Unlocking the District Office Door: A Grounded Theory Study of Induction and Mentoring for Female Superintendents in the State of Idaho

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Abstract

Idaho's public school district leadership has a gender gap; men outnumber women nearly three to one in the superintendency. The purpose of this study was to explore gender-specific mentoring availability and influence upon female administrators, specifically superintendents, in the state of Idaho. Using a modified version of grounded theory, specifically incorporating constructivist and informed iterations, (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Crotty, 1998; Thornberg, 2012) a theoretical account emerged which explores the perceptions and utility of mentoring, and other induction services experienced by women serving as superintendents in Idaho. The study answers the following research questions: (1) What is the experience of female superintendents who have had mentors; (2) To what degree are perceptions about mentoring experiences attributable to gender pairings (same gender, mixed gender); (3) How do different experiences influence perceptions of mentoring efficacy; and (4) Does mentoring help female administrators navigate modern expectations of school leadership and leadership styles? Seven female superintendents currently serving in the state of Idaho participated in semi-formal interviews. The data reveal elements of successful mentoring, which include: time, structure, trusting relationships, and an appropriate mentor/protégé match.

Keywords: mentoring, superintendency, female administrators, leadership style, gender

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Dedication

A very special thank you goes to my family. Mom and Dad, you made education a priority when we were growing up and you made sure that you supported our growth, our curiosity, and our academic achievements at every stage and every age. Thank you for your love and support. I love you and hope that I make you proud.

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Chapter 1: Nature and Scope of the Study

Schools are structured in a hierarchy of leadership and responsibility. At the helm of America's schools are administrators of varying years of experience and aptitude. Principals, who lead individual school buildings, are starting to leave the profession at great cost to districts, buildings, and student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006; School Leaders Network, 2014; Scott, 2014). Superintendents who are tasked with the responsibility to lead entire districts are also leaving. In 2021 alone, Idaho saw districts hire at least 22 new superintendents (Streng, 2021) and the nation saw a nearly 10 percent increase in superintendent openings in the period between June 2020 and April 2021 (Sawchuck, 2021). Given these trends, now more than ever, school systems need to determine a form of induction and institutional scaffolding of activities to help new administrators transition into leadership roles successfully and with projected longevity.

One popular form of induction for teachers is mentoring, which is required in the state of Idaho for teachers in the first two years of their educational careers (Idaho Legislature, 2022). In the same way that new teachers need guidance and encouragement (Athanases et al., 2008; Cook, 2012), new administrators also need induction support (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). It is important that mentoring not be reserved for entry-level staff alone (Wilson & Elman, 1990); new administrators face a changing job description that includes increased authority, responsibility, and expectations without adequate training (Lochmiller, 2014). Daresh (2001b) describes a "specific deficiency" in the comfort that new administrators have with their new leadership roles and associated responsibilities. With these changes in job responsibility and authority, new administrators often struggle with isolation and the personal growth and change that must occur as they acclimate to new levels of autonomy and accountability (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). Mentoring for administrators is one way to address these induction issues, as well as promoting the creation of and support for specific, emerging educational leadership styles.

Supporting new administrators is vital to school success; student achievement and school success rely heavily upon the leadership that administrators provide to a school and/or a district (Bush, 2009; Daresh, 2001b; Leithwood, et al., 2006). This professional development opportunity should be offered at all levels of administration—from the assistant principal to the superintendent (Reyes, 2003). Mentoring is one form of professional development and induction that schools have utilized as to aid novice administrators transitioning to their new educational role (Clayton et al., 2013). Questions arise about the efficacy of mentoring, especially if mentoring merely reinforces a mediocre status quo or fails to address the needs of specific leadership qualities possessed by the

mentee/protégé (Clayton et al, 2013). This is specifically important for women who wish to enter the administrative realm.

Mentoring is a strategy that helps women in education to overcome the proverbial glass ceiling that may hinder their progression into senior management/administrative positions (Ehrich, 1994). Statistics show a disparity in the percentage of teachers who are female and the percentage of school leaders who are female (Allen, 2011; Ehrich, 1994) even though women complete education for administrative role at the same rate as men (Mullen, 2013). One prominent reason cited for this discrepancy is that women want to lead differently than their male colleagues (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013). In addition, women do not have the casual and unscheduled exposure to traditional mentoring situations that many men receive (Ehrich, 1994). Studies show differences in leadership styles and preferences between men and women (Allen, 2011; Fine, 2007) and that, due to these differences, mentoring may not be the most effective form of induction for new female administrators (Daresh, 2004). In the Idaho 2021-22 cohort, of the 28 junior superintendents participating in the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Project, only 9 were women (W. Dobbs, personal communication, January 15, 2022).

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore gender-specific mentoring availability and influence upon female administrators, specifically superintendents, in the state of Idaho. Using a modified version of grounded theory, specifically incorporating constructivist and informed iterations, (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Crotty, 1998; Thornberg, 2012) a theoretical model emerged which explores the perceptions and utility of mentoring, and other induction services experienced by women serving as superintendents in Idaho. In addition, the aim of this study was to inquire and build theory around the influence of both gender and leadership style on mentoring efficacy. For example, although mentoring is mandated for teachers in their first two years of professional service in the state of Idaho (Idaho Legislature, 2022), no such requirement exists for new administrators in the same state, though it is provided on a voluntary basis through the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Project (W. Dobbs, personal communication, January 15, 2022). This is a significant gap; beyond the intrinsic difficulties administration presents, women often find themselves excluded from and marginalized by the existing administrative network that is populated primarily by men, which often provides informal, de-facto mentoring.

Justification of Theoretical Gap and Research Questions

According to Alsbury and Hackman (2006), limited research exists about the effectiveness of mentoring programs geared toward new administrators and a preponderance of said research focuses solely on new principals. “Despite an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of context for district level leadership…little of the scholarship in leadership and mentoring in the extant U.S. leadership development literature has centered on the superintendency in either theory or praxis” (Liang et al., 2020, p. 25). To address the disparity in gender distribution in leadership roles (Bush, 2009; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Mullen, 2013), it is important to study the formative years of an administrator’s career and his/her transition into a leadership role. These early years provide a foundation upon which an administrative career is built and are indicative of future practice and assumptions. This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What is the experience of female administrators who have had mentors?
- To what degree are perceptions about mentoring experiences attributable to gender pairings (same gender, mixed gender)?
- How do different experiences influence perceptions of mentoring efficacy?
- Does mentoring help female administrators navigate modern expectations of school leadership and leadership styles?

Answers to these questions form the basis for analysis of this transition to district leadership, the support mechanisms in place in Idaho’s school districts, and current practitioner’s leadership styles in conjunction with the availability and efficacy of mentoring situations. From this constant comparative analysis, a grounded theory model was generated which may inform practice as districts seek to provide tailored professional development for women new to their administrative roles. It also may help school districts understand the types of support needed by new female administrators and what characteristics are important when pairing a protégé administrator with a veteran administrator in a mentoring situation. This research can also inform district induction practices for new administrators—both new to the position and new to a district. In addition, the research can influence policy and funding at the state level about the need for and specificity required by new female administrators for successful mentor pairings in district level leadership roles.

Definition of Terms

Mentoring is a commonly accepted model of support for individuals new to a task, organization, or career; the concept originates in Greek literature. In Homer’s epic, *The Odyssey*, Mentor guides

Odysseus' son, Telemachus, during his father's lengthy absence (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Daresh, 2004; Ehrich, Hansford, Tennent, 2004; Hastings & Kane, 2018; Pence, 1995; Playko, 1991). A model with such an ancient history is worthy of note. In addition to the historical gravitas given to the name, many studies in the 1970s and 80s illustrate a correlation between mentorship and career success (Hastings & Kane, 2018). Moving to a more modern perspective, there are many definitions of mentoring, including the idea that a mentor must be more experienced, must be in a position where he/she is able to guide and lead a less experienced person, and must be an individual in whom the protégé can put trust (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). Another definition includes the idea that the mentor not only supports a protégé; he/she challenges the protégé to new levels of thought (Bush, 2009). Yet another vision of mentoring emphasizes the use of specified criteria to match mentors and protégés (Walker & Stott, 1994). Common assumptions include the idea that the mentor is as invested in the mentoring relationship as is the protégé and the organization that assigns the mentoring relationship (Mertz, 2004). According to Reyes (2003), mentors "bridge the gap between theory and practice" (p. 47) and can be divided into two types: a formal mentor, who is the protégé's immediate supervisor, and an informal mentor, who is a guide but not a supervisor (Reyes, 2003). Research indicates that the best situations combine the two types of mentor[ing] (Copeland & Calhoun, 2014).

There are many variations on the definition of mentoring and the very breadth of the modern understanding of "mentoring" makes scholarly research difficult (Mertz, 2004). For the purposes of this review, a mentor will be defined as an individual with professional experience who is formally assigned to assist a less experienced individual as she enters the administrative profession. Mentoring is the formal process employed by districts and/or schools; support systems or networking may be less formalized iterations of the mentoring ideal.

Protégé and mentee will be terms that are used interchangeably. Neither one is reliably defined in literature; usually the terms are used in connection with the more clearly defined term, "mentor" (Bush, 2009; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Walker & Stott, 1994). A protégé or mentee will be defined in this study as the novice administrator to whom a mentor is provided to assist with the induction to a new professional responsibility and as a form of professional development.

Assumptions

I have spent twenty-four years in education in Idaho: fourteen years in the classroom at public middle and high schools, and eight years in administration at a parochial school. I am currently finishing my second year as a public-school administrator in a remote rural district in Idaho. During this time, I

have experienced mentoring in teaching both as a novice teacher and as a mentor to novice teachers and to teachers new to the school district. In addition, I have thoroughly researched teacher mentoring in earlier degree programs. When I moved to administration (with a complete lack of mentoring), my research focus changed to the necessity of administrative mentoring relationships. The focus was further narrowed to gender and mentoring efficacy, especially due to leadership style discrepancy and modern expectations of school leadership, when I was only able to find male mentors who had vastly different leadership styles than I.

I have experienced the transition to administration with a lack of mentoring and this has created a potential bias toward the necessity of a functional and productive mentoring relationship for new leaders. In addition, I assume that mentoring relationships between individuals with aligning philosophies and/or life experiences might be more productive than those that do not match philosophically and/or managerially.

Delimitations

Identification of delimitations is crucial in any qualitative study. The geography of Idaho is a initial constraint that must be acknowledged in any research conducted within the state. While electronic means were utilized to collect data, the study was limited by factors such as time zone differences and geographic distance. Consequently, the study is delimited to the state of Idaho, and if data saturation was not achieved through interviews within the state, it might have been necessary to expand the research to neighboring states like Montana. However, this did not occur. Due to the limitations imposed by geography, the researcher had no choice but to establish the participant relationship virtually, through electronic means, often across different time zones.

The study was limited to exploring the experiences of female superintendents in the state of Idaho. Geographically, this encompasses a wide area that houses districts in different socioeconomic situations, different constructions (from consolidated districts to independent districts), different sizes, and different political ideologies. These are all situations that can influence the perceptions of administrators and their experiences. Because of this heterogeneity, Idaho is in a unique position to offer a variety of perceptions, experiences, suggestions, successes, and struggles. From urban Boise to rural Raft River, from north Idaho's Coeur d'Alene lake area to the desert of the Magic and Treasure Valleys, Idaho has a wide variety of locally controlled schools that are shaped by the communities they serve as well as by state and federal education guidelines. These constraints were further confined to the experiences of female administrators in the state and their perceptions of their

transitions to the administrative profession as well as the lasting effects such transitions may or may not have on their subsequent careers. Due to the lack of required administrative mentoring in Idaho, the study was also limited to the individual experiences of the administrators and, perhaps, their perceived needs and retrospective suggestions for future administrative transitions.

Limitations

This study has many limitations worth noting. One limitation of the study was the willingness of serving superintendents to participate—as well as coordinating times for interviews with those who agreed to participate. In addition, ensuring anonymity was important and limited some of the story that could be shared within the study. Idaho's educational community was (and still is) relatively small, and the pool of female superintendents even smaller. Participants expressed concern that their stories might reveal their identities and/or impact their relationships with the community and their staff. Careful collaboration and redactions have been utilized to counter this limitation.

Another imitation was the fact that the researcher herself is a full-time educational leader; finding times that could accommodate both participants and researcher was a limitation of this study. This limited the availability of both researcher and participants for more in-depth follow-up interviews. However, the interviews were very thorough, and all participants were more than willing to share their experiences and expertise for the study.

Drawing on constructivism, the grounded theory approach was appropriate because it allowed the research to develop a model based on the view of participants. The constructionist approach to inquiry is similar to informed (see Thornberg, 2012) and constructivist (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Crotty, 1998) grounded theory because (1) the literature review was completed before data collection and, (2) meaning was co-constructed "with participants" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 2) using interviews as the main form of data collection.

Mentor/protégé pairing in each situation—whether formal or informal—was important to understanding the outcome of the relationship. Some pairings were innovative while others reinforced the status quo. Some pairings were same gender while others cross gender. Each pairing with its own set of concerns and needs. Perhaps the only mentor a participant experienced was the school board, where the relationship is inherently tainted by the evaluative nature of the board's role. There might not have been e a mentor/protégé pairing if the individual was left to navigate the first years of administration alone. These scenarios, and more, can and do play out in Idaho's schools; this study sought to explore the nature of these mentor/protégé pairings and the perceived influence these

relationships, if they exist, have on female superintendents, surfacing a theoretical model illustrating the necessary elements and conditions needed to better support new female superintendents.

Organization of the Study

Chapter two of the study contains a review of the literature pertaining to mentoring new administrators and the implications of gender and leadership. Specifically, the areas addressed include:

- Conceptual Framework encompassing constructionism and Critical Feminist Theory;
- Gender and Leadership, including a review of leadership style and gender, stereotype threat, and the connection between leadership style and mentoring;
- Mentoring in Educational Leadership, including benefits and limitations; and
- Mentoring and Women in K-12 Educational Leadership, including mentor/protégé pairings and specific needs of and challenges for women in mentoring situations.

Chapter three presents a detailed explanation of the study's methodology and why it was appropriately aligned to its purpose. This includes a rationale of grounded theory design (as well as applicable variations), setting and context of the research, the sample and data sources for the research, the methods of collecting and analyzing data, and the study's validity and reliability as well as limitations and delimitations. Chapter four will reveal the study's main findings and explain the data and how it led to those findings. Chapter five will present an analysis of the research and its findings in connection to the research questions and the larger body of research in which this study fits. Finally, chapter six will highlight conclusions that can be drawn from the research findings and recommendations for further study, recommendations for local implementation, and recommendations for statewide consideration.

Chapter 2: A Review of Literature

To fully explore the efficacy of mentoring for female superintendents, this chapter will review relevant literature about mentoring, gender, leadership styles, and educational leadership. This review will first address the conceptual lenses of critical feminist theory and constructionism. Second, it will address current literature about gender and leadership styles to discover the gender-based traits of modern leadership. Third, it will discuss the benefits and limitations of mentoring as a form of induction and professional development for educators and for educational leaders—especially considering studies about leadership styles. Fourth, it will illuminate the considerations of mentoring specifically for female K-12 administrators. Finally, the review will offer suggestions for further study and research about mentoring as a form of induction for female K-12 superintendents.

