so widely underrepresented in the high school principal role. Women who often hold the same principal certifications, the same degree attainment, and attend the same universities as men have not been afforded the same opportunities as men (Hernandez Bark, Escartin, Schuh, & Dick, 2016; Kruse & Krumm, 2016). In 2012, the National

Center for Education Studies reported that degrees earned by women in the United States were 58% of the total bachelor's degrees awarded, 60% of the total master's degrees awarded, and 52% of the total doctorate degrees awarded. Women exceeded their male counterparts in all degrees awarded (NCES, 2012). In fact, women have outnumbered men in college admission and completion rates since the 1990's (Pew Research Center, 2015). In raw comparison, as women enter the workforce with higher academic attainment than men, it appears that women's expertise are not being used to their full potential (Hernandez Bark et al., 2016; Kruse & Krumm, 2016).

Change is necessary at the local school district level, as well as in university principal preparation programs, to minimize gender inequalities in secondary school administration (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). By bringing forward the voices of women high school leaders, stakeholders will gain a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by these women, and be better equipped to address the strengths and needs of aspiring women high school principals.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. By exploring the lived experiences of these women, the researcher sought to illuminate reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship and identify some of the key challenges they faced while leading in high school environments. To date, some of the key reasons cited for the underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship include: broad stereotypes, double standards, differing conflict management styles, poor recruitment,

and a dismal mentoring structure (Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Sherman & Wrushen, 2009). Some scholars propose that the field of education will be improved by changing society's misconceptions about women in positions of leadership (Nogay & Beebe, 2008).

Ten years from now the “numbers, career paths, barriers, and support systems will remain the same without intentional action by programs of educational administration and professionals currently in the field” (Gosmire, Morrison, & Van Osdel, 2010, p. 47). Therefore, there was a need to examine how women were experiencing the high school principalship, in order to bring forth the challenges and barriers they faced, and to explore how principal preparation programs and school districts can better address the needs of women aspiring to be high school principals, as well as raise awareness about existing discriminatory practices.

### **Significance of the Study**

Limited studies are available that focus on the lived experiences of women high school principals as a means of understanding how these experiences might inform the underrepresentation of women in high school principal roles. In conducting this study, the researcher identified the challenges these women faced, and increased awareness about the impact of gender stereotyping and gender role expectations of women working in the high school principalship. Additionally, in bringing forth the stories of women high school principals, results from this research could assist policy makers, school district administrators, and educator preparation programs in understanding concerns that current women high school principals have about their career options.



## **Conceptual Framework**

This research is framed by various feminist theories and Social Role Theory. To date, researchers who have studied women in leadership positions mostly focused on the social idea of gender inequities and have conveyed the voices of women through a feminist theoretical lens. In this study, a feminist lens and Social Role Theory were used to inform and frame research.

As described by hooks (2000):

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. (p. 28)

The goals of feminist theorists are to identify the reasons for gender discrimination, oppression, and stereotyping (Blackmore, 2013; Dentith & Peterlin, 2011; Lazarri, Colarossi, & Collins, 2009). Feminist researchers tend to study women's societal roles, the involvement of women in the workforce, and the politics women encounter in their professions (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011; Nogay & Beebe, 2008). Eagly (1987) describes Social Role Theory to explore and address stereotypes based on gender. Social Role Theory "argues that the beliefs that people hold about the sexes are derived from observations of the role performances of men and women and thus reflect the sexual division of labor and gender hierarchy of the society" (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000, p. 124). Communal characteristics such as being caring, fostering, and supportive are often used to describe women, and are perceived as qualities most suitable for women to demonstrate (Wood & Eagly, 2012). In contrast, agentic characteristics such as being

forceful, dominant, and self-assured are usually used to describe men and are perceived as fitting for men to exhibit (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Approaches to feminist theory and Social Role Theory are varied and these diverse approaches are reviewed in Chapter II.

### **Research Questions**

The central research questions in this study were:

- 1) How do select high school principals who are women describe their lived experiences in the principalship?
- 2) What do these select high school principals who are women believe contributes to the underrepresentation of women in high school principal positions?

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms were used throughout this research study:

**Epoche'**. To attempt to refrain from judgement (Moustakas, 1994).

**Gender Bias**. Preferring one gender over another (Carl & Eagly, 2001).

**Glass Ceiling**. An upper limit to professional advancement, especially as imposed upon women, which is not readily perceived or openly acknowledged (Matsa & Miller, 2011).

**High school**. Any public school serving students Grades 9 through 12.

**Leadership**. Ability to lead, direct, or manage (Ely et al., 2011). The aptitude to influence individuals to actively contribute to the attainment of specific goals (Vele, 2016).

**Principal.** A person who has the controlling authority of a public educational institution.

**Secondary school.** For the purpose of this study, defined as any public school serving students Grades 9 through 12.

**Social Role Theory.** Perceived differences in the behavior of men and women originate in the contrasting distributions of men and women into societal roles (Eagly, 1987).

**Transcendental Phenomenology.** Requires the researcher to set aside prejudgments and see the phenomenon newly, as for the first time, and be open (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Delimitations**

This study only included the experiences of women principals that worked in Texas public high schools with students in Grades 9-12. The study was limited to seven women public high school principals, who had at least three years of experience leading their current school, in districts served by the Region 4 Education Service Center of Texas. Principals of alternative, charter, schools of choice, parochial, or private schools were not included in this study. Moreover, this study was conducted in southeast Texas during the 2016-2017 school year.

### **Limitations**

Research is often controlled or restricted by certain factors that occur during a study. The participants in this study were purposefully selected based on their characteristics of being a woman and serving as a high school principal for at least three years at their current school in southeast Texas, during the 2016-2017 school year. The

researcher was not able to control the participants' willingness to complete background questionnaires or answer interviews honestly. Additionally, the researcher was not able to control the respondents' honesty and accuracy with regard to their beliefs. Moreover, because this study involved current high school principals, some of the respondents might have used caution in communicating their experiences, with regard to their career and advancement. Due to the researcher's emic perspective as a woman and a high school administrator, the possibility of researcher bias in the data analysis may be a limitation to the study. Furthermore, the single interview with limited time might exclude pertinent information collected from the participants.

### **Assumptions**

Several assumptions were intrinsic to this study. The researcher assumed that the participants contributed freely and comprehended the conditions of their participation. Moreover, the researcher assumed the respondents answered all questions honestly and entirely. Self-declared participant background data provided was assumed to be correct. In addition, the researcher assumed the data were transcribed and interpreted correctly, to allow themes to surface. Lastly, the researcher offered the participants the opportunity to examine each of their own "voices" to check for accuracy of my interpretation.

### **Researcher Bias**

In designing this study, the researcher attempted to address any potential researcher biases. Specifically, the researcher has served as a high school administrator and is a woman. The researcher has experienced gender bias and barriers in the workplace, and therefore might have empathized with participants when they expressed frustrations regarding their careers and gender perceptions.

## **Organization of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. The organization of this study consists of five chapters, references, and an appendix section. Chapter I was developed to provide a brief introduction, describe the background of the study, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the study. In addition, the conceptual framework was provided to introduce feminist theory and Social Role Theory. Chapter II presents a review of the research literature related to women in leadership. The literature review includes articles pertaining to the benefits of women in leadership, the high school principalship, women in educational leadership, management styles of women principals, and barriers encountered by women principals. Chapter III describes the methods used to conduct this study. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences of women high school principals. In addition, explanations of participant selection, the role of the researcher, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations were included. Chapter IV details participant profiles, emergent themes, and findings of the study in response to the research questions. Chapter V details the practical implications of the research findings and suggest recommendations for future research. Lastly, the appendix includes participant consent forms, principal contact email, principal questionnaire, interview protocol, and Institutional Review Board approval.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

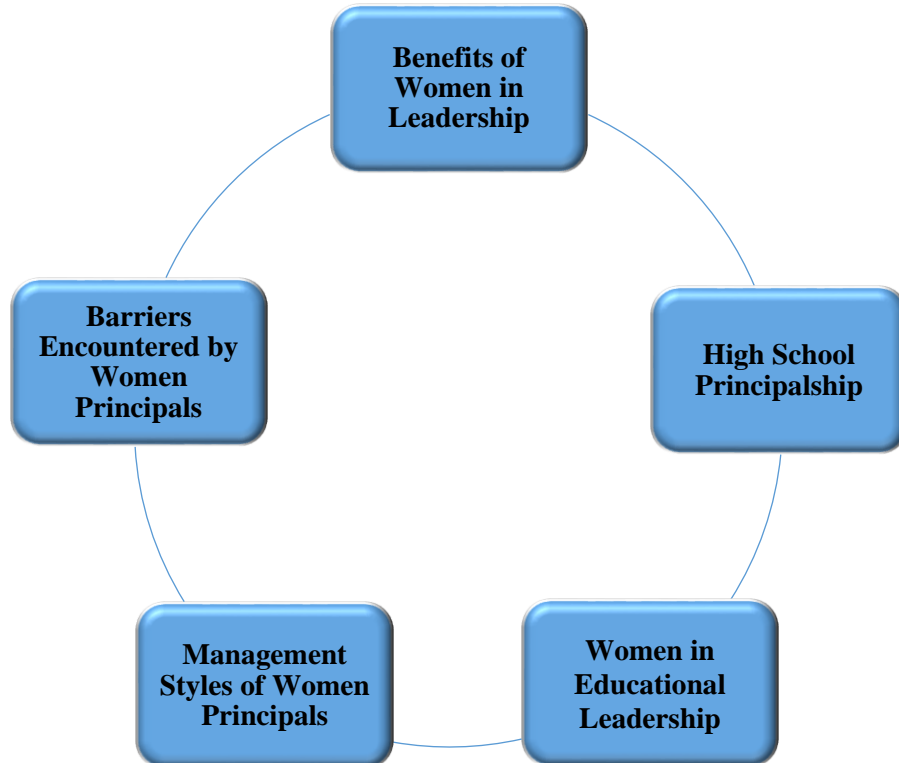
In this chapter, a review of literature regarding the benefits of women in leadership, the high school principalship, women in educational leadership, management styles of women in educational leadership, and barriers encountered by women principals will be presented. Additionally, this chapter will provide a review of literature and conceptual framework of feminist theory and Social Role Theory. Finally, in this literature review, the challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship are explored. This literature review supports the need for research exploring the underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship.

#### Search Strategy

To review existing academic literature relevant to women and leadership and in secondary principal positions, strategies for identifying and locating resources were utilized. This involved accessing Sam Houston State University's library search engine for peer-reviewed journals, articles, and research studies. The utility of literature based on the quality of the content and the relevance to the topic was assessed. Key terms that were used in locating relevant literature were *equity*, *principal*, *secondary school*, and *underrepresented*. The Education Source database and the Education Resources Information Center database yielded the greatest number of matches to the keywords. The key term *equity* yielded 9,531 results; the additional key term *gender* restricted the search to 669, followed by the addition of the term *women* to yield 42 results. The search for *principal* resulted in 14,277 matches; the additional terms of *female* and *school* were added to narrow the search to 49 results. The term *underrepresented* was used to locate

1,515 articles, the addition of the term *women* yielded 178 results. Finally, the term *secondary school* yielded 40,021 results and the addition of *Grades 9-12* yielded 176 matches.

The literature review and primary search topics are illustrated in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Literature Review Search, Author created.

### **Underrepresentation of Women in Leadership**

Although women account for 57% of the American workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015), they continue to be disproportionately missing in leadership positions. For example, women account for 4% of chief executive officer positions at Fortune 500 companies, (Catalyst, 2016), 19.4% of the seats in the United States Congress are held by women (Center for American Women and Politics, 2016), 17.1% of equity partners in

multi-tier law firms are women (National Association for Law Placement, 2014).

Women comprise 26.4% of president positions of universities (Cook, 2012), and of the military four-star admirals and generals women account for less than 1% of the highest leadership ranks (Krieger and O'Hanlon, 2014). Furthermore, full-time employed women account for 78.6% of men's median earnings (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). Gender discrimination is the prevailing explanation about the causes for women's lack of leadership roles (Eagly and Heilman, 2016).

As described by Eagly and Heilman (2016),

As long as women and men are differently distributed into social roles, gender stereotypes will continue to coalesce around the behaviors required for success in these male-typical and female-typical roles. The persistence of role segregation, despite women's increased labor force participation, is illustrated by women's continuing concentration in occupational roles that are perceived as communally demanding but not especially agentially demanding. Role segregation in current environments continually reinvigorates stereotypical thinking, thereby working against efforts to deter people from prejudice and discrimination. (p. 352)

Consequently, Hoyt and Murphy (2015) identified the significance of recommending and hiring more women into "leadership roles is greater than just fulfilling the promise of equal opportunity and making businesses, institutions, and governments more representative. Evidence is clear that fostering full participation for women is important for promoting a prosperous and civil society" (p. 1).



## **Conceptual Framework**

This study was informed by feminist theory and Social Role Theory as focused on the potentially unique challenges that women high school leaders face. To date, studies on women seeking high school principal positions primarily reflect a feminist theoretical lens and the social idea of gender inequities through the voices of women.

As described by hooks (2000),

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, and particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. (p. 28)

Feminist theories and Social Role Theory are varied and diverse. Moreover, the goals of feminist theorists are to identify the roots of gender discrimination, oppression, and stereotyping of women (e.g., Blackmore, 2013; Dentith & Peterlin, 2011; Lazzari, Colarossi, & Collins, 2009). Feminist theorists have examined women's societal roles, the involvement of women in the workforce, and the power and politics women encounter in their professions (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011; Nogay & Beebe, 2008).

