TCWSE

JOURNAL OF TEXAS WOMEN SCHOOL EXECUTIVES

Grit, Grace and Pearls

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS COUNCIL OF WOMEN SCHOOL EXECUTIVES

ISSN2166 - 112X

Executive Editors

Dr. Jennifer S. Jones
Past TCWSE Executive Board, Regional Representative

Dr. Sharon Ross, Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University-Commerce
Retired Texas Superintendent
TCWSE Executive Board, Past-President 2017-2018

Reviewers

Dr. Stephanie Atchley
Department of Educational Leadership
Assistant Professor, Tarleton State University

Dr. Roslyn Bell
Principal, Crowley 9th Grade Campus
Crowley ISD

Sonja A. Brown
Government Affairs Coordinator, Lancaster ISD
Mayor of Glenn Heights, Texas,
TCWSE Executive Board, Vice-President

Dr. Danna Beatty
Department of Educational Leadership
Associate Professor, Texas A&M University-Commerce

Dr. Elizabeth Clark
Associate Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Accountability
Birdville ISD; TCWSE Executive Board, Past President (2001-2002)

Blanca Cruz
Director of Human Resources, San Elizario ISD
TCWSE Executive Board, Regional Representative (ESC 19)

Dr. Sharon Deloach
District Director of Student Services, Marlin ISD
TCWSE Executive Board, Regional Representative (ESC 12)

Lisa Meysembourg
Superintendent, Woodville ISD
TCWSE Executive Board, Past President (2019-2020)

Dr. Juanita Reyes
Department of Educational Leadership
Associate Professor, Tarleton State University

Dr. Kristen Walls
Executive Director of College & Career, Tyler ISD
TCWSE Executive Board, Past Regional Representative (ESC 7), Historian

Cover Design
Valerie Walker
Principal, Jackie Carden Elementary
Crowley ISD

The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE)

The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE) is an official publication of the Texas Council of Women School Executives (TCWSE). The purpose of JTWSE is to provide a forum to promote the development of women school executives through scholarly research and practice and recognize the professional knowledge and wisdom of practicing and aspiring women school executives, higher education faculty, and other significant partners in education. Since leadership is both art and science, JTWSE solicits creative works that promote the journal's purpose. The journal solicits original submissions in three categories to recognize the diversity of talents and skills of women school executives (see Categories of Articles).

Because of a commitment to leadership development and scholarly school women executives, the Texas Council of School Women School Executives previously published an annual monograph until 2008. In January 2011, President Lu Anna Stephens and the Executive Board commissioned Dr. Genie Linn and Ms. Karen Saunders to serve as co-editors to design and launch a new professional publication for TCWSE for publishing in an electronic format with the first publication unveiled at the Annual Conference in January 2012.

JTWSE is a double-blind, peer-reviewed, open-access e-journal publishing original scholarly research and creative works. The JTWSE, although originated by Texas women's school executives, serves as a national academic journal. For membership information: https://tcwse.org/membership/. All editorial, Board, and reviewer services are provided without cost to JTWSE or its members by volunteer scholars and practitioners.

JTWSE *provides a forum to promote the development of women school executives through scholarly research and practice.* ***JTWSE*** *recognizes the diversity of talents and skills of women school executives.* Copyright 2024 by the Texas Council of Women School Executives - All rights reserved. ISSN 2166-112X

President's Message

Dear TCWSE Members -

It has been an honor to serve as your TCWSE State President for 2023! Last year's theme of Writing *HerStory* was a salute to all the brave women who have come before us and who had the courage to write their story so that we could follow in their paths. Writing *HerStory* was a framework by which we could examine their courageous work and be empowered to write our own adventure! This year's theme, Grit, Grace, and Pearls, looks at the qualities that symbolize our work and the ways in which we celebrate our shared experience.

First, I want to thank our dedicated editors who keep this Journal going. I also applaud the authors featured in this year's issue of the TCWSE Journal. Their contributions represent a level of dedication in time and talent from which we all benefit. As you read these articles, I encourage you to take this opportunity to grow in your personal and professional practices, as well as share this information with others through professional development opportunities and mentoring discussions. Through these avenues, we continue to support and develop our craft as leaders in Education.

This issue of the 2023 TCWSE Journal focuses on the qualities of:

Grit: Courage and resolve; strength of character

Grace: Simple elegance or refinement of movement; Undeserved favor

Pearls: Small, round jewel forms around a grain of sand; Treasured item

This year has been full of examples of all three of these for me. I have learned to remain courageous and refine my character strength, especially when encountering difficulties. I have enjoyed working alongside the wonderful women of TCWSE, and their grace to me and one another in our collective efforts is inspirational! Finally, I have seen firsthand how a small bit of "sand" (change) has grown into a treasure of knowledge and advancement that will benefit others for years to come! I will expand on these themes at our January annual gathering in Austin. There, I will be wearing one of my treasures - a set of pearls that belonged to my grandmother. A strong, courageous woman whose spirit of dedication and determination to make this world a better, more equitable place continues to inspire me. It is because of those who came before us that we can continue to do more. In the TCWSE spirit of Mentoring, Renewal, and Career Advancement…..

Sending you all the best,

Lindsey Pollock, Ed. D., LCSW
TCWSE 2023 State President
Provost, Sarasota University
Executive Director, Lian Dante Foundation

From the Executive Editors

Greetings, Authors and Conference Attendees,

Grit. Grace. Pearls.

Perseverance - driven by your passion and resilience. Courage and determination - fueled by your purpose, strength, and follow-through. The intensity of your focus. The commitment toward educational excellence. Grit. Guts to do the hard work. Grace when working under pressure. We see you, Texas Council of Women School Executives. We see the layers of GRIT formed around you, molding you into place. Pearls. We honor you, Pearls of Excellence, each uniquely created, with your reflections of quality and value to our world, TCWSE, and education.

In this issue, we explore educational leadership and challenges related to the theme, "Grit, Grace, and Pearls," in the form of research, professional perspectives, and creative works. Current events and issues surrounding political agendas and active forces attempting to derail public schools create pathways for courageous executives to lead forward and transform with their high-performance presence in arenas where the weak dare enter. Yes, you, with your robust and gritty self! Every day, you show up and show out. We see you.

JTWSE exists to provide educational research, perspectives, and works that connect with the conference theme to understand the processes to improve problems, practices, and concerns. The journal further accepts creative works to highlight the inner talents of the authors. We desire to provide submissions that impact our audiences' learning and offer new opportunities to turn researched implications and suggestions into practice, thus contributing to school improvement.

Leading with grit, grace, and pearls,

Jennifer Jones, Ed.D. and Sharon Ross, Ed.D.
JTWSE Executive Editors

Pearls of Wisdom from the Founder

To: Texas Council of Women School Executives

YOU are doing an amazing job of fulfilling what we started 39 years ago. I am pleased to hear of all the great things you are doing as leaders. That is what this organization is all about. Years ago, a few of us joined and blazed these trails for women in school leadership. Today and in the future, you must never let our work die. You must commit to living by our mission to create and maintain a united community of professional educational executives by promoting equity and quality in leadership through renewal, mentoring, and career advancement support.

My desire was to be with you this year, but I am preparing for next year, our 40th year. In the meantime, I want each of you to keep your regions strong and get involved at the state level. Remember to:

- Facilitate a unique and rejuvenating annual conference,
- Host a dynamic support network of educational executives, leaders, university professors, recruiters, and strong regional groups,
- Recognize exemplary practitioners,
- Maintain fiscal sovereignty and
- Provide robust membership services.

Until next year,

Dr. Margret Montgomery Sheffield
TCWSE Founder

Categories of Articles

Research is the hallmark of educational professionalism and scholarship. The following articles reflect the scholarship of women school executives from universities and school districts. While university professors research issues vital to women as leaders and support women educators, district and campus authors share applied research from their experiences in the field. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines research as a detailed study of a subject, especially to discover new information or reach a new understanding. May you read with a clear vision and understand a new journey requires fresh faith and a fresh fight to:

- Creatively collaborate to connect communities, universities, colleges, and schools that prepare all students for success.
- Intentionally operate as a culturally relevant and data-driven leader.
- Collaboratively redesign programs that inspire and propel students beyond their wildest dreams and imagination.
- Unapologetically owning a passion and love for the journey and the work required to sustain success.
- Continuously advocating for all children.
- Consistently communicating the organization's vision and work, including successes along the way.

Scholarly research builds leadership capacity and strengthens our voices.

Professional and Scholarly Perspectives offer research both scholarly positions and professional understandings. The contributors represent the diversity of TCWSE members: university professors, district administrators, and aspiring administrators. It is critical to include and consider perspectives that offer a view of education from inside the hearts and minds of our various levels of leadership. It is with pride that we accept and cherish each life role as more evidence of our unique capacity for leadership.

Creative Works *Picture this…*We are constantly inspired and amazed at the creativity of women school executives. To recognize the diversity of talents and skills, JTWSE also solicits creative works that promote the journal's purpose. Creative works include poetry and artwork.

We are leaders. We are learners. We are women.

Call for Journal Submissions

Submission for January 2025 Conference
Deadline for Submission: September 1, 2024

THEME: Fierce Leadership: Honoring the Hero – Focusing on the Future

The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE) is a national double-blind, peer-reviewed, open-access e-journal publishing original scholarly research and creative works. JTWSE is an official publication of the Texas Council of Women School Executives.

JTWSE welcomes studies examining characteristics of fierce leadership in women school executives.

TCWSE connects women in leadership to other women aspiring to climb the ladder and break through the glass ceiling. For decades, women have led without being the voice in the wilderness. They were silent for fear of the unknown and fear of the known. Documented narratives tell of women leaders who have jumped hurdles, broken down barriers, and shattered glass ceilings, paving the way for more extraordinary visionaries to have a seat at the table. Now, we are here. Others are coming. How will our 'way forward' be defined? Susan Scott (2009) introduces the issues holding people back from getting to know others and working collaboratively, which affects performance. Scott further educates leaders on the art of investigating the worst practices, even though they are often seen as the best practices. This investigation is carried out using what Scott defines as the 'squid eye,' which means a leader can point out deficiencies and problems while spotting the truth in the hardest places. When lights are flashing red, as in a traffic light situation, fierce leaders can see the signs and immediately begin an assessment. In educational leadership, these processes align closely with conducting data analysis, identifying a problem and practice, and offering a solution to the problem. In her book *Fierce Leadership*, Scott posits that everyone desires to be connected and informs that this type of leadership is not for individuals who find themselves lost in the crowd as a shadow. Fierce Leadership is for those willing, ready, and courageous enough to take on the big challenges using new ways of leading and thinking. JTWSE 2025 seeks submissions that answer one or more of the following questions:

1. How will our way forward be defined?
2. What type of leader is needed for the next-century learning community?
3. Can fierce leaders be compassionate?
4. How do we learn from and honor the past and move forward with different mind shifts?
5. How do school districts, education service centers, and universities hire for fierce leadership qualities?
6. What did we learn from the last 40 years, and what challenges do we anticipate beginning with the next five years? Ten years?