Conceptual Framework

Women currently occupy a disproportionately low number of educational leadership roles (Bush, 2009; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Mullen, 2013; *Schools & Staffing Survey, 2011*), although there is a trend showing progress in addressing this disparity (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013; Mullen, 2013; Robinson et al., 2017). While the majority of the teaching workforce is female (Litmanovitz, 2010-2011; Schools & Staffing Survey, 2011), studies have shown that the probability of women advancing to leadership roles is much lower than that of men; in addition, women are expected to advance to positions of leadership much later in their careers even as they earn qualification and degrees at a similar rate to men (Mullen, 2013). In Idaho (at the time of this review), 24 of the state's 115 districts were led by women. This stands in stark disparity to the 74.6% of Idaho's teaching force who are female (*Schools & Staffing Survey,* 2011). The struggle may begin in an individual's formative years; Midkiff and Houck investigated the disparities that exist in the funding formulas of school finance that "contribute to the unequal lifetime economic outcomes for girls" (2018, p. 563). It is important to investigate the reason for this disparity and to address the organizational and cultural norms that may be contributing to this leadership disparity.

Critical Feminist Theory

Critical feminist theory is a theoretical lens that focuses on "the gender/power dynamics in political, social and organizational lives" (Young & Marshall, 2013, p. 976). It is a refinement of critical theory, which not only focuses on power, but on "the emancipation of the less powerful" through the investigation of ideologies and assumptions (Paul, 2005, p. 44). While traditional theory illustrates

the situation as it exists, critical theory serves as a vehicle to try to understand and change the situation (Crotty, 1998). In many ways, critical theory is a way to investigate what is, to orient the situation in a frame of values, and to critically assess and advocate for liberation (Crotty, 1998; Paul, Graffam, & Fowler, 2005). It challenges prevailing "culture[s] of silence" (Crotty, 1998, p. 154), illuminates embedded assumptions of institutions and society, and empowers the traditionally oppressed to action (Crotty, 1998). Further, critical qualitative research, an extension of critical theory, not only recognizes the role of power in relationships, it asks questions about the beneficiaries of privilege and is greatly concerned with issues of gender (Ravitch & Cole, 2016).

While critical theory seeks to empower all who are oppressed to new levels of enlightenment and freedom, critical feminist theory focuses that drive specifically upon women (Young & Marshall, 2013). The four major applications of critical feminist theory exhort scholars to find and hear marginalized voices, focus on women, challenge hegemony, and challenge prevailing blindness to reality (Young & Marshall, 2013). This allows scholars to study how certain groups have gained power, maintained privilege, and created the prevailing context and culture of the environments they inhabit (Crotty, 1998; Young & Marshall, 2013). Female educators—including female administrators particularly—are the products of the context and culture of the environments in which they have developed as women, scholars, educators, and leaders (Crotty, 1998; Lumby, 2015). These experiences help women to develop their unique styles; in fact, one prevalent characteristic of the feminist leader is her use of social context to empower and support all group members regardless of the tradition of privilege (Porter & Daniel, 2007).

Constructionism

To understand gender balance in educational leadership, it is critical to understand the embedded practices and their influence on both men and women in education (Young & Marshall, 2013). In addition, it must be understood how these assumptions and power dynamics influence educators and students as they construct their personal assumptions through their experiences; this is an epistemology termed constructionism (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism posits the idea that reality is not discovered or learned, it is constructed through human experience (Crotty, 1998). Thus, the female administrator is not only facing the embedded structure and assumptions of an organization, she is also a product of that same genre of organization (Allen, 2011; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Lumby, 2015; Midkiff & Houck, 2018). Shapiro and Permuth (2013) asserted that the construction of each person's reality is created within the particular society or culture in which the individual is raised. In order to construct her new identity as a leader (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth,

2004), a novice female administrator must identify the assumptions of educational leadership (Young & Marshall, 2013), navigate the politics of school organizations (Playko, 1991), and intentionally interact with the educational system to recreate the existing hegemony with her leadership styles in mind (Crotty, 1998; Paul, et al., 2005; Young & Marshall, 2013). If a mentor is to guide a novice administrator through his/her first years of leadership (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011), the two must share similar leadership traits—and gender can be a defining factor in leadership style (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Through these understandings of critical feminist theory and constructionism, an exploration of gender and leadership, and their connections to mentoring, can begin.

Gender & Leadership

Both Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry (1991) and Allen (2011) have commented on the difference between the biological distinction of sex and the social construct that has defined gender. Social constructs are hard to see because they are often embedded in the individual consciousness as a matter of course (Allen, 2011; Young & Marshall, 2013). This often impacts women's success in leadership roles; de la Rey explained that feminine leadership styles and skills are often directly formed by women's unique struggles toward leadership roles (2005). Shakeshaft et al. (1991) emphasized the role that gender identification has on "behavior, perceptions, and effectiveness" (p. 134). Goodwin et al. have illustrated outside of the educational sphere that women "perceive they will have lower power in majority-male leadership groups" (2020, p. 17) which is a contributing factor to women's pursuits of leadership goals. Other studies have revealed that social influences as far back as childhood are integral to women's paths toward—or away from—leadership roles (Rashid, 2010). Although many believe that there is no gender difference in leadership style (de la Rey, 2005), studies show that not only do differences exist (Grogan, 2012; Shaked, et al., 2018), they significantly impact the quality of the individual's leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Vinkenburg, et al., 2011; Shaked et al., 2018) and the success of the mentor/protégé pairing (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006).

Fine (2007) identified dominant theories of leadership and their connection to masculinity—and then contrasts these theories with four principles of feminine leadership. These include positive contributions, collaboration, open communication, and honesty (Fine, 2007). For women to be successful educational leaders, it is critical that they embrace leadership styles that emphasize their strengths (Polnick et al., 2012). Unfortunately, there are embedded prejudices that women must face: specifically, the deeply rooted societal expectations of leadership that do not reflect the feminine leadership strengths (Eagly & Carli, 2003). These stereotypes of leadership present threats for

aspiring female educational leaders (de la Rey, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2003; von Hippel et al., 2011). To support women who aspire to leadership roles, organizations need to identify strategies of effective leaders, leadership styles, and role models, including mentors, that most closely align with feminine leadership strengths (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

Leadership Styles

Studies show that there are several identifiable leadership styles. Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) have separated leadership into two camps: task-oriented leadership and interpersonally oriented leadership. They further defined task-oriented leadership as agentic, autocratic, and directive and contrast it with the communal, democratic, and participative nature of interpersonally-oriented leadership (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Eagly & Carli (2003) aligned agentic leadership to masculine traits and communal leadership to feminine traits. More specifically, leadership styles have traditionally been identified as four distinct types: transactional, transformational, servant, and laissez-faire (Crippen, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Kark et al., 2012; Polnick et al., 2012; Reed et al., 2011; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). New forms of leadership, acknowledging collective work such as distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2004), collective (Fredrich et al., 2009) and shared leadership (Carson et al., 2007) continue to enter the academic lexicon; while undertheorized, these leadership constructs are prevalent and must be included in any discussion of leadership style (Spillane et. al, 2004; Lumby, 2016). Finally, digital leadership is an emerging and ever more ubiquitous expectation of K-12 administrators; when looking at transactional vs. transformational leadership, Lommen (2016) expressed doubt that "those traits suffice to lead for the growing platforms of 'wirearchy' over hierarchy" (p. 21). A brief study of each of these styles and their connection to society's expectations and leaders' gender differences follows.

Transactional Leadership

A prevalent stereotype of leadership excellence in modern society closely follows the transactional style of leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013). In transactional leadership, several characteristics are usually present: there is a distinct hierarchy where supervisors have authority over subordinates and delegate their responsibilities, supervisors monitor their subordinates' activities, and supervisors reward subordinates for successful completion of duties and impose consequences for failures (Eagly et al., 2001; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). In addition, transactional leaders are rarely change agents; they are content to work within the structure and in tandem with cultural assumptions that are already in

place (Mullen, 2013). Transactional leadership values many "traditional" models of authority, including formality, organizational structure, and hierarchical power (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013).

Eagly and colleagues' (2001) study concluded that transactional leadership is a style to which male managers and leaders naturally gravitate, and therefore, excel. Characteristics of masculine leadership typically include individuality, decisiveness, and vision; traditional literature offers a consistent profile of leadership that is heroic and charismatic (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013). Transactional leaders can be appealing to their subordinates because they clearly delineate lines of responsibility and expectation, they distribute rewards, and they shoulder responsibility (Eagly & Carli, 2003). In educational leadership specifically, transactional leadership can persist from generation to generation because almost all educators are formed in school cultures whereby they learn the norms of the educational world (Mullen, 2013). If transactional leadership in the principal's or the superintendent's office is the norm for those systems, then educators rising through the ranks—from student to teacher to leader—will also understand educational leadership through a masculine-dominant, transactional lens (Mullen, 2013). In order to be accepted, women are often encouraged to fit the transactional leader mold (Stead & Elliott, 2012). However, for women to be successful leaders, it is critical that they utilize their natural strengths, which are very different from those of male leaders (de la Rey, 2005). Unfortunately, those strengths, such as inclusion and collaboration, are traditionally associated with subordinate roles (Allen, 2001). Modern scholarship, however, is starting to understand that leadership is less than a position or authority; it is a "capacity or process residing in relationships between people" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013, p. 112). This leads to a newer form of leadership: the transformational leader (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kark et al., 2012; Mullen, 2013).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is identified as a style that is more conducive to feminine leadership strengths, including participation, democracy, collaboration, shared decision making, and nurturing (de la Rey, 2005; Fine, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013; Polnick et al., 2012). In fact, women outscore men on transformational leadership measurement scales (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Transformational leaders are skilled at developing and sharing visions and plans for the future and are dedicated to empowering their subordinates to greater levels of autonomy and productivity (Eagly & Carli, 2003) as well as ensuring that education becomes ever more equitable and just (Agosto & Roland, 2018). This is a step toward transformative leadership practice, which is a social-justice conscious framework that strives to "effect deep and equitable change" (Agosto & Roland, 2018, p. 257), aligning with critical feminist theory. A transformational leader is a change agent,

specifically due to the ability to motivate, support, and inspire subordinates (Mullen, 2013; Shapiro & Permuth, 2013), partly due to the leader's personal high standards, willingness to serve as a role model, and ability to innovate, gain trust, and motivate others (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Because of the correspondence between natural feminine leadership traits and transformational leadership's characteristics, women are more likely to embrace this type of leadership strategy (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Mullen, 2013; Polnick et al., 2012; Shaked et al., 2018; Vinkenburg et al., 2001).

In educational leadership, principals utilizing transformational leadership strategies are more likely to excel in instructional leadership and cultural leadership (Mullen, 2013). In instructional leadership, transformational leaders are more able to maintain a focus on assessment and accountability while still developing the learning community (Mullen, 2013). This may be due to several factors, including the inspirational nature of transformational leaders (Vinkenburg et al., 2001) and the ability of transformational leaders to not only see a vision, but to create and share a plan for implementation and enthusiasm for the vision (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kark, et al., 2012). In addition, the transformation leader will inspire through example and shared power (Kark, et al., 2012; Polnick et al., 2012). Instructional leadership is critical to educational leadership; cultural leadership is equally important, especially if a leader expects to see organizational change (Mullen, 2013).

Transformational leaders impact the culture of their schools because they can capture the district-vision and align that vision with building needs, student needs, and staff needs (Mullen, 2013). Because transformational leaders value relationships and shared decision-making, they are able to build the political capital to accomplish these leadership goals (Grogan, 2012; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2013). Jones (2017) has revealed that women see themselves as more supportive, nurturing, and emotionally intelligent, traits that align with transformational leadership. Even though transformational leadership is not the traditional form of educational leadership, it is one that may be particularly suited to female educational leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Paris et al., 2009; Vinkenburg et al., 2001). It is important to note that transformational leadership is not exclusive to female leaders; men are also capable transformational leaders (Mullen, 2013).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a type of leadership that possesses characteristics very similar to those of transformational leadership; the servant leader is one whose priority is the well-being of others over

herself (Porter & Daniel, 2007). In many ways, these two styles not only complement each other (Reed et al., 2011), they can most easily coexist. While both transformational and servant leaders care for others and serve as role models, the servant leader is more focused on values, ethics, and morality (Reed et al., 2011). Values, according to Porter and Daniel, are the center and focus of feminist leadership (2007); this makes servant leadership a unique fit for female leaders. In fact, they have created an acronym from the word "values" in feminine leadership: vision, action, learning, understanding, ethical, and social constructivism—these are the traits of feminist, servant leadership (Porter & Daniel, 2008). Women often seek to serve others through facilitation, motivation, empathy, foresight, and building community (Crippen, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). These are the hallmarks of servant leadership. As gender and leadership continues to be a topic of study, research shows that women "demonstrate higher scores on *both* [original emphasis] communal and agentic leadership styles as compared to men" (Xu et al., 2015) which illustrates strength in servant leadership. It is important to reiterate that this is not a leadership style that is limited to women; in fact, "true leadership is virtually synonymous with services and great leaders are perceived as such precisely because of the service they perform for individuals and society" (Reed et al., 2011, p, 422), gender notwithstanding.

It is important to note that feminist theory does not completely support the idea of servant leadership as positive toward feminine leadership or in any way "neutralizing" gender bias (Eicher-Catt, 2005). The terms "servant" and "leadership" can be construed to be mutually exclusive, with the idea of "servant" being immediately submissive and "leadership" being immediately dominant (Eicher-Catt, 2005). In addition, the term is "deceptively ambiguous, especially when it comes to the nature of leadership responsibility, authority, and accountability" (Eicher-Catt, 2005, p. 18). While appealing to feminine leadership styles, servant leadership may, in fact, be a step backward for aspiring administrators when viewed through a feminist lens (Eicher-Catt, 2005).

Laissez-faire Leadership

Though transformational and transactional leadership styles are very prominent in the literature, and servant leadership is gaining ground in research (Reed et al., 2011), there is a fourth type of leadership that many individuals encounter: the laissez-faire leader (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). This leader is almost an anti-leader; it is an individual in authority who abdicates all responsibility for actual leadership and/or management (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). This type of

leader can be any gender, but studies show that it is most often a masculine leadership style (Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership entered the research lexicon in 2005 as a framework or lens through which leadership could be studied (Spillane et al., 2005). The original framework holds that "human activity is *distributed* in the interactive web of actors and artifacts, and *situation* is the appropriate unit of analysis for studying practice (Spillane et al., 2005, p. 9, original emphasis). Distributed leadership looks at the concept of leadership not in a vacuum, but in an engaging and dynamic fashion—which is often the reality of leadership in education (Spillane et al., 2005; Kelley & Dikkers, 2016; Bellibas & Liu, 2018). In addition, this is a popular leadership concept because it includes many stakeholders, those who often have great expertise and skill level, in the management of a school (Bellibas & Liu, 2018). Distributed leadership has two major assumptions: 1. That leadership is best considered as a cumulation of required tasks and 2. That leadership is and should be distributed between and among leaders, teachers, stakeholders, other followers, and is dependent upon the situation or school context (Spillane et al., 2004). These assumptions reveal the heart of distributed leadership: leadership is not centralized at the "top" of a bureaucratic pyramid; it is distributed appropriately throughout the organization based on skill, culture, and situation (Spillane et al., 2004; Kelley & Dikkers, 2016; Bellibas & Liu, 2018). Agosto & Roland's research described educational leadership as a "conception of leadership as a distributed web of influence" (2018, p. 278), very much distributed throughout the organization.

This leadership style is not without its critics. A major criticism occurs simply because the impetus for distributed leadership began as a conceptual framework and/or research lens rather than an expectation of practice (Lumby, 2016; Spillane et al., 2004). In fact, Lumby asserts "[m]any researchers acknowledge that DL (distributed leadership) is an unsatisfactory concept and then go on to set this aside and research it anyway" (2016). The author continues to note that distributed leadership is an encouraged form of leadership that has a reputation for positive results (Lumby, 2016). Conversely, Bellibas and Liu (2018) have asserted that distributed leadership's popularity is "due to its capacity to include broad stakeholders with expertise and skills into school management and operation, and research supports the participation from broad shareholders positively impact the staff satisfaction and commitment around the school goal, and cohesion among faculty" (p. 227). While the research is not overtly "gendered," distributed leadership fits well with the concepts of both transformational and servant leadership, both of which are compatible with the feminine leadership

style (Kark, et al., 2012; Polnick et al., 2012; Crippen, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Xu et al., 2015).