## **History of Feminism in Three Waves**

The first waves of feminism in the United States were categorized by varied methods of involvement that have sustained and encouraged more feminist actions. In the beginning, feminism in the United States was entwined with other restructuring movements and originally involved working women (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006; Tong, 2013). The suffragist movement challenged stereotypes and involved fighting for women's rights. Gray and Boddy (2010) explained during the first wave the significant

mission was the “individualist and reformist attack to dismantle discriminatory laws and gender-based exclusionary social norms. These feminists were primarily concerned with establishing in policy that women are human beings in their own right and not the property of men” (p. 369). The second wave was comprised mostly of radical feminism, in which feminists made their message loud and clear at protests associated with the Miss America Pageants (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). Several books, speeches, and poetry were inspired during the second wave. Finally, the third wave was “born with the privileges that first and second wave feminists fought for, [but] third wave feminists generally see themselves as capable, strong, and assertive social agents” (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006, p. 15). As shown in Table 1, the type of feminist theory, its timeframe, its central concern, and notable leaders of each wave are depicted.

Table 1

*Three Waves of Feminism*

<b>Movement</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Central Concern</b>	<b>Notable Leaders</b>
<b>First Wave</b>	Liberal feminism	Late 1800s- Early 1900s	Social and racial justice Women’s suffrage	Lucretia Mott Elizabeth Cady Stanton Susan B. Anthony
<b>Second Wave</b>	Radical feminism	1960s	Gender equity and political inequalities	Betty Friedan Gloria Steinem Audre Lorde
<b>Third Wave</b>	Postsocialist feminism	1990s	Pursuit of feminine self-realization	Rebecca Walker Jennifer Baumgardner Amy Richards

**Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminists wanted to change society and disband patriarchy (Tong, 2013).

Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and dominate in roles of

leadership, social privilege, and control of property (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006).

According to Tong (2013), liberal feminists consider the control over women as the worst type of repression. They believe that women of different races, ethnicities, classes, and cultures are oppressed worldwide. Liberal feminists want to free women and men from the gender roles that they believe society has forced on them (ASHE, 2011). They believe the sex-gender structure has generated oppression, and their undertaking is to overthrow this system (Tong, 2013). At times liberal feminists believe they must battle against men, the gender system, and patriarchy. Liberal feminists fully abandon social roles, all facets of patriarchy, and in some cases, reject men as well (Tong, 2013). Liberal feminists highlight their dissimilarity to men and form groups that reject men.

### **Radical Feminism**

Radical feminism was most popular in the 1950s and 1960s when many civil rights movements were taking place (Tong, 2013). These feminists believed that oppression existed because of the way people were socialized, which supported patriarchy and retained men in top working roles. By the mid-1960s, most liberal feminists had joined an evolving women's rights group, such as the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), or the National Organization for Women (NOW). The broad resolution of these groups was to increase women's status (Tong, 2013). Women have the same mental aptitudes as their male colleagues and should be afforded the same opportunities in leadership, politics, education, economics, and social contexts (ASHE, 2011). Women should have the right to make their life choices, not have their life chosen for them because of their sex. Radical feminists produce and support acts of legislation that eliminate the barriers for

women. These acts of legislation demand equal opportunities and rights for women, including equal access to jobs and equal pay. Radical feminists believe that removing these barriers directly challenges the ideologies of patriarchy, as well as liberates women.

### **Postsocialist Feminism**

Postsocialist feminists test the principles of capitalism and patriarchy concurrently (Tong, 2013). Similar to the views of radical feminists, postsocialist feminists believe that all women experience oppression simply by being a woman. The way to end this oppression is to put an end to class and gender. Women must work with men in the political arena and workplace. In order to get anything accomplished, women must partner with men, as opposed to snubbing them (Tong, 2013). A working relationship between men and women, along with seeing each other as equals in all aspects of life, will improve gender relations and equality (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). In contrast to principles of liberal feminism, the postsocialist feminist theory concentrates on the broader perspective of social relations in the community and includes facets of race, ethnicity and other dissimilarities.

The comparisons of the feminist perspectives are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Comparisons of Feminist Perspectives*

	<b>Radical Feminism</b>	<b>Liberal Feminism</b>	<b>Postsocialist Feminism</b>
Society is controlled by...	Men	Mainly men but some women have power	Capitalism and men
Society is defined as...	Patriarchal	Lack of equal opportunity	Patriarchal
Who benefits from inequality?	Men	Nobody- Gender stereotypes for both	Men and Husbands
What is to blame for inequality?	Women are dominated by men	Socialization into gender roles and sexist discrimination	Men's status and pay- Women are financially dependent on men
Solutions to the exploitation...	Separation of the sexes	New reforms and laws against discrimination	More economic equality between men and women

Intersectionality Theory was introduced in the late 1980's. Intersectionality focuses on the importance of understanding multiple identities, including gender and race uncovering where marginalization and oppression occur and are connected (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013). All individuals have multiple identities that can take account of ethnicity, race, social class, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, educational attainment, and religion. In 1989, Crenshaw described how multiple social identities come together to create a unique experience and termed it Intersectionality. The main premise, and identifying feature of Intersectionality, is the interaction of identities producing a unique outcome. Developed out of the feminist movement, Intersectionality Theory works to understand how an individual's multiple identities,

particularly those influenced by oppression and privilege, intersect to create a unique experience (Shields, 2008). The theory particularly focuses on women of color, who experience sexism and racism in ways that also cannot be separated (Vlasnik, 2016). Intersectionality is relevant to this study because many women have experienced barriers to the high school principalship in various forms of discrimination. Subsequently, there needs to be continued discussions about the intersections of gender, culture, and race in educational leadership.

Blackmore (2013) explains, “feminism is best depicted as shared understandings as to the significance of focusing on gender as an analytical category with the aim to achieve social justice” (p. 146). Feminists are cognizant of the fight between femininity and masculinity; they advocate that women’s circumstances should be transformed and their independence should grow. Feminist theorists suggest ways of ending gender based discriminations that ought to be considered in the structure of leadership (Lazzari et al., 2009). Moreover, practicing feminist principles in leadership positions require determination by women seeking high school principal positions and support from others. Using feminist theory and Social Role Theory as a lens, school districts can be assessed on the degree to which women are treated equally in salary, promotions, and opportunities for advancement (Howley & Howley, 2007). Additionally, Blackmore (2013) suggested, rather than focus on women leaders, feminist researchers need to focus on the social relations of gender and how these are reproduced/produce and constituted within globalized school systems. The feminist gaze needs to refocus on the wider gender restructuring of the social, political and economic in ways that they produce patterns of inequality that position women leaders and teachers in particular ways that

limit or enable their leadership practices in specific contexts (p. 149). Feminist theory can offer methods to understanding the intricacies of injustice and design plans to uproot its causes (ASHE, 2011). Table 3 includes quotes from well-known feminists and their shared thoughts about gender and equality. These voices are instrumental in the pursuit of this study. By listening to the voices of the past and present, we can assist future generations to reach gender equity.

Table 3

*The Voices of Women*

Quote	Cited	Years
“Resolved, that the women of this nation in 1876, have greater cause for discontent, rebellion, and revolution than the men of 1776.”	Susan B. Anthony	(1820-1906)
“I always feel the movement is a sort of mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end.”	Alice Paul	(1885-1977)
“Courage is the key to the revelatory power of feminist revolution.”	Mary Daly	(1928-2010)
“Black women have not historically stood in the pulpit, but that doesn’t undermine the fact that they built the churches and maintain the pulpits.”	Maya Angelou	(1928-2014)
“We’ve begun to raise our daughters more like our sons...but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters.”	Gloria Steinem	(1934- )

*Source: Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006.*

### **Benefits of Women in Leadership**

The Pew Research Center (2015) conducted a survey to investigate public attitudes of gender and leadership. The authors analyzed the responses of 2,839 randomly selected adults. Most Americans found women similar to men on leadership qualities such as intellect and aptitude for innovation, with many saying women excel in the areas of compassion and organization. The authors determined 40% of Americans stated a double standard exists for women seeking leadership positions (Pew Research Center, 2015). In addition, the Pew Research Center survey concluded women were more trustworthy and ethical than men in leadership positions (2015).



Dezsö and Ross (2012) conducted a quantitative study of the underrepresentation of women leaders in top management teams. The authors analyzed Standard & Poor's (S&P) ExecuComp data of 1,500 firms covering the years 1992 through 2006. Firms with women in top leadership positions fared better economically than firms with males in top leadership positions. Additionally, Dezsö and Ross (2012) concluded that firms focused on innovation performed better with women in top management positions. Lastly, the authors explained advancing women into top management teams often advances company performance.

Similarly, Krishnan and Park (2005) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the impact of women on top management teams on organizational performance. The authors analyzed data from 679 firms on the 1998 *Fortune 1000* list of the largest American companies. The data included all individuals with the title of senior vice president or higher (Krishnan and Park, 2005). Furthermore, 51% of the 679 firms had no women on their top management teams. The authors concluded that firms with women on their top management teams outperformed firms with no women. Additionally, Krishnan and Park (2005) stated that career development should be an integral part of a company, including mentoring of women within the organization.

Also studying women in leadership, Eagly, Johannsen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis of 45 gender leadership style studies. The data were publicly accessible through various internet information searches. In addition, 53% of the studies examined leaders within the United States, and 47% studied leaders from other nations. The authors concluded that internationally, women were more transformational and transactional than males in leadership styles. Moreover, the authors

stated “women produced significantly better outcomes than men on all three outcome measures: the extra effort they inspired from subordinates, the satisfaction that people expressed about their leadership, and their overall effectiveness in leading” (p. 583).

Lastly, Eagly et al. (2003) contend the findings suggest the need for more women leaders as they have more positive and effective leadership styles than men.

### **The High School Principalship**

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Mandela, 1994). High school principals have the opportunity to change the world everyday on their campuses. However, it is a position filled with great responsibility, extreme workloads, high stress, long hours, and mounting pressures of accountability. Additionally, “principals have been targeted to make immediate and fundamental changes in management of schools. They are especially held to task on the learning gains of students” (Militello, Fusarelli, Alsbury, and Warren, 2013, p.75).

**Texas Principal Requirements.** Today, high school principals are expected to produce higher levels of achievement and learning for all students than ever before. Accordingly, pressure has mounted to create new, improved, and measurable standards for school principals (Militello et. al., 2013). Moreover, Texas high school principals must have specific skill sets, acquire principal certification, and follow professional standards outlined by the state. The five requirements to obtain a Texas principal certification include:

- (1) Must hold a master's degree from a university that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating

Board (THECB), U.S. Department of Education Database for Accredited Colleges and Universities

- (2) Hold a valid classroom teaching certificate
- (3) Have two years of creditable teaching experience as a classroom teacher
- (4) Successfully complete an approved principal educator preparation program
- (5) Successfully complete the required exam

([http://tea.texas.gov/Texas\\_Educators/Certification/Additional\\_Certifications/Becoming\\_a\\_Principal\\_or\\_Superintendent\\_in\\_Texas/](http://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Educators/Certification/Additional_Certifications/Becoming_a_Principal_or_Superintendent_in_Texas/))

Principal standards serve as a guide for improving school efficiency, increasing student achievement, and continual professional reflection. In 2013, the Texas Education Agency completed new school principal professional standards. The Texas principal advisory committee determined best practices for principals to be effective leaders and improve student performance (<http://tea.texas.gov>). Specifically, the Texas principal professional standards include five major categories of principal leadership: instructional leadership, human capital, executive leadership, school culture, and strategic operations. The Texas Education Code (2014) principal professional standards are comprised of:

- (1) Instructional Leadership- The principal is responsible for ensuring every student receives high-quality instruction.
- (2) Human Capital- The principal is responsible for ensuring there are high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom and throughout the school.
- (3) Executive Leadership- The principal is responsible for modeling a consistent focus on and commitment to improving student learning.

(4) School Culture- The principal is responsible for establishing and implementing a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all staff and students.

(5) Strategic Operations- The principal is responsible for implementing systems that align with the school's vision and improve the quality of instruction.

(<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter149/ch149bb.html>)

***Instructional Leadership.*** Chapter 149 of the Texas Commissioner’s Rules Concerning the Educator Standard of Instructional Leadership states:

In schools led by effective instructional leaders, data are used to determine instructional decisions and monitor progress. Principals implement common interim assessment cycles to track classroom trends and determine appropriate interventions. Staff have the capacity to use data to drive effective instructional practices and interventions. The principal's focus on instruction results in a school filled with effective teachers who can describe, plan, and implement strong instruction and classrooms filled with students actively engaged in cognitively challenging and differentiated activities.

***Human Capital.*** Chapter 149 of the Texas Commissioner’s Rules Concerning the Educator Standards of Human Capital states:

In schools with effective leaders of human capital, staff understand how they are being evaluated and what the expectations are for their performance. Staff can identify areas of strength and have opportunities to practice and receive feedback on growth areas from the leadership team and peers. Staff evaluation data show variation based on effectiveness but also show improvement across years as

development and retention efforts take effect. Across the school, staff support each other's development through regular opportunities for collaboration, and effective staff have access to a variety of leadership roles in the school.

***Executive Leadership.*** Chapter 149 of the Texas Commissioner's Rules

Concerning the Educator Standards of Executive Leadership states:

In schools with effective executive leaders, teachers and staff are motivated and committed to excellence. They are vested in the school's improvement and participate in candid discussions of progress and challenges. They are comfortable providing feedback to the principal and other school leaders in pursuit of ongoing improvement, and they welcome feedback from students' families in support of improved student outcomes.