Submissions should address one or more of the following topics:

- Defining and providing examples of Fierce Leadership
- Challenging the ability to energize and re-energize employees
- Campus and district leadership culture, their way of life
- Connecting teachers and leaders to teams
- Defining, analyzing, and evaluating the learning community engagement
- Conversations centered around the toughest challenges currently being faced

Authors are encouraged to provide original scholarly research, including empirical, historical, and/or action research addressing the theme. To address the topics described, we welcome single-study investigations, research addressing teaching and learning, educational leadership, policy and finance, school law, and other professional and scholarly perspectives.

To recognize the diversity of talents and skills, JTWSE also solicits professional and scholarly perspectives as well as creative works that promote the journal's purpose. Creative works include poetry and artwork.

Submitting Manuscripts/Submissions to JTWSE Manuscripts and submissions should be sent to dr.jsjones@gmail.com.

Subject line: JTWSE: Conference 2025 Issue

Each submission is reviewed by the Editor, evaluated as appropriate, and then sent to the Editorial Board for double-blind peer review. Editorial decisions will be made typically within four to six weeks after receipt.

Manuscripts should follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association 7th Edition. The typical article submission is equivalent to 5 to 15 pages single-spaced.

Document Preparation

Your manuscript/submission should consist of the following:

- Cover Sheet – Title and information of authorship, name of author(s), current position, contact info, and brief bio for author(s) (no more than 100 words); email address, postal address, and phone number.
- Include a statement confirming that the submission has not been previously published, is not under review for publication, and will not be submitted elsewhere while being considered for approval with JTWSE.
- In cases where the research involves human subjects, confirm that the IRB (Institutional Review Board) has exempted the study from any further review or approved the investigation.
- Abstract & Keywords– Place on a separate sheet. The title should be placed at the top of the page. The text following should be no longer than 200 words and should summarize the purpose, methodology, and findings.
- In the body of the paper, please adhere to the following:
    - American Psychological Association 7th Edition format

    - Charts, tables, and/or figures within the body of text
    - List of references in American Psychological Association 7th Edition format.
    - Use a hanging indent for references
    - Use 12-point Times New Roman font
    - Single spaced
    - One-inch margins
    - Do not add section breaks/page breaks
    - Remove heading auto-formatting
- As a part of the review process, all manuscripts will undergo a double-blind peer review and will be screened for originality. The author(s) is responsible for guaranteeing their work's originality, ensuring it is devoid of plagiarism through the appropriate citation of all sources. By submitting a manuscript to the journal, the author(s) consent to any necessary originality check that the manuscript may undergo as part of the publication process.
- By submitting a manuscript to the journal, authors consent to any necessary originality check that the manuscript may undergo as part of the publication process.
- Authors may be asked to revise and re-submit as a part of the review process. It is the responsibility of the author(s) to adhere to the deadlines provided. Please be sure to read all guidelines and prepare accordingly carefully before submission.
- If the manuscript or creative work is approved for the journal, the authors must sign a consent to publish before publication.

Prospective authors may view copies of past submissions and themes of the JTWSE at tcwse.org

Questions regarding the JTWSE may be directed to Executive Editor.

Jennifer Jones, Ed.D.
dr.jsjones@gmail.com

Contents

In this Issue

Disparities and questions linger in the shadows about the pathways and leadership of women school executives. How she leads, what she is made of, the health and wellness of women leaders, and riding through educational storms are just a few issues researchers explore to bring solutions and recommendations to practitioners. Lessons learned, over time, provide a recipe for the grit and grace needed to lead forward. Authors from various educational organizations, statewide and nationally, are represented in this issue.

Research

The Leadership Practices of Texas School District Superintendents During The COVID-19 Pandemic by Dr. Akua Anyei Obeng

This study examines the various leadership practices that emerged during the pandemic in small, medium, and large school districts from 2021-2022. The results section of this study informs audiences about superintendent decision-making behaviors based on values, personality, and grit.

Guiding Light: A Qualitative Case Study to Describe What Factors Prompt African American Male Educators to Teach Elementary Education and Their Experiences in this Role by Dr. Ugochi M. Emenaha

Despite the societal stereotype, lack of respect, and diversity attributed to early elementary education, African American male teachers must persist. It is that persistence that reflects the unique patterns attributed to pearls. The life experiences of four African-American male teachers shed light on why they chose certification in lower grade levels.

How & Why She Leads: Women Leaders in Higher Education During Crisis by Dr. Katrina Struloeff, Dr. Kimberly Sterin, and Christopher Fornaro

To understand how women lead during times of crisis, researchers must create spaces for women's voices in higher education administration to be heard. This study amplified the role of women in higher education administration roles and led to the emergence of leading with compassion, leading by example, and leading through partnership.

Disparity of Representation and the Pathway to the Principalship: The Phenomenological Experience of Female High School Principals by Dr. Crystal Deaver, Dr. Melissa Arrambide, Dr. Teresa Farler, Dr. Jennifer Dyer, and Dr. Elsa Villarreal

The workforce has changed and evolved; however, the struggle remains for women seeking pathway preparedness. Examining the paths taken and the obstacles faced by current female high school principals in Texas in becoming principals is essential in learning and preparing for that role and gaining insight into the journey of attaining the superintendency.

Professional Perspectives

Creative Works

RESEARCH

…district administrators challenged processes and explored outside the formal boundaries of their organization for innovative ways to improve their work during the crisis. This trait validates the philosophies on growth mindset and grit, where leaders go beyond their expected call of duty to achieve long-term goals.

The Leadership Practices of Texas School District Superintendents During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr. Akua Anyei Obeng
Research Manager and Data Analyst
Harris County Department of Education

Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders committed to developing protocols to safeguard students and staff members without compromising ongoing academic programs. The purpose of the study was to examine the various leadership practices that emerged during the pandemic in small, medium, and large school districts from 2021-2022. The instruments utilized were the Crisis Leader Efficacy in Assessing and Deciding scale developed by Hadley et al. and the Leadership Practice Inventory by Kouzes and Posner. A sample of 60 participants was obtained using random stratified sampling from 800 Texas school districts. The survey responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS 22.0. The study's findings contribute to the literature on crisis decision-making, and they illustrate the effective leadership behaviors that could enable leaders to operate at their best under crisis.

Keywords: leadership, crisis decision-making, COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

Unpredictable events compel leaders to make rapid decisions with little or no information to meet the short- and long-term goals of their organizations. The act of persevering passionately to meet those goals is known as grit (Duckworth et al., 2007). Researchers have taken an interest in measuring grit using self-reported questionnaires like the Original Grit Scale (Grit-O) (Abu Hasan, Munawar, & Abdul Khaiyom, 2022). Duckworth (2016) believes that grit is key to success, more so than talent. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted both national and international educational systems. However, most educational leaders quickly persevered through the crisis by restructuring, rethinking, and reorganizing educational activities to online learning (Zhao, 2020). Due to the pandemic's disruption of educational systems, school district leaders had to reinvent learning and teaching methods to foster greater collaboration and responsiveness. Leaders who cultivated grit were able to achieve not only long-term personal goals but also goals that benefited their organization throughout the pandemic.

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the decision-making process of school district administrators in Texas with an emphasis on the COVID-19 pandemic. The study centers on the various leadership practices and traits that emerged during the pandemic to identify effective leadership strategies and personality traits necessary for thriving in a crisis. The research questions were:

> **RQ1:** What was the crisis leader efficacy and ability of (small, medium, and large) school district administrators to assess and make decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic?
>
> **RQ2:** Did small-medium and large district administrators self-report different leadership practices during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Literature Review

Literature on the efficacy of decision-making during a crisis shows that good decisions—irrespective of time pressures, the risks involved, and the environment—must be quick (Hannah et al., 2010), include all comparative and scrutinized data, stakeholders' efforts, and extend from school officials to local personnel (Gorge, 2006). The decision-making process of school district administrators is significantly influenced by a variety of internal and external factors. External factors include local and federal legislation, diverse cultural norms, and unpredictability in political and economic environments. Internal factors such as a school administrator's personal values, cognitive (one capacity to learn) and noncognitive abilities (self-control or grit), ethical procedures, organizational goals, and interpersonal relationships can also influence the results of efficient decision-making.

Notwithstanding the vast number of studies on leadership methods, experts have not yet identified the most effective method for leading during a crisis. Early research on leadership practices focused particularly on individuals deemed heroic leaders. Successively, scholars shifted beyond the behavioral and trait approach to focus on transformational and transactional leadership (Banks et al., 2016). In education, leaders' decision-making processes that impact staff and students also evolved. For example, the decisions of leaders during the economic recession of 2007 and June 2011 differ from decisions made during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2011, school district leaders across Texas decreased teacher, librarian, and school therapist salaries to reduce expenditures after the 82nd Texas Legislature cut $4 billion from school budgets (Starrett et al., 2014). On the contrary, during the COVID-19 pandemic, school district administrators committed to developing protocols to safeguard students and staff members throughout the pandemic without compromising the ongoing academic programs.

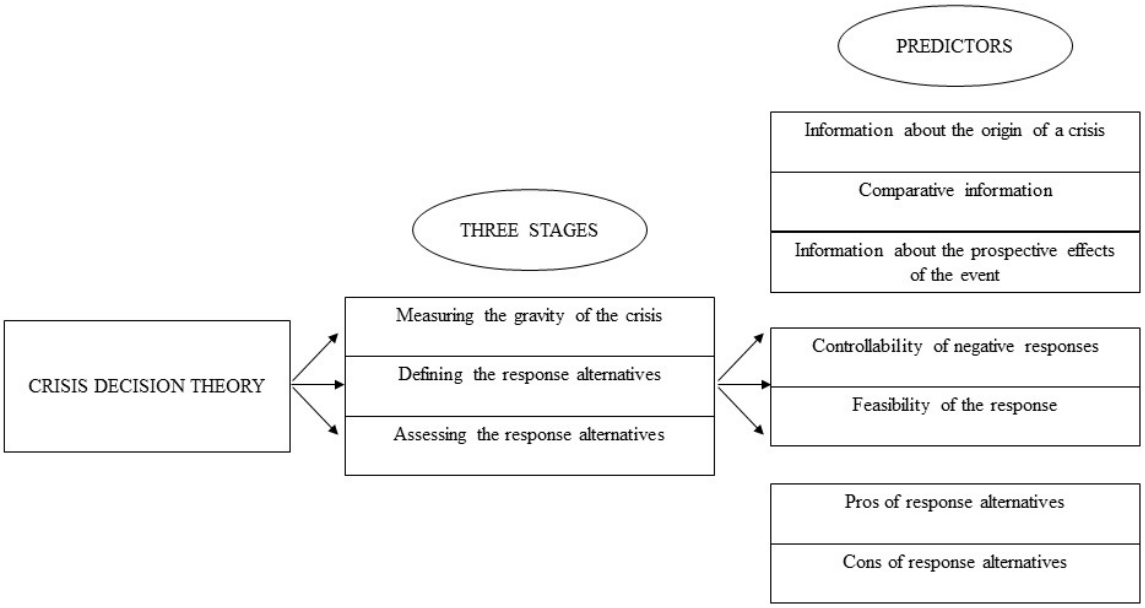
National and global leaders purposefully planned to accommodate extracurricular activities while managing serious health concerns to prevent lowering the quality of the education and experiences offered to students and their families (Harris, 2020). The educational disruption was not just related to students' learning experiences in the classroom but relevant to the restructuring of leadership practices. The hierarchical idea of leadership, in which leaders primarily lead and followers obey, was changed. Now, leadership practices and knowledge put a strong emphasis on vulnerability, collectivism, and bridging the gap between the advantaged and the underprivileged. According to Sen (2020), overcoming the pandemic was only feasible when individuals perceived it as a way of uniting all people and redirecting everyone to rethink the structure of guidance and leadership, hence showcasing the grit and grace of leadership.