Digital Leadership

In March of 2020, digital leadership became an overwhelmingly important topic due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting impact on the educational system. An important introductory note to digital leadership came from McLeod (2015): "Heads of school don't have to be skilled users themselves to be effective technology leaders, but they do have to exercise appropriate oversight and convey the message—repeatedly—that frequent, meaningful technology use in school is both important and expected" (p. 54). Technology influences the students' experiences, the educators' experiences, and requires vision, control, and support from educational leaders (Cabellon & Brown, 2017; McLeod, 2015). Digital leadership is integral to the educational experience (Cabellon & Brown, 2017), and must be a part of an administrator's leadership plan, whether transformational, transactional, distributed or otherwise. It is important for administrators to "[m]odel effective ways of integrating technology into one's life and leadership" (Cabellon & Brown, 2017, p. 17). Older research posits that mentors must be found in geographically favorable proximity (Pence, 1995); the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the flexibility and accessibility of online meetings that can quickly negate distance and eliminate travel. As such it is important to acknowledge that leadership work, including mentoring, takes place online and in person.

The study of leadership styles is continually evolving—and will continue to do so as women affect the workforce (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Robinson et al, 2017). A common problem, however, is that women find themselves trained and locked in stereotypes of leadership that do not effectively represent themselves as leaders. This may eventually negatively impact women's careers (de la Rey, 2005; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) as is evident by the fact that "men are still four times more likely" to serve as a district superintendent than women (Robinson et al, 2017, p. 1).

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is defined as "the psychological threat of conforming or being reduced to a negative stereotype" (von Hippel et al., 2011). It can cause people to alter how they communicate, respond to certain situations, and present themselves to the world (von Hippel et al., 2011). For example, if a system, organization, or community embraces traditionally masculine leadership styles as the unspoken norm, women may align their actions to either counter the stereotype or conform to the stereotype (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Stead & Elliott, 2012; von Hippel, et al., 2011). Either way, the

female leader will suffer repercussions in public perception (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Stereotype threat is possible because there are many stereotypes about female leaders in modern society (de la Rey, 2005; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Many of these stereotypes are based on how men actually behave as leaders and how society believes women should behave as leaders (Vinkenburg et al., 2011) and women who break these stereotypes often find themselves less effective or influential as leaders (von Hippel et al., 2011). The inconsistency in society's perceptions of leadership qualities and feminine traits often leads to prejudice either due to the leadership style being too transformational, and thus less "traditional," or due to a perceived lack of femininity (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Female leaders must be allowed to construct their leadership style free from stereotypes and in a way that complements their own femininity while still effectively generating respect and exerting influence (Clayton et al., 2013; von Hippel et al., 2001). Mentoring for new leaders is one way that districts try to address this conflict between stereotype and successful leadership induction (Pence, 1995).

Leadership Styles and Supervision

An interesting manifestation of leadership style and gender was the subject of Shakeshaft's 1986 study on female organizational culture and followed by a study on gender and supervision in 1991 (Shakeshaft et al.). In the first study, Shakeshaft (1986) illustrated several conceptualizations of female administrators, which include a focus on the individual, a focus on teaching and learning, and the importance of community building to the role of administrator. Throughout the course of the study, Shakeshaft (1986) concluded that female leaders are more likely than men to: (1) have personal interactions with teachers and students, (2) embrace the role of principal as a lead teacher rather than a manager, and (3) enjoy supervising instruction rather than embracing managerial tasks. She also identified a democratic and participatory style embraced by women that is comparable to transformational leadership (Shakeshaft, 1986). These characteristics also embody the framework of distributed leadership which "presses us to consider the enactment of leadership tasks as potentially *stretched* over the practice of two or more leaders and followers (Spillane et al., 2015, p. 16, original emphasis).

In a subsequent study that focuses on gender and supervision, Shakeshaft et al. (1991) maintained that "gender perceptions are influencing behavior and interfering with effectiveness" (p. 136). This study focused on communication and feedback given to both male and female subordinates by both male

and female supervisors. It concluded that the types of feedback received by men and women are disparate; men receive more types of feedback—both positive and negative—and women tend to receive more positive but less specific feedback from supervisors (Shakeshaft et al., 1991). From the administrative perspective, women tend have different preferences to men and concentrate on different criteria for evaluation (Shakeshaft et al., 1991). There is also a discrepancy in how male administrators deal with female subordinates and how female administrators react to interactions with male subordinates (Shakeshaft et al., 1991). Both studies illustrated that gender interferes with the educational climate, especially as it applies to women in leadership.

Leadership Styles and Mentoring

Experiential learning is critically important for aspiring administrators (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). "A person takes on a leader identity when they hold as part of their self-construct the belief that they are a leader" (Priest, et al., 2018, p. 23). As female leaders construct their leadership styles through their experiences, it is often difficult to find examples of strong female administrators to serve as mentors or role models (Gupton & Slick, 1996). The mentor/protégé pairing is a critical element in mentoring success; if this pairing is done poorly, the protégé may not receive the guidance she needs in her induction to educational administration (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Bush & Chew, 1999; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Clayton et al., 2013). Daresh (2004) commented on the fact that mentoring cannot be used to "simply [reinforce] past practices" (p. 512), especially when past practices may not include the strengths inherent in feminine leadership. Leaders are not always "born;" they develop their leadership identity through a series of stages which can be a "lifelong developmental process" (Priest et al., 2018, p. 27). The study of leadership styles illustrates the diversity of leadership strengths, but also offers insight into the masculine and feminine characteristics of leadership, as well as society's expectations for both (Korver, 2021). Technology is providing new and unique opportunities for mentoring in a digital age; "savvy…educators have the power to reimagine traditional paradigms and develop new strategies," (Cabbellon & Brown, 2017, p. 18), which includes mentoring practices. Combining the study of leadership and the study of mentoring reveals significant concerns about the efficacy of mentoring as an induction strategy for new female K-12 administrators.

Mentoring in Educational Leadership

Mentoring is an area that is filled with research; however, the research about the implications of mentoring for new administrators—and new female administrators—is relatively sparse (Alsbury &

Hackman, 2006; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Daresh, 2001a, Liang et al., 2020). Lack of mentoring can be a significant barrier to the success of new administrators; without mentoring, newly hired administrators may not receive appropriate guidance (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Korver (2021) asserted "[s]chool divisions must work at…encouraging formal and informal mentorships" (p. 74).

The Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Project was created by the 2013 Idaho Superintendent-of-the-Year, Dr. Wiley Dobbs. Founded in 2019, the project founder and the Idaho Department of Education have teamed up to add this component to the Idaho Superintendents Network (founded in 2008). This project is entirely voluntary for the mentors and proteges it assists and is showing early success, growing from 14 new superintendents/charter directors in 2019 to 28 in the 2021-2022 school year. Protegees may stay in the program for three years; 100% of the first year protegees are participating in year 3. The intent of this program is to pair a proven, successful superintendent with a "junior" superintendent, establish a relationship, and learn from one another. Though in its infancy, this program is helping new superintendents find success and confidence in their roles (W. Dobbs, personal communication, January 15, 2022).

Successful mentoring can serve as a "career development process" (Reyes, 2003, p. 45). While a mentoring relationship is important, it is not all-encompassing nor is it permanent (Wilson & Elman, 1990). The selection of the mentoring partnership is critical to the ultimate success of the mentoring process and can influence principal placement if the mentoring partnership precedes the advancement to administration (Reyes, 2003); hence the Job-Alike-Mentors (JAM) in the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Project (W. Dobbs, personal communication, January 15, 2022). Principal efficacy is an important factor in school success (Daresh, 2001b); therefore, it is imperative that districts provide ample support, at all career stages, in order for principals to lead successfully (Reyes, 2003). It stands to reason, therefore, that superintendent efficacy is equally, if not more, important to district success and induction support is necessary for successful leadership development.

New principals and superintendents overwhelmingly face circumstances for which they are unprepared and lament that the reality of leadership is not always the same as the theoretical perception presented to them in leadership preparation (Daresh, 2001b). In fact, many find great loneliness and confusion (Daresh, 2001b) in the midst of coping with significant new levels of responsibility and autonomy (Wilson & Elman, 1990). The importance of administrative mentoring as not only a professional courtesy but a moral imperative (Bush, 2009). Without it, "requiring individuals to lead schools, which are often multimillion-dollar businesses, manage staff and care for

children, without specific preparation, may be seen as foolish, even reckless, as well as being manifestly unfair for the new incumbent" (Bush, 2009, p. 377). While prospective administrators frequently have academic and practical preparation, including internships and field experiences, they are often insufficient for the realities of the job (School Leaders Network, 2014). In many ways, new administrators "become *de-skilled…*they cannot possibly know the new context…they must 'participate as learners' in helping the organization move forward" (Fullan, 2020, p. 140). Mentors can offer valuable perspective and input. Change is constant, in schools and in careers; lack of capacity is often the barrier (Fullan, 2009). Mentors should be experienced administrators who can answer questions and share advice "about concerns that arise on the job but are not necessarily covered in the board's formal policies and procedures" (Daresh, 2001b). In addition, mentors are valuable because they not only share their visions with the protégés, but they can nurture in protégés the confidence and leadership skills necessary to develop and implement their own visions (Wilson & Elman, 1990). Thus, ensuring that new administrators are set early upon a successful path is a valuable endeavor (Daresh, 2001b).

Though there are definite differences in administrative mentoring and teacher mentoring (Daresh, 2001a), a solid understanding of the pressing concerns facing new administrators as well as the benefits and limitations of mentoring as a form of induction and professional development for new administrators is critical to a further exploration of mentoring's appropriateness for women in leadership roles.

Concerns of New Administrators

Many principals enter the administrative realm without a full understanding of the responsibility they are assuming (Daresh, 2001b). New administrators are at a disadvantage with a lack of experiential knowledge (Daresh, 2001b). The stakes are high: "[g]iven the importance of educational leadership, the development of effective leaders should not be left to chance" (Bush, 2009, p. 386). Unfortunately, there are rarely systems in place that allow new administrators to seek help without seeming unable to cope with their responsibilities (Daresh, 2001b; Liang et al., 2020, Wilmore, 1995). This holds true for superintendents as well as principals. Every building and district has its own politics, mores, and procedures; new administrators must navigate the intricacies of the new position, new responsibilities, and new expectations as well as the climate of the building/district (Daresh, 2001b, Liang et al., 2020). While there are options other than mentoring, such as the buddy system (Daresh, 2001b), it is clear that new principals need to have mentors who are available, willing to talk, comfortable interpreting mores and procedures that are unwritten (Daresh, 2001b), and

with whom the new principal is comfortable (Wilmore, 1995). The same can be extrapolated to the superintendency.

Confidence in Role for Protégés

Mentoring for administrators is important; the role of the school leader is continually changing with the advent of school reform and data driven accountability (Crow, 2006; Playko, 1991). Administrators themselves acknowledge the importance of mentoring (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). Becoming an administrator is more than a change in job description; it is a change in the educator's very identity (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004) as well as in the role, responsibility, and authority that it brings (Lochmiller, 2014). Most administrators are leaving behind successful careers as classroom teachers and must face the dichotomy of being veteran educators who are now novice administrators with full administrative authority and responsibility (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2003; Crow, 2006). Not only can this create a crisis of confidence, it can be a very isolating experience for the new leader (Bush & Chew, 1999; Daresh, 2001a; O'Mahoney, 2003; Pence, 1995). Mentoring can be a way for protégés to begin to understand their roles and responsibilities within this new position (Bush & Chew, 1999; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Clayton et al., 2013). With this new professional perspective, novice administrators can begin to foster new relationships and enhance existing professional networks.

Supportive Relationships & Reduction of Isolation for Protégés

The creation of supportive relationships is the second benefit commonly attributed to administrative mentoring (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). While school buildings may have hundreds of teachers, the administrative staff is necessarily smaller; in fact, many buildings only have one administrator—and districts usually only have one superintendent—which increases the sense of isolation that new administrators may experience (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Bush & Chew, 1999). Daresh (2004) has emphasized the loss of support systems experienced by new principals and further research advocates socialization to counter this isolation (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). Increased demands upon administrators, coupled with insecurity and isolation, erode the leader's perception of success, and increase the importance of some type of mentoring support (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). Isolation, then, becomes one of the foremost enemies of a new administrator; mentoring can reduce its effects both professionally and personally (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Bush & Chew, 1999; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). Reducing isolation may be as simple as finding a confidante; however, leadership development

will flourish when protégés can participate in reflective conversations with mentors (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

Leadership Development & Reflective Conversations for Protégés

Leadership as a professional skill is something that can be developed through time, experience, and education (Bush, 2009); mentoring support can enhance that skill through leadership development and reflective conversations (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Bush & Chew, 1999; Bush, 2009; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Clayton et al., 2013). In fact, the most appreciated mentor skill cited by protégés is the ability to listen; this is followed closely by providing perspectives and posing reflective questions (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). Collegiality and reflection are significant benefits of administrative mentoring for protégés (Ehrich et al., 2004). The most effective mentoring relationship will grow beyond the term of induction and become collegial and reciprocal (Gupton & Slick, 1996). This relationship cannot only benefit protégés, however; it must encourage growth for both mentor and protégé (Daresh, 2004; Walker & Stott, 1994).

Benefits of Mentoring for Mentors & Districts

Effective mentoring will be beneficial for both mentors and school districts/organizations that properly implement the strategy—whether for teachers or for administrators (Bush & Chew, 1999; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Daresh, 2004; Ehrich et al., 2004). Benefits to the mentor include job satisfaction and career-boosting recognition (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Daresh, 2004). Additionally, mentoring may serve to rejuvenate the mentor into a new enthusiasm for his/her profession (Ehrich et al., 2004). Finally, mentoring can serve as professional development for the mentor, advancing his/her skill and honing his/her craft (Bush & Chew, 1999). Districts, too, can benefit from properly implemented mentoring programs. Districts will enjoy capable and effective staff (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Daresh, 2004), increased motivation (Daresh, 2004; Ehrich, et al., 2004), and increased levels of productivity (Daresh, 2004). There is also the advantage that mentors may have an extra edge in understanding the organizational culture because of their interactions with protégés (Wilson & Elman, 1990). These benefits are highly desirable and are based heavily upon the relationship built between the mentor and the protégé (Walker & Stott, 1994).