***School Culture.*** Chapter 149 of the Texas Commissioner's Rules Concerning the

Educator Standards of School Culture states:

In schools with effective culture leaders, staff believe in and are inspired by the school vision and have high expectations for all students. Staff take responsibility for communicating the vision in their classrooms and for implementing behavioral expectations throughout the building, not only in their own classrooms. Teachers regularly communicate with the families of their students to provide updates on progress and actively work with families to support learning at home. Members of the broader community regularly engage with the school community.

***Strategic Operations.*** Chapter 149 of the Texas Commissioner's Rules

Concerning the Educator Standards of Strategic Operations states:

In schools with effective leaders of strategic operations, staff have access to resources needed to meet the needs of all students. Staff understand the goals and expectations for students, have clear strategies for meeting those goals, and have the capacity to track progress. Members of the staff collaborate with the principal to develop the school calendar. Teacher teams and administrator teams meet regularly to review and improve instructional strategies and analyze student data. Throughout the year, all staff participate in formal development opportunities that build the capacity to identify and implement strategies aligned to the school's improvement goals.

(<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter149/ch149bb.html>)

**Changing Role of High School Principal.** The role of the high school principal has mostly changed from manager to instructional leader (Kafka, 2009). Today, the high school principal is accountable for many areas such as curriculum, budget, student discipline, attendance, communication, hiring, student performance, safety, and staff appraisals, to name a few (Ediger, 2016; Lynch, 2012; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Moreover, the challenges for high school principals include “changing demographics, schools and curricula that are inappropriately designed for today’s adolescents, principals trained to be managers rather than instructional leaders, and a dramatic shortage of qualified candidates willing to take on the principalship” (Tirozzi, 2001, p.435). Furthermore, high school principals today are expected to take on more responsibilities and “resolve society’s social and educational inequities in a market-based environment” (Kafka, 2009, p. 328). Subsequently, expertise essential of high school principals in the 21st century include student mobility, school construction and population growth, virtual

learning, high stakes testing, staff attrition, and resource distribution (Tirozzi, 2001). In addition, other than the teacher, the building principal is the most influential individual with regard to student academic performance and achievement (Lynch, 2012). Therefore, excellence in the high school principalship should be recognized as the most important factor of school transformation (Tirozzi, 2001).

Tee, Hoon, Liu, Ting, and Porodong (2010) conducted a qualitative study in Malaysi to investigate high school leadership behaviors. The authors directed unstructured interviews and observations of urban and rural high school principals. Tee et al. (2010) revealed participant ideas of the role of high school principal and the skills necessary for the position. In addition, the majority of the principals displayed high energy on their high school campuses. Moreover, the principals built positive relationships with students and staff. Lastly, the high school principals demonstrated affirmative leadership behaviors.

Also studying the high school principalship, Valentine and Prater (2011) conducted a quantitative statewide study investigating principal leadership behaviors and student achievement. The authors analyzed student state test results data and viewpoints of leadership from 155 principals and 443 teachers serving high schools in the state of Missouri. The authors concluded principals with higher education attainment had an increased perceived effectiveness (Valentine & Prater, 2011). In addition, findings suggest student achievement is influenced by high school principal leadership behaviors.

### **Women in Educational Leadership**

Even with the increase of women in public school educational leadership, men are still the majority nationally as superintendent (77%) and high school principal (70%)

(NCES, 2013). Furthermore, at the present rate, it will be another 75 years before gender equality will emerge in the office of public school superintendent (Wallace, 2015).

Moreover, women outnumber men in principal preparation programs, which have not translated into the high school principalship (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). In addition, when women are able to attain top leadership positions, they are more likely to be selected for organizations in crisis (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Gray, 2015), such as leading failing schools, thus creating additional hurdles to success for women (Weiner & Burton, 2016; Smith, 2015).

Wallace (2015) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the underrepresentation of female superintendents. Data was analyzed from sixty-three female superintendents spanning six states. Wallace (2015) stated participants' advice to aspiring female superintendents was to be aware of gender bias and to prepare for the superintendency. In addition, 71% of participants stated gender should not be a concern when discussing the office of superintendent (Wallace, 2015).

Hallinger, Dongyu, and Wang (2016) conducted an international quantitative meta-analysis study to investigate gender differences in instructional leadership. The authors analyzed 40 data sets from 28 studies that used the Principal Instructional Management Scale (PIMRS) between 1983 and 2014. The data sets included perceptions of more than 2,500 principals, collected from numerous principals and teachers (Hallinger et al., 2016). The authors concluded women principals demonstrated more active instructional leadership than male principals. In addition, Hallinger et al. (2016) explained their "findings offer an 'instrumental rationale' to complement equity-based



arguments for increasing the density of female principals in the population of school leaders in contexts where they continue to lag male counterparts” (p. 595).

Eckman (2004b) examined the effect of gender on high school leaders in three Midwestern states during the 1999-2000 school year. Using descriptive research, the author analyzed data from 164 female and 175 male secondary principal participant surveys. Based on the participants’ responses, Eckman (2004b) discovered the following differences between female and male secondary principals: (a) female principals had more teaching experience; (b) males acquired their first principal position at a younger age than females, (c) males elected a preparedness to move for a secondary principal position more than females; and (d) females expressed more role conflict than males. The author noted similarities in terms of the role commitment and job contentment of both males and females. In addition, Eckman (2004b) concluded an “understanding of these similarities and differences continues the work of building a more inclusive theory of educational administration, adds to the knowledge base on the high school principalship, and identifies areas for further research” (p. 367).

Similarly, Coleman (2005) investigated the influence of gender, on becoming a secondary school principal. The author conducted a quantitative study that involved analyzing survey data from male and female principals in England, in 2004. Coleman (2005) discovered that 50% of the female principals surveyed indicated they had experienced chauvinism and discrimination with regard to advancements in leadership. Women in the study perceived a sense of bitterness from male colleagues and others (e.g., parents, male teachers, and other women leaders), in response to their being female in the role of principal. The researcher noted that female principals often worked in

isolation among large groups of male counterparts. Further, the author concluded that the inclusion of women in leadership roles would lead to greater integrity in education if more efforts could be made to decrease gender-related bias.

Funk and Polnick (2005) provided a review of literature regarding women in the role of principal, to provide “advice from the field” to assist in leadership and best practices. The study included: (a) effective practice for women principals, (b) barriers faced by women principals, (c) politics for women principals, (d) challenges for women principals, (e) advantages of women principals, (f) the voice of women principals, and (g) successes and sacrifices of women principals. The authors expressed that women ought to be equipped through “innovative, transformational preparation programs that target the unique needs of women who plan to institute humanistic school reform practices on behalf of the children they serve” (p. 35). Moreover, Funk and Polnick (2005) concluded women principals have enhanced advantages to their male colleagues, due to their collaborative leadership styles and relationship building.

### **Management Styles of Women Principals**

In a quantitative study of school culture and conflict management style, Blackburn, Martin, and Hutchinson (2006) focused on the impact of principal gender on their conflict management style in secondary schools. The authors analyzed two survey instruments from 30 secondary school principals and 150 teachers. Blackburn et al. (2006) concluded that secondary principal’s conflict management skills and school culture were interrelated, and gender played a part in how leaders’ conflict style were perceived. Blackburn et al. noted female principals were able to apply conflict management styles more effectively than their male counterparts. Blackburn et al. further

explained that school districts should use a conflict management assessment as a screening instrument for new applicants, or for the purpose of principal selections for campuses.

Also studying management styles, Marczynski and Gates (2013) conducted a quantitative study in Texas to examine the similarities and differences of female principals in 1998 and 2011. The data were accessed from the Texas Education Directory and the Public Education Information Management System. The survey participants included 106 female principals in 1998 and 117 female principals in 2011. The authors discovered female principals in 2011 were more directive in their management style than their colleagues in 1998. Interestingly, in both 1998 and 2011, female principals did not hold delegation as their major management style. Marczynski and Gates stressed the importance of educational personnel giving serious consideration to qualified women applicants for secondary principal positions.

Additionally, Giese, Slate, Brown, and Tejado-Delgado (2009) examined the management styles of female secondary principals in Texas. A random list of female administrators were developed, using the 2004-2005 Texas School Directory. The authors analyzed 56 participant surveys in the quantitative study. Giese et al. (2009) discovered the following: (a) 75% of the principals reported that supporting staff and being approachable was essential to their position; (b) conflict management was ranked high in importance; and (c) solving problems decisively were vital to the secondary principal role. Giese et al. noted the need for additional studies using a larger sample size and studying the impact of gender in leadership practices.

Moreover, Nogay and Beebe (2008) conducted a qualitative study in Ohio during the 1994-1995 school year. From the Ohio State Department of Education a random sample of 533 educators, including 28 female and 33 male high school principals, were studied. Nogay and Beebe analyzed surveys completed by the educators. Based on the participants' responses, female principals were perceived to communicate school goals better than their male counterparts. Female principals also were perceived to be more effective than their male principal colleagues at: coordinating curriculum; maintaining visibility on campus, and providing incentives for teachers. Furthermore, women principals were viewed as more effective in virtually all facets of leadership behaviors studied. Also noted in this study was that the protection of instructional time for teachers appeared to be influenced by superintendent gender. An analysis of the means of subscale survey items demonstrated male principals received a higher rating in the area of protecting instructional time. Nogay and Beebe (2008) concluded that by "changing society's misconceptions about women in leadership roles, we have the opportunity to enhance our educational system. The negative image of female administrators is not corrected by the occasional successful female" (p. 601). Finally, the authors suggested that school districts consider leadership adjustments in evolving administrative teams, based on the strengths and weaknesses of each member as one means of alleviating gender bias and preference for male educational leaders.

Also studying leadership styles of female secondary principals, Gray (2015) conducted a qualitative multiple case study. Gray (2015) analyzed data collected from three African American female secondary principals which included observations, interviews, and review of documents. All participants were transformational leaders that

worked to change damaged systems in their schools, while supporting students and staff on their urban campuses. Furthermore, each participant “served as turnaround principals and were able to create positive change on each campus by having a clear vision, paying attention to the unique needs of the students and teachers and using campus and community resources” (Gray, 2015, p. 91). Gray concluded that principal preparation programs should include the experiences of African American secondary female principals in their coursework, such as theoretical models, panel discussions, and pedagogy. Lastly, Gray (2015) recommended school district be cognizant of campus demographics and strive to hire quality principals to lead urban secondary schools.

### **Barriers Encountered by Women Principals**

Eckman (2004a) studied the similarities and differences between females and males in their experiences as secondary school principal, in a mixed method study. The author analyzed 564 principal surveys in the quantitative phase of the research, followed by a structured interview of eight female and eight male principals for the qualitative portion of the study. Based on the participants’ responses, Eckman (2004a) discovered some implications for barriers encountered by female principals: (a) the women delayed their careers due to family responsibilities and considered the principal role only when encouraged by others; (b) the women were older than their male contemporaries when they started as building principals believed the position marked the end of their careers; (c) the type of mentoring and encouragement differed for the women, specifically the lack of a female principal role model; and (d) the “good old boys’ club” continued to disadvantage women as high school principals.

In a comparable study, Gosmire et al. (2010) examined female secondary principals and the barriers they encountered. The authors directed a mixed method study in the High Plains region of Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota from 1997 to 2007. The quantitative portion of the study relied on archival data and was collected from the Department of Education, in each state. The qualitative section involved interviews with seven secondary female principals and five female superintendents, from the states. The researchers noted that the High Plains states have not kept up with the nation, in terms of the percentage growth of females serving as secondary building principals. The barriers defined by the participants included: (a) gender bias from faculty and staff, (b) apprehensions about the female principals' capacity to take care of discipline, and (c) higher expectations for women, in terms of time and work effort. The authors stressed that female educators would profit from a mentoring structure (Funk & Polnick, 2005), and that professional organizations should inspire women to develop career paths to secondary principal roles as well as superintendent positions.

Moreover, Sherman and Wrushen (2009) investigated barriers encountered by women secondary principals of diverse backgrounds. In a qualitative study, the researchers directed open-ended interviews with eight female principals, of various ethnicities. Four female principals were White, two were African American, one was Hispanic, and one was Asian. Interestingly, the researchers noted barriers and obstacles were imposed by other women in leadership for all of the female principals. Sherman and Wrushen (2009) stated, "although the women represent various ethnicities, their experiences as secondary school leaders are more similar than different and more directly related to issues of gender than race" (p. 182). The authors cited the need for leadership

programs and districts to actively recruit women and expand their ideas of what administrators should look like.

In a similar qualitative study, Fernandez, Bustamante, Combs, & Martinez-Garcia (2015) investigated the career advancement experiences of Latino/a secondary principals. Through the phenomenological reduction analysis process the authors' revealed barriers participants experienced. Fernandez et al. (2015) determined that internal barriers were career doubt and questioning of leadership capacity. In addition, external barriers were gender discrimination and district resistance to change. The authors concluded that leadership preparation programs should "explicitly address social justice issues in ways that raise the consciousness of all school leaders regarding the importance of diversity in school leadership" (p. 72).

Wrushen and Sherman (2008) directed a qualitative study to identify perceptions of female secondary principals. They conducted open-ended interviews with eight secondary female principals, from eastern regions of the United States. Participants noted their awareness of collective opinions of women administrators. In addition, female principals shared their frustrations of not being received and the continuous judgment of their leadership style to their male colleagues and predecessors. Wrushen and Sherman (2008) stated the need for universities and districts to capitalize on availabilities for all current and future administrators, so that stereotypical gender perceptions are diminished.

Researchers have studied leadership practices from various viewpoints to determine if there are substantial differences between genders in the role of secondary school principal. As shown in Table 4, some of the authors in this literature review

shared themes about gender equity and secondary principals. Women continue to struggle in gaining equal representation at the secondary principal position in a field in which the majority of professionals are women. Finally, research on the underrepresentation of women in secondary principal roles needs to continue in order to educate stakeholders and diminish gender inequities in educational leadership.