Theoretical Framework

Crisis decision theory, cognitive and non-cognitive abilities, were the framework for the research study. Crisis decision theory is based on a variety of literature on unexpectedly negative events. It forecasts the responses to specific incidences of uncertainty at all levels of severity. All crises have different and serious repercussions, but the crisis decision theory suggests that even the smallest crisis with the fewest negative effects needs serious attention (Sweeny, 2008). Importantly, the theory combines principles of decision-making with coping theories to predict reactions to adverse situations. According to the theory, the first step is to determine the gravity of the unexpectedly negative event by gathering data on its causes, other comparison data, and impacts on one's

environment. In the second stage, leaders identify their response alternatives to decide how to handle unexpectedly negative events and the practicability of their response alternatives. In the final stage (evaluating response alternatives), leaders examine the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative selected, the context of the response, and any potential effects of systemic processing on their decision-making process (see Figure 1). Sometimes, leaders may not respond to an unpredictable negative event in accordance with the three stages. Leaders may get "stuck" at a particular level, or they may review a previous stage after moving on to a new stage (Sweeny, 2008).

FIGURE 1
Crisis Decision Theory



Note. Adapted from "Crisis Decision Theory: Decisions in the Face of Negative Events," by K. Sweeny, 2008, *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(1), 61–76. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.1.61

Both non-cognitive and cognitive abilities have an impact on leaders' decision-making and are significant success factors. While noncognitive factors include personality traits such as self-control (Mischel 1968) and growth mindset (Dweck 2006), cognitive abilities involve a leader's ability to process information and learn (Duckworth and Eskreis-Winkler 2015). Similar to conscientiousness (one of the Big Five personality traits connected to success, McCrae & Costa, 1987), grit is a noncognitive ability present in leaders who put out significant effort and embrace difficulty over ease (Duckworth et al. 2007). They are seen to persevere through the laborious tasks and consistently uphold interest in their work, regardless of external rewards or challenges. Grit has positive correlations with established psychological traits such as happiness and life satisfaction (Singh and Jha 2008), conscientiousness, and growth mindset (Duckworth et al. 2007).

Methodology

A quantitative data collection methodology was used to address the key contextual elements in school leaders' decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. The instrument utilized to gather information about the participants' leadership practices and efficiency in making decisions during the crisis was the Crisis Leader Efficacy in Assessing and Deciding (C-LEAD) scale. The Kouzes and Posner Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) was also used to gauge leadership abilities and styles.

Sampling

The study's target population consisted of male and female superintendents of large (more than 5,000 students) districts, medium (fewer than 5,000 students), and small (fewer than 1,200 students) districts from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Texas. The study included superintendents who supervised school districts between 2019 and 2020. A target pool of 1,020 superintendents was identified based on district names from the TEA Ask Texas Educational Directory (TED). Sixty school district administrators responded out of the nearly 800 Texas superintendents who received email invitations to complete the survey.

A random stratified sampling approach was used to select the school districts. The survey consisted of three sections. The first section contained nine questions from the C-LEAD scale, while the second section consisted of 16 questions from the LPI questionnaire. Lastly, participants' race, age, educational background, crisis management training, and number of years as superintendents were among the six demographic questions in the last segment.

Instrumentation

The C-LEAD scale is a standardized nine-item measure developed by Hadley et al. (2011) to predict leaders' self-efficacy. It focuses on assessing two critical leadership behaviors: leaders' capability to evaluate critical information and to make decisions in crisis. The scale serves as a guide for practitioners to recognize and prepare for their crisis-resilience readiness. It is a reliable and empirical measurement of leadership skills; however, it does not eliminate the need to measure leadership competencies regularly (Hadley et al., 2011). The instrument has an original Likert rating scale, from 1 (at all times) to 7 (never). However, this study used a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (almost always) to 5 (almost never).

The Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI) is an instrument used in diverse organizations to assess the effectiveness of leadership behaviors in times of crisis (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). The LPI is a well-known instrument used at workshops as a formative method to assess the effectiveness of leaders. According to Kouzes and Posner (2003), the five pillars of excellent leadership practices are (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, and (e) encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Leading school districts and communities into new territories requires a leader to possess extraordinary skills. The instrument originally consisted of 30 questions for self-evaluation with psychometric properties. A 5-point Likert scale was used, where 1= almost never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = usually, and 5 = almost always measurement. The scores were summed to obtain a leadership composite variable.

A higher score on the leadership composite variable indicated greater self-assessed leadership skills in a crisis.

Data analysis

The survey responses and demographic data were analyzed in IBM SPSS 22.0 and scored on a scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) to get a mean for each group. Statistical analyses occurred to affirm a relationship between the demographic data and the survey statements. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was a means to compare the significance of the means of the large, medium, and small school districts. Finally, a Pearson correlation was computed to determine correlation strength.

The Test for Reliability and Validity

Previous scholars found Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient scores between 0.81 and 0.88 (Hadley et al., 2011) when used to measure the C-LEAD scale reliability. Samuel et al. (2015) also affirmed Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.917. Similarly, the validity and reliability conducted by Kouzes and Posner (2003) resulted in the following Cronbach's coefficient alpha scores: challenging the process (.86), inspiring a shared vision (.91), enabling others to act (.86), modeling the way (.84), and encouraging the heart (.91).

Results

Superintendents (N = 60) from large (5%), medium (28.3%), and small (66.7%) school districts participated in the study. The results showed that more than one-third of school district superintendents had received crisis leadership training before or during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, participants (61.5%) had received specific training, including Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training, restorative practices, FEMA and active shooting, National Incident Management System (NIMS) training, etc. Of the large district superintendents, 66.7% reported *almost always* made decisions even when they lacked much information. Further, 33.3% *almost always* communicate the main issues in a situation to others regardless of how much knowledge they have. Of medium school district superintendents, 64.7% acknowledged that they had modified their routine work activities to address an urgent need. In comparison, 20% of small school districts decided which information was crucial to transmit to others when needed (see Table 1, 2, & 3).

TABLE 1
Self-Reported Leadership Practices of Large School District Administrators With the Highest Percentage Scores

Behavior statements	Almost never		Almost always	
	N	Percentage	*N*	Percentage
I am clear about my philosophy of leadership	0	0.0%	3	100%
I always give a "big picture" as far as what I want to accomplish	0	0.0%	2	66.7%
I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done	0	0.0%	3	100%
I give people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work	0	0.0%	3	100 %
Overall score		0.0%		91.6%

TABLE 2
Self-Reported Leadership Practices of Medium School District Administrators With the Highest Percentage Scores

Behavior statements	Almost never		Almost always	
	N	Percentage	*N*	Percentage
I am clear about my philosophy of leadership	0	0.0%	3	100%
I always give a "big picture" as far as what I want to accomplish	0	0.0%	2	66.7%
I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done	0	0.0%	3	100%
I give people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work	0	0.0%	3	100 %
Overall score		0.0%		91.6%

TABLE 3
Self-Reported Leadership Practices of Small School District Administrators With the Highest Percentage Scores

Behavior statements	Almost always	
	N	Percentage
I am clear about my philosophy of leadership	28	70%
I always give a "big picture" as far as what I want to accomplish	26	65%
I actively listen to diverse points of view	26	65%
I always challenge "What can we learn?" if things do not go the way we wanted it to be	25	62.5%
Overall score		65.6%

The findings from RQ1 indicated that superintendents showed the crisis leader efficacy of divergent thinking (see Hadley et al., 2011). Particularly, they adjusted their schedules to respond to urgent crises and at any instance. An investigation of each district individually revealed that large district superintendents showed crisis leader role-taking (Hadley et al., 2011) skills by taking on leadership roles they could confidently achieve. Medium district superintendents showed divergent thinking, such as providing alternative solutions to a problem. In contrast, the small school district superintendents exhibited crisis preparedness by anticipating deaths or injuries during a crisis. The results for RQ1 aligned with the crisis decision theory theoretical framework, which suggests that school district superintendents measure the seriousness of an unexpected situation in three decision-making phases. Some superintendents (such as the small school district participants) concentrate on the planning stage while considering and selecting alternative responses.

The results for RQ2 presented the self-reported leadership practices and personality traits of the participants used during the pandemic. The LPI 360+ enabled the participants to understand better how they perceived themselves, their character traits, and their leadership practices during the pandemic. Finding an answer to the research question consisted of performing a frequency computation for multiple responses for 16 LPI questions on a 5-point scale, with two to five behavioral statements for each of the five practices. All participants (N=60) reported modeling a way, inspiring a shared vision, and enabling their staff to act.

The large district superintendents reported being explicit about their leadership philosophies by providing staff members with the "big picture" of what they hoped to accomplish, discussing how future trends could affect their work, and allowing individuals freedom and choices in their approach to work. The middle and small school district administrators described their leadership practices as challenging the process. Of medium and small school district leaders, 70.6% agreed that they have always explored outside the formal boundaries of their organization for innovative ways to improve their work during the crisis. This trait validates the philosophies of growth mindset and grit, where leaders go beyond their expected call of duty to achieve long-term goals.

Additional Analysis

The C-LEAD and LPI's total scale scores and psychometric characteristics are shown in Table 4. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was α = .75 for the C-LEAD total score (M = 4.2, SD = .47). The LPI total score was α = .86 for the (M = 4.4, SD = 0.42). These findings imply that both scales had a high internal reliability. There was a substantial association between the C-LEAD and LPI total scores at the p .05 level according to bivariate Spearman's correlation (r =.34, p =.007) and Pearson's correlation (r =.30, p =.019) results for the C-LEAD and LPI total scores. LPI total score and C-LEAD total score specifically moved in the same direction but at a lower magnitude.