Limitations of Mentoring

Although mentoring has more research-based benefits than drawbacks (Ehrich et al., 2004), the existing limitations can significantly curtail the effectiveness of mentoring as a support system for

new administrators. For example, mentoring programs that are inadequately funded—either through money or time allocated to the project—will not be fully successful (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Bush & Chew, 1999; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). Another limitation is evident when mentoring programs are not planned or implemented in such a way that novice administrators' needs are addressed (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). There is also research that indicates that mentors often exhibit a lack of dedication to the concept and practice of mentoring (Wilmore, 1995). Korver believes that mentoring is often a "surface" remedy for a situation that is often much more complex (2021, p. 74). Several limitations, however, have specific implications for female K-12 administrators; these include the mentor/protégé pairing (Carr, 2012; Pence, 1995), the reinforcement of the status quo in leadership roles (Carr, 2012; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Clayton et al., 2013), and the relative lack of gender diversity in the existing gender pool (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

Mentor/Protégé Pairing

One of the most detrimental facets of mentoring programs is that which should be its greatest strength: the pairing of the mentor with the protégé. When done correctly, this pairing has great potential for significant support and guidance for the protégé (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006), as well as professional and intrinsic rewards for the mentor (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). When the pairing is not ideal and trust cannot be built, mentoring will not be effective (Ehrich et al., 2004). Trust is essential, as is mentor/protégé collegiality; however, successful pairings may not be enough to overcome ingrained habits of ineffectiveness (Clayton et al., 2013). The mentor/mentee match is increasingly important for female administrators, if only in their perception of efficacy (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

To create an ideal mentor/protégé match, it is wise to allow all parties to have some input into the pairing (Walker & Stott, 1994). Both the mentor and the protégé must be committed to the relationship, have time to commit to the relationship, and be either in reasonable geographic proximity (Pence, 1995) or able to telecommute. Ideally, the mentor and protégé will have similar philosophies of education and a matching idea of what the mentoring relationship will be during the pairing (Mertz, 2004). Leadership style, whether transformational, transactional, masculine, feminine, or other, may also provide an important commonality between mentor and protégé. The mentor/protégé pair must be able to develop trust and mutual respect, demonstrate commitment, and be able to communicate clearly with one another (Carr, 2012; Korver, 2021; Pence, 1995). Some studies advocate same-gender pairings to ensure that the mentor/protégé match is ideal (Carr, 2012;

Pence, 1995). Even the most ideal pairing, however, cannot guarantee the mentoring relationship's success.

Reinforcement of the Status Quo

Reinforcing the status quo (Clayton et al., 2013) is one of the unseen limitations of mentoring programs. This is especially worrying when that status quo encourages exclusionary practices, whether explicitly or implicitly (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001; Clayton et al., 2013). Many veteran administrators have had successful careers but may be at the end of their careers—or may be modeling their professional ideals after those of their own mentors who flourished in an age gone by (Ehrich, et al., 2004; Playko, 1991). In fact, "it might be argued that mentoring could actually stifle the fresh insights brought into the organization by new members" (Wilson & Elman, 1995). The reinforcement of the status quo may even lead to reluctance to sponsor a female administrator (Ehrich, 1995). This is a significant concern for women in leadership roles, who may not share leadership styles or philosophies with the current generation (or gender) of leaders (Carr, 2012).

Existing Pool of Mentors

Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) questioned the effectiveness of mentoring when mentors are not sharing similarities "such as values, background, experience, and outlook" with their mentees (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011, p. 17). Thus, the existing pool of mentors may not have the tools necessary to successfully guide a new generation of administrators (Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004). In addition, those available to mentor may have different priorities than those who need to be mentored (Clayton et al., 2013). Mentors can lack critical understanding of the protégés' needs (Playko, 1991). These limitations—mentor/protégé pairings, reinforcement of the status quo, and the availability of mentors—are all significant in light of the stereotypes and struggles women face when they enter the administrative workforce (Litmanovitz, 2010-2011).

Mentoring and Women in K-12 Educational Leadership

Although great strides have been made in gender equality, there is still a marked discrepancy in the number of actual educational leaders who are women (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). Many individuals enroll in principal and superintendent preparation programs and many qualified candidates never apply for leadership positions because they doubt their own abilities; this is not a gender-isolated problem (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). These potential leaders are often groomed for leadership through preservice mentoring (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Litmanovitz, 2010-2011).

Preservice mentoring often begins when administrative candidates are teachers and their principals provide leadership opportunities and support their abilities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004), but women are often excluded from these opportunities (Ehrich, 1994). This pipeline from teacher to administrator (Litmanovitz, 2010-2011) favors males because the highest administrative levels are still predominately male (Carr, 2012) and men are often the only mentors available (Ehrich, 1994). Women identify a lack of role models and/or appropriate mentors as a significant impediment toward career advancement (Polnick, et al., 2012).

Mixed-Gender and Same-Gender Pairings. It can be difficult for a woman to find a female role model, especially if she is looking to find one of a higher professional rank for emulation (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). This lack of role model can create a culture where women are less likely to advance in their careers (Kay et al., 2009). Some of the lack is sheer demographics: more men are available in higher level administration to serve as mentors for both men and women (Carr, 2012). In addition, there is often an embedded culture where men are more easily able to network with colleagues and supervisors, thereby creating their own support networks and mentoring situations (Carr, 2012; Stead & Elliott, 2012). This is a challenge when creating mentor/protégé pairings; women need to be mentors to other women, especially because there are so few female role models (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Although some research indicates that there is no statistical difference in mentoring pairings that are same-gender (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Korver, 2021), there is a perception that women believe that having a female mentor is important to their success (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2001; Pence, 1995) and perception is an individual's reality. Thus, same-gender mentor/protégé relationship can be psychologically more supportive than mixed-gender relationships (Kark et al., 2012).

In the absence of female mentors, women must turn to male mentors; this is sometimes successful (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Korver, 2021). However, men often choose protégés who more closely resemble them—in leadership style and in gender—which discriminates against women who are searching for role models (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Gender and race are two components that frequently derail mentor/protégé pairings (Ehrich et al., 2004) and research reveals that there are definite risks in male/female mentor/protégé pairings (Ehrich, 1995). These dangers include the risk of sexual intimacy, innuendo, marital difficulties, and rumors about inappropriate relationships (Ehrich, 1994; Ehrich et al., 2004; Gupton & Slick, 1996); overreliance, false security, and/or abuse; and the embedded cultural implications when the protégé surpasses the mentor (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Although men in mixed gender teams do not report any concerns with the partnership, the

female partners report insufficient interactions, limited and limiting conversations, and significant discomfort in the mentoring relationship (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006).

Specific Mentor needs for Women in Administration. While finding appropriate mentor/protégé pairings is more difficult for women who aspire to be educational leaders, it is also significant to note that women and men report very different induction and professional development needs and participation levels (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Carr, 2012; Grissom & Harrington, 2010). Women are more likely to even participate in professional development activities, whether mentoring or otherwise (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). In specifically mentoring situations, men report thriving in pairings and programs that are very structured and have required components that are easily identifiable and fulfillable (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). In contrast, women prefer to build relationships in a less structured environment (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006). They also value frequent feedback, modeling, mentor-initiated contact, and reinforcement of their efforts (Carr, 2012). Mentoring can also be a tool to help women break down barriers in their leadership pursuits (Karamanidou et. al, 2017). Unfortunately, some of these traits also cause the mentor/protégé work and professional line to blur into more personal relationships; there is also a reported significant fear of failure in female protégés (Carr, 2012). As new female administrators create their new vision of themselves as educators and leaders, it is inevitable that differences in leadership style and induction/professional development needs will impact their progress (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003).

Negative Female Role Models & Influences. Same-gender mentor pairings may not always be the solution, however. There are many women who report that they are becoming leaders specifically to counter the negative female role models that they have encountered (Gupton & Slick, 1996). For example, the “queen bee” syndrome occurs when women exclude upcoming female leaders to protect their own leadership positions and prestige (Gupton & Slick, 1996). In addition, there are women who have been successful in leadership roles because they have adopted more masculine leadership styles and philosophies; this adaptation will also draw female leaders into believing some of the prevalent leadership stereotypes that are embedded in organizational and cultural visions and lead them farther away (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Finally, it is important to note the phenomenon that, through stereotype threat, many women prefer men as leaders over women, thus negatively influencing their peers who may pursue leadership opportunities (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).

Mentoring and Motherhood. A final significant element of the female administrative path is one that men do not have to consider: motherhood (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). A male mentor will not

be able to advise a female protégé about career paths and family planning, when the reality is that motherhood is likely to impact a woman's career significantly more than parenthood impacts men's careers (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Kaparou & Bush called this an "invisible barrier;" men tend to have an uninterrupted career progression while women often face the barrier of parenthood (2007, p. 233). A female mentor, however, will be able to discuss how family choices can impact career goals, and how female administrators can plan for the possible eventuality of family (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). In this way, a female mentor can be a more reliable role model who can more accurately relate to the concerns, experiences, and decisions that a female administrator must make—both personally and professionally—and who can provide more professional comfort and counsel in this level of mentoring relationship (Alsbury & Hackman, 2006; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

Women Mentoring Women. Although women are uniquely able to mentor other women in some instances, research also indicates difficulties. For example, Ehrich concludeed that a female principal must be mentored by a more senior administrator, but the lack thereof can cause difficulty (1994). In addition, women who are available to mentor often are of lower organizational status and younger than male mentors for the same position—and earn lower salaries (Ehrich, 1994). Finally, "without a great number of female role models in the most coveted school leadership positions, women teachers simply do not perceive themselves as potential administrative candidates" (Sherman, 2005, p. 711). This perpetuates the cycle of difficulty finding competent and engaging female mentors.

Conclusion

Women are making great strides in joining the ranks of educational leadership, even though equity has not yet been achieved (Allen, 2011). While women must overcome prejudice and stereotypes that embedded in the consciousness of society, they must also face assumptions that may be embedded in their personal constructions of leadership (Crotty, 1998; Young & Marshall, 2013). The unique perspectives that accompany the female K-12 administrator are evident in the leadership styles that are most frequently embraced by women: the transformational and servant leadership styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Reed et al., 2011). All of these factors influence women in educational leadership and the efficacy of induction programs that are offered to new female K-12 principals.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to investigate mentoring availability and influence upon female superintendents in Idaho to develop a theory grounded by data. First, this chapter will address the rationale for the research approach utilized in this study and why it is the best method for answering this study's research questions. Next, the methods of collecting and analyzing data and, the strategies used to minimize validity threats and maximize trustworthiness with triangulation are described. Finally, there will be a summary of the chapter's key points and discussions.

Rationale

Grounded theory is particularly appropriate to this study due to its unique combination of flexibility and structure (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Birks et al., 2019). There is a lack of theory about gender and leadership style as it relates to mentoring and other induction support experienced by women in superintendency positions. Drawing on constructivism, the grounded theory approach is appropriate because it allows the researcher to develop a model or theory based on the collected experiences of participants. The constructionist approach to inquiry is similar to *informed* (see Thornberg, 2012, original emphasis) and constructivist (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Crotty, 1998) grounded theory because (1) the literature review was completed prior to data collection and, (2) meaning was co-constructed "with participants" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 2) using interviews as the main form of data collection.

Accessing the Phenomenon to Develop Theory

Qualitative research focuses on phenomena and people, which are in a state of continual flux; therefore, an important tenet of grounded theory method is "to build change, through process, into the method" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 419). The study solicited knowledge from the representative group (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to help answer the "why" question inherent in grounded theory and qualitative research (Birks et al., 2019).

In grounded theory, "the researcher brings to it some idea of the phenomenon he or she wants to study, then based on this knowledge selects groups of individuals, an organization, or community most representative of that phenomenon" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 420). In Idaho, 24 out of 113 districts had female leaders at the time of the study; this stands in stark disparity to the 74.6% of Idaho's female teaching force (*Schools & Staffing Survey,* 2011). To access the phenomenon of mentoring and female superintendents in Idaho, the founder and leader of the Idaho Superintendent

Mentoring Project was consulted. According to the organizer of this project, nine new female superintendents who participated in the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Project in 2021-2022 as mentees (W. Dobbs, personal communication, January 15, 2022). This was an important starting point in purposeful participant selection in line with a representative community related to the focus of this study, given it is the main group of its kind in the state.

Participant Selection

Within the state of Idaho, there were 24 female superintendents leading districts during the time study parameters. The initial contact for the data collection occurred via digital survey soliciting participation in the study sent by email to the female superintendents currently serving in Idaho to elicit interested individuals. Selection was limited to superintendents whose gender identification is female, who are currently employed by a public school district in the state of Idaho, and who were willing and able to share their induction experiences with the researcher. Follow up contact occurred both via email and telephone call when a respondent agreed to participate. In addition, final follow up emails were sent to participants who did not respond, soliciting participation. Interviews were set up over the course of three months (June-August), at mutually agreed upon times and dates. Information about the purpose of the study and participant protection in line with IRB-approved measures was shared and participants were asked for their informed consent. In all, seven superintendents who met the selection criteria responded to and agreed to participate in the research study.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was through semi-structured personal interviews. In addition, follow-up correspondence, journaling, and memoing during data collection and analysis, consistent with a constant comparative approach, were additional data points used to track progress toward saturation. Data collection was structured to elicit authentic perceptions, understandings, and experiences of mentoring and female superintendents in the state of Idaho through interviews with seven participants using an IRB-approved protocol. Adherence to these protocols allowed for theoretical saturation by uncovering that which is "*repeatedly* being present in each interview…or by being significantly absent" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 420, original emphasis).

Interviews

The main instrument for data collection in this study was a structured and approved interview as outlined in the *Interview Protocol* (see Appendix D). The protocol included questions and follow up

probes that elicited perceptions and experiences from the participants in the sample pool that met the purposeful selection criteria (i.e., female superintendents in Idaho). The interviews were designed to understand the influence of the educators' experiences (Lichtman, 2011), the meaning that is constructed from those experiences (Crotty, 1998), and the wider implications of lived experience toward the exposition of an embedded grounded theory model (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). While the interview questions were prepared in advance (see Appendix D), the interview process was also fluid enough to allow the participant to fully express her experiences (Gibbs, 2007). Finding a balance between preparation and authenticity was achieved using a semi-structured interview format. A semi-structured interview format allows the balance between prepared questions and freedom to let the interviewee elaborate (Silverman, 2011), as well as giving the researcher freedom to seek greater understanding through clarifying probes. This approach provided the reflexivity necessary to authentically generate a model informed by grounded theory (Oleson, 2007).

Why Interview Research

Using interviews as the primary form of data collection allowed the researcher to enter a dialogue with the respondents. This dialogue allowed trust and camaraderie to develop and allowed the researcher to explore perceptions, experiences, and opinions in a personal and thorough manner (Johnson, 2002; Warren, 2002). Interviews also allowed the researcher to enter into the experience of the participant; through the reflexivity of an interview, the researcher "rejects reliance on value-free objectivity and foregrounds instead the relationship of researcher and participant in which the participant is seen as gazing back at the researcher" (Oleson, 2007, p. 425).

The interview process was specifically appropriate for grounded theory-informed research because it allowed the researcher to not only gather data, but enter into to a constructive relationship with the participant(s) to build experience, knowledge, and theory utilizing themes, ideas, ideals, and the lived expertise shared by the participants. It was critical to the process that the interviewer was fully cognizant of her own position in the research and identified with three key areas of reflexivity:

1. "Full explanation of how analytic and practical issues were handled;
2. Examination of the researcher's own background and its influences on the research; and
3. Reflections on the researcher's own emotions, worries, feelings" (Oleson, 2007, p. 423).

Researcher Positionality

The interviewer has an ethical responsibility to not only carefully construct an interview process that follows the rigor of the interview research stages, but that works to protect participants in every possible manner (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Warren, 2012). First, it is critical that interviewers participate in a process called epoche (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Epoche, or researcher positionality, occurs when the researcher "explores his or her own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). The researcher worked to identify and acknowledge any biases, preconceptions, and presumptions to ensure that the interview process proceeded fairly and ethically because these preexisting positions can influence interviews and data analysis (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Warren, 2012). This was done through reflection, journaling, and constant review of prejudices, preconceptions, and preferences. Throughout collection, data was constantly analyzed and reviewed with reflexivity and reflection; this was critical for the development of the grounded theory-informed model (Birks, et. al, 2019).