Table 4

*Themes Located in Research Studies about Gender Equity and Women in Leadership*

Connections within the literature	Eckman (2004a)	Coleman (2005)	Blackburn et al. (2006)	Wrushen & Sherman (2008)	Giese et al. (2009)	Gosmire et al. (2010)	Dezsö & Ross (2012)	Krishnan & Park (2005)	Eagly et al. (2003)	Kafka (2009)	Valentine & Prater (2011)	Tee et al. (2010)
Benefits of Women in Leadership			X				X	X	X		X	
High School Principalship	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X
Women in Educational Leadership	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Management Styles of Women Principals	X	X	X	X	X						X	X
Barriers Encountered by Women Principals	X	X	X	X	X	X						

**Summary**

This Chapter reviewed the relevant literature relating to the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions. The literature included: (a) Benefits of Women in Leadership, (b) High School Principalship, (c) Women in Educational Leadership, (d) Management Styles of Women Principals, and (e) Barriers Encountered by Women Principals. Indeed, additional information regarding the experiences of women high school principals in the state of Texas can be helpful in understanding the exclusive experience of leading a public high school. In Chapter III, the methodology for this study will be described.

## CHAPTER III

### Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. By exploring the lived experiences of these women, the researcher illuminated reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship, and identified some of the key challenges they faced in leading in high school environments. Therefore, a phenomenological study served as the most appropriate design for describing and giving meaning to the shared experiences of women who are high school principals (Creswell, 2013).

Van Manen (1990) claimed that descriptive phenomenological approaches were most appropriate when a researcher seeks to understand the essence of lived experiences of participants. In this qualitative study, the transcendental phenomenological research approach proposed by Moustakas (1994) was employed. Moreover, Moustakas (1994) summarized transcendental phenomenology as “a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness” (p. 49). Specifically, the researcher attempted to bracket their own experience (*epoché*) before collecting and analyzing data, to describe the phenomenon in terms of what the participant experiences and how they experienced it. According to Moustakas (1994), *epoché* is a “process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time” (p.85). Ideally, by taking this approach, the researcher was able to better to access each participant in their own voice and gain a deeper

understanding of the experiences and challenges of being a high school principal and a woman. Different forms of data, including background questionnaires and individual interviews were collected. For phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) recommended sampling three to 10 participants.

### **Context**

This study focused on seven women high school principals in southeast Texas serving major suburban and urban districts. A list of all high school principals was provided by leadership representatives at the Region 4 Education Service Center (ESC) in the state of Texas. Of the 127 public high school principals in the Region 4 ESC, 22 were women that met the criteria of this study. Regional Education Service Centers were established by the Texas Legislature to provide support to school districts: (a) with student performance, (b) educator professional development, and (c) in offering educational certifications. There are 20 ESCs serving districts in the state of Texas (TEA, 2017). The Region 4 ESC serves a seven-county area composed of 49 public school districts, 1,500 campuses, 1.1 million students, and 94,000 educators. The Region 4 ESC total district teacher demographics include 78% women and 22% male (2015). Interestingly, the percentage of women in the high school principalship is much less (NCES, 2013) and account for 37.8% of principals in the Region 4 ESC (2016). Moreover, women account for 17.3% (2016) of principals serving three or more years in the area of Region 4.

With so few women in the high school principalship, this study will help gain insight into the experiences of the women. Neutral off site face-to-face interviews and phone interviews were conducted with women principals who meet the predetermined

criteria established for the study. Ethical Considerations Permission from the Sam Houston State University's Institutional Review Board was approved to conduct this study (see Appendix E).

### **Participant Selection**

In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is widely used as an appropriate method for selecting settings and individuals. In this strategy, particular settings, person, or activities are selected to provide information that is mostly relevant to the research questions and goals of the study (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, the qualitative screening included purposeful criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select the participants. The participants had the following qualifying characteristics: (a) the participants were women high school principals; (b) the participants were employed on high school campuses in districts served by the Region 4 Education Service Center in the state of Texas; and (c) the participants had at least three years of experience as a high school principal leading their current school.

The Texas Education Agency (<http://tea.texas.gov/>) categorizes Texas public school districts into district types using elements such as enrollment, growth, economic status, and vicinity to urban areas. These district types, group school districts into eight categories ranging from major urban to rural. The majority of the school districts within the Region 4 ESC are classified as major urban or major suburban (<http://tea.texas.gov/>). This study included women principals from five districts, including three major urban and four major suburban districts.

As defined by the TEA (<http://tea.texas.gov/acctres/analyze/1516/level.html>):

A district is classified as major urban if: (a) it is located in a county with a population of at least 950,000; (b) its enrollment is the largest in the county or at least 70 percent of the largest district enrollment in the county; and (c) at least 35 percent of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. A student is reported as economically disadvantaged if he or she is eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program. A district is classified as major suburban if: (a) it does not meet the criteria for classification as major urban; (b) it is contiguous to a major urban district; and (c) its enrollment is at least 3 percent that of the largest contiguous major urban district or at least 4,500 students. A district also is classified as major suburban if: (a) it does not meet the criteria for classification as major urban; (b) it is not contiguous to a major urban district; (c) it is located in the same county as a major urban district; and (d) its enrollment is at least 15 percent that of the largest major urban district in the county or at least 4,500 students.

For the first level of sampling, the researcher contacted the Region 4 Education Service Center of Texas to gather a listing of all female high school principals who had at least three years of experience leading their current school. The Region 4 ESC provided the researcher with a list of all 127 high school principals employed in the Region 4 area and their email addresses. The list provided was cross-referenced by visiting district websites. Moreover, the Texas Education Directory (AskTED) was accessed from the public Texas Education Agency (TEA) website to further cross-reference the high school principal listing provided. When male high school principals were removed from the list, 17.3% (22) of high schools were led by women in the 2016-17 school year, with three or

more years' experience on the campus. The second level of sampling included a demographic questionnaire sent to the Region 4 women high school principals via email (see Appendix B). Finally, based on questionnaire response, women high school principal participants were selected based on criterion sampling and invited to participate in interviews to allow for depth and detail in addressing the phenomenon of women high school principals' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Principals who meet the criteria for participation were contacted via phone call describing the purpose of the study and asking their permission to conduct the face-to-face interview. A follow-up email confirmed their participation, explained the process to be followed for the study, and established a mutually agreeable meeting time and place.

Prior to the interview, each participant signed an informed consent document outlining the research goals and the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix A). Demographic data were collected from the selected women high school principals and interviews were conducted. Seven women high school principals participated in the study. For phenomenological research, Creswell (2013) recommended three to 10 participants.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Bracketing out biases is necessary in safeguarding trustworthiness in qualitative research. Moustakas (1994) identified the importance of *epoche*, or the attempt to be explicit about one's own researcher biases and prejudices. *Epoche* requires continuous awareness and focus on the part of the researcher. As an emic researcher, each of the experiences forms the researchers' perspective of the underrepresentation of women in high school principal roles. Because of the researcher's experiences as a female

educational leader who has applied for positions in administration but did not secure a position, the researcher did disclose personal experiences. For example, the determination and drive of the researcher have been viewed as too strong and aggressive, by some, in the path to the principalship. Bracketing and reflexivity (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Christensen, 2014) assisted the researcher to clearly position their own beliefs and opinions about women in the high school principalship and allow readers to decide how the researcher's own perceptions and interpretations as the study conductor might influence the research outcome.

### **Instrumentation**

An interview protocol was developed according to guidelines suggested by Spradley (1979) and the questions were designed to gather data in response to research questions and grounded in feminist framework. The questions used in the interview were descriptive and included grand tour and example questions (Spradley, 1979) to set the stage upon which a woman high school principal fulfills her role as an underrepresented instructional leader (see Appendix D).

The researcher concluded that semi-structured interview questions were a better fit for the purpose of the study. As Merriam (2009) pointed out, in qualitative research where interviews are the main instrument of gathering data, identifying appropriate participants is important because they must be able to provide insights into the phenomena. Additionally, asking participants questions that will elicit in-depth responses is equally important in gathering useful data. The conceptual framework and literature review were utilized in developing the research questions and interview protocol.



## Procedures

Permission were requested from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Sam Houston State University. A copy of the IRB approval letter to conduct this study is included in Appendix E. Following permission from the IRB, the researcher used the cross-referenced public principal list provided by the Region 4 ESC to access a listing of women high school principals. Next, contact was made to enlist participation by women high school principals through emails and phone calls.

A consent letter was developed to advise the participants about the purpose, procedure, and estimated time needed for the interview. The consent form also included assurance of the anonymity of questionnaire respondents and the interviewees.

Participant interviews were conducted and audio-taped by the researcher. As suggested by Spradley (1979), a verbatim transcription of interviews was used to minimize bias in recording information. Interviews were transcribed and the researcher compared the transcripts with the audio-tapes for accuracy. Transcripts of the interviews were coded and analyzed by the researcher to identify overlapping themes. Lastly, follow-up participant emails were conducted by the researcher.

Data was collected from face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and demographic questionnaire. In this study, characteristics of the participants were collected through a demographic questionnaire. A copy of the demographic questionnaire is located in Appendix C. In addition, audit trails and a reflexivity journal were maintained throughout the study. The interview questions were developed after a review of the literature and piloted with a former woman building principal. The pilot interview results allowed for improvements to interview questions.

All interviews were transcribed. The completed transcripts were offered to participants to verify the correctness of what was stated and transcribed. Allowing for member checking assists in providing participants the opportunity to check the accuracy of interpretations from the interview process (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as provide additional information. However, none of the participants requested to review their transcript.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcribed data was read several times to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2013). To analyze the transcriptions, a combination of first-cycle and second-cycle coding techniques were completed by the researcher (Saldaña, 2013). Initially, attribute coding was applied to each transcript using the demographic data. Next, first-cycle coding consisting of structural codes to organize the large amounts of information gathered from the interviews was used. Using the structural codes, the researcher analyzed each transcript applying a combined descriptive and in-vivo coding.

Analysis continued with several cycles of coding, building on the data and horizontalize coded statements across participants. Moustakas (1994) described “We consider each of the horizons and the textural qualities that enable us to understand an experience. When we horizontalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence” (p. 95). Moreover, the researcher categorized clusters of meanings (Creswell, 2013) from significant statements and constructed themes in second cycle coding until reaching saturation and no new information seemed to surface (Saldaña, 2013). Detailed analysis was conducted by combining data from

questionnaires and interviews, based on themes and categories that related to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Finally, the findings were presented within the framework of gender equity in the high school principalship.

### **Trustworthiness/Credibility of the Data**

In phenomenological research, it is imperative to build trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). In order to build trustworthiness in this study, researcher bias was clarified from the onset of the study, triangulated the data, attempted to use informal member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), and shared participants' voices with rich description (Creswell, 2013). Because the researcher is an aspiring female high school principal, objectivity was maintained and personal experiences were not allowed to get in the way. In addition, as noted by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) researcher bias can threaten "external credibility of the findings because the particular type of bias of the researcher may be so unique as to make the interpretations of the data ungeneralizable" (p. 238). Lastly, participants were offered a copy of the interview transcript for clarification, recommendations, and analysis upon request.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The goal of this study was to produce valid and reliable knowledge through true research results and to conduct research in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009). To ensure the validity of the research findings, policies and guidelines were followed during the study. The protection of participants, the right to privacy, and informed consent were communicated to the participants ahead of time. All participants in the study were referred to by pseudonyms of their choosing to protect their identity and their position. Only the researcher knows the names of each participant. All data is maintained on a

password-protected personal account. In addition, the data will be maintained for three years, after which it will be properly disposed of.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. The steps and procedures used in this study were designed to increase understanding into the stated phenomenon. Chapter III described the rationale for selecting a qualitative research method and provided an in-depth discussion of each phase of my research including the use of a phenomenological design, participant selection, data collection, informed consent procedures, and the data analysis process used. Additionally, the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and credibility were described. Lastly, the goal of this study is to assist district administrators, principal preparation programs, and future educational leaders a better understanding of the principalship through the lens of women currently leading secondary schools. The findings of the study are provided in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

#### Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. As previously discussed, women represent the majority in the U.S. teaching profession but are considerably absent in the role of high school principals. Seventy-six percent of the education workforce consists of women, yet the number of women in secondary leadership positions are a fraction of that statistic (NCES, 2013). Nationwide, women account for only 30% of high school principal positions throughout the United States (NCES, 2013). Moreover, women only account for 17.3% (ESC, 2016) of high school principals serving three or more years in the Region 4 Education Service Center in the state of Texas. By bringing forth the stories of women high school principals, results from this research will assist policy makers, school district administrators, and educator preparation programs in understanding concerns that women high school principals might have about their career options. In addition, it is this researchers hope that this study will assist aspiring women principals to be aware of, and understand some of the challenges faced by current women high school principals.

This chapter will report demographic characteristics and findings from the analysis of individual interviews conducted with seven women high school principals currently serving Region 4 public high schools in Texas. This study includes data collected through semi-structured interviews, with seven of the 22 currently serving women public high school principals in the Region 4 ESC, with three or more years of

high school principal experience. Initial communication was made through email (see Appendix B) and phone contact to the 22 women principals. Personal contact was made with the seven principals agreeing to participate in the study. Data was collected from a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) as well as face-to-face and phone interviews (see Appendix D). The demographic questionnaire responses generated direct details, which did not require special attention to understand their meaning. All participants understood and signed consent forms to participate in the research study. Each interview was conducted in a secure area in order to avoid disruptions and distractions. Moreover, each interview was audiotaped; the researcher took notes during the interviews. Interviews ranged in time between 16 minutes and 7 seconds to 44 minutes and 1 second. Data analysis and organization was completed by hand, and the researcher did not make use of any qualitative data analysis software. Color-coding was completed on each interview transcript for initial analysis of significant statements. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' approach to data analysis of transcendental phenomenological research. The analysis process included: (1) bracketing of biases, (2) identifying significant statements, (3) reducing non-pertinent data, (4) clustering into themes, (5) identifying emergent themes, (6) building of individual textural descriptions, and (7) developing combined meanings for each participant. Interview data was input by the researcher, into tables to assist in organizing emergent themes.