TABLE 4
Psychometric Characteristics for C-LEAD and LPI Total Scale Scores

Instrument	Items	*M*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*	*α*	Item total correlation
C-lead score	7	4.2	.47	2.8	5	.75	.302
LPI score	16	4.4	.42	2.8	5	.86	.302

Conclusions

Crisis decision theory holds that a leader's decisions are influenced by their values and personality traits (The Institute for Crisis Management, 2020). The self-reported inventory and assessment tools used in the study showed that school district leaders made decisions based on their experiences, personal beliefs, cognitive and non-cognitive traits, and shared values within the community or educational system.

The theory on cognitive and non-cognitive abilities is that leaders motivated by non-cognitive traits like grit expand their abilities beyond what is expected of them, aligned with the participants' reports of challenging what they could learn if things did not go as planned (Park et al., 2018). Therefore, this study acknowledges that leaders' ability to succeed in crisis is a result of lessons acquired from their experiences, advice from their role models, leaders' perseverance to challenge unknown processes, and effective decisions that align personal and organizational goals for the benefit of a community.

Future research studies may include developing a grit test reliability measure, along with the self-reported scales employed in this study, to gauge the cultivation of grit post-crisis to validate its long-term construct as a success-related ability.

References

Abu Hasan, H. E., Munawar, K., & Abdul Khaiyom, J. H. (2022). Psychometric properties of developed and transadapted grit measures across cultures: a systematic review: Research and Reviews. *Current Psychology, 41*(10), 6894-6912. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01137-w

Banks, G. C., McCauley, K. D., Gardner, W. L., & Guler, C. E. (2016). A meta-analytic review of authentic and transformational leadership: A test for redundancy. *The Leadership Quarterly, 27*(4), 634–652. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.02.006.

Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. NY: Random House.

Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Scribner.

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087–1101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

Duckworth, A. L., & Eskreis-Winkler, L. (2015). Grit. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences (2nd ed.), pp. 397–401. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Gorge, M. (2006). Crisis management best practice: Where do we start from? *Computer Fraud & Security, 2006*(6), 10–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1361- 3723(06)70367-0

Hadley, C. N., Pittinsky, T. L., Sommer, S. A., & Zhu, W. (2011). Measuring the efficacy of leaders to assess information and make decisions in a crisis: The C-LEAD scale. *The Leadership Quarterly, 22*(4), 633–648. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.05.005

Hannah, S. T., Campbell, D. J., & Matthews, M. D. (2010). Advancing a research agenda for leadership in dangerous contexts. *Military Psychology, 22*(1), 157–189.

https://doi.org/10.1080/08995601003644452

Harris, A. (2020). COVID-19 – School leadership in crisis? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community, 5*(3/4), 321–326. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-06-2020- 0045

The Institute for Crisis Management. (2020). ICM Annual Crisis Report. https://crisisconsultant.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ICM-Annual-Crisis- Report-for-2019.Issued-May.4.2020-1.pdf

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (1995). *The leadership challenge* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (2003). *The five practices of exemplary leadership*. Pfeiffer & Co.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa Jr., P. T. (1987). Validation of the five-factor model of personality across instruments and observers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52*, 81–90. https://doi.org/10. 1037/0022-3514.52.1.81.

Mischel, W. (1968*). Personality and assessment*. NY: Wiley.

Park, D., Yu, A., Baelen, R. N., Tsukayama, E., & Duckworth, A. L. (2018). Fostering grit: Perceived school goal-structure predicts growth in grit and grades. *Contemporary*

Educational Psychology, 55, 120–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.09.007

Samuel, P.; Quinn Griffin, M.; White, M. & Fitzpatrick, J.(2015). Crisis leadership efficacy of nurse practitioners. *Journal for Nurse Practitioners, 11*(9):862-868. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nurpra.2015.06.010.

Sen, A. (2020). The possibility of social choice. In S. D. Sarasvathy, N. Dew, & S. Venkataraman (Eds.), *Shaping entrepreneurship research: Made as well as found* (pp. 298–339). Routledge.

Singh, K., & Jha, S. D. (2008). Positive and negative affect, and grit as predictors of happiness and life satisfaction. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 34*(Special Issue), 40–45.

Starrett, T. M., Casey, P., & Dunlap, K. (2014). Superintendent response to the financial downturn. *Journal of Education and Learning, 3(*1), 34–39. http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v3n1p34

Sweeny, K. (2008). Crisis decision theory: Decisions in the face of negative events. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(1), 61–76. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.1.61

Zhao, Y. (2020). COVID-19 as a catalyst for educational change. *Prospects, 49*(1), 29– 33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09477-y

"I didn't think I wanted to be a teacher – it was an accident."
However, after working for an after-school program, he found his niche in teaching. He also earned a master's…
Mark truly understands and embraces the idea that he has a responsibility beyond the role of teacher.

Guiding Light: A Qualitative Case Study to Describe What Factors Prompt African American Male Educators to Teach Elementary Education and Their Experiences in this Role

Dr. Ugochi M. Emenaha
Associate Director of MAT, EC-6 at Rice University
Mentor: Dr. Sarah Smitherman Pratt

Abstract

As a diamond persists (with grit) through pressure to become a prized jewel and pearls are amongst the rarest of gems due to their process—African-American Male teachers must persist despite the societal stereotypes, lack of respect, and diversity that are attributed to early elementary education. Additionally, the uniqueness of each experience of African-American male teachers reflects the unique patterns attributed to pearls. The importance of incorporating mentors and sharing the stories of African-American male teachers is similar to the importance of sharing pearls. The beauty of pearls only exists because we are able to see it. Just like the beauty of African American male teachers will only exist if we are able to recruit and retain African American male teachers.

There are too few African American male teachers in K–8 classrooms. The number of African American teachers (female and male) declined after integrating schools. The 1954 Desegregation allowed African American students equal access to quality schools but did not make room for teachers to follow (Hodge et al., 2008). Additionally, the salary and respect level given to teachers, in general, has impacted the quality and diversity of applicants (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll & May, 2011). While the number of African American female teachers has increased since the sixties, African American male teachers have not increased as steadily in today's schools. African American male educators can positively impact all students in K–8 classrooms—especially African American students, who make up nearly half of the students in public education. However, male teachers are typically concentrated in high schools, highlighting the intersectionality between male, African American, and K-8 teachers. Little research has been done focusing on the lack of African American male teachers in K-8 classrooms.

I conducted a single case study on the experiences that impact African American male teachers in public school settings. Students can learn a lot from different cultures but tend to perform better if exposed to teachers who look like them (Fregni, 2019). Additionally, research shows that African American students who have African American teachers are likely to show academic success eventually; if an African American teacher teaches an African American student by third grade, their chances of graduating from high school increase (Fregni, 2019; Graham et al., 2014).

Exploring four male teachers' life experiences sheds light on why African American male teachers choose certification in specific grade levels. The study resulted in three findings that could contribute to a better understanding of why the number of African American male teachers in K–8 classrooms should increase and in what ways to support them. I categorized their

experiences into three main categories: mentoring, connecting and building relationships, and otherfathering. Based on these findings, I recommend increasing the number of teacher mentors, the opportunities for professional and financial growth, and the opportunities for teachers to connect.

Keywords: African American male teachers; counterstories; representation; elementary education; Black male teachers

Where do We Start?

The United States public schools have struggled to keep up with the recent African American student-to-teacher ratio. Research shows that the decrease in the number of African American teachers began during *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 (Ashenfelter et al., 2006). The Brown decision ended the idea of separate but equal, but it also harmed the African American teachers who were in the segregated schools (Hodge et al., 2008). To meet the regulations set by desegregation, schools were combined, resulting in the large-scale removal of African American female and male teachers (Ashenfelter et al., 2006). While the impacts of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision on teachers are not the focus of research around the monumental decision, it is necessary to recognize all the consequences of this monumental decision (Walker, 2013). The leaders behind the push for equality and access were the teachers (Walker, 2013). African American teachers advocated for their rights before the decision and fought for change in the education system before they were removed from their classrooms (Anderson, 1988; Hodge et al., 2008; Walker, 2013).

The disparity in African American teacher representation becomes steeper when focusing on gender. In elementary schools in the state of Texas, women outnumber men 9 to 1, and over 60% of those women are European American (Texas Education Agency, 2020a). Some researchers revealed that European-American educators degrade African American students in public schools in a passive way known as microaggressions (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Solorzano et al., 2000; Strauss, 2019). Microaggressions are inadvertent or indirect acts against a group or person based on race, gender, or religious belief (Palfrey, 2017). Microaggressions are important to consider because of their implicit role in education and curriculum. According to Strauss (2019), microaggressions that minimalize the struggles of African American students are often the norm in public schools. Based on the data from Straus (2019), a conclusion can be made that these microaggressions persist because of the lack of African American male teachers to identify and directly confront the micro aggressors.

Approximately 2% of educators working in the United States public school system are Black males (Whitfield, 2019), which is disproportional to their representation in the overall population in the country. To better understand the scarcity of this representation, this problem of practice dissertation sought to understand the experiences of African American male teachers and their reasons for choosing elementary education certification (K–8). These life experiences may serve as deterrents, preventing African American males from seeking out teaching positions in elementary schools across the United States or as inspirations to spur others to pursue the same profession. My goal was to use African American male teachers' narratives and lived

experiences to understand the patterns that led them to choose their teaching grade level certification.

What's Good for the Goose

Due to the lack of data on African American male teachers, I framed the information needed for this research within the male teacher and African American teacher lenses (Tucker, 2015). While my research focuses on the stories of African American male teachers, the impacts are profitable to all educational leaders—including African American female teachers.

The stories of African American male teachers have been historically left out of teachers' narratives, and little research exists surrounding the ways African American teachers can impact culturally relevant curriculum (Lynn, 2006; Milner, 2008). The presented narratives often paint a negative picture of African American teachers and their schools (Milner, 2008). Although there have been tremendous efforts to increase this diversity for students and staff, Bond et al. (2017) reported that "the teacher workforce has gotten less ethnically and racially diverse and more female…which has had an adverse effect, particularly on students of color" (p. 25). Ladson-Billings (2020) demonstrated that this decline began shortly after *Brown v Board of Education*. As the African American students left their schools, the African American teachers stayed and subsequently lost their jobs. The Albert Shanker Institute recognized that teacher diversity is an area of concern in the United States (ShankerInstitute.org).

Another concern regarding the lack of African American male educators is attrition. Teacher recruitment of minority candidates has slowly increased, but the number of minority teachers leaving the teaching workforce overshadows the recruitment efforts. In a recent report, the Center for American Progress published that:

- Over 25 years, from 1987 to 2012, the minority share of the American teaching force—including African American, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, American Indian, and multiracial teachers—has grown from 12% to 17%.

- The minority share of the American student population also grew during these 25 years, albeit not at the same tempo as increases among minority teachers. Minority students now account for more than half of all public-school students.