The researcher participated in reflective journaling and memoing throughout this process, not only to identify preconceptions and/or biases, but also to become more thoroughly imbedded in the research process. This genuine reflexivity is "the manner and extent to which the researchers present themselves as imbedded in the research situation and process" (Oleson, 2007, p. 423). Together reflective journaling, memoing, and any follow-up contact with participants which occurred during and after coding ensured the accuracy of themes, depth of inquiry, and reaching of saturation, i.e., after and through constant comparative analysis (Chun Tie et al., 2019). This process not only focused the researcher, it allowed the participants to clarify, approve, and analyze their own participation and its written representation in the context of the study.

Interviews were digitally recorded and securely stored. This included storage on the University of Idaho's OneDrive service, on OtterAI's platform, and on the Zoom digital platform (also through the University of Idaho). Geography required that all interviews were conducted via the online meeting platform, Zoom. Zoom has both transcription and recording features, which allowed the researcher to revisit all conversations with accuracy. Otter AI was utilized for transcription purposes. A copy of the transcription was made available to each interview participant.

Follow-up contact via email allowed participants to review their interview transcript for accuracy and authenticity to confirm their intended meanings and perceptions, as well as clarify, elaborate, or

reconsider any part of their previous responses consistent with constructionist grounded theory. This follow-up step assured the interview transcripts represented the participants' experiences, opinions, and perceptions as accurately and authentically as possible. Participants were provided with their individual "write ups" after data analysis, allowing them to experience the researcher's understanding and positionality from their input. They were invited to—and several responded to this invitation—clarify any issues, delve deeper into any themes, or share if any part of the interview was "off limits" or misrepresented in the writing. They were then provided an updated version for approval before any data was utilized in the study.

Data Analysis

After each interview was conducted and data transcription from Otter AI was "cleaned up," the transcripts were initially analyzed using open or initial coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). This first coding process allowed the researcher to begin the process of "fracturing the data" through comparisons, contrasts, similarities, differences, and patterns revealed through the collected data (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 4). During this initial stage, categories began to emerge; this was the coding that started to "inform the 'developing theory'" of the study (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 5). Following initial coding, axial coding was used, to elaborate upon, clarify, and/or dismiss the emergent themes from the open coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Once themes were revealed through the coding process, a final follow-up contact with the interview participants via email ensured the themes and representations of participants' ideas were accurately captured and communicated.; this is where participants could read their individual "write ups" and how their data was represented thematically. Finally, using the themes that were identified, theoretical coding, "the final culminating stage toward achieving a GT" with the purpose of "integrat[ing] the substantive theory" tells the story of female superintendents in the state of Idaho and their experiences with (or without) mentoring as an induction tool (Tie et al., 2019, p. 6). All transcripts, codes, and follow-up transcripts were kept in a secured format to protect the identities of the participants. All information remained confidential, pseudonyms were created through randomizing software and consistently used, and identifying details were masked. Theoretical memos (Birks et al., 2019) as well as reflective journaling were used to not only develop theory but to acknowledge and account for the researcher's experiences and/or biases.

Credibility & Validation

Research credibility came from several accepted processes and criterion promulgated by prestigious qualitative researchers, including Cresswell (2013) and Straus and Corbin (1990). While there are several mechanisms available to researchers, Cresswell (2013) has recommended researchers utilize at least two of the specific mechanisms that promote research credibility. This study employed the five mechanisms described below:

- Data saturation/prolonged engagement: when the data collected is showing no new perspective or criterion on which to construct theory (or, in this case, a theoretical model).
- Triangulation: the researcher "make(s) use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" (Cresswell, 2013, p. 252), placing the research into a larger body of critical theory.
- Clarifying researcher bias: clearly understanding, recognizing, and reporting biases, preconceptions, experiences, and/or any factor that may influence data coding.
- Member checking: giving voice beyond the interview process to participants, thus the theory will have a solid, verifiable foundation on which to build.
- Rich, thick description: to immerse both the researcher and the reader into the experience and the subsequent theory that arises from the data.

Beyond ensuring credibility in process, procedure, coding, and writing, the researcher used specific criteria for validating her work; Corbin and Strauss (1990) have given the following criteria for validating the study:

1. Sample selection: what grounds and rationale?
2. Major categories: how are they revealed and identified?
3. Are there similarities or common themes in the categories?
4. How did conceptual framework guide the data sampling; was there alignment?
5. How did the original research questions relate to the conceptual framework and the resulting categories?
6. Did the questions align to the identified categories? If not, why not?
7. How was the analysis conducted? (Corbin & Strauss, 1990)

"If a grounded theory researcher provides this information, readers can use these criteria to assess the adequacy of the researcher's complex coding procedure" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 425). These

were utilized by the researcher to validate the conclusions of this study. Each of the seven steps have been addressed throughout the course of the research to ensure validity.

Summary

Data gathering through an introductory survey and subsequent interviews, transcription, coding, and a rigorous process of validation, combined with best practices in qualitative research were utilized to ensure the subsequent theory is one that contributes accurate and reliable new knowledge to the field of educational leadership. Rigor, attention to detail, and fidelity to the process guided the researcher throughout this process.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter tells the stories of seven strong, independent women who are leading districts across the state of Idaho. Their stories, which evolved into themes through careful analysis, share commonalities, differences, and a variety of perceptions about leadership in Idaho, particularly the induction plan for women in the superintendency. Each journey is as unique as its owner, and yet the similarities—revealed through thematic organization.

First, the overarching theme, Different Paths to Leadership, is shared by describing each participant's unique journey before describing four subthemes that emerged through the data analysis process: Self-Advocacy; Women and the Superintendency: Gender Specific Concerns; and Perceptions of Women by Women in Leadership. Rooted in constructionism (Crotty, 1998), the importance of the stories told by these leaders cannot be overstated; each story, each experience, and each lesson converged to create new theory and knowledge for future generations of leaders in Idaho.

Different Paths to Leadership

The first major theme is evident in the participants' career paths. Of the seven superintendents interviewed (*Ilaria, Cecilia, Ashtyn, Jenny, Ismene, Lena and, Vera* —pseudonyms), only one started her career with any sort of administrative goal in mind. One other participant did not even set out to be a teacher; she started her academic career pursuing a computer science degree and then changed her major to accounting before considering a career in secondary mathematics. The earliest departure from the classroom was after three years of teaching, moving not to administration but to pursue a counseling degree. Yet another participant, seeking a higher degree, eschewed administration and focused on curriculum and instruction. The road to the Superintendency was not straight or streamlined for these women. They all forged their leadership path in different ways.

Linearly, the path to the Superintendency is a stereotypical rise through levels of authority in the school system. A common stereotype might show a teacher moving to building level administration (vice-principal or principal), and then from building level administration to the District Office (a Director, Assistant, or Superintendency role). The participants in this study all found their way to leadership on different paths. Though each path varies in timeline and direction, it is important to consider these paths to understand each participant's individual experiences and expectations of leadership.

Ilaria

Ilaria went to college in the early 1980s, hoping to major first in computer science and then in economics. In both instances, she realized that the lifestyle and career commitments were not conducive to the life she hoped to build. On the suggestion of her mother, she put her mathematics tendencies to use and became a certified secondary math teacher. She taught in a small Idaho school for over 20 years before moving into part-time administration in the same building. In order to pursue administration full time, she moved to a new state and served as both elementary principal and superintendent. After six years out of state, she moved back to Idaho to lead the district where she still serves as not only Superintendent but also Director of Federal Programs (Ilaria, personal communication, June 22, 2022).

Cecilia

Cecilia self-deprecatingly joked that she graduated "a million years ago and I just started teaching" (personal communication, June 28, 2022). She taught several different elementary grades. Her master's degree was in curriculum and instruction, and she insists that she "didn't ever plan on being a principal." In fact, she "became a principal, kind of by default." By this, she shared her story of being moved to an office position to support administration and then deciding that "if I'm going to be in the office, I'm going to get the nine credits that I need to get an admin degree on top of the curriculum." She was soon given a position as a vice principal, where she served for 6-7 years, and then moved to the principalship. She casually noted that "somewhere in there" she earned her Education Specialist. After several years as principal, she was given an opportunity to open a brand-new school in a district. Four years later, she moved to the district office as an assistant Superintendent and finally moved into the Superintendency. She describes herself as "just sassy enough that everyone I knew was getting their masters in administration, and I thought…I need one more thing to stand out…it worked out!"

Ashtyn

One of the few participants with out-of-state experience, Ashtyn both went to college and started her career in the midwest. Her first teaching experience has stayed with her due to the "horrendous" number of preps her "administrator put on me." She had always wanted to move to Idaho, and found that opportunity four years after she started teaching. In Idaho, she taught in several districts for a total of 23 years before she was tapped to take over for an administrator who left mid-year. After her first principalship, lasting 2.5 years, she moved to yet another Idaho district to serve as

Superintendent. She describes her transition from teaching to administration as “a confederacy of dunces,” as she took time away from teaching, went back to school, and worked on her administrative credential nearly simultaneously (Ashtyn, personal communication, June 28, 2022)

Jenny

Jenny comes from a family of educators and remembers fondly spending time in her father’s classroom in Kindergarten, waiting for her mother to be able to pick her up from school. College was an expectation, and Jenny’s plan was always to go into administration. Her degree was in elementary education with an emphasis in K-12 reading and a secondary health endorsement. She has ample experience, teaching in second grade, first grade, middle school, and high school. After teaching for approximately 19 years, she became an elementary principal and three years later, she stepped into the Superintendency. In her situation, the district cut the administrative FTEs down by one and she was able to split her elementary principalship with the superintendency (Jenny, personal communication, June 28, 2022).

Ismene

Ismene was in her 28th year of education when interviewed. She started her educational career as a paraprofessional. She went to school to become a teacher, and she taught in the same district where she served as a paraprofessional. She taught secondary math and was very active in the local teachers’ association. She had the trust of her administrators, often stepping in to lead meetings in their absence. She was hired and encouraged by a female superintendent to get her advanced degree. She was not interested in administration until she was approached by the district to share the superintendent position with another in-district teacher. The district had experienced a lot of turnover and the two teachers had the skills to complement one another’s strengths in a leadership role. Ismene was in charge of finances at the district level for seven years before moving to her current role as the district’s sole superintendent (Ismene, personal communication, July 6, 2022).

Lena

Lena’s story is one of mentorship from one level of educational responsibility to the next. She started her career at a private school in the early 1990s. She spent some time out of state teaching choir and music; when her family moved to Idaho, she taught English at two different high schools. She was in one district for 20 years and relates that “during all that time, you know, I had some mentors and leaders who started seeing things in me that I didn’t see in myself.” She went on to describe how her

final principal as a high school teacher "mentored me right into the principalship." She finished her administrative degree while teaching and became an assistant principal at her district's middle school. She was there for five years before being "mentored" into the Curriculum Director position by the Superintendent. A college professor reached out and told her, "Hey, I think you would make a good superintendent," and Lena decided that she could see herself in the role. After a series of applications, some ending in disappointment, she was hired as a district superintendent (Lena, personal communication, July 14, 2022).

Vera

Accepting a teaching job right out of college, Vera soon wanted to do more to help students. She taught third grade for three years while simultaneously earning her master's degree in counseling. She reduced her employment to part time when she became a mother, and used this time to not only raise her family but to get her administrative degree, as well. Her first administrative position was as a vice principal, followed quickly by an 18-year principal role. She describes her desire to become a superintendent as an "itch to do something different." She was also honest in sharing that "the money was better than in the classroom." She also waited "until all of my own kids were out of the house growing up, you know, out of the house before I made another move to the superintendency."

It is interesting to note that a variety of experiences, skills, intentions, and focuses all led these women to the District Office, and further, to the helm of the School District itself. It underscores the fact that no journey is the same—underscoring perceptions and perspectives are informed by individual experience (Crotty, 1998). It is the compilation of this study's participant experiences that tell the story of the women leading Idaho's school district.

The next section describes the following four sub-themes which emerged from data analysis:

- Self-Advocacy & Confidence in Leadership
- State & Regional Support Opportunities and Efficacy
- Women's Concerns (i.e., Family, Motherhood, Women helping Women)
- and Perceptions of and by Women in Leadership

Self-Advocacy & Confidence in Leadership Induction Years

Although Idaho has a Superintendent Mentoring Network, it is not a requirement nor is it a guaranteed source of support for new superintendents. Each superintendent that was interviewed for

this project revealed the necessity of self-advocacy as an induction strategy for new superintendents as they begin their careers because, “you don’t know what you need. You just don’t” (Ashtyn, personal communication, June 28, 2022). Research supports this view: new administrators are at a disadvantage with a lack of experiential knowledge (Daresh, 2001b) as they enter their new roles and assume new responsibilities.

For the seven participants, self-advocacy assisted their development of confidence in the district leadership role and started immediately upon assuming the role of new superintendent. Proactively meeting members of the community, identifying “movers and shakers” in the district through conversations with school boards and district office staff, meeting with administrators soon upon arriving, and generally building relationships with individuals who have insight, concern, and influence within each individual district was something most participants shared. Such meetings allowed participants to better understand their district’s priorities and vision quickly.

Beyond proactively meeting with district stakeholders, many participants shared how finding a trustworthy mentor lies mostly in the hands of the superintendent, not the district or the state necessitating a high degree of self-advocacy. Mentors were mostly informal and ran the gamut from regional superintendent groups to a variety of state programs that connect leaders to individuals with whom the participants were familiar and who agreed to unpaid, informal mentoring relationships. While there was a high degree of willingness to serve as mentors and be mentored, it became evident that mentoring was largely a relationship that was driven by the protégé’s self-advocacy skills. What was universal was the fact that the impetus to develop these relationships lies in the self-advocacy of the superintendents themselves.

Due to the loneliness and self-doubt that can plague leaders inherent in the design of the institutional hierarchy and its rules, leaving superintendents separated and isolated from many forms of support within the organization, a sentiment shared by many participants, developing and utilizing skills of self-advocacy is critical for a new superintendent.

> The superintendency is a lonely job, and it is very lonely because you’re the only one in your district…and…everybody in the district, you’re a supervisor to them…so really get to know your area superintendents. If there’s a local group, you need to be involved in it, because they know what you’re going through. (Ilaria, personal communication, June 22, 2022)

Jenny echoed this sentiment, “Admitting that you need help is not a weakness; it is a leadership strength. “It can be pretty lonely at times…and it’s important to be strong enough to be vulnerable

and ask for help" (personal communication, June 28, 2022), The loneliness experienced by superintendents can be exacerbated by the "mystique" of the superintendent's office and a general misunderstanding of the role, making self-advocacy that much more important. Ismene, too shared how she was very cognizant of the importance of self-advocacy and confidence in her leadership role when she stated:

> I think from a female perspective, I think you have to be sure of yourself. Be able to know when you don't know an answer and be strong enough to say 'I don't know'…I think that this is a crucial piece of who you have to be, willing to be vulnerable…I think, as a female, we often don't want to be perceived as not knowledgeable if we've gotten this job. (personal communication, July 6, 2022)

The journey toward building community trust requires self-advocacy and communication in both knowledge and vision—and the ability to focus on making change. Vera emphasizes this, saying, "I'll point out if something's not being done correctly…I was not afraid to write people up for things" (Vera, personal communication, July 21, 2022) in her principalship; this confidence has continued to the superintendency. Interestingly, she shared that "the further up you go, the harder it is to make systemic change…and you think, oh well, they're at the top, they can make this happen, but it is not that easy" (Vera, personal communication, July 21, 2022). Communication, driven by confidence and self-advocacy, drives the superintendent's ability to realize her vision through sustainable systemic change.

Having the ability to think ahead to things that are outside of the superintendent's control and yet will impact the school and to build capacity within the school system with confidence and leadership; "to be able to be that outside support for them, to be able to make changes…to feel like somebody's advocating for them" is especially critical to students: "If there's a problem, let's figure out what it is and figure out how to solve it and we move on. Kids don't have time to lose" (Cecilia, personal communication, June 28, 2022). This all requires independence, self-advocacy, and a firm understanding of the school, the system, the needs, and the capacity of a district in order for a new superintendent to find success.