In addressing the research questions in this study, four major themes emerged: (a) Servant Leadership, (b) Facing Barriers, (c) Support Systems, and (d) Advice. The themes embodied the common set of experiences each participant has lived as a woman in the high school principalship. Emergent subthemes included: (a) serving students, (b)

serving staff, (c) internal barriers, (d) external barriers, (e) support in faith, (f) family support, (g) mentor support, (h) advice for women, and (i) advice for district administration. In addition, each theme and subtheme provided awareness of the challenges the participants experienced, the supports the participants received, and the recommendations the participants provided with regard to leading a high school campus as a woman.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by two central research questions:

- 1) How do select high school principals who are women describe their lived experiences in the principalship?
- 2) What do these select high school principals who are women believe contributes to the underrepresentation of women in high school principal positions?

### **Participant Profiles**

As previously described in Chapter III, the selection of the participants occurred through the use of purposive sampling. Criterion required of each selected participant were: (a) a woman high school principal; (b) employed on a high school campus in a district served by the Region 4 Education Service Center in the state of Texas; and (c) the participants had at least three years of experience as a high school principal leading their current school. The participants shared their personal experiences through interviews, on dates and locations of their choosing.

The participants served campuses ranging from 1,100 to 3,000 students in five different districts within the Region 4 Education Service Center. The Texas Education

Agency (<http://tea.texas.gov/>) categorizes Texas public school districts into district types using elements such as enrollment, growth, economic status, and vicinity to urban areas. Through the designation of district types, school districts are grouped into eight categories ranging from major urban to rural. The majority of the school districts within the Region 4 Education Service Center are classified as major urban or major suburban. As defined by the TEA:

A district is classified as major urban if: (a) it is located in a county with a population of at least 950,000; (b) its enrollment is the largest in the county or at least 70 percent of the largest district enrollment in the county; and (c) at least 35 percent of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. A student is reported as economically disadvantaged if he or she is eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program.

A district is classified as major suburban if: (a) it does not meet the criteria for classification as major urban; (b) it is contiguous to a major urban district; and (c) its enrollment is at least 3 percent that of the largest contiguous major urban district or at least 4,500 students. A district also is classified as major suburban if: (a) it does not meet the criteria for classification as major urban; (b) it is not contiguous to a major urban district; (c) it is located in the same county as a major urban district; and (d) its enrollment is at least 15 percent that of the largest major urban district in the county or at least 4,500 students.

Three of the participants served major urban districts and four served major suburban districts. Five of the participants were White, one was Black, and one was Hispanic. Three of the participants earned a doctorate degree, one of the participants was



completing a doctoral program, and the remaining participants earned a master's degree. In addition, all participants had at least 21 years of experience in the field of education. As educators, the participants averaged 30 years of service to public schools. Furthermore, the participants ranged from 3-17 years of experience serving as high school principals. The average of high school principal experience was eight years for the participants. The ages of the participants ranged from 43-83 years. The average age of participants was 54 years. Moreover, participants were assigned pseudonyms of their choosing to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities. Table 5 provides demographic data collected from participants.

Table 5

*Participant Demographic Data*

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Highest Degree Earned	Years in Education	Years HS Principal	Student Enroll	District Classification
Katherine	43	Black	Doctorate	22	6	2,300	Major Urban
Janie	43	Hispanic	Doctorate	21	4	1,650	Major Urban
Bernice	83	White	Doctorate	57	17	1,100	Major Urban
Melissa	47	White	Post Master's	23	12	2,300	Major Suburban
Cathy	61	White	Master's	39	10	2,560	Major Suburban
Peg	52	White	Master's	23	6	3,000	Major Suburban
Laurie	49	White	Master's	25	3	2,650	Major Suburban

**Katherine.** This principal was one of the youngest interviewed, she self-identified as Black and her age as 43. She earned a Doctorate degree as well as Principal and Superintendent Certifications. Katherine has been the principal of her current high school campus for six years. The interview was conducted by phone. She previously served as an assistant and associate principal for 10 years at a neighboring high school

within the same district. Prior to administration, she taught for six years feeling the need to “impact more kids” she pursued administration. Regarding her path to the principalship, Katherine shared:

I think that a lot of why my past has been the way it has been is simply a gift, because it just is my ministry, this is what I'm supposed to be doing. And so, if you say what's led me, probably would be more of spiritual aspect, which is the reason I sit here today.

**Janie.** This principal was also one of the youngest interviewed, she self-identified as Hispanic and her age as 43. She earned a Doctorate degree as well as Principal and Superintendent Certifications. Janie has been the principal of her current high school campus for four years. The interview was conducted by phone. She previously served as a high school teacher, an assistant principal at the middle school and elementary school levels, and then a middle school principal for ten years prior to her high school principalship. Janie felt it was important to work at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as she had aspirations of becoming a superintendent later in her career. Regarding her path to the principalship, Janie stated, “my district didn’t believe that a female would be able to run a 5A or 6A high school. So I went to another district that did have faith in me.”

**Bernice.** The oldest of the principals interviewed, she self-identified as White and her age as 83. She earned a Doctorate degree as well as Principal and Supervisor certifications. Bernice has been the principal of her current high school campus for 17 years and served as an educator for 57 years. The interview was conducted face-to-face in her office on campus. Through her career she held many positions including teacher,

elementary principal, assistant superintendent, area superintendent, and educational consultant. Bernice had retired; she was contacted by her former district to return as high school principal. She described:

I'd been retired five years and I went snow-skiing with my grandchildren and my daughter and her family, and I had a granddaughter, she was 16. She always said that she wanted to grow up and make the world a better place for all the people. She said that she'd seen a lot of inequities, a lot of discrimination, and that she wanted to be somebody who could really make a difference in the world, and that she thought she could do that if she could grow up and really work to bring equity and equal rights to everybody. That she could make the world a little kinder place for all people. She died in a skiing accident. It was right after that that I got a call to come to the high school. So the third time that they called me, I thought of my granddaughter who had wanted to make a difference and couldn't. And I thought, let me go see if I can do something.

She stated to administration she would stay at the campus and help for three months, until a replacement was found. Bernice just completed year 17 as principal, at the high school she adores, "it was the best thing I've ever done." She added with a smile, "I fell in love with the people over here and I just kept coming back like a bad nickel. That's what happened."

**Melissa.** This principal self-identified as White and her age as 47. She earned a Master's degree as well as Principal certification and is currently pursuing her Doctorate degree. Melissa has been the principal of her current high school campus for eight years with a total of 12 years high school principalship experience. The interview was

conducted face-to-face in her office on campus. She previously served as a teacher, coach, high school assistant principal, high school associate principal, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade campus principal prior to her high school principalship. When asked about her career path to the principalship, Melissa shared:

I love being involved in the big picture, and when I knew I wanted to be an educator, I knew pretty early on I wanted to have a broader effect than just 150 kids in my classroom. I also knew that it takes certain skills to be effective, to affect change at a high school. You know you can't just be the stereotypical books, butts, and buses principal from the past, and that you truly need an instructional leader.

**Cathy.** Of the principals interviewed, she had just completed her last school year and was preparing to retire and hand over the reins to the incoming principal. Cathy self-identified as White and her age as 61. She earned a Master's degree as well as Mid-Management Administrator certification. Cathy has been the principal of her current high school campus for 10 years. The interview was conducted face-to-face in her office on campus. She previously served as a teacher, Drill Team Director, high school assistant principal, and middle school principal prior to her high school principalship.

Regarding her path to the high school principalship, Cathy stated:

When I was hired as an AP (on current campus), my initial goal was to make some changes, to make a difference in education. I thought I can help the educator, and students, be a liaison. When I came here, I actually applied for the principalship and I was not hired for the position. But when I was not hired for the position, I trained the new principal, because he had come from a smaller

district. So, I guess I did a good job training him. Our then superintendent, called me one day and said, 'I need you to go help them at the junior high.' I said, 'Well, okay. How long will I be there?' He said, 'Well, that principal's retiring, we need you to just go over there and help. We're going to interview.' I said 'okay.'

She described going to the middle school in December of that year. Cathy continued to clean up several situations at the middle school, the retiring principal stopped going to work, and interviews hadn't started for a new principal. In February, she received a box with her belongings from the high school. Cathy contacted the superintendent:

'My stuff came from the high school.' He said, 'Yeah. You're going to be the new principal there.' I said, 'but I love my job at the high school. I'm not ready to do this.' He said, 'Yeah. You're ready. You're fine. You need to stay there. That's where you need to be.' 'Okay.' I literally cried.

After serving as middle school principal for approximately four years, she received a call in March from the superintendent to go back to the high school as building principal. She discussed with her husband, he stated "Absolutely not. You do not take that job. They've had five principals in seven years. It's crazy there. You don't need to go there." Cathy decided to take the high school principalship and has served the students, staff, and community for the past 10 years.

**Peg.** Of the principals interviewed, she served the largest student population (3,000). This principal self-identified as White and her age as 52. She earned a Master's degree as well as Principal certification. Peg has been the principal of her current high

school campus for six years. The interview was conducted by phone. She previously served as a high school teacher, Dean of Students, associate principal, and elementary school principal prior to her high school principalship. Peg described her path to the principalship:

Actually, I was an administrator at the same high school where I'm principal. I was an administrator for six years. I left the school where I was an associate principal. I became an elementary principal for four years, and when the vacancy came open, there were a large number of teachers and community members that wanted the next principal to be someone who knew their community, and they wanted someone who was also a member of the community and someone that was familiar with the high school. Because I had previously been an administrator, I lived in the community, my children went through the same school. So, I felt that call. With that said, the reason I took the job was I felt like at the high school, there was tremendous amounts of student potential being left untapped. I felt inspired to take it on, so that I could take the school further than it had been previously.

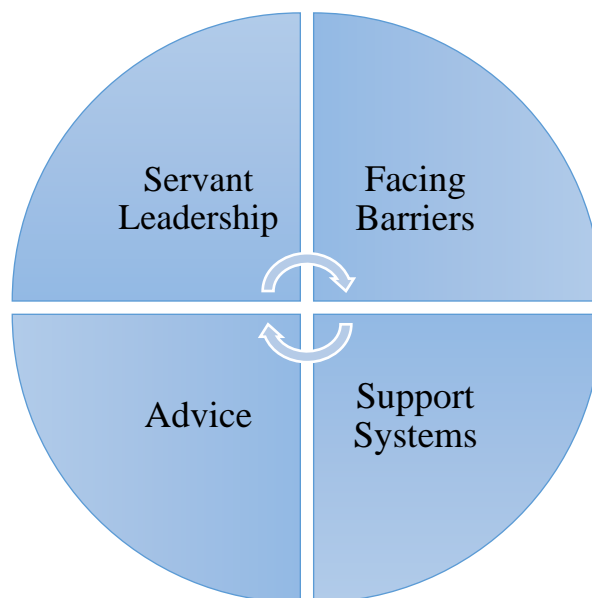
**Laurie.** She has been the principal of her current high school campus for three years, having the least high school experience of the principals interviewed. Laurie self-identified as White and her age as 49. She earned a Master's degree as well as Mid-Management Administrator certification. The interview was conducted face-to-face in her office on campus. Laurie previously served as a teacher, coach, middle school assistant principal, high school assistant principal, and middle school principal prior to her high school principalship. Having served as a student, teacher, coach, and

administrator in her current district, she shared “I didn't really pursue the high school principalship as much as it pursued me.” Laurie discussed her placement into the high school principalship:

I've been fortunate here. My superintendent is the one who really talked to me about this role, and I just said, "I don't know if I can do the job." And he said, "I think you'd be great at it." And I said, "Well, if you feel like I can add value to that campus, then I'll do it. Because I believe in you." That's kind of how I evolved into this role. I think if I would have had to go interview for the job, and do the whole thing like that, I don't know if I would have done it, to be quite honest with you. But the fact that he came to me and said, "Listen, I really want you to do this. I think you'd be great," we had a conversation, and it worked. I mean it had its challenge just being placed too, and not going through a process. That had a whole other issue I think that came with that.

### **Emergent Themes**

Application of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach and Saldaña's (2013) coding techniques helped me identify themes. Through analysis, the data was horizontalized into “common categories or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). In this qualitative research study, four themes emerged after several rounds of first cycle coding: (a) Servant Leadership, (b) Facing Barriers, (c) Support Systems, and (d) Advice. The four emergent themes are illustrated in Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Emergent Themes.

In addition to the four major themes, subthemes also emerged from the participant interviews. Emergent subthemes included: (a) serving students, (b) serving staff, (c) internal barriers, (d) external barriers, (e) support in faith, (f) family support, (g) mentor support, (h) advice for women, and (i) advice for district administration. Specific statements were shared from each participant to provide insight into the lens of women high school principals. Furthermore, similarities of participant experiences were offered to better understand the challenges of women high school principals. Table 6 provides a summary of the major themes, subthemes, constructed meanings, and significant statements.