- The most significant impediment to increasing the teacher workforce's diversity is not found in the recruitment and hiring of minority teachers. Nationally, minority teachers are being hired at a higher proportional rate than other teachers. Instead, the problem lies in attrition: Minority teachers leave the profession higher than other teachers. (Bond et al., 2017, p. 2)

In order to summarize the research conducted by Bond et al., I list the benefits of diverse teachers for all students and the possible difficulties in recruiting and retaining African American male teachers (see Table 1). It is important to note that the bullet points listed in Table 1 apply to teachers of color.

Table 1
Benefits and Hindrances of Diverse Representation Among Teachers

Benefits of Diverse Teachers on All Students	Hindrances to Recruiting and Retention of African American and African American Male teachers
• Teachers of color positively impact the academic growth of all students. • Teachers of color can be an advocate for students and underserved campuses. • Diversity in staffing can benefit teachers by creating a sense of community.	• The population of students of color is increasing faster than the rate of teachers of color. • Recruitment programs have increased for minority teachers, but retention focuses have not. • *Brown v. Board of Education* caused a decline in African American teachers and culturally relevant curriculum.

The table and data in Table 1 show the benefits of African American teachers in K–8 and students in K–8. Therefore, research must continue to find ways to alleviate the disparity between African American male teachers and students of color. The following literature review examines research regarding teachers of color, African American male teachers, and European American male teachers in K–8. The literature review explores the characteristics and experiences of male teachers and teachers of color and how they impact their teaching decisions.

Although the Supreme Court's decision was to integrate students and provide high-quality instruction for all, closing African American schools implied that African American schools and teachers were inferior (Irvine, 1988; Oakley et al., 2009). Decreased teaching opportunities for African Americans were detrimental to the African American community due to the fact that in the 1950s, more than half of professional African Americans were teachers (Irvine, 1988). At the time of desegregation, European American school boards decided to fire approximately 39,386 African American teachers and move the teachers deemed highly competent to European American schools (Irvine, 1988; Peters, 2019).

Post *Brown vs. Board of Education,* there have been many attempts to rectify the unintended negative effects of the landmark decision. Researchers acknowledge that there is still a need for diversity in the American teaching force, and recruitment alone will not address the lack of racial and gender diversity in American schools (Ginsberg et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2019). In the United States, 54% of students in public schools are students of color, while 82% of teachers are White (Ginsberg et al., 2017). This “racial divide” is extremely high in urban schools, where the difference between teacher and student diversity is 45% (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Nationally, teachers in public schools are likely to be European American females; only 23.5% are males, and only 6.7% are African American (De Brey et al., 2021).

Attempts to positively affect the “racial divide” in education have been made locally and federally. For example, Richard Riley, former US Secretary of Education, created a campaign to recruit talented and diverse teachers (Ginsberg et al., 2017). Then, in 2010, former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan reiterated the need to address the academic achievement gap by recruiting diverse and talented teachers from HBCUs (Ginsberg et al., 2017) because HBCUs

have a supportive and productive environment for future teachers of color (Brown & Thomas, 2020). The recruitment effort spanned from legislation initiatives from the US Secretary of Education to the recruitment efforts from HBCUs, but the current number of African American male teachers is still 2% (Cox et al., 2016).

Resurgence of critical race theory in education. The second historical marker that has more recently impacted African American male educators is the resurgence of critical race theory in education. CRT is an attempt to discover why oppressive structures exist by asking questions such as: (1) Who holds the power; (2) What power do they hold; (3) How are they using this power to benefit others (Lynn & Jennings, 2009). Using these questions, CRT in education examines power dynamics within (1) curriculum and pedagogy, (2) teaching and learning, (3) schooling in general, and (4) policy and community engagement (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015).

A tenet of CRT examined in this research is teaching and learning. According to Ledesma and Calderon (2015) and Kiyama (2017), CRT gives researchers a way to view teachers' behaviors, expressions, and choices. Ledsema and Calderon (2015) posit that a large number of teachers' attitudes and practices are impacted by the views of mainstream society. CRT also gives students an avenue to learn about diversity in education through the lens of their teachers and other members of society.

CRT is a theory that helps analyze how the idea of White Supremacy plays a role in the school classroom and culture (Kohli et al., 2017). Because of recent backlash, it is important to note that the tenets of CRT are not actually taught, for it is not a curriculum. Instead, CRT is a framework to understand how policies affect public institutions like education or the judicial system (Delgado, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2020). CRT has received negative publicity in recent current events (Kohli, 2017; Sawchuk, 2022). Kohli (2017) refers to this negative publicity towards CRT as a form of "new racism." This idea of "new racism" says that CRT is a tool to focus on slavery and make European Americans the root cause of issues that African Americans and other minoritized populations deal with (Hess, 2022). This trending analysis then pulls in the idea of reverse racism and causes the public to believe that CRT is less about equity through understanding stories and more about blame and a form of "new racism."

The last tenet of CRT is that of policy and community engagement. CRT states that policy is rooted in racist ideas and concepts (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). This tenet focuses on action-based policies designed to compensate for the negative effects of a political system built on European- American power (Kohli et al., 2017).

Although scholars draw from CRT in education contexts across the United States, CRT did not begin in education. CRT began within the American legal system as a way to explain the experiences of the minoritized (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Lynn & Jennings, 2009; Wisconsin Law Review, 2021). Legal scholars like Derrick Bell sought ways to amplify the voices of legal students who were excluded from the American Legal System meetings (Wisconsin Law Review, 2021).

Ladson-Billings (2020) drew from the legal to apply CRT to the field of education as a way to explain the disenfranchisement of minority students in education. Ladson Billings cited cases such as *Roberts vs. City of Boston*, in which children of color were forced to go out of their neighborhood to attend inferior schools (Wisconsin Law Review, 2021). CRT tenets are applicable in the education field where educational inequities in school zoning exist. The tenets

help explain that racism is normal, and the ideologies surrounding racism are deeply woven into our society, as in the case of school zones (Sawchuk, 2022).

One of the attempts to answer the questions that CRT poses is the creation of critical pedagogy. Giroux (2003), considered a founder of critical pedagogy, believed that schools reproduced inequality in society. For example, school systems use tracking systems to project students' academic ability rather than provide the resources needed to make sure students receive an equitable education (Sutton et al., 2021). It is important to discuss critical pedagogy because critical race theory is rooted in similar concepts. One of those concepts is critical race theory in education, which says schooling is based on controlling students through hegemonic practices. Additionally, both theories assert that education liberates schooling as a way to uplift society (Lynn & Jennings, 2009).

African American male teachers play an important role in the connection between critical pedagogy and critical race theory. African American male teachers are levers that enable African American students to use schooling to develop their education (Jennings, 1999). Although African American female teachers can also encourage the development of student's education, this research emphasizes the specific benefits related to male teachers. Ladson Billings (1994) stated that African American teachers do this by (1) questioning the link between knowledge and power, (2) encouraging students to become active in society, (3) allowing discourse to be a way to gain knowledge, and (4) showing students that they value their impacts on society and that the students are valuable producers to their own culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994). African American teachers are able to decipher which of the four strategies will work for their students in a fluid and sincere manner (Lynn & Jennings, 2009). Critical race theory is the acknowledgment of the educational concerns that exist in the American educational system.

Despite the low number of African American male teachers, CRT and its tenets allow African American teachers to make significant impacts on education (Gay, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2022). Gay (2005) states that this positive impact is in conflict with growing tensions around the ideas of CRT. Gay (2005) attributes this to the need for a shift in power in the education and political arenas. By applying critical race theory as a framework, the focus becomes the stories of African American male teachers who are underrepresented or marginalized by the education system. This shift of focus helps balance the need for more voice in politics and education with concrete examples from teachers in the classroom (Riley, 1998; Stone, 2001). To avoid continuing the same negative hegemonic cycle that exists in education, CRT disrupts the traditional narrative in education with many unheard voices.

Storytelling is an important part of CRT because it gives outsiders (non-African American male teachers) a view of the insider story (African American male teachers) and allows outsiders a chance to understand their role in systemic racism (Ladson-Billings, 2020). Often, the minoritized can accept a disparaging view of themselves based on the purported information shared in mainstream media. Sharing their stories (formally and informally) as a counterstory generates a way to break down dysconcious racism (Ladson-Billings, 2020). Dysconcious racism is like microaggressions; both are not consciously acted on but continue the acts of racism from the oppressor (Delgado & Stefancic, 2020).

Although ideas such as culturally responsive teaching have emerged, there are still negative stereotypes attached to the predominantly female field of teaching that hinder the diversity of the field. One such topic centers on the issue of discipline. While culturally responsive teaching

supports the inclusion of culture, diversity, and equality in the curriculum to be adaptive and dynamic (Dancy, 2014), discipline structures taught in pre-service education programs challenge the foundation of culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2020) and perpetuate the view of male teachers as the disciplinarians. Discipline structures are centered around extreme discipline policies such as zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline and perpetuate hegemonic principles of power, stereotypes, and punishment (Ginsberg et al., 2017; Dancy, 2014). Since there are very few male teachers in K-8 schools, they often take on the discipline structures at their campus.

The intersectionality of being African American and male often leads to these individuals being utilized as disciplinarians (Lynn & Jennings, 2009). Dependence on African American male teachers as disciplinarians is a problem for multiple reasons. First, teachers handle many parts of their classroom: management, planning, parent contact, professional development, etc. If a teacher is seen as the one in charge of behavior, they are pulled away from academic roles to help support behavior issues encountered by other teachers. This drain on resources can lead to teachers leaving the classroom for higher-paying positions, schools with fewer discipline issues, or grade levels with fewer disciplinary problems (Heitzeg, 2009; Klassen et al., 2011).

Case and Participant Descriptions

This case study focused solely on the experiences of African American male teachers in an elementary classroom. I conducted criterion sampling to select the participants. The first step in the process was to recruit participants. The second step was to purposefully select the participants who met the criteria. Steps one and two occurred concurrently to maximize time. Based on race, grade level taught, and gender, I selected four participants from those who volunteered. Although there are additional characteristics that the participants use to identify themselves, race and gender remain the focus of this study.

The case study consisted of recruiting African American teachers who were currently teaching in kindergarten through eighth-grade classrooms. The recruitment process was mainly done through personal connections or social media. After the candidates were recruited, they completed an interview and post-interview via email. The post-interview questions focused on otherfathering and were completed after the zoom interview to avoid any framing of what had been presupposed about otherfathering.

The four participants all taught in a K–8 classroom during the 2020–2021 or 2021–2022 school year. Additionally, all resided and taught in public schools in the Houston metropolitan area. Two taught at Green Sky (pseudonym), located in one independent school district in Houston, and the other two taught at Blue Sky (pseudonym), located in a nearby independent school district in Houston.