For a new superintendent to leverage the capacity of a district, communication and confidence are significant self-advocacy elements. Critical advice from Ashtyn emphasizes the importance of self-advocacy and communication: "I would say, be very clear about what you want. You know, I want this job…Act like a man because I think so often women are a little bit more humble or bashful."

Similarly, she offered, "whether it's writing a newsletter or…asking for what I need," about the importance of clear communication related to self-advocacy early in the superintendency (personal communication, June 28, 2022).

Importance of Formalized Support (State & Regional) to Build Trust

When interviewed, all superintendents in this study emphasized the importance of the support that they received regionally from colleagues, as well as through local and state initiatives for leaders. This section will briefly describe their experiences with formalized systems of support within the state of Idaho.

In many of the interviews, the superintendents credit the Idaho State Department of Education with providing useful initial induction training during the summer they begin their contracts. In addition, superintendents credit the Idaho Association of School Administrators (IASA) summer conference for being a place to network with new superintendents and starting a cohort group that met a few times during the year. Vera shared that she was "surrounded by a lot of support. The State Department is great…I always feel like they're helpful and want to help…offer you any sort of support or opportunity" (Vera, personal communication, July 21, 2022). Other groups that were credited during interviews as being particularly helpful included the Idaho Principals' Network (for building relationships that endure to the superintendency as well as for mentorship), the Capacity Builders initiative, the Idaho Rural Education Association, and Project Leadership. The Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Program was also mentioned as a positive opportunity.

Even more than these specific programs, however, the participants relied heavily on the relationships and supports developed through regular regional superintendent meetings. Unanimously, the leaders shared the strength of these meetings and the relationships that are built through the crucible of shared geography, district size, and similar geopolitical situations. Ilaria shared the situation by bluntly describing:

> Our regional superintendents group, that's probably where most of the support came from, because…you can start an email thread or, 'Hey, this is what I've got going on. What do you guys do?' Almost immediately, there [are] 8 or 10 responses. So that's the easiest way to get questions answered, is just to send an email out to the area superintendents and they'll respond right away. (Ilaria, personal communication, June 22, 2022)

Cecilia similarly called the superintendency a “fight” unless you’re with a group like [the regional superintendents]. All of us get together and are pretty formidable humans at one time” (Cecilia, personal communication, June 28, 2022). This illustrates the power and efficacy of this type of group.

Within the regional superintendency groups, it is evident through the data that trust is rapidly established and is a hallmark of the groups’ success. COVID-19 has been a boon to the structure of these meetings, thanks to the proliferation and availability of distance meeting software, such as Zoom or Google Meet. Meetings that once called a superintendent away physically or that were unreachable due to inclement weather have now become as easy as a click of the mouse on ubiquitous technology. In addition, meetings could be scheduled as needed, rather than on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Jenny shared that the social aspect of these meetings is equally as important as the business because they build relationships and trust among the leaders (personal communication, June 28, 2022).

A strong relationship of trust and shared understanding is an important facet of the induction experiences of the participants. Creating structure and support for women new to the superintendency was a critical piece of induction and future success as a district level administrator in Idaho’s school systems. However, this can hold true for superintendents of all genders; the participants shared many gender-specific concerns with the researcher and how leadership has impacted them differently than, perhaps, their male counterparts who outnumber them in the state of Idaho.

Women & the Superintendency: Gender-specific Concerns

The superintendency is ideally a position that is open to any individual with appropriate training, certification, leadership skills, and district support. However, though both men and women lead districts in the state of Idaho, there are specific concerns that follow a woman’s path to the superintendency. One very significant concern shared by most participants was that of motherhood and family. Another was the phenomenon of women supporting women through the ranks of leadership within the state. These two aspects of the theme, at first glance, may seem disparate. However, they emerged intertwined, providing a glimpse into the very gender-specific concerns that women face in educational leadership, career building, and the path to the superintendency. Of the superintendents interviewed, only one did not provide any comments related to these concerns.

Family & Motherhood

Family and motherhood figured significantly into the participants' career decisions and choices. For example, several individuals made the comment that they would not pursue any type of superintendency until their children were out of the house. Another mentioned the fact that many women are constrained by the areas where their husbands can find work, which can be difficult since most women superintendents are hired first by smaller districts where they can gain experience. One superintendent works alongside her spouse who is a contractor and has helped her to make significant facilities and structural progress in her district. Yet another participant was not even approached as a potential leader until a life-changing event rocked her family; the timing was interesting when viewed in connection to her personal life and needs. Even the superintendents who did not cite their own children as a factor, or did not have children of their own, mention that the motherhood factor is significant to women who want to take the courses, complete internships, and assume the type of all-consuming job that the superintendency often is. Ashtyn bluntly offered:

> I think a lot of times, women look at the role of principal or superintendent and go, 'No. I am not that stupid. I'm happy. I'm happy with the responsibilities I have right now. I have family. I want to do other things. I don't want to be stressed. I don't want that kind of responsibility.' I think that might be part of it. (personal communication, June 28, 2022)

Moving from teaching to leadership—and even from building leadership to district leadership—is another factor that participants shared where family is a significant concern. One participant shared a serious reservation about moving into leadership: teachers enjoy a great deal of protection, from continuing contracts to union representation and support. What participants offered illustrated the fact that, the protections that surround teachers are gone at the district leadership level, and women must be very sure that their paths do not endanger job security for their family's safety. For example, one superintendent shared that her salary negotiations were influenced by her family; the board wanted to know how much money her husband made because they couldn't offer her a salary that was greater than her husband's.

Women Connecting with Women

This theme arose throughout the discussions and interviews and shows the importance of informal, same-gender connection in the educational workplace. While several participants shared the story of women helping them achieve their leadership goals, others shared their intentions and successes in mentoring new leaders to careers in administration. One superintendent specifically credited the

intervention of other strong, female leaders for her current leadership position: “I never would have interviewed for this job if [female colleague] hadn’t said, ‘Hey, [district] needs a superintendent’” (Ashtyn, personal communication, June 28, 2022). One specific story stands out, however, in this theme; it was experienced by Lena in her first year of the superintendency (personal communication, July 14, 2022).

Lena shared her journey through a history of female mentors who had influenced her career, from a principal who “mentored me right into the principalship” culminating in a professor telling her that she would be a good superintendent. She discovered that having women supporting women was important in her role when her Job-Alike Mentor in the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring program was a man and they “didn’t connect as much as I would have liked to with a mentor” (Lena, personal communication, July 14, 2022):

> I really need someone who is …maybe a woman. I just need to know how to navigate some things as a woman because that has…some different, unintended, really weird things that sometimes happen…some of those dynamics are still just very interesting and navigating the waters…would help things move along. (Lena, personal communication, July 14, 2022)

When recounting moments of unintended weirdness—Lena shared a story of the community mistaking the board chair for her husband and not understanding that she was the superintendent explicating her thoughts about why having a more experienced, female leader would be beneficial to a new female superintendent (personal communication, July 14, 2022).

Being Treated Differently and Double Standards: Self Perceptions

Many of the participants interviewed discussed perceptions of women in leadership that they have encountered through their careers which equated to being treated differently than their male counterparts surfacing the notion of double standards. This surfaced as external, but it was also often expressed by participants as internal. In addition, the perceptions that women hold about leadership, its rewards, its challenges, and its changes are explored through the participants’ thoughts. This section compiles their thoughts and experiences encompassing local and personal perceptions of women and by women in leadership positions.

One very prominent perception that women in leadership shared was their own perception of themselves as crisis managers. More than one participant shared that she is a “rule follower” and that angry parents and patrons cause great stress and angst. They recognized a need to be authoritative and

firm, but had to develop a persona with which they were comfortable in doing so. Their perceptions of themselves as leaders had to grow and change as they learned to be the authority in the district and to trust themselves in times of conflict and upheaval.

Another perception that several participants shared was from the community recognizing a woman as the superintendent, whether it was because she was preceded by a well-known male or because she was "displaced" as the authority figure by her husband or another male in her company. The leaders shared that they had to put extra effort into being visible in the community, not only as instructional leaders for their teams, but to be recognized as the district's superintendent by the general population. As one participant mused, communities are used to seeing a man as the superintendent. This held true whether the superintendent was new to the district or was a familiar face to the town and community.

The stereotype of the male superintendency leads to another perception to which women fall prey: that one female leader defines them all. Vera shared the hiring biases she faced when searching for a superintendent role:

> he told me that they'd had a bad experience with a female superintendent and they would never hire another one. Therefore, they wouldn't even interview females. And then that same was said in another school district, that they will only hire male administrators. (Vera, personal communication, July 21, 2022)

Lena also shared her experiences of hiring bias in Idaho: "there were a number of times that, if I made it to a level when I was interested in interviewing and there was a male person, the male person got [the job]" (Lena, personal communication, July 14, 2022)

A final thought shared by several participants about women in leadership is specific to Idaho and its conservative nature. "Women in power are not always viewed as positive…and in certain parts of the state there's a very strong religion that wants to leave [women] home, more so than out in the workforce" (Ismene, personal communication, July 6, 2022). She states that men and women have different mentalities when entering leadership and emphasizes that women need to be confident and "sure of yourself. Be able to know when you don't know an answer and be strong enough to say, 'I don't know.'…I think that is a crucial piece of who you have to be—willing to be vulnerable." This vulnerability is a perception of leadership that may deter women from the path to leadership. Lena saw this bias dependent upon different areas of the state. "There were a number of times that, if I made it to a level where I was interested in interviewing and there was a male person, the male person got [the job]" (Lena, personal communication, July 14, 2022). She credited the bias as unconscious,

and hoped that women will step up to discredit the bias by "do[ing] a good job as a leader. I think that is just the only really way to change it" (Lena, personal communication, July 14, 2022).

Despite the perceptions of participants varying widely, they all shared different levels of confrontation, pushback, bias and more. What was consistent, however, was that the perceptions of these women in leadership were different than those of men in leadership and that they had to deliberately compensate for these perceptions as they pursued leadership positions and led districts.

Conclusion

The women who participated in this study shared a wealth of experience and perspective providing the data necessary to inform the model shared in the next section. They were open and candid—and very willing to share whatever expertise or advice they could to anyone aspiring to understand or undertake the superintendency. The themes that were drawn from data were significant to each individual superintendent, and yet information can be extrapolated that is applicable to all educational leaders, both as they transition to leadership and as they lead schools and districts. The following chapter will share the grounded theory inspired model that evolved, and conclusions drawn through the analysis of data, and will answer the study's research questions.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This section will construct a grounded theory-based model that evolved from the data themes as well as share how this model can influence educational leadership practice in the future by directly addressing women's needs for leadership induction. As revealed in the review of literature, mentoring for administrators can reduce isolation, build self-advocacy, and strengthen confidence; this was also revealed in the study data, as well. The study participants clearly valued other women in leadership positions, their experiences, their perspectives, their advice, and their advocacy. Stories like Lena's (her career influenced by a string of strong female mentors) show the specific needs that a female superintendent may have while navigating social situations and stereotypical assumptions. The concerns of family, motherhood, and social norms affect female leaders, overtly and subtly, as they strive to fulfil their leadership roles and define their leadership styles.

The research questions posed in this study:

1. What is the experience of female administrators who have had mentors?
2. To what degree are perceptions about mentoring experiences attributable to gender pairings (same gender, mixed gender)?
3. How do different experiences influence perceptions of mentoring efficacy?
4. Does mentoring help female administrators navigate modern expectations of school leadership and leadership styles?

By answering these questions, a theoretical model of how to better support new female superintendents is shared, grounded by the perceptions revealed by study participants about their experiences.

What is the Experience of Female Administrators who have had Mentors?

Each participant was asked about mentoring; mentors they had, the importance of mentoring, and what they thought was necessary for mentoring to be effective at the superintendent's level of experience, education, and expectation. All of the superintendents interviewed had mentoring experiences to share, with varying degrees of structure, formality, accountability, and efficacy. All of the participants indicated clearly that mentoring was important. Regardless of their experiences, successes or struggles with mentoring relationships, and/oryears on the job—mentoring is seen by these women as a critical piece of induction to the role of the superintendent. Participants used words like "necessary," and "absolutely vital" when describing mentoring relationships; the other word used

consistently with mentoring relationships was “trust.” Trust was the overwhelming characteristic that shared by participants which they linked to a successful mentoring relationship at the superintendent’s level of leadership. It was not the only characteristic that defines success, but it was the characteristic that unanimously evolved from the participants’ experiences and needs.

The participants’ experiences in mentoring varied in structure and success of mentoring; these experiences shared some key elements of what should be in a successful mentoring relationship based on both highly productive and more challenging mentoring relationships. The first thing that emerged from the data was the idea that a mentoring relationship should be structured. Structure, according to the participants, means that the mentor and protégé should have scheduled times to meet that are sacred and uninterrupted. Participants felt these collaborations should be calendared in advance, held regularly, and planned appropriately for the time of year, upcoming expectations, and time available. Some participants told of mentors who honored the collaboration time but had no relevant topics of discussion. Other participants had mentors who were skilled in observation and could pick out relevant questions from observations. Yet another participant had a formal mentoring program that answered pressing questions a month after the deadline had passed. Together these insights highlight time and content are critical to mentoring’s success. Not all mentoring experiences are equal—and not all are useful. Mentoring time has to be a priority and treated as such by the mentor and the protégé. “It’s not a luxury and it’s not a thrill. It’s just a really important connection” (Ashtyn, June 28, 2022).

The next criterion that the participants shared was the time that mentoring takes, coupled with the willingness to not only mentor, but for the protégé to learn from the mentor. Why was time important to participants? To them, time was critical due to the level of trust that superintendents must cultivate with a mentor; the type of confidentiality and the political nature of the superintendent role necessitated significant trust and relationship-building. This requires dedicated time. Time is in short supply for most educational leaders, and more so for superintendents. Creating valuable time, time that can be used to build relationships, time that is sacrosanct, is a barrier to mentoring programs. When this can be prioritized, the mentoring relationship has a better chance to flourish.

The participants in this study had mentors assigned, had found their own mentors, had negotiated to be a part of the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Program, and more. There was no consistency in the success of the mentoring relationship based on the way the relationship was formed. Those relationships formed through prior experience and collegiality were universally successful; however, this was not the only strategy that Idaho’s female superintendents had found to seek out induction

support. Several superintendents made use of Department of Education programs to make connections with colleagues and build mentoring relationships. Others followed defined programs (one in another state) to varying degrees of satisfaction. The insights from the data illustrate that the relationship between mentor and protégé is a primary factor impacting mentoring success.

"Once I develop those relationships, they've been great as far as if I reach out" (Vera, July 21, 2022). Finally, it's important for mentors to remember that new superintendents cannot be the only ones who take the lead in the relationship. The mentor should reach out to the protégé, offer support and understanding, and be there to take some of the burden from the new superintendent, not add to it by waiting for the protégé to seek help. Mentors need to determine the individual needs of the protégé and work to help fulfill those induction needs. This final piece solidifies the successful mentoring relationship.

While the experiences were generally positive, there were many suggestions for improvement and success that the participants shared. The shared stories ran the gamut from participants finding their own mentors to one participant who participated in a less-than-helpful state-run mentoring program. From these experiences, the following suggestions for mentoring efficacy can be determined:

- Mentor/protégé pairing success is highly determined by the level of **trust** and relationship-building that can occur. An **appropriate** mentor/protégé **match** is integral to success. The confidentiality and gravity of decisions and situations in the superintendents' purview requires mentorship where absolute confidence and trust abounds.
- Relationship-building requires **time** and opportunity. The time reserved for mentoring must be scheduled and treated as sacrosanct; it cannot be brushed aside for convenience or even emergent situations. This time is not a luxury; it is and should be treated as a necessity.
- Successful mentoring should be **structured**. This means that topics should be prepared in advance and the mentor should lead the meetings and/or interactions; however, mentoring meeting agendas need to be co-designed with mentees in order to identify how best to use emergent issues faced by mentees as skill and competency building opportunities. Agenda topics should be timely and important—and should be addressed well in advance of any deadlines or expectations.