Table 6

*Description of Emergent Themes*

Theme	Subtheme	Constructed Meaning	Significant Statements
Servant Leadership	Students	Desire to give students positive learning opportunities.	“Being able to grow students and give them meaningful and purposeful experiences that they would not have otherwise.”
	Staff	Desire to support staff in their growth and positive impact of students.	“I really try to praise teachers and give them all they need, because they are the hardest of hardworking.”
Facing Barriers	Internal	Self-doubt about personal abilities to lead a high school campus.	“It made me question my leadership that first year a lot, like I don’t know if I have what it takes to do this job. Because it was so challenging.”
		Unable and/or unwilling to show emotions due to perceived perceptions.	“I’m a woman, I’m not supposed to show my emotions because if I do, then I’m perceived as weak.”
	External	The continuous work and true desire needed by women, to attain a high school principalship.	“There is a lot more criticism of a female leader, before you even stand up and say a word.”
		Gendered perceptions of women principals.	“If you’re a tough female principal, people refer to you as being a bitch. But if you’re a man, then somehow you’re gifted or you’re assertive.”

(continued)

Theme	Subtheme	Constructed Meaning	Significant Statements
Support Systems	Faith	Having a sense of connection with a higher power to assist in life.	“Just prayer to help you be able to cope because, at the end of the day, for me, my mission. . .my ministry is kids.”
	Family	Ability to discuss experiences with family members. Having a safe sounding board.	“Being able to go home and talk to my family everyday about my struggles, I think was good.”
Advice	Mentor	Having a professional colleague who understands and is available to assist in navigating the high school principalship.	“She constantly tells me don’t get involved in this, because people will judge you on this. Don’t waste energy on that, let other people do that. So you’re constantly having to check what you’re doing.”
	Aspiring Women Principals	Have confidence in yourself and your work.	“I think a lot of women feel they need to come in and change their personality if they want to be considered a school leader. Be authentic in who you are and it will fall into place.”
	District Administration	Respect the time and vision of high school principals.	“I could be more effective if I didn’t have to do ridiculous paperwork or reports that come down the pipe from administration at the last minute.”

**Servant Leadership.** The desire to serve others was communicated by all of the participants in the study. The principals' personified servant leadership on their respective campuses, through their "helping" mindset. Two subthemes emerged in analyzing participants' responses, serving students and serving staff.

**Students.** School principals are the most influential people regarding student academic performance and achievement (Lynch, 2012). All of the principals in this study placed students at the forefront of daily decision making. They shared genuine regard and hopefulness when speaking of their students. Laurie shared her strengths were building positive student relationships:

I will stop anything if a kid wants to come in and have a conversation with me, or if a kid emails me. I think the kids absolutely know that I want to set them up for success. And then, I believe that when these students have been with us for four years, they should be better human beings than if they had not been here four years. I think I breathe that philosophy out, and just, I think that's impacted our culture.

Similarly, Katherine discussed her passion for building positive student relationships and assisting in their growth:

When I have kids come through as a ninth grader and I see them walk the stage four years later. Some who, maybe didn't think they would. You know, that look in their eyes that I made it. For me, when I see kids make it that maybe they were the underdog, that is my reward. That's my reward. And I have good relationships with kids so, I'm not that principal that just sits in the office and says, 'Oh, you're graduating, great.' You know what I mean? I have good

relationships with these kids, so for me it's like almost like a parent watching their child get ready to go into the next phase of life. And so for me that probably will always be the icing on the cake.

Bernice described several experiences she had in helping students. Her face lit up with joy as she shared stories about her students:

I love to see...transformation happen in kid's lives. The 95% graduation rate thrills me. That they're now graduating and going on to college. One of my students who came here to this country speaking no English, she was a Gates Millennium Scholar and she won a full paid scholarship to Smith. She's been studying in Spain this summer and she's coming back to Harvard to get her doctorate in law. She was someone that her father was my custodian. To see her make that kind of progress and to see that it can be done for all of these students, that's been the most rewarding thing.

**Staff.** The type and quality of the relationship principals have with their staff is important. School principals can assist in reducing work-related stress and uncertainty through leadership practices that provide emotional support and positive guidance for staff members (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009). The participants in this study shared the importance of serving and growing their staff. Laurie expressed, "I really try to praise teachers and give them all that they need, because they are the hardest of hard-working." With a servant leadership heart, Laurie acknowledged the demands teachers face each day. Melissa shared the importance of training and growing her staff as leaders:

I do a lot of coaching of my AP's and my counselors. I don't have to meet with a lot of parents, because I train my team up pretty well that we take care of business

at our level, and we do things right. I spend a lot of time with my lower administrators, really training them and talking to them.

In addition, Janie shared the importance of guiding her administrative staff to continued professional growth:

The advice I give my assistant principals every single day is network, network, network. I know you don't have time for it, I know you don't think it's important. It's very, very important. You need to find the time, you need to make the time, and you need to get out. You will not get promoted being just a good employee, that won't get you anywhere. So, if you want to get promoted, you need to be networking, you need to be involved, I really believe you need to be presenting. I make it a point for my administrative team to present and I started off with city wide things and then we went to statewide, and now we do national all the time. So they look at me like, another thing to do. Yeah, you want to get your next spot, yeah get moving.

Moreover, Cathy expressed she wanted “to make a difference in education. I thought I can help the educator, and students, be a liaison.” In describing leadership, Laurie stated, “we're here to serve. We're serving kids, we're serving parents, we're serving teachers.”

**Facing Barriers.** All of participants in the study discussed facing barriers in the principalship as a woman. The participants affirmed obstacles they confronted as a woman in the position of high school principal. Two subthemes emerged in analyzing participants' responses, internal and external.

**Internal.** All of the participants discussed “emotions” as a barrier whether it was internal or perceived. The participants also described the challenges of feeling alone and

self-doubt as a woman in the position of high school principal. As noted by Coleman (2005) female principals often work in isolation among large groups of male counterparts. Laurie expressed:

I think the principalship is a lonely job. Because, you can't really commiserate with your subordinates, and you can't really even among, we try to have a good learning community among our other high school principals but, we all deal with really different things, they're all uniquely different. And so, it's a bit of a lonely job I think. And then, if you feel like you want to call your superiors that appears weak. And so, you don't want people to see that you're struggling. And then, if I get emotional about something just 'cause it's tough, does that make me look weak 'cause I'm a female and the females get emotional and males don't?

Gosmire et al. (2010), described barriers including: (a) gender bias from faculty and staff, (b) apprehensions about the female principals' capacity to take care of discipline, and (c) higher expectations for women, in terms of time and work effort. Katherine shared the internal barrier of leading staff that were not in favor of her being the building principal.

Rumors start and they start based on nothing. And of course, the rumors get back to you. And you try to understand like, where would this come from? And again, that's become that challenge of I'm trying to be the best thing for kids. But at the same time, I'm trying to lead people who are more concerned about starting rumors or what I'm doing or whatever, than they are about these kids. And so, you know, that's hard. That's hard. Because it's like you're leading people who you know are really championing for your downfall. So that's hard. It's really hard.

Melissa described the difficulty of the position and the possible occurrence of self-doubt for women.

The high school principalship is hard, and I think it's scary to a lot of really good educators that maybe don't have the self-confidence or think that they could handle it, but they can.

As described by Wrushen and Sherman (2008), female principals shared their frustrations of not being received and the continuous judgment of their leadership style to their male colleagues and predecessors. Similarly, Janie added, “having to constantly demonstrate that yes you can do this too, you can’t get too emotional, and you can’t get too worked up. You have to constantly put that in check. You feel like they're watching all of that all of the time.”

*External.* All of the participants discussed facing external barriers as women high school principals. Women are conscious of burdens induced simply by being a woman in the male dominated field of high school principal (Coleman, 2005; Eckman, 2004b). As noted by Eckman (2004a) the “good old boys’ club” continued to disadvantage women as high school principals. Bernice shared as a woman, “I was an outlier. I was not a good old boy.” Cathy described some gendered perceptions (Coleman, 2005) she experienced as a woman high school principal:

At one of my first discipline meetings I had with a parent, the man came in and said, ‘I don't want to talk to you. I want to talk to a real principal.’ I smiled and I said, ‘Well, sir, I'm sorry. This is as real as it gets. You get to speak to me today. How can I help you?’ I met those challenges many times. This is a very

conservative community. Very old-school. I use that term a lot. They don't expect a woman to be in leadership capacity.

Cathy continued with a tone of sadness, "I feel like it is a tough ceiling [high school principalship] to crash."

Women high school principals feel inhibited by the expectations of others to continuously prove themselves in their leadership position (Coleman, 2005). Peg discussed the stereotypes of women in educational leadership, "we're not as smart, that we're not as hardworking, we don't know enough. I think we have to work so much harder to prove ourselves in this field, than men do." She also added:

I'm a professional woman, but I've actually had mentors tell me before that my attractiveness and my prettiness works against me. I've had people tell me that I should dress differently, to look like I'm a little bit more kind of matronly. All of the different types of stereotypes that effect women everywhere are much more significant in the educational workplace.

As described by Crenshaw (1989) through Intersectionality Theory, Janie experienced discrimination based on her gender and race. Janie shared a similar experience regarding stereotypes and the outward appearance (Coleman, 2005) of women high school principals:

You have your community members and parents who are always shocked that you're the principal. Always. I've been there for four years and they're still like, 'Oh you're so pretty to be a principal.' You hear comments constantly about how you look compared to your work. That you know men don't hear. And it's from every age group. You have to work a little harder than your male counterpart all



the time. And so, you have to go the extra yard, you have to be a little nicer, you have to go a little further with whatever you offer, whatever you're doing, whatever the event is.

As a Hispanic female, there's always judgment. So, if I'm at an event then how am I being a good mom? If I'm at an event, then how am I being a good wife or a good daughter? You're constantly judged on those things. Like, you know she must be sleeping with somebody if she's getting promoted.

Bernice, an educator with 57 years of experience, added the frustrations she had of gender inequality in educational leadership, promotions, and salary.

Early on, most of the promotions were going to men, especially when I first came into education. It still is male dominated as everything is male dominated.

Actually, they [men high school principals] were making a higher salary too than the females. It hasn't gotten much better quite frankly. I had thought that by now, after all these years, it would've been better, but it isn't. Still, when I look at what's happening even in [the school district] right now, most of the people who are being promoted are men. Right now, I'm really concerned about decisions that are being made in the state because of the men that are there and the decisions they're making. The white men.

Peg also shared the family responsibilities of women (Eckman, 2004a), at times, can be a barrier for a high school principal.

The job is really, really difficult, especially a high school principal job when you have children. Because I think that most homes, the woman is typically the primary caregiver. When you think about the difficulty and complexity of the job

and the unpredictability sometimes of having to be somewhere and not be able to get home, I think sometimes that discourages women from feeling empowered to step up into that high school principal role.

**Support Systems.** All of the participants in the study stated the importance of having support systems in the principalship. Furthermore, a support system, both personal and professional, nurtures women high school principals in the daily challenges of the profession (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Three subthemes emerged in analyzing participants' responses, faith, family, and mentors.

**Faith.** A belief in a higher power is a support and coping instrument for some high school principals (Sherman & Wrushen, 2009). Katherine described the importance of faith in her daily endeavors' as a woman high school principal:

Just prayer to help you be able to cope because, at the end of the day, for me, my mission and like I told you earlier, my ministry is kids. So, those other things that try to challenge me outside of the children. I have to figure out how to cope with those things, because at the end of the day I've got to be here for kids.

**Family.** All of the participants shared the importance of the support of their families in the role of high school principal. Cathy discussed the importance of having her spouse as a support system. She described his understanding of the role of high school principal.

There were many nights that right after an [after school] event, I went home and went straight to bed and got up early and came to work the next day. I haven't been able to do much else than be the high school principal for the last 10 years.

My husband, being a [central office personnel], in his role, he totally understands. So, I've had that support.

Similarly, Peg also shared “I have a spouse that couldn't be more supportive. He is a good sounding board.”

**Mentors.** As noted by Eckman (2004a), the type of mentoring and encouragement differed for the women, specifically the lack of a female principal role model. The participants expressed the need of mentors with regard to the high school principalship. Janie discussed the importance of having professional mentors as a high school principal:

I have a couple of mentors that I can look to, so for instance I have one mentor and they're mostly males that's the sad part. Ok, so if I'm having an issue with an employee I'll take it to him and role play with him, and I'll sound out what I'm saying. No, you sound too emotional. No, you sound this. No, that sounds right go say that. I have another one that when I want to look for approval for something, he'll help me on my wording, how to say it to my higher ups that are all men. I'm so grateful.

Additionally, Katherine shared the significance of having a mentor:

Select group of friends who understand the plight of a principal, mainly. I have a mentor that can kind of walk me through some things, share my challenges with and concerns, and try to get their feedback on how to deal with it.

**Advice.** The last theme that emerged from the interviews was Advice. The participants shared their recommendations to others regarding being a woman high school principal. Agreement occurred among the participants about staying true to themselves and being prepared to face challenges due to their gender in the role of high

school principal. Two subthemes emerged in analyzing participants' responses, advice was communicated for aspiring women principals and district administration.

*Aspiring Women High School Principals.* Bernice, the most experienced principal, shared advice for women aspiring to the high school principalship.

I would say go for it and don't try to be a man. And don't try to emulate the principals that you see, other principals and the old principals who sit in their office and play top executive. Get involved with the community, with the kids. Get to know the kids. Get to know their backgrounds and what their dreams are, and then to help them protect those dreams and help them to grow. And don't be afraid to be caring and concerned and compassionate, and even a little bit emotional.

Melissa emphatically expressed:

I would tell them that we have to work hard, we have to work harder, we have to believe in ourselves in the decisions that we're making. And be strong. And we have to be innovative and creative. And it can't just be about opening the school and letting it run, you've got to change it, you've got to move it, you've got to research and study, and be creative so that the things that you are doing are copied by other people. And they always have to give their credit away. It's not about them, it's about everybody else who works with them and for them.