Participant 1, Isaac, is a veteran educator with over 25 years of experience in education. He has worked in charter and traditional public schools as a physical education teacher for multiple grade levels. He earned his teaching certification for EC-12 through a university teacher preparation program. Isaac identifies as a homosexual and is very open to sharing this part of his identity with his students. Isaac was a founding member of Houston's most prestigious charter schools. After serving as a paraprofessional, he became a full-time physical education teacher. At that time, he was one of the few African American males on his campus. The school was very small, and Isaac shared that "we valued all kids equally." Isaac went on to say that the value was

shared between colleagues as well. None of the administrators felt that they were more important than the teachers. At one point, the principal was also the fifth-grade teacher, and like most of the staff, he was a male educator.

Participant 2, Mark, has been teaching seventh-grade science for over two decades. After he earned his teaching certification for grades 4–8 through a university teacher preparation program, Mark began his teaching career at his current campus, where he served as a student-teacher. Since then, he has been on the same campus and has held the same role throughout his time at the campus. After retiring from the military, he decided to teach because he felt that his leadership and mentoring experience aligned with the great teachers in his K–8 experience. Mark identifies as a biracial African American teacher but "often just checks Black in the identity box" when filling out applications.

Participant 3, John, received his teaching certification through an alternative certification program in Texas. After completion of the program, he became certified for grades 4–8. He began his teaching career in a small middle school outside the Houston city limit. He currently teaches special education students and is the club sponsor for the Black Indigenous People of Color Student Union. John is completing his first year at his current campus. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, he decided to transfer to a district closer to his family so that he could be available for them in case of any emergency school closures.

Participant 4, Paul, at the time of the interview, received a promotion to become the behavior specialist on the campus where he taught the previous school year. He earned his teaching certification for 7–12 through a university teacher preparation program. Paul started as an elementary music teacher but moved to middle school to work with special education students. In all, Paul spent seven years teaching math, science, English language arts, and music before being promoted. During the initial interaction with Paul, he shared that he did not want to be a teacher. As he put it, "I didn't think I wanted to be a teacher—it was an accident." However, after working for an after-school program, he found his niche in teaching. He also earned a master's from Texas A&M University and hopes to become a band director or administrator.

The four participants comprise the case for this research study. All took part in each phase of the data collection as well as member-checking. Together, their stories offer insight into why African American males choose to become teachers in elementary classrooms, as well as their experiences once becoming an elementary educator.

Qualitative Data Findings

Findings from the data first focused on responses from each participant, followed by an analysis of all data. This section explores findings from the first-cycle coding of the data from each participant. I used the critical race theory (CRT) tenets, which are based on the power dynamics within the contexts of (a) curriculum and pedagogy, (b) teaching and learning, (c) schooling in general, and (d) policy and community engagement (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015) as the a priori codes. Each participant's online questionnaire responses, transcribed interviews, and any follow-up communication were combined as the data for each participant. The data collection occurred from August 2021 until January 2022.

Before I coded the data, I transcribed the Zoom recordings. Once completed, I scanned for any errors in the transcription. I then overlaid anecdotal notes taken during the interview using a

transparent film paper to compare spoken words to perceived emotions and actions. After I completed this process, I entered the response to each interview question into a Google form. The form allowed me an easy method to conduct member checking. I shared each participant's responses with them in a document. They verified what I transcribed as accurately representing their responses. After validating the accuracy of the transcription, I proceeded to code the data for each participant.

Once I compiled all of the data for a participant, I coded using a priori codes from CRT to conduct the framework analysis. Table 2 shows the codes I initially used as well as examples from the data to provide further explanation for how the data were coded during the first cycle (Saldaña, 2021). After I completed the coding process, I created a summary statement to synthesize what I found holistically from each participant. By engaging in first-cycle coding, I applied tenets of CRT in education to the data to better understand each participant's personal and professional journey. This information allowed me to create an overall impression from each participant's responses before moving to second-cycle coding of themes during the thematic analysis of the case. Performing the two cycles of coding helped me answer the research questions and describe the factors that lead African American males to teach in K-8 classrooms and their experiences once there.

Table 2

First-Cycle Codes Based on Critical Race Theory

CRT Tenet	Codes	Thematic Elements from the data
Curriculum and pedagogy	Curriculum, content, textbook	Content: Elementary, building blocks, biggest ability for change and shaping to help kids become critical thinkers and leaders through content
Teaching and learning	Best practices, student-centered,	Teaching toolkit: My daily motivation is to help our students succeed, led by example
Schooling in general	Testing, administration	Inadequate schooling procedures: Frustrated by testing procedures, lack of understanding from principals and leadership
Policy and community engagement	Parents, family, neighborhood, relationship	Community Support and Mentoring: Took me under his wing, Black/AA mentor, teacher who looked like them, Teach for America, City Year, and TA with Urban Teachers

Isaac

Isaac was the only participant who attributes counterexamples to his motivation to become a teacher. Isaac grew up in a small town that had very few teachers, and he believed that many of the teachers were hired through nepotism. He stated, "they were all related and did a horrible job." Many of his student counterparts had potential in various fields, including academics and occupational fields like mechanics and automotive. He recalled that none of the students were given options in high school except to apply at the nearby grocery store when (and if) they graduated. He was openly enraged about the fact that many of the teachers grew up in the neighborhood and left to attend prestigious colleges. However, they lacked the ability (or desire) to motivate his peers to expand their professional options. This passion led him to the field of physical education because he believed that he could impact all grade levels since physical education teachers often work with every student in the building. Isaac also used this desire to become a college and career advisor at the charter school where he began working. He even created a scholarship (named after himself) that was given to students from small towns who desired to go to college after graduation.

During the interview, Isaac continuously shifted in his seat, walked around the room, and switched to headphones from his computer. These small behaviors did not make him seem nervous but rather helped him respond to the questions in the interview. For example, when he mentioned his hometown, he switched to headphones and turned off the screen so he could find a picture of his city. Another example of how these changes helped narrate the interview was when he called himself an 'untie.' He shifted postures as he explained the nuances of his gender. It appeared that he was using his body as a way to communicate like he would in his physical education course.

When asked if he identifies as a father figure, Isaac responded by saying:

> Not a father figure… but being a Black gay man, I identify as the UNTIE...the uncle and the auntie. Joking, I like to identify as a thought partner. Tell me what is on your mind, and I'm going to ask a question, and if you can't answer and say "I don't know" more than five times to any of my questions, it's time to stop talking and start doing.

Isaac uses his questioning pattern as a motivational skill when a student refuses to participate in an activity in class. He believes that if you cannot think of a reason not to complete a task, then you are able to complete the task. Overall, Isaac believes that learning for students is based on their ability to participate in learning and the teacher's ability to lead by a positive example.

Mark

Mark is a second career teacher, as he was in the United States military before becoming a teacher. He attributes his positive character and traditional mannerisms to a mixture of observations of people from the military and public schools. During the interview, Mark started off by saying that he was proud of me for pursuing a terminal degree. He repeatedly stopped mid-sentence to check if he was on the right track and "sharing the right information for the research."

For Mark, connections are the biggest lever for making change as a teacher. He often used humor in the interview to, as he said, "lighten the mood." He even said that he uses humor to break down barriers because it is hard for students not to trust you when they are laughing. Another important characteristic of Mark is honesty. Mark said, "I tell my students when I am

disappointed/proud that it is not about just their grade—it's about who they are becoming." Mark's honesty is an important part of who he is and what he believes his students can add to their values.

Mark welcomed the idea of being a father figure to the students in his life.

> Since becoming a teacher, I have used otherfathering (OF) to attempt to find a common ground in which to relate to students. At my current campus, my commonality is my color. Our campus does not have many teachers of color, especially male teachers. As I write this message, the full-time curriculum teachers [of color] would be ME. This is a great responsibility for me as I am the only person of color that a young kid will see in their daily life.

Mark truly understands and embraces the idea that he has a responsibility beyond the role of teacher.

John

John has a progressive mindset about teaching and a belief centered around the examples of good teaching that he encountered as a child. He aims to become secretary of education and create lasting change in education because of the worldwide impact the investment in policy will have. His progressive mindset is summarized in a quote from his interview, "What's best for the kids is best for the class." To John, everyone in the class is part of a wheel that only turns when everyone is functioning at their highest level. This is best done by support in practice and in theory. He believes that laws are only the start of the change in curriculum and pedagogy and that districts must make sure teachers are actually practicing the change in their classes:

> I think this otherfathering is great; my method is following through and follow up and advocate for yourself. I try to teach my student to get of the slavery mindset of I don't know. Someone once told me at the age of 45 that if you want to hide something from Black people, put it in a book. That hit me really hard because I read all the time. It kills me to hear kids say that they don't like to read.

Mark's educational values are based on the people and experiences that motivate him. Seeing his friends in classes and training are his daily motivators to keep teaching. He believes that teaching is very transformational, and as teachers, transformation starts with the people who support us. John attributes his desire to become a teacher to his high school teachers and other informal mentors throughout his life.

During Mark's interview, his body language remained formal. He had a professional background as a Zoom filter to blur his background. John made sure to tell me that he completed all of his responses on the online questionnaire outside of work hours. When reminded about completing the interview or sharing information via email, he made it clear that he would only respond after school hours. From these behaviors, I inferred that John has a very traditional notion of work and social separation. Other teachers felt comfortable responding during the school day if time permitted, but John did not do the interview or respond to any emails until after 4:30 pm each day.

Paul

Paul's interview showed that he believed teachers are academic and social leaders for their students. His teaching philosophy is that teachers should execute the curriculum to the best of their ability but also ensure they are creating a foundation of learning that builds strong students with great character.

Paul's educational values are based on the community and experiences that he had growing up. He grew up attending a school similar in size and racial demographics as HISD (Houston Independent School District). As he stated, he was one of the students who were written off because of their behavior when all he really wanted was someone to connect with and encourage him. Knowing that he needed motivation growing up, he chose the teaching career so that he could be the person that he needed as a child.

According to Paul, teachers can use everyday experiences to teach lifelong experiences. During a conversation with a student, he recalls modeling this statement:

> I had a conversation with a kid who I told he was a shift manager at an ice cream store. He said he would not hire me because I was old and had too much experience. We had a whole conversation about this, and later, he said I'm glad we had this conversation because I didn't think about it like that.

Paul explained to the student that making assumptions based on what we think we know can be damaging to you and prevent you from moving forward. Paul took the time to explain this to the student, modeling otherfathering, because he wanted the student to understand there are always consequences to our choices.

Summary of CRT Tenets in the Data

Drawing on critical race theory, I used the following categories for my first-cycle coding: (a) curriculum and pedagogy, (b) teaching and learning, (c) schooling in general, and (d) policy and community engagement. Using CRT as the framework for analysis, I sought to answer what factors influenced African American males to teach in K–8 classrooms as well as their experiences as teachers. The tenets of CRT in education informed how I categorized the data. African American male teachers do not represent a racial or gender majority in the teaching professions, so policies and structures in place impacted their journey to becoming teacher as well as their experiences as teachers in the classroom. Thus, the four tenets helped answer the research questions regarding factors that influenced their decision to become a teacher as well as experiences that directly impact their teaching.