These conditions are the necessary elements which combined form a theoretical model about how best to support new female superintendents as shown in Figure 1.

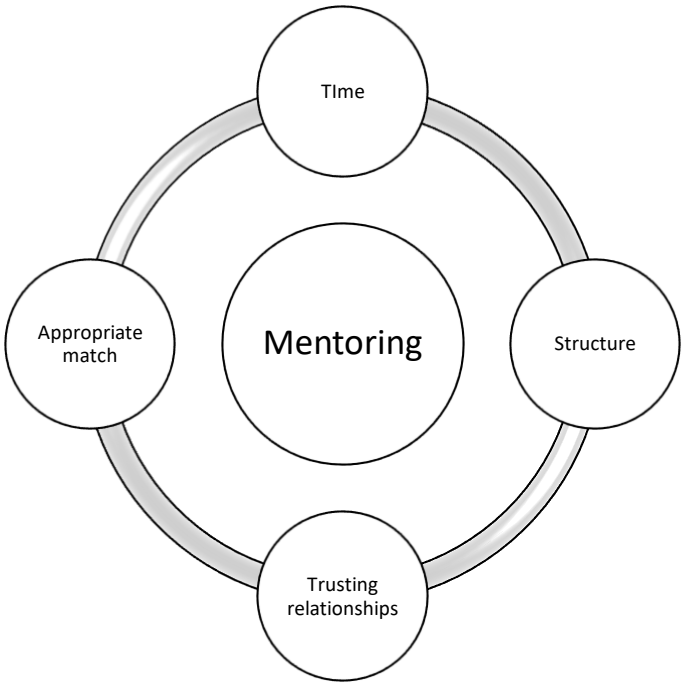

Figure 1 Elements of successful mentoring: A necessary induction support

All of the participants indicated that mentoring is absolutely critical to the success of female superintendents in the state of Idaho. Through their experiences, they were able to share the conditions that would bring the most power to an already critical relationship for educational leaders.

To what Degree are Perceptions about Mentoring Experiences attributable to Gender Pairings (Same Gender, Mixed Gender)?

The participants rarely commented upon the efficacy of one gender over another; only one participant specifically related her story of asking for a female mentor to replace a male mentor and shared her reasoning. Other participants, however, told of seeking mentors who were female leaders they held in high esteem, with whom they had worked, and/or whose leadership style worked well with their own. Women often sought other women to be their mentors, their resources, their go-to helpers. This echoes research done by Dunbar & Kinnersley (2011) and Korver (2021), which found no statistical difference in gender pairings for mentoring situations. However, the psychological and perceptive support that the participants felt with female leaders echoes Kark et. al's (2012) assertion that same-gender pairings can be more supportive.

This indicates the probable positive influence that female leaders can have on the next generations of educational leadership in Idaho; however further research discussed in the next chapter is needed, thus this aspect is not included in the theoretical model shared (see Figure 1).

How do different experiences influence perceptions of mentoring efficacy?

Different experiences shape the perceptions that leaders have of mentoring efficacy; this is a constructionist phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). A good experience leads to a good perception. A mediocre experience tends to subdue perceptions, but still, mentoring was seen as a good form of induction. Even poor experiences fail to completely convince leaders that mentoring is poor professional development; however, these poor experiences do temper the enthusiasm with which leaders in this study recommend structured mentoring programs.

Even with different experiences, the portion of mentoring that rings true with all of the participants was the importance of a professional, trustworthy relationship where a superintendent can turn for advice, support, and even venting. Confidentiality, safety, and understanding are all aspects of a collegial relationship that new superintendents are seeking; the addition of a mentoring element adds to the efficacy. The female superintendents in this study often sought out leaders whose philosophies and leadership styles were similar to their own; these were characteristics that led them to believe that the mentoring relationship would be fruitful. Because of the unique needs of women in leadership, it is important that women empower other women who are pursuing similar interests and opportunities.

The office of the Superintendent "reflects back the culture" of the school district and the school (Ashtyn, June 28, 2022). Her sentiment supports the notion that the leader defines the culture and must support words with actions. Mentoring can foster this type of instructional leadership, which requires the development of trust and rapport, real and genuine knowledge of the administrators, teachers, and support staff in the district, and an understanding of the students—through data, yes, but also through a real and demonstrable relationship with the school community. High expectations for learning are non-negotiable; with those high expectations, then, must come support, encouragement, and opportunity from the superintendent.

A challenge in instructional leadership can be "communicating expectations. Being incredibly clear about what I expected for curriculum, what I expected for data usage, what I expected for walkthroughs, that kind of thing" (Ashtyn, June 28, 2022). These communication skills can be tested through appropriate goal setting and strategic thinking explicated by what Jenny shared as the most exciting part of instructional leadership for her as:

> [S]etting goals for the school overall and implementing those things, whether it was improving our reading and math scores, or setting up the interventions and supporting the staff by going in and observing what was happening in the classroom and to give insight or finding opportunities for staff professional developments and things like that; (June 28, 2022)

goals that must be communicated clearly and supported tangibly. Mentors can be good resources about how and when to communicate with the school community and beyond; they can also provide insight from experience to help guide the new superintendent as an instructional leader.

Not only must goals be communicated clearly, but there must also be expectations that school employees adhere to these goals—and any instructional, systemic, policy, or other rules that have been established by the leadership hierarchy in the district. Superintendents shared how shocked they are when teachers and staff are blatant in their disregard of instruction, expectation, policy, and rules. Especially poignant is their consternation regarding policy violation and how it impacts not only the teachers and staff, but the leader's credibility. This is a specific area that mentorship can help. Several participants shared how important follow-through was in developing the type of trust that led employees to "buy in" to their vision. Without follow-through, whether in deed or word, the leader loses credibility. The participants shared a variety of ways to ensure follow through—carrying notebooks, memos, emails, and more—but were adamant about the importance of the practice.

Vision in instructional leadership involves holding oneself accountable as much as, if not more so, than those who are following the superintendent's lead. It's important to build a team with a common goal and for the leader to be the face of that goal—trust, transparency, follow through, and relationships are critical to the instructional leadership that comes from the superintendent's office. To do this, mentoring can guide new superintendents, who may be shocked by the oxymoron that "The further up you go, the harder it is to make systemic change" (Vera, July 21, 2022). Never assume that people understand the intent of an action, never assume that one communique is enough, never assume anything; this was shared in nearly every interview. Communicate, be intentional, be deliberate, and then communicate some more; these are key strategies in instructional leadership. While many leadership studies emphasize transformational, servant, or even digital leadership styles, the data shows that educational leaders try to pinpoint their attention on instructional leadership and borrow characteristics from different leadership styles to ensure success.

Instructional leadership was a focus for all of the women interviewed. They stressed that if given the time and opportunity such a focus would be a much more overt part of their day. They all either

referred or alluded to the fact that every piece of what they do leads to instructional leadership in some form because every decision influences the teachers' abilities to instruct and for students to learn. Thus, this is an area of the superintendent's influence where mentoring can be particularly efficacious supported by the model illustrated in Figure 1.

Does Mentoring help Female Administrators navigate Modern Expectations of School Leadership and Leadership Styles?

A popular poster from Jamie Vollmer found in schools shows the disparity between the expectations of teachers in the early 1900s versus the expectations in the 2000s (*The ever increasing burden on America's public schools by Jamie Robert Vollmer*, n.d.). The changes in educational leadership likely have been exponentially greater than those in the classroom. While expectations continue to grow, the support offered to leaders often does not. Many times, districts and boards believe that, in hiring a superintendent, they are hiring the "expert," the leader who has all of the answers and will guide the district through the inevitable storms. Frequently, leaders in this study found themselves isolated and without recourse as they learned the intricacies of their new leadership position. The participants in this study believed that mentoring as an induction strategy can (and does) help new superintendents navigate new and modern expectations of leadership and leadership styles. For study participants this started when they started to navigate what both Ashtyn and Vera attributed as a "man's role." (June 28, 2022; July 21, 2022)

Historically those who fill the superintendent role are male. The participants in this study advocated that women need to act more like men if they are going to be taken seriously as leaders. Acting more like a man, for participants, started with the job application, as they shared how women need to go after what they want and suppress any feelings of unworthiness or impostor syndrome. This continues through to the negotiations of salary, handling stressful situations, and commanding respect from district employees. Clayton et. al (2013) and Daresh (2004) suggested that the existing pool of mentors may not be sufficient for today's administrators—especially if an appropriate match in leadership style and expectations cannot be made (Dunbar and Kinnersley, 2011). If this is true for female administrators and their pool of compatible mentor matches, combined with the masculine legacy of the superintendency, the questions surface: is this a natural and necessary leadership strategy unique to women? Or is this something that new female superintendents must learn as they grown into the role? Can mentoring under the right conditions assist new female superintendents to navigate as they learn to lead in a "man's world" and manage perceptions?

Another way that mentoring can help women navigate modern expectations of leadership is illustrated in the family/career balance that women are expected to create; it is frequently one that is much different than a man's. In many ways, family considerations affect the career trajectories, desires, and successes of women in educational leadership. Whether this consideration is motherhood with its implications of childcare, moving to where a husband's job or career may take her, or negotiating a salary that may be higher than her husband's, the women in this study indicated that their careers were influenced by family considerations. Mentorship in this area should be specific to women and their needs—especially from a successful leader who can give advice in the home/life balance that a new superintendent may be seeking.

Men and women lead differently and may even have different expectations of leadership at the district level. The participants in this study clearly indicated a preference for instructional leadership—for the work that most directly impacts students and student learning. Although they have learned that instructional leadership encompasses more than data and teaching strategies, their commitment is reflected in their leadership styles. Through the interviews, the women show a marked tendency toward transformational and servant leadership styles. Shared leadership is also present in their repertoire. None of the participants demonstrated the leadership style that is traditionally ascribed as masculine: transactional.

Instructional Leadership, Modern Expectations, & Mentoring. Many educators who go into leadership do so for the students. Instructional leadership is the driving force behind modern school expectations and, and the superintendents interviewed for this study all discussed their vision of instructional leadership within their roles as district leaders. Instructional leadership encompasses several aspects of the superintendency, including vision, follow-through, relationships (including mentoring), communication, and organization. This is also where the study of leadership style can become significant.

Instructional leadership was the driving force that led most of the participants to seek out leadership roles. They wanted to effect greater change, be sources of strength and support to teachers, provide high quality professional development, and generally be in a position to evoke significant change on a macro scale, compared to the change they could make in a classroom. They all believed that they could leverage their own leadership styles to create change. What they discovered, however, was that change is slow to come and that their biggest contributions were not always related to instructional leadership, as they had hoped.

One superintendent shared that her greatest love is instructional leadership, but her greatest accomplishment has been in facilities. While this may not seem like instructional leadership, per se, it is critical that the teachers and students have facilities that support their needs. Another participant detailed the vision and strategic planning that accompanied growth in a district; instructional leadership cannot occur when the students don't have room to attend school or the facilities are falling to the ground. Yet another shared the absolute importance of knowing and understanding district policy when looking at instructional leadership from the superintendent's lens; this is an important building block with the board, administration, and community at large that builds the foundation for any substantial instructional leadership to occur.

Many leaders shared their dream of having the freedom to go in and out of classrooms, to observe and coach teachers, and to even take groups of students to teach and assist. Trust between teachers and administrators is difficult; when anyone is in an evaluative position over others, it becomes difficult to offer advice without the worry of evaluative feedback. Instructional leadership from the superintendent's office can look many ways, and Cecilia detailed her hands-on approach:

> I like solving problems…so to be able to have the time and—authority is a heavy word—but to be able to go sit down with a first-grade group and say, 'Okay, let's look at this data. Here's what, from the outside, I've seen is happening or what isn't happening…' To be able to be that outside support for them to be able to make changes…and to be able to do that in a non-threatening way…so they feel like somebody's there, advocating for them. (June 28, 2022)

Again, it is important to develop trust, to eliminate threat, and to be an advocate; this is the instructional leader that the participants aspire to be. Building relationships for successful instructional leadership, Cecilia said, comes from:

> knowing how to appropriately talk to people and hear them out and see what their concerns are and what they want. And then to lead them down a path to get them to trust and believe in where we are headed. (June 28, 2022)

These are the same characteristics required in the relationships that make mentoring such an effective induction tool: trust, advocacy, and non-evaluative.

Gender Discrimination. At least two of the participants in the study experienced hiring bias based on gender—and in one instance, leadership style. This is another facet of leadership where

mentorship can be particularly useful for women, as they are searching for district leadership positions. Having a successful female mentor guide women as they seek, apply, and interview for superintendent jobs may alleviate some of the glass ceiling that women encounter in district office openings. Sadly, discrimination does exist; one participant shared her experience with a district who refused to hire any women superintendents based on their poor experience with a single administrator. This type of blatant discrimination against a gender based on one experience was from a perception that one feminine leadership style equates to all. Perhaps mentorship from a strong, female leader can help hopeful new leaders address and overcome sexist hiring traditions.

Implications for Practice

Along with the implications offered above, there are many additional implications worth noting that were revealed through the lived experiences of the research participants. Education is about scaffolding knowledge and experiences, from the moment a student walks through the door in kindergarten; this philosophy can and should hold through all the way to a new district leadership candidate's induction experience. Just as the state requires mentoring for teachers new to the profession, districts should consider mentoring opportunities for new superintendents, not as a luxury, but as an essential piece of the induction process. Specifically, districts should ensure that mentor time is scheduled and protected, time is structured and effective, that the superintendent is able to have input on who her mentor is so that the most efficacious relationships can be built, and empower the superintendent to share highly sensitive information with her mentor (see Figure 1).

To facilitate the above suggestions, it is important that districts consider confidential agreements with mentors at the superintendent level in order to protect legal and ethical considerations related to confidential information, In addition, the mentor should be offered compensation for the high level of professional consultation that she will be providing. Districts should also ensure that their superintendents are not only permitted but encouraged, if not required, to attend regional and state superintendent functions—specifically during their induction years. The connections made and support offered through these organizations will supplement mentoring and will help the superintendent develop as a leader within her regional communities.

On the superintendent's side, it is imperative that she is a willing participant in the mentoring partnership. She must be willing to develop a relationship with a mentor and needs to protect the time set aside for developing the mentor relationship. In addition, she must recognize when she needs support and must have the self-advocacy skills necessary to seek support from her mentor at times

between regularly scheduled meetings, if and when contact is necessary. Recognizing when she needs help and support is a skill that the mentoring relationship should help develop. The superintendent should be an active and present participant in all state and regional superintendent activities to which her district sends her, and should be encouraged to develop relationships with fellow leaders through networking opportunities.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Future Research

This study explored mentoring and posited four research questions regarding mentoring and the superintendency in Idaho. Subsequently, the researcher conducted semi-formal interviews with seven female administrators in the state of Idaho. Using basic and axial coding, themes were developed and thoroughly analyzed, culminating in a grounded theory of mentoring based on constructionism and critical feminist theory shown in Figure 1. This section presents conclusions and suggestions for future research based on this information.