Katherine added:

To have a tight knit group of people they can trust for support. A mentor, for sure. Again I would say you have to have thick skin. And, as far as just the job itself, is being able to prioritize what is most important so that you can, even

though time's a factor, it still has to be done, is prioritizing so that you can get the things done that you need to get done.

***District Administration.*** Peg shared her frustration, “male principals just tend to get listened to by the district.” Bernice discussed, “the most challenging is working with the district that has such set rules about things.” Participants expressed the need for more diversity in hiring for the high school principalship, from the district office. Janie stated, “Boards hire reflections of themselves. So, if you look at school boards, they’re mostly men so they are going to hire other men.” Cathy suggested school districts should be open to all potential qualified high school principal applicants. She added, “Being a strong person and perceived as capable of leading a high school is dependent on the perceptions and expectations of the district school board and community.”

### **Summary**

In Chapter IV, demographic characteristics and findings from the analysis of individual interviews conducted with seven women high school principals was reported. The verbatim interview transcripts were used to record participant statements and grouped their comments into themes. Four emergent themes were presented with multiple subthemes, through the use of Moustakas’ transcendental phenomenological approach to data analysis. Additionally, by capturing the spoken words of each participant, the essence of their lived experiences was shared.

In Chapter V, discussion, implications, and recommendations will be presented in relation to the research questions and literature review. Suggestions for principal preparation programs, school district administrators, and aspiring women high school principals will be provided. Lastly, recommendations for future research will be offered.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

#### Overview

Women represent the majority in the U.S. teaching profession but are considerably absent in the role of high school principals. Seventy-six percent of the education workforce consists of women, yet the number of women in secondary leadership positions are a fraction of that statistic (NCES, 2013). Nationwide, women account for only 30% of high school principal positions throughout the United States (NCES, 2013). This research contributes to the astonishing statistics of the underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship with only 17.3% (2016) of women high school principals serving three or more years in the Region 4 Education Service Center.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. Data collected in face-to-face and phone interviews from seven participants who currently serve as women high school principals in the state of Texas were presented in Chapters III and IV. Themes emerged from the analysis of the data and revealed similarities in the participants' experiences of: Servant Leadership, Facing Barriers, Support Systems, and Advice related to the experiences of women high school principals.

As a woman and current high school administrator, the researcher had a personal interest in exploring the underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship. The researcher wanted to examine the experiences of current women high school

principals in hopes that valuable information could be shared regarding the roles and challenges of the position. In addition, by identifying the challenges these women faced, and increasing awareness about the impact of gender stereotyping and gender role expectations of women working in the high school principalship improved practices could be determined. Furthermore, in bringing forth the stories of women high school principals, results from this research might assist principal preparation programs, district administrators, and aspiring women high school principals in understanding concerns that current women high school principals might have about their career options.

In Chapter V, discussion, implications, and recommendations will be presented in relation to the research questions. Additionally, findings will be discussed to the context of the literature review, and comparison to the conceptual framework. Lastly, recommendations for future research and practice will be provided.

### **Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Research Questions**

Two central research questions guided this study:

- (1) How do select high school principals who are women describe their lived experiences in the principalship?
- (2) What do these select high school principals who are women believe contributes to the underrepresentation of women in high school principal positions?

The high school principalship has evolved from a managerial position to a high stakes instructional leadership role. As the leader of a high school, the building principal holds a tremendous responsibility to students, staff, community, and stakeholders. Furthermore, for women high school principals the stakes are even higher with a

seemingly present *glass ceiling*. By answering these research questions, this study provides information to better explore the underrepresentation of women high school principals.

Seven women currently serving as high school principals in the Region 4 ESC in the state of Texas responded to interview questions that were aligned with the above stated research questions. The participants in this study described their experiences as a woman high school principal. Their explanations included the ever present themes of: (a) desire to serve students and staff, (b) facing barriers internally and externally, (c) the need for support systems, (d) as well as advice for others regarding women and the high school principalship. The principals in this study enthusiastically served their campuses, always keeping students at the forefront regardless of the barriers they faced themselves. These women lend important insight in the principalship, as they have experienced and lived in the role of high school principal. By studying the experiences of women high school principals in terms of leadership, barriers, supports, and backgrounds, the researcher hoped to enhance the current body of knowledge regarding gender equity in the high school principalship.

Moreover, the participants in this study shared many reasons why they believed women are underrepresented in the high school principalship. Overwhelmingly, they discussed the presence of gendered perceptions of women, the ‘good old boys club’ (Eckman, 2004a), and the ever-present glass ceiling. Specifically, a feeling of continuous struggle due to their gender in acquiring and remaining in the high school principalship. In addition, the participants shared family responsibilities and lack of self-confidence as reasons for underrepresentation of women in the high school principalship.



### **Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

It is important to discuss the findings of this study in relation to the literature review, as presented in Chapter II of this study. Consistent with the literature and findings of this study, women educational leaders continue to encounter barriers from gendered perceptions (Celikten, 2010; Coleman, 2005; Wallace, 2015). Most of the participants perceived gender stereotyping as a main cause that prevented women from progressing to the high school principalship. Moreover, stereotypes imposed by staff, the district, and various stakeholders created a challenge for women principals (Coleman, 2005; Fernandez et. al., 2015; Gosmire, 2010; Sherman & Wrushen, 2009). The themes and subthemes which were confirmed by participants in relation to the literature review are illustrated in Figure 3.

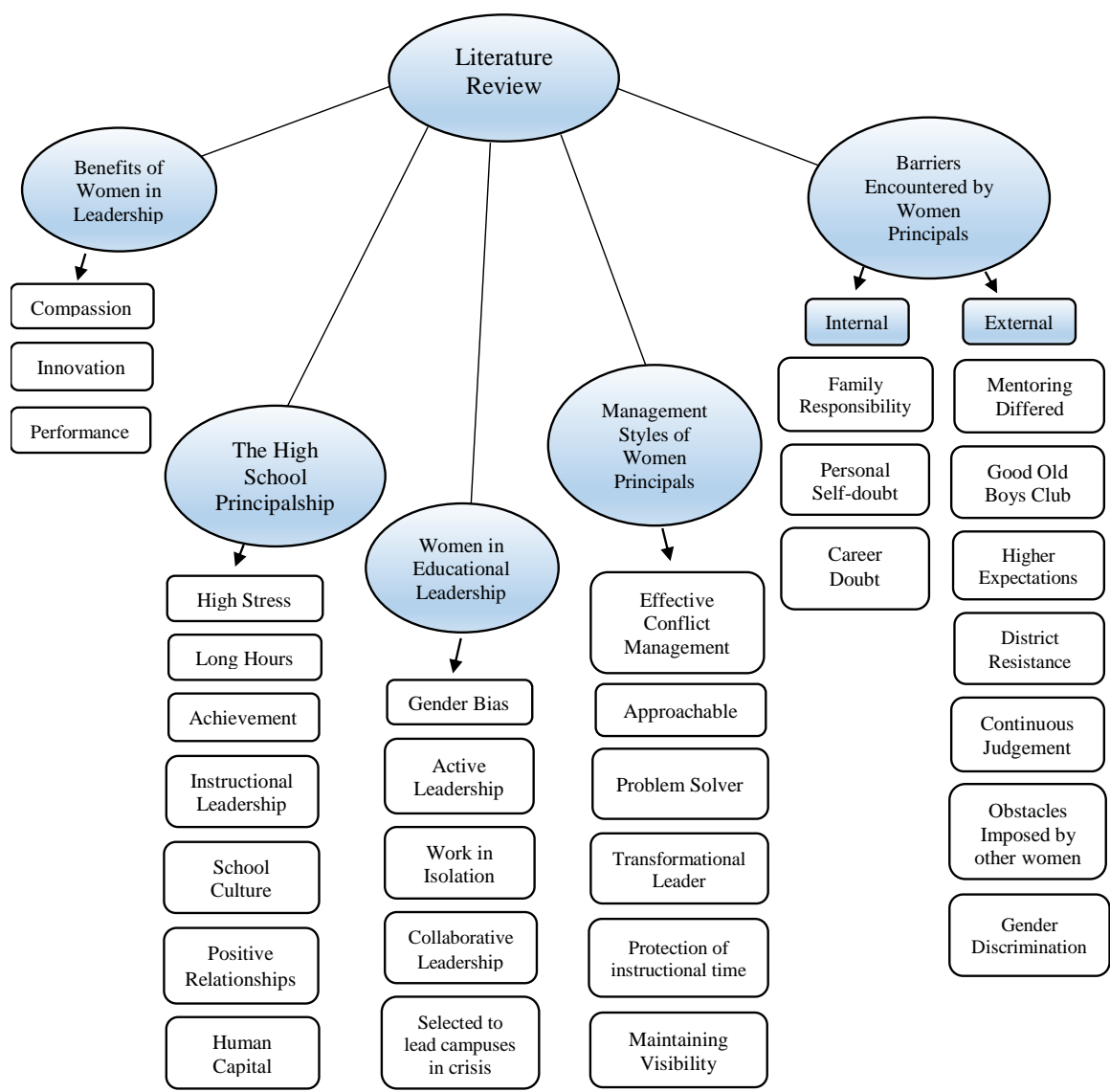


Figure 3. Literature Review Confirmation.

## **Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that guided this study was based on feminist theory and Social Role Theory. Both feminist theory and Social Role Theory support the need to understand the unique experiences of women high school principals. By listening to the voices of these women, we can assist future generations to reach gender equity in the high school principalship.

**Feminist Theory.** Women have sought equality in the workplace for many years. The feminist movement brought awareness to the disparity of women in leadership positions. This study confirmed women high school principals were aware of gendered barriers preventing professional advancement in secondary educational leadership. Participants confirmed Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) in the high school principalship by sharing experiences of discrimination due to gender, race, and age. Moreover, Shields (2008) states “forms of intersectionality create unique situations of disadvantage and marginalization, yet gender may be a significant explanatory through-line” (p. 307).

Furthermore, the participants echoed a lack of women as mentors in the high school principalship. As described by Peters (2010),

The feminist poststructuralist perspective was used to challenge traditional notions of mentoring relationships. The discourse of mentoring has been traditionally dominated by white males in which the ‘good old boy’ network serves as a vehicle for men to network with and mentor other men. (p. 111)

Moreover, by providing women same gender mentors, stereotypical threats are reduced and communication is opened regarding career options and daily attitudes with regard to gender in the high school principalship (Elprana, Felfe, Stiehl, & Gatzka, 2015).

**Social Role Theory.** Social Role Theory describes stereotypes about the underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership.

Social Role Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how labor division leads to gender role beliefs in terms of shared assumptions about gender-specific attributes. Because of gender-specific role expectations, the female gender role and leader roles are perceived as incongruent. Role incongruity causes prejudice toward female leaders and even stereotype confirming behavior. (Elprana et. al., 2015, p.143)

Furthermore, participants in this study described Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) familiarities within the principalship. The principals in this study expressed barriers from community, staff, and district personnel consistent with stereotypical expectations that women should stay at home to raise children. In addition, the participants shared emotions such as insecurity and fear of failure congruent with traditional gender beliefs (Elprana et. al., 2015).

### **Recommendations for Educational Leaders**

Increasing the number of women in the high school principalship is important and necessary. The findings of this study suggest a need to increase the introduction of women to the high school principalship, increase the availability of mentors for women aspiring to the principalship (Peters, 2010; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010), provide proper preparation for the position, and the offering of equity in hiring practices (Marczynski &

Gates, 2012). Moreover, university preparation programs, public school districts, and aspiring women principals can benefit from the recommendations that emerged from this study.

**University Principal Preparation Programs.** Providing students with real-life examples of the challenges they will face and connecting them with women principals through mentorships and internships are ways preparation programs can improve the students' experience. By providing aspiring principals real-life examples of daily decision making, barriers, stressful working conditions, and long hours, preparation programs can assist students in understanding the role of the principal (Bass, 2006; Dentith & Peterlin, 2011). In addition, the connection to a woman principal will also provide a lens into the position from a perspective of gender. Specifically, university principal preparation programs and supervising principals should form strong partnerships and internships around students' needs (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Hines, 2007). As noted in this study and the literature, mentoring is a crucial piece of the principalship. University principal preparation programs should recruit more women graduate students and encourage mentoring. Furthermore, preparation programs should connect women superintendents and women high school principals to serve as mentors to aspiring women high school principals, as they have experienced the position and can speak of it. Providing a network of women educational leaders to graduate students will ensure understanding of gender issues and enhance the university preparation program. Moreover, by increasing the number of women attaining principal certifications the presence of women in high school principal applicant pools will begin to increase.

**Public School Districts.** By promoting gender equity on leadership teams within the district and on high school campuses, public school districts could create a positive and diverse culture. Moreover, gender diversity at the high school principalship will encourage more communication and collaboration within the community and campus. Female students and staff will be encouraged by seeing a woman as the leader of a high school. Additionally, school district administration should continue to grow aspiring principal mentees by including time for collaboration and communication during professional development. School district administration should design effective support systems, include fair hiring practices, and build respectful trusting relationships with campus principals.

***Leadership Cohort.*** A year-long leadership cohort should be created within school districts inviting women to participate in conversations about the principalship, high school principalship opportunities, and hurdles in the principalship. A leadership cohort would give women an opportunity to share, learn, network, and support colleagues. As described by Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013),

Identifying common experiences increases women's willingness to talk openly, take risks, and be vulnerable without fearing that others will misunderstand or judge them. These connections are especially important when women are discussing sensitive topics such as gender bias or reflecting on their personal leadership challenges, which can easily threaten identity and prompt them to resist any critical feedback they may receive. (p. 8)

Furthermore, women superintendents and women high school principals should encourage highly qualified and motivated women leaders to the high school principalship.