For the first CRT tenet, curriculum and pedagogy, the findings in this research suggest that African American teachers can have an impact on curriculum and pedagogy through representation. The African American males in this research represent a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and characteristics. The participants being present in elementary classrooms helps students see early on that despite the racist undertones presented in the current curriculum, there are real-life counter-examples that break down stereotypes of non-educated, unprofessional African American men.

Secondly, the CRT tenet of teaching and learning related to the data by showing that African American males play various roles in the teaching, learning, and schooling of all students and

teachers. Teachers play a role in supporting students who look like them by helping them see that the opportunities they dream of can be made real. When diversity is present, students can also understand the false narratives presented by the persistent stereotyping of people who do not look like them without an example to prove them wrong. Teachers acknowledge that being a role model is an important part of their role as educators. To help facilitate this type of social-emotional growth, three out of four teachers chose to perform duties outside of the classroom to significantly impact a larger group of students.

The third CRT tenet, schooling in general, emerged as data revealed that African American male teachers' relationships with their peers positively impact the school environment and culture. For example, the data from the literature review states that an overwhelming majority of African American male teachers are used as disciplinarians and cannot grow in the academic section of their role properly. However, the data showed that the teachers in this study believe that their peers can seek them (and do seek them out) for both discipline issues and academic issues. For example, Mark shared,

> I have many colleagues who ask me for help—some that don't even work with me anymore. Or some that aren't in my subject area. I don't know if it's the wealth of experience that I have as a teacher or the wealth of experience that I have in life.

If teachers believe that they are needed at their campus and feel confident in their roles, they are perceived as leaders on their campus for all issues that pertain to student success.

In the fourth CRT tenet, policy and community engagement, data conveyed that beyond their school contexts, African American male teachers act in ways that enhance and enrich community engagement. For example, all participants embraced the idea of otherfathering as part of their role as teachers. Two participants mentioned that they did not know the term otherfathering but gave specific examples of how they used mentoring as a way to support students who they were able to share space with and connect over stories. Overall, the participants shared their pathways to becoming educators and their experiences while working in elementary schools. The findings supported the CRT tenets posed by Ledesma and Calderón (2015). After analyzing the data collected using CRT, three themes emerged: mentoring, connections and relationships, and otherfathering.

Thematic Analysis

Once I completed the first-cycle coding process and generated synthesizing statements for each participant, I proceeded to engage in second-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2021). In this process, I coded the comments of the participants using student interactions, personal interactions, and professional interactions. I used the data as a whole to form categories (personal, professional, and student-facing). These categories emerged into three themes for this case. It is important to note that otherfathering was a predetermined theme, so I created post-interview questions to help the participants engage with the idea. In Table 3, I listed examples from the data that were frequently used phrases and how they related to the themes that emerged. Based on these themes, I grouped the data across participants in order to share what influenced their journey to becoming a teacher as well as their experiences once in the classroom.

As participants responses repeated phrases or terms, I grouped them into categories and then found a theme related to all of the terms. For example, the phrase "someone I look up to"

occurred consistently when asked about their decision to teach the grade level and content area that they are teaching. When participants were asked about their roles before teaching, all four participants mentioned an example (or counter-example) of a leader who helped guide them to become successful teachers. The theme of otherfathering was determined when participants mentioned their role as part of the students' family, father figure, or a variation of that role. Finally, the theme of connections with their colleagues was developed when participants were asked whether other teachers rely on them for support with disciplinary issues, academic issues, or both. I describe how each theme related to the findings from the data with respect to mentoring, connecting and building relationships, and otherfathering.

Table 3
Thematic Analysis

Themes	Examples of codes from the data
Mentoring	Someone I look up to My leader Role model Only Black (African American) male teacher Only male teacher Students trust me Students talk to me about anything
Connections and Building Relationships	Teacher friend Colleagues rely on me I want them (teachers) to trust me Teachers can come to me for academic or disciplinary support
Otherfathering	Father figure …no dad at home …even if they don't have both parents. "Untie" Consistent discipline and building relationship

Mentoring

As defined by literature, mentoring is a representation or counter-representation of a role model for students or peers (Rodríguez & Greer, 2017; Tafari, 2018; Smith et al., 2007). During the Zoom interview, each participant was asked to explain the experiences that shaped their decisions to become teachers in their current grade level. As each participant's responses were analyzed, one of the prevalent themes was mentoring. All participants could recall being mentored informally and used that experience to define their role as a mentor.

Isaac's mentoring experience. Isaac's mentors were African American female teachers who served as counterexamples to the teacher he wanted to be. Isaac saw how much the teachers in his school did not care about the students. They did not represent the well-spoken, well-mannered mom he had at home. Isaac was concerned that if students (of any race) saw the teacher's apathy, the students would think this is how all African American teachers behave. He

knew that he had to do something about the negative image of African American teachers. Isaac struggled with the idea of becoming a teacher because it was not a popular option for boys at the time.

When he became a teacher, he felt like he did as a kid and wanted to represent the best teacher for boys like him. Isaac commented, "being a Black male, I am very conscious of how the children view me—and the outside world. I have to make sure my moves are purposeful and impactful in a good way." As Isaac noted, he is viewed as a teacher, an African American male, and a representative of how those character traits intersect. As a teacher, Isaac is an informal mentor because he knows that many students may not see an African American male professional in their formative years.

Mark's mentoring experience. Mark was a mentee of a teacher whom he recalled fondly as Mr. Zach. Mr. Zach taught Mark everything he knew about science and found a way to engage all the students. Up until that point, Mark was not convinced that science was even an interesting subject. Mr. Zach was Mark's one and only African American teacher. Mr. Zach taught Mark middle school science. After more than two decades of teaching middle school science, Mark credits his success to his mentor, Mr. Zach.

Before teaching, Mark, a retired United States veteran, had the opportunity to mentor high school students while in the Army. Mark believed that there were many reasons that he was a mentor to the students in the small neighborhood high school. He recalls that a majority of the male students were looking for opportunities after high school. When the students talked to Mark, they asked him questions about his choices as a high schooler to serve in the Army. However, the African American boys that he worked with him just showed up. Mark stated:

> they [African American boys] were few—not a lot of Black boys. But they came to our mentor meetings all the time. They didn't ask questions; they just participated. I knew they were looking for a connection. That was enough for me to continue being a part of the mentor program while I was stationed in that city.

The experience of mentoring these students during his tenure in the military influenced his more recent involvement as a mentor while working as a teacher in a middle school.

Mark participated in the mentoring program a few years ago at his current campus because of his prior experiences as a mentor, but more strongly, he attributes his involvement due to his relationship with Mr. Zach. Mark stated that he stands out the most because he is an African American Middle school science teacher.

> That hit me well because I saw a role model, and it was something I could strive to be. I have mentored kids in the past (in the Army), and at my current school, we had an official mentoring program in which I took part. I always thought my job as a mentor was to listen and make course corrections where I could. I am still in contact with my mentees to this day as they attempt to find their places in the world.

It is not clear if Mr. Zach knew his impact on Mark's success. Mark's ability to recall the connection to his experience as a mentor and mentee shares the value and power of creating successful teachers through a relationship with an advisor at a formative age.

John's mentoring experience. John is the youngest teacher and the teacher with the least amount of experience, but his responses provided the same theme of mentoring that the other participants provided. John chose middle school because he believes this is a critical time for students—especially boys and African American boys. They are all growing and finding their learning styles, and this is where I belong because of that. I can impact students and set them on the right path.

Before coming to his current school, he worked as an after-school tutor at the High School level. John's role was to teach math to athletes who were in danger of failing. John said, "I gravitated towards supporting them—I want to coach to help impact them. I wanted to mentor students, not just teach them math." John chose to apply for an after-school math tutor because he needed the money, but he chose to help the students because he believed he needed to.

John was not a certified teacher when he mentored the student-athletes he tutored. The make-up of the students' homes was irrelevant to John when he decided to become a mentor. Regardless of whether John was their only African American male teacher, the students he worked with benefited from his presence. John works alongside the school's coach at his current campus. John explained his thoughts on how his role as a mentor impacts his campus, "I know I'm new, but I am valued—and sometimes kids need to hear that about themselves too." Kids experience unique situations outside of the home if they have someone (an example) to deal with those real-life situations in real-time. Coaching is an example of benefiting from an African American male figure out of school context. Students need support in various ways during developmental stages because they are at school for so long (including after-school activities). The impact that a Black male teacher can have is immeasurable. One benefit is that the students can learn how to handle situations in various ways—even if they have both parents at home.

Paul's mentoring experience. Paul's experience as a teacher began in elementary school because he was aware of the lack of men in K–8 classrooms.

> I specifically started my teaching career in elementary because we needed more men. There is a need at the elementary/middle school level—we need equal representation at all levels, but especially for the younger kids for behavior that affects deeper issues in culture and academics, too.

For Paul, applying to schools does not just mean that he is looking for a role that fits him—he is also looking for how the campus needs him. Paul believes that students need to know how to relate to all people, and that is his role as a teacher. Paul says,

> I am their mentor because they need to relate to people of all races and backgrounds. So, I know that I am one of the few African American males on my campus because I can share my experience with students. I use this as a way to even apply to campuses: 'what can I add as an African American male teacher to this campus?' What won't be there if I don't go there—or another African American male teacher doesn't come?

Paul looked at his race as an asset when applying for teaching positions because he was aware of the complexities he faced at that age. Paul is also mindful of how his presence on campus can positively impact the trajectory of the students, the teachers, and even the campus.

Connecting and Building Relationships

Participants mentioned relationships with their colleagues and the role that these relationships play on personal and student success. Participants realized that to be successful both in and out of the classroom; they must rely on other colleagues and be open to their input. Even the newest teacher in the participant group recognized that this was not something he had done yet—but needed. All participants wanted their impact to be beneficial for students and teachers.

Isaac on connecting and building relationships. Isaac believes that teaching is not done in isolation. Mentoring is usually a one-sided relationship; connecting and building relationships is multi-dimensional. As Isaac stated, connecting with others in education can help you reach beyond your classroom impact. "To change education, one of my biggest goals is to become Secretary of Education. I want to work to create lasting changes in education because it's universal work with universal impact." Isaac expanded his impact by attending professional development sessions outside of the district. He chose not to sit with teachers he knew at staff meetings to meet new teachers on his campus.

Since participating wholly in building relationships with his peers is a priority for him, he made friends with teachers who have helped him expand his impact outside of Houston and surrounding cities. He was honored by his first campus with a scholarship named after him. His first campus recognized the relationships he built with donors and helped support the school financially. "Teachers who cope successfully with teaching stressors rely on strong relationships with supportive family and friends. They choose positive attitudes and humor to sustain themselves, and they manage to carve out time for solitude, reflection, and other beneficial activities like exercise or hobbies." Isaac built strong relationships with his co-workers, so much so that he referred to them throughout the interview as his family. After just a few years of teaching, Isaac decided that he would not take work home on the weekends. He said this is how he and his family reenergized for the next week and connected with the teachers and friends he made in a nonprofessional setting.