Mentoring is a useful and necessary induction strategy for women entering the superintendency in the state of Idaho. Regardless of the numbers of years in education, the path they took to reach the superintendency, the experiences they have shared, each of the participants emphasized the importance of a mentor as they started their superintendencies. Some found their own mentors; others had mentors through professional organizations or the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring Program. Successful mentoring, however, must be carefully defined and designed as a strategy in order for it to be an efficacious strategy for leaders at the superintendency level. While the structure of a mentoring program is significant for both genders of leader, it is clear from the participants that they have experienced gender bias and thus have some specific mentoring needs based on their leadership styles, journey to leadership, and leadership goals and expectations.

Mentor Selection and Appropriate Match

The selection of a mentor is paramount to the program's success. Mentoring requires the development of a relationship, high levels of trust, willingness to work together, and general compatibility in leadership style—including identifying priorities and vision for leadership direction and strategic planning (see Figure 1). Without this type of compatibility, the growth of a trusting relationship, and an appropriate mentor/protégé match, mentoring advice and support will be less effective and may even become a liability to the new superintendent as she navigates both her new role and the ever-changing expectations of modern educational leadership. This is where it likely makes sense to find female mentorship for female leaders; there are intricacies about leading a district as a woman that only another woman will be able to understand and share with a protégé superintendent; however, more research is needed.

Structure & Schedule

A successful mentoring relationship requires time, structure, and commitment to both (see Figure 1). Time is often in short supply in the superintendent's world, so a commitment to scheduling and protecting time for a mentoring relationship must be a priority. Districts need to be willing to allow superintendents not only the time to dedicate to the mentoring/protégé relationship, but also travel and out-of-district time to support the relationship. Not all mentor superintendents are retired; many are still running districts and have significant demands on their time as well. Thus, districts need to be willing to not only support new superintendents in their mentoring relationship as proteges, they must also support superintendents who serve as mentors to new leaders in the state.

Not only is time an important piece of the structure required for mentoring success, the structure and content of that time is significant. Mentoring topics should be structured to address timely issues that are relevant to current needs for the superintendent. Topics should be applicable to district size, demographics, and specific needs, as previous scholarship points out that the context where Idaho school leadership is enacted is full of complexity (Budge et al., 2019; Wargo, et al. 2021a; 2021b; 2022). Just meeting and spending time together is not sufficient support for a new superintendent in a mentoring relationship. Mentors should be trained to observe and ask important questions of the new superintendent and be able to address specific questions and/or needs that the protégé may have. The protégé superintendent, conversely, must be able to articulate and present questions. However, the protégé may not always know what questions she needs to ask; therefore, a well-trained and experienced mentor superintendent is necessary.

Gender-Specific Concerns

Women frequently have career pathways that are influenced by family and motherhood in a different way than men are impacted by family and fatherhood. In addition, women as leaders face stereotypes and discrimination at a much higher rate than their male counterparts. Female superintendents are overcoming different obstacles than men in the same leadership position; thus, the support they need is different than that of male superintendents. Even once a woman has succeeded in securing a superintendency, she faces public scrutiny and discrimination in a way that her male counterparts do not. Perhaps a female mentor might be better positioned to address these issues and provide support.

Instructional Leadership and Leadership Styles

In Chapter 2, the review of literature explored different leadership styles and their relationship to masculine and feminine leadership strengths and how those styles may influence mentoring matches and efficacy. That relationship between mentoring and leadership style was implicit in the interview results, but what was more overt and unexpected was the female leaders' dedication to and determination to be an instructional leader in her role as superintendent.

Unanimously, the participants interviewed shared a desire to make a difference for students through instructional leadership. These women were successful teachers whose classroom experiences led them to want to make a difference on a greater scale through building and district leadership. Some of the participants were dismayed by the fact that their focus was continually torn toward other issues: finance, facilities, personnel, board relationships, etc. Others were surprised at the pushback and even defiance they received toward their efforts to be instructional leaders. Still others were dismayed by the time that change takes, even from the "top" of the organizational hierarchy. Instructional leadership as a personal priority did not always come forward through the realities of leadership.

This is an area where mentoring likely can be a force to strengthen, encourage, and support new female superintendents in the state of Idaho. Of course, finance, facilities, personnel, board relationships, and more are significant and important in the superintendents' lists of responsibilities. However, helping new superintendents prioritize instructional leadership while still addressing other issues is a potential focus for mentoring relationships. Not only will this address student needs, it will also help the new superintendent create educational change based on her leadership style and focus.

Suggestions for Future Research

The suggestions for future research offered above support the notion that women in the superintendency in the state of Idaho is a topic worthy of future empirical exploration: why are so few women ascending to the superintendency when the majority of the teaching force is, in fact, female? In addition, it would be interesting to delve into the career paths of all Idaho superintendents and learn about the prominence of elementary teachers as superintendents versus secondary teachers, coaches, and other roles ascending to the superintendent's office. This might even include a close look at superintendent candidates within their credentialing programs and the access or lack thereof they have to professional networks and experiences that will facilitate future success in the superintendency. A study inquiring more specifically on leadership style and the superintendency would also be significant, both by gender and by role and/or route to the superintendency.

As far as mentoring and future research, a study focused on the Idaho Superintendent Mentoring program and its participants would illuminate the current state of formal mentoring in the state of Idaho and could evoke data that will continue to strengthen the program for new and upcoming superintendents. In addition, tracking the superintendents who have been mentored into their careers and learning how mentorship has influenced their progress and success would provide meaningful information for future policy and practice. Research into gender bias and mentoring's role in overcoming that bias will reveal perceptions about hiring and leading for Idaho's women and will give leaders the data necessary for success as both female mentors and proteges. The phenomenon of teachers and administrators stepping in as untrained building (teacher) and district leaders, revealed by both Ashtyn and Ismene, bears future research. (personal communication, June 28, 2022; personal communication, July 6, 2022). Finally, instructional leadership in the superintendency has revealed itself to be an area of future research that will be efficacious for current and upcoming female superintendents, not only in the state of Idaho, but likely in educational institutions in America. Future research in surrounding states and beyond will provide additional insight and probable weight to the theory.

Conclusion

Mentoring is a powerful form of induction support for new superintendents in the state of Idaho. In order to support female superintendents in Idaho's school districts, specific mentoring structures and parameters must be implemented for paramount efficacy and utility. Supporting female leaders in the state of Idaho will help to close the gender gap in the superintendent's role throughout the state; it will also help female leaders embrace their leadership styles and goals when they have mentorship that is structured specifically for their needs. School districts should implement mentoring as an induction strategy for their incoming superintendents and should also provide support to current superintendents who are willing and able to serve as mentors for new superintendents in other districts. Professional development for both mentors and proteges will be necessary in order to create the dynamic mentoring relationship that is both structured and effective.

Although the numbers are slowly changing as more women are hired as superintendents in the state of Idaho, they have not yet reached parity with male superintendents in the state. This research provides a platform for providing support to those women who have achieved the level of superintendency in their leadership journeys. Future research and adjustments to policy and practice will support women's leadership styles and career goals as well as assist in helping more women successfully navigate the modern expectations of school leadership in the state of Idaho.

Appendix A: Research Participation Invitation Note

June 13, 2022

Dear colleague:

My name is Bridgit Arkoosh. I am currently serving as the principal of Heyburn Elementary School in St. Maries, Idaho and I am pursuing my PhD in Educational Leadership at the University of Idaho. This letter is an invitation to you to participated in my doctoral research project, titled: Unlocking the District Office Door: Mentoring Female Administrators.

The purpose of this study is to investigate mentoring availability and influence upon female administrators, specifically superintendents, in the state of Idaho. It will explore the perceptions and utility of mentoring and other induction services experienced by women serving as superintendents in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, this study will inquire about the influence of gender and leadership style on mentoring efficacy. Beyond the intrinsic difficulties administration presents, women may find themselves excluded from the existing administrative network that is populated primarily by men. While over 70% of the teaching workforce in Idaho is comprised of women, only 24 of Idaho's 115 districts have women superintendents. In a time of increasing turnover in the educational profession, it is important to learn what support systems are effective in supporting leadership induction at the district office level.

I would like to invite you to participate in a series of interviews; the interviews can be in person or via Zoom. I'm hoping to learn from you, your career, and your experiential wisdom as a leader in Idaho's school districts. In all aspects of this study, **your identity will be protected and you will be given access to your interview data to ensure that your input is represented accurately and authentically.**

You can access the initial survey here: https://forms.office.com/r/sYz5fzDTsw. Thank you in advance for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: arko5019@vandals.uidaho.edu.

Sincerely,

Bridgit Arkoosh

Appendix B: Letter of Support

Letter of Support from Dr. Elizabeth Wargo

June 13, 2020

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to you to offer my support for the study being proposed by Bridgit Arkoosh, an Educational Leadership doctoral candidate at the University of Idaho. Ms. Arkoosh's study, Unlocking the District Office Door: Mentoring Female Administrators, has potential to surface some new and important data about district leadership practice.

As chair of her dissertation committee, I assure you that the study will be conducted in accordance with the strictest guidelines for participant confidentiality and research rigor as dictated by the University of Idaho's Institutional Review Board and Bridgit's dissertation committee.

I also realize that leaders are incredibly busy people and that affording anyone time for interviews is asking a significant consideration on your part, but I do hope you will give this study your participation. It is a worthwhile study, and the results could be important in providing all of us a deeper appreciation for how best to support female leadership in Idaho. If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at ewargo@uidaho.edu.

Sincerely,

Dr. Elizabeth S. Wargo, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Leadership and Counseling
University of Idaho
+1 208 290 0138

Appendix C: Consent for Participation

Unlocking the District Office Door: Mentoring Female Administrators

A Grounded Theory exploration of induction for Idaho's Female Superintendents

Informed Consent for Interviews

Bridgit Arkoosh, a Doctoral Student from the Department of Education at the University of Idaho is conducting a research study. The purpose of the research is to explore gender-specific mentoring availability and influence upon female administrators, specifically superintendents, in the state of Idaho. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a female superintendent in an Idaho school district.

Your participation will involve participating in at least one and perhaps up to three interviews. The interview should take about 60 minutes to complete. The interview includes questions such as:

- Tell me a little about your first few years as a superintendent? How did you navigate those first days, weeks, and months?
- In Idaho, women are outnumbered in the superintendency by more than 3 men to every woman. What are your thoughts about this statistic? Did you find it difficult to secure a superintendent position in Idaho? What qualities do you believe led to your success?
- Do you believe that mentoring is-or could be-an important facet of induction for new superintendents? Why or why not?

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. All names and identifying information will be masked in the study to ensure participant privacy. This includes hiding the identity of the district you serve. There are no names or identifying information associated with your responses. There are no known risks in this study, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions. Data will be stored for future research and will be available to the researcher and her Major Professor, Dr. Elizabeth Wargo. Data will be password protected and stored on local computers. We will be using Zoom, Otter AI, Apple recording apps, and/or a professional transcriptionist to record or transcribe identifiable data to conduct the research. The Terms of Service and Privacy Policies for these can be found here:

Apple

- Terms of Service: https://www.apple.com/legal/internet-services/itunes/

- Privacy Policy: https://www.apple.com/legal/privacy/en-ww/

Otter AI

- Terms of Service: https://otter.ai/terms-of-service
- Privacy Policy: https://otter.ai/privacy-policy

Zoom:

- Terms of Service: https://explore.zoom.us/en/terms/
- Privacy Policy: https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/

You will not receive payment or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study. The findings from this project will provide information on district induction practices for new administrators—both new to the position and new to a district. In addition, the research can influence policy and funding at the state level about the need for and specificity required by new female administrators for successful mentor pairings in district level leadership roles.

If published, results will be presented in summary form only. Any quotes will be attributed to a pseudonym.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call Bridgit Arkoosh at (208) 539-9945. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input you may call the Office of Research Assurances at (208) 885-6340 or irb@uidaho.edu.

By signing below (digitally or physically) you certify that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in the above-described research study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Adult Participant	Signature of Adult Participant	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Research Team Member	Signature of Research Team Member	Date

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Start interview

**Review purpose, protection measures, ask permission to record*

**Start recording and back up recording*

**Ask for verbal consent*

Participant's Statement of Consent

I have read the description of the research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions that I have will also be answered by the researcher. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand that I will verbally provide a statement of consent at the beginning of the interview.

Name of Participant:_____ (obtained verbally)

Participant's Signature:_____ (obtained verbally)

Participant's phone number: _____ (obtained verbally)

Date:_____(obtained verbally)

RELEASE FORM

Permission to use quotations

The purpose of this form is to secure permission to use quotations from the interview conducted as part of a research study on female district leaders so insights can be gained to help support future practice, policy, and research conducted by Bridgit Arkoosh. The undersigned *(participant of the study and originator or the quotation*) hereby grants permission for Bridgit to utilize quotations by the undersigned to be reported in her research study.

Participant's Signature: ____(obtained verbally)____Date:__(obtained verbally)

Do you have any questions before we begin about the interview process?

1. I would like to start by gaining insights about your career as an educator. Will you please tell me a little bit about your career journey that has led to your current position?

   Probes include:
   - What motivated you to become an administrator?
     - What roles have you held?
     - How has each role worked to prepare you for your current position?
   - Tell me a little about your administrative internship experiences.
     - Were these experiences helpful when you transitioned into your position as superintendent?
     - What internship experience stands out as the most useful for your subsequent administrative career?
   - What was your first administrative position?
     - Explain some of your responsibilities for this position.
     - What responsibility did you find to be the most exciting?
     - What responsibility did you find to be the most difficult?
     - What support was offered to you? By whom? From where?
       - What did they do to support you?
2. We all know that different administrative roles have different responsibilities and rewards. What motivated your pursuit of district leadership positions?

   Probes include:
   - What was your first superintendent position?
     - Explain some of your responsibilities for this position.
     - What responsibility did you find to be the most exciting?
     - What responsibility did you find to be the most difficult?
     - What support was offered to you? By whom? From where?
       - What did they do to support you?
     - What were the demographics of the district?
       - Size, number of schools, number of staff/students, FRL, ELL, etc.
       - Budget?
3. Tell me a little about your first few years as a superintendent? How did you navigate those first days, weeks, and months?

   Probes include:

- What type of support did your first district provide during your first years as a superintendent?
    - Did you have to find your own avenues of support or was support offered to you?
    - Were colleagues supportive? What type of network did you join?

4. Looking back through your administrative career, what surprises you the most about your experiences? Why?

   Probes include:
   - What were the most significant questions you had as a first year superintendent? Who helped you to answer them?
   - What were the most stressful things you've experienced as a superintendent?
       - What helped you manage these situations?
   - What were your most significant accomplishments in your first year as a superintendent?
       - Who supported you in these?
   - If you had advice for a first year superintendent, what would they be?
       - Why did you choose this advice?
   - Looking back to your first years as a superintendent, what type of professional development might have helped you adjust to your new role?

5. In Idaho, women are outnumbered in the superintendency by more than 3 men to every woman. What are your thoughts about this statistic? Did you find it difficult to secure a superintendent position in Idaho? What qualities do you believe led to your success?

   Probes include:
   - Have you helped to mentor female teachers and/or principals toward a district office position? What advice did/would you give to them?
   - Do you have any same-gender colleagues to whom you look for support and/or advice? Do you have any opposite-gender colleagues to whom you look for support and/or advice?
       - Who is your go-to confidant? Why?

6. Do you believe that mentoring is-or could be-an important facet of induction for new superintendents? Why or why not?

   Probes include:
   - Do you think that any mentoring you received helped you to navigate the expectations of school district leadership? Why or why not?

7. Is there anything else you can tell me about your initial years as a superintendent?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Thank participant*
**Remind participant of next steps (transcription, storage in a secure location, opportunities for them to engage in member checking, masking etc.)*

Do not stop the recording early! Often participants share great insights right at the end.

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