***Hiring Practices.*** School Board members and superintendents should make every effort to fill high school principal positions by fairly evaluating the experiences and qualifications of each candidate without regard to gender. Peg shared “the number of men that sit as a principal for two years and then suddenly they become the supervisor of principals, it is so fast. I've unfortunately seen it happen that way with the large majority of principals being men in the district.” Bernice explained, “It hasn't gotten much better quite frankly [promoting women]. I had thought that by now, after all these years, it would've been better, but ... most of the people who are being promoted are men.” In addition, hiring practices should reflect the needs of the district and warrant the use of diverse interview panels. Panels should include women and minorities, which will promote discussion and differing viewpoints for choosing the best candidate. Furthermore discussions should include candidate instructional leadership capacity, knowledge of data, community efforts, and how they could address the immediate needs of the campus.

***Trust in the Principal.*** Women principals are skilled and excel in leading high schools, but are viewed differently than their male colleagues (Celikten, 2010, Eagly & Karau, 2002). Conversely, the participants voiced concerns of not being listened to or trusted in the role of high school principal by district administration. Peg described:

Male principals and they just tend to get listened to by the district. Like, if I bring up an issue ... [it isn't taken seriously]. It later became a very serious district wide

issue and I was the first one to bring it to the attention of the district. When I shared it with my other [male] principal friend. But once [he] expressed concern for the district about the very same thing, then suddenly it became important enough to listen to. So, I experience that quite a bit.

Regarding male leaders, Katherine shared “I think that they're [men] less challenged, because they are male. I think that people [district] traditionally see men, in a leadership position and so there's less to try to attack.”

**Aspiring Women High School Principals.** Based on the literature and interviews with women high school principals, the following recommendations were developed for women aspiring to the high school principalship.

- 1) *Increase networking efforts with district personnel and campus administrators.* Janie excitedly shared, “You will not get promoted being just a good employee, that won’t get you anywhere. So, if you want to get promoted, you need to be networking, you need to be involved.”
- 2) *Achieve experience as a high school instructional leader in roles such as associate principal and assistant principal.* Seek leadership opportunities that will expand your knowledge of the high school principalship. As noted by Kruse and Krumm (2016), entry level administrative positions may be a vital preparatory starting point for aspiring women high school principals.
- 3) *Seek professional mentors to assist with concerns and questions regarding the principalship.* Regarding the need for mentors, Laurie shared, “I think the minute you act like you know it all, you're going to fall on your face.



So, I would say ask for help”. As described by Katherine, “I have a mentor that can kind of walk me through some things.” Moreover, mentors provide assistance and encouragement during the transition into the high school principalship (Kruse & Krumm, 2016).

- 4) *Become familiar with the district and campus you are interested in applying for the principalship.* As recommended by Cathy, “build your toolbox. Know as much about it as you can, before you get into it.”
- 5) *Continue to develop a positive self-image.* In describing her transition to the high school principalship Peg recalled, “In the beginning, it was very difficult but then I kind of found myself; now it's not. I try to tell myself, Yeah, I can just be who I am.”
- 6) *Be prepared to face gendered perceptions in the high school principalship.* Bernice shared, “I never felt that I was part of the group because generally speaking, most of the group were white men. I never took a backseat to them. I never let them make me feel inferior because I was a woman.” Additionally, Kruse and Krumm (2016) stated “women who desire to enter high school administration must be prepared to navigate the cultural stigmas that still exist” (p. 37).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore underrepresentation of women high school principals. This study examined the leadership, barriers, supports, backgrounds, and personal experiences of each of the seven participants. The participants were all women high school principals serving suburban and urban campuses

in the Region 4 ESC in the state of Texas. Based upon the results of this study, the following recommendations for future research are provided:

- 1) Include women high school assistant principals as participants in a similar study. It would be valuable to gain the perceptions of administrators aspiring to the principalship.
- 2) Include women high school principals of private schools as participants in a similar study. Attaining private high school women principals' insights will benefit the overall study exploring gender in the principalship.
- 3) Replicate this study using sample populations outside of Texas to determine if themes are consistent with other women high school principals nationally. An increased sample size would account for more perspectives and reveal a richer data set.
- 4) Explore the role of mentoring for women high school principals. It would be valuable to explore the voices of women high school principals and the impact or lack of mentoring, in assisting with the position of principal.
- 5) Explore the impact of intersectionality regarding gender and race in the high school principalship. It would be valuable to gain the insights of Black, Hispanic, and Asian women high school principals.
- 6) Replicate this study using a mixed methods approach. A mixed methods approach could consider strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods in addressing the research problem.

## **Conclusion**

The number of women leading public high schools and the number of men leading such schools are disproportionate. The findings of this study added to the knowledge base by allowing women a voice to express their experiences as high school principals in the state of Texas. These participants openly shared their frustrations, rewards, barriers, and supports they experienced as women in the role of principal. Each of the participants described the importance of servant leadership and always keeping students at the forefront of every decision.

Advancement in the area of gender equity in the high school principalship requires continuous work. The results from this study confirm that dialogue is necessary among all stakeholders to resolve the unequal number of women who are in or seek high school principal positions. This study will hopefully increase the awareness of gender inequality in the high school principalship and accelerate the process toward gender equality in positions of leadership.

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## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study



You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate.

**Title of Research Study:** Through Their Lens: Exploring Underrepresentation of Women High School Principals

**Institution:** Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas

**Principal Investigator:** Shaleh "Rene" Malveaux

**Purpose of this study:** The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership.

**Participation in this research study consists of:**

- **Background questionnaire:** You will be asked to complete a background questionnaire to give the researcher a profile of the participants of the study. Your name or school districts of employment will not be associated with your responses at any time.
- **Interview with researcher:** If you accept participation in this study, the research investigator will meet with you to conduct an audio-taped interview. At the time of the interview, a set of questions pertaining to your experiences as a high school principal will be asked. These questions are designed to assist the researcher in understanding the lived experiences of secondary women principals.

**Duration:**

- Background questionnaire (10-15 minutes)
- Interview with researcher (45-60 minutes)

**Anticipated benefits:** The outcome of this study will provide information on the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. Such knowledge base will increase understanding of the barriers and supports experienced by women high school principals. As well as, suggestions from the participants for aspiring secondary women principals.

**Incentives/Compensations:** There will be no costs for participating in the research study. Participants will not be paid to participate in the study.

**Right to refusal or withdrawal of participation:** Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time.

**Confidentiality:** All information gathered from this research study will remain confidential. Audio tapes will be heard only for research purposes by the investigator and erased at the completion of the study. Participant names will not be used in the transcripts of the recording. Instead pseudonyms will be used to disguise identities of participants and any school districts named. If the results of this research are published or presented, your identity will not be disclosed.

**Questions about the research study:** If you have questions about the study or the contents of this consent form, the researcher is available to provide a complete explanation. Please contact Rene Malveaux (researcher and doctoral program student at Sam Houston State University), [REDACTED], or [REDACTED].

**Participant Signature:**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. Your signature on this page indicates that you understand what you are being asked to do, and you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

**APPENDIX B**

## Principal Contact Email



Dear (*Principal Name*),

This email is to introduce myself and invite you to participate in my research study related to women high school principals. I am currently working on my dissertation at Sam Houston State University and the purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of women high school principals to uncover challenges contributing to the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership. This research will provide aspiring women principals with the information they will need in order to make informed decisions and increase their understanding of the barriers and supports experienced by women high school principals.

Please read the attached electronic questionnaire and complete if you are willing, it will take approximately 10 minutes. I know your time is valuable and truly appreciate your assistance in completing and submitting the questionnaire. If you have concerns or questions about this study, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Shaleh "Rene" Malveaux



**APPENDIX C**

## Principal Questionnaire

1. Number of total years in public schools: \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
2. Number of total years in public schools, in the position of high school principal:  
\_\_\_\_\_ years
  
3. What was your age when appointed to your first high school principal position?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. List the positions held prior to your principalship:  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Number of students enrolled in your school: \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. What is the highest degree you have earned?
  - Bachelor's
  - Master's
  - Post Master's coursework
  - Doctorate: PhD or EdD
  
7. Your current age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Your ethnicity
  - Asian
  - Black
  - Hispanic
  - Native American
  - Pacific Islander
  - White/Not of Hispanic origin
  - Other
  
9. What other information might you want to share about the underrepresentation of women in the position of high school principal?

## **APPENDIX D**

### Interview Protocol

1. What led you to pursue a high school principalship?
2. Tell me about your experiences as high school principal. What might a typical work week look like for you?
3. What are some of the main challenges you face as a woman in this position?
4. How do you manage or cope with those challenges?
5. How might your experience compare with those of male high school principals?
6. Women are severely underrepresented in high school principal positions in general. Why do you think that is?
7. Think back over your career path into the high school principalship, please share what was most rewarding? Most challenging?
8. What advice would you give to women aspiring to the role of high school principal?
9. What is next for you in pursuing your own career as an educational leader?

**APPENDIX E**

## Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
2405 Avenue I, Suite E, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448  
Phone: 936.294.4875  
Fax: 936.294.3622  
irb@shsu.edu  
[www.shsu.edu/~rgs\\_www/irb/](http://www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/)

DATE: June 2, 2017  
TO: Shaleh "Rene" Malveaux [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Rebecca Bustamante]  
FROM: Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB  
PROJECT TITLE: Through Their Lens: Exploring Underrepresentation of Women High School Principals [T/D]  
PROTOCOL #: 2017-05-34927  
SUBMISSION TYPE: INITIAL REVIEW  
ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: June 2, 2017  
EXPIRATION DATE: June 2, 2018  
REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED  
REVIEW CATEGORIES: 7

Thank you for your submission of your Initial Review for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Expedited** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of June 2, 2018. When you have completed the project, a Final Report must be submitted to ORSP in order to close the project file.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforges  
IRB Chair, PHSC  
PHSC-IRB

**VITA****SHALEH RENE MALVEAUX****EDUCATION**

Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX	Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) Educational Leadership	2017
Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX	Master of Education (M. Ed.) Educational Administration	2007
Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX	Bachelor of Education (B.S.) Kinesiology (Major) Art (Minor)	1994

**PROFESSIONAL LICENSES**

Texas Superintendent Certification (EC-12)  
 Texas Principal Certification (EC-12)  
 Texas Teaching Certification (Art 6-12, Physical Education 6-12)

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

2015-2017 Carl Wunsche Senior High School, Spring ISD, Academy Principal  
 2009-2015 Klein Forest High School, Klein ISD, House Principal  
 2005-2009 Tomball Junior High School, Tomball ISD, Fine Arts Department Chair  
 and Art Teacher  
 1997-2005 Westfield High School, Spring ISD, Physical Education Teacher and Head  
 Coach  
 1994-1997 Wunderlich Intermediate School, Klein ISD, Art Teacher, Physical  
 Education Teacher and Head Coach

**HONORS**

Dr. Genevieve H. Brown and Dr. Beverly J. Irby Endowed Scholarship, 2016  
 Dr. Jimmy N. Merchant Graduate Fellowship Award, 2015  
 SOAR Outstanding Administrator, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015  
 Lamplighter Outstanding Teacher Award, 2004 and 2006  
 Regional and State Qualifying Coach, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004

## PUBLICATIONS

Craft, H.M., Malveaux, S. R., Lopez, S.A., & Combs, J.P. (2016). *The Acclimation of New Assistant Principals*. Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 1(2), 9-18. Retrieved from <http://jsard.org/>

## PRESENTATIONS

Malveaux, S. R. & Rhodes, S. (2017, February). *Career Pathways for Every Student*. The Center for Secondary School Redesign and the EdExcellence Group, San Diego, California.

Malveaux, S. R. (2016, April). *Qualitative Methods*. Presentation for doctorate students in Educational Leadership program of Sam Houston State University, The Woodlands, Texas.

Craft, H. M., Lopez, S. A., Malveaux, S. R., & Combs, J. M. (2016, February). *The Acclimation of New Assistant Principals*. Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA), New Orleans, Louisiana.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, November). *Qualitative Methods*. Presentation for doctorate students in Educational Leadership program of Sam Houston State University, The Woodlands, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, November). *New Teacher Needs Assessment*. Program Evaluation presented to Wunsche Executive Board at Carl Wunsche Sr. High School, Spring, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, October). *Underrepresentation of Women in Secondary Principal Roles*. Graduate Research Exchange at the Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration (TCPEA), Austin, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, October). *Role of the Principal*. Presentation for master's students in Educational Administration program of Sam Houston State University, The Woodlands, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, August). *Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System*. System overview presented to the faculty at Carl Wunsche Sr. High School, Spring, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, July). *Emergency Operation Plan Training (EOP)*. Training presented for safety liaisons in the Klein ISD, Klein, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, July). *Role of the Principal*. Presentation for master's students in Educational Administration program of Sam Houston State University, The Woodlands, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2015, January). *Threat Assessment Training*. Training presented for safety liaisons in the Klein ISD, Klein, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2014, December). *Basic Crisis Response Training*. Training presented for administrators and counselors in the Klein ISD, Klein, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2014, August). *Professional Learning Communities at Work*. Training presented for teachers at Klein Forest High School, Houston, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2012, August). *Building Capacity in Teacher Teams*. Training presented for teachers at Klein Forest High School, Houston, Texas.

Malveaux, S. R. (2012, August). *Data Analysis*. Training presented for teachers at Klein Forest High School, Houston, Texas.

### **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS**

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)

Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA)

Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP)

Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA)

Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration (TCPEA)