Mark on connecting and building relationships. Mark has the longest career in teaching and attributes it to not getting involved in the "minutia of things." Although he does not directly connect with teachers intentionally, Mark builds relationships with teachers informally.

> I was voluntold to do crosswalk duty—and I could have said no. But I knew the other teachers did not want to get up early. This is a good way for me to connect with other teachers without getting involved in drama.

Mark takes his role during crosswalk duty to help teachers because he knows who is running late and can help them avoid the long line of parents dropping off kids. The principal sent an email telling teachers to use the appropriate traffic pattern, even if they are late. Mark replied "All" to the email and said, "If you are late, flash your lights at me, and I will stop traffic to let you in." In this case, the administration attempted to draw a line, but he found a way around it because of Mark's relationship and empathy with the staff. Mark found a way to break down the formality and subvert rules by authentically connecting with staff, like stopping traffic to let a late co-worker bypass the parent line.

John on connecting and building relationships. John is still at the beginning of his teaching career and does not feel like he can connect with other teachers. He knows the importance of

connection but feels like his efforts to sustain his position can be focused on building a single relationship. This relationship happens to be with another African American male teacher. John meets with his informal mentor and colleague weekly. “I don’t feel pressured to have things prepared to say when I meet with him. I just talk about stuff. And we easily switch from sports to work stuff. I don’t think I could do this with a lot of people right now.” John desires to help others as he becomes more comfortable with the campus culture, but he does not feel comfortable yet. His reluctance does not stop people from asking him for help. Teachers come to him for discipline issues and academic issues related to special education students. Since his informal mentor is also in special education, he often consults his mentor. “Mr. Perkins is a good guy—we laugh and learn, and that’s helped me a lot,” says John. This small interaction between peers gives John the confidence to tackle difficult situations. He can confidently respond to questions about behavior or academics because he has a peer to guide him through concerns. When teachers reach out to John (and indirectly his mentor teacher), they are helping to dismantle the low expectations that teachers have for their students. Mark uses his connection with his informal mentor teacher to leverage appropriate expectations and place students in appropriate programs.

Paul on connecting and building relationships. Paul emphasized his ability to connect with teachers because of his role in the behavior support program at his campus. In his role, Paul stated, “I’m fortunate that part of my current role is to connect with teachers who have [special education] students or behavioral students by request or need.” His tone and hand gestures emphasized “need” as he spoke. Paul is the teacher, always present in the halls, at the students’ games, or even at lunch. When asked about his relationship with teachers, he says he comes from a sensible and positive place—not “toxic positivity.” He wants teachers to know him as a person first, so he feels that being present in multiple areas of the school at various times will allow him to accomplish this goal.

In addition, the information that he collects both informally and formally from the teachers helps him develop plans for students with behavioral needs. On why connection and relationships matter, Paul states:

> Representation matters—it’s supply and demand; when I want to transfer to a new campus—I look at what can I offer them—what won’t be there if I don’t go there—for teachers and students. I help teachers because I’m helping students, and building a relationship with PASS teachers is the most important part of my job. How can I fix the problem if I don’t know the teacher or the student? At some point, we have to fix the problem.

Building relationships and making connections is not a part of the job role, but it is an integral part of success. As Paul mentions, individuals cannot understand the root of the problem if teachers do not get to know the people (teachers and students) involved. In addition, relationships with teachers help him distinguish between classroom climate and classroom culture.

Otherfathering

As provided in Appendix D, I generated a follow-up email questionnaire to otherfathering, defined as the idea that mentoring happens with Black male teachers as a positive presence in the life of a child or as a personal reference to a content or experience (Tafari- Hicks, 2018). Within

this mentoring relationship, there are two types of otherfathering. Somatic otherfathering is when both parties are available for physically present and mutually accountable face-to-face interactions. Somatic otherfathering typically happens in a healthy and safe mentor relationship. Conversely, cerebral otherfathering is when other father figures or mentors are mentioned in relation to content, situations, or social experiences. The mentor being referenced is not physically present and is only a representation of the idea of a mentor. Although cerebral otherfathering has its place, the emphasis on critical race theory's tenets leans heavily into the definition of somatic otherfathering (otherfathering).

The focus for this data centered on somatic otherfathering. Findings related to their experiences in the classroom. Because a criterion for participants in this study was they had at least one year of teaching in the classroom, they could respond about how they interacted with students and viewed their role as instructional leaders.

Isaac's response on otherfathering. The otherfathering method that Isaac's teaching focuses on is asking questions to avoid assumptions. "I use my skills of listening, observing, and asking questions (my life coach training) to gather information before making assumptions." He often repeats what the students say when engaging with the students. He expressed shock when students encounter him because they are not used to having their opinions matter in decision-making.

When asked if he believed himself to be a father figure, he said no. "I see myself more like an 'untie,' an uncle and an auntie—not a dad because I don't want nobody's kids, ha!" The idea of 'un-tie' acknowledges that he is a part of the student's family circle but not as their parent.

Mark's response on otherfathering. Mark's response to otherfathering focused on responsibility and common ground. The common ground is often race because of the demographics of the campus. At the interview, he was the only full-time African American teacher on his campus. "This is a great responsibility. I truly understand that I have a responsibility beyond the role of a teacher." Mark's presumed responsibility causes him to connect with students in humor and authenticity. He tells the students that he is a father figure to them (regardless of race) while the students are at school. He shares his disappointments and joys, not just with their grades but also with their actions.

John's responses on otherfathering. As a new teacher, John struggled with the idea of otherfathering. He recognized that there is a need to develop father-like relationships with students. John has not yet found a method to do this with students, especially male students. He attempted to build connections with the students by using the same applications that are popular with the age group he taught. For example, "Kids are on their phones a lot—using TikTok. I stay up to date with these types of trends." Although John does not see himself as a father figure (yet), he finds ways to show them love, guidance, and support.

Paul's responses on otherfathering. Paul believes that otherfathering is the epitome of building relationships with students. He also believes that operating as a mentor or father figure has a greater impact when the African American males around the students have diverse interests. This diversity of interest exposes students to various types of "being Black" and encourages them to become confident in their characteristics and talents. Paul said, "Helping our students gain experiences with ballets, opera, musicals, and sports other than basketball, football, and track is important. There's so much out there to be seen and experienced." It is virtually impossible to

expose students to everything outside of their neighborhoods and cities. Teachers are the window to various experiences, and the foundation of otherfathering means that students can have many experiences without leaving their classroom.

Answering the Research Questions

The research questions were answered through the interviews of each participant. The teachers interviewed showed and exemplified the response in their written and verbal responses. The teachers also responded to the questions by sharing their teaching philosophies. Additionally, the research questions were answered through thorough data analysis.

For the first question, factors that prompted African American males to choose to teach in elementary (K–8) classrooms, data revealed responses that provided a variety of reasons for African American males to teach in a K–8 classroom. Some of the responses were mentoring students who looked like them, creating a space for positive experiences in education to exist, and being a positive role model for all students.

The data revealed that representation matters. All the candidates mentioned that they were influenced to teach by an informal or formal mentor. “I became a teacher because I wanted to give back…I had a black male teacher who took me in,” Mark stated. Mark recalled that an African American male took him in when he was a “troubled youth in high school.” This informal mentor lived in Mark’s neighborhood and supported him for only a few months before he moved away. Mark’s informal mentor checked in on him at the end of the week to make sure he was completing his homework and even attended some of Mark’s school functions. Mark did not recall how they met, but he remembered the few encounters that they had and credited this mentor with his desire to teach. Mark believed that if he had many mentors in his neighborhood when he was younger, he could have used positive interactions to avoid some of the conflicts he dealt with in high school.

The second research question focused on the experiences of African American male teachers. Themes arose through the teacher responses as well as the data analysis. The theme of creating a positive space was evident in all of the participants’ teaching philosophies:

- Mark— “When you do something with 100%, you learn something about yourself and others in the environment around you that can help everyone succeed.”
- John— "Empathetic accountability—respect the student for who they can be and what they bring to the space they are in.”
- Paul— "What’s best for the child is best for the class.”
- Isaac— "Teach the curriculum but also focus on life skills that will help them succeed in life.”

Each participant’s teaching philosophy mentioned the environment that the educator or the student is in. The philosophies bring together the connectedness of the teaching profession and its impact on the space that the student (and teacher) are in now and can be in the future.

Analysis of the data also answered the second research question regarding the experiences of African American male educators while teaching in elementary (K–8) classrooms in several ways. The themes of mentoring, connecting, building relationships, and otherfathering all relate to the experiences described in this case.

While the literature review revealed a low number of African American male teachers placed in K–8 classrooms (Bullough, 2015), the case showed that counter to societal and cultural norms, the participants held important rationales for becoming certified to teach in K–8 classrooms. The participants' rationales were summarized in their teaching philosophies. The rationales were also stated in their response to the interview question that asked why they wanted to teach in elementary school.

- Mark— "Middle school is the most difficult time that children have because of so many changes mentally and emotionally."
- John—"I feel that many of the gaps and issues of childhood can be negated at younger ages."
- Paul—"I chose elementary because in those building blocks is when you have the biggest ability for change and shaping to help kids become critical thinkers and leaders.
- Isaac— "Middle school is important because it shapes a kid's outlook as they grow towards being a teenager in high school."

Each participant shared their rationality by focusing on the importance of the students' grade level and its connection to their emotional and academic growth.

The themes that were identified through the research were generally based on the impact of the participants on the students and the correlation to the students' growth. Each participant believed that they played a part in successfully developing all of the students around them and believed that their experiences helped prepare them to do so. Overall, participants believed that middle and elementary school shape the foundation for students' future success.

References

Allbritton, D. W., McKoon, G., & Gerrig, R. J. (1995). Metaphor-based schemas and text representations: Making connections through conceptual metaphors. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, *21*(3), 612–625. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-7393.21.3.612

Allen, Q., & White-Smith, K. A. (2014). "Just as bad as prisons": The challenge of dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline through teacher and community Education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *47*(4), 445–460. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958961

Amos, Y. T. (2010). "They don't want to get it!" Interaction between minority and White preservice teachers in a multicultural education class. *Multicultural Education, 17*(4), 31–37.

Anderson, J. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South*. University of North Carolina Press.

Ashenfelter, O., Collins, W., & Yoon, A. (2006). Evaluating the role of Brown vs. Board of Education in school equalization, desegregation, and the income of African Americans. American Law and Economics Review, 8(2) 213–248. https://doi.org/10.1093/aler/ahl001 https://doi.org/10.3386/w11394

Barnum, M. (2018). *Black teachers leave schools at higher rates - but why?* Chalkbeat. https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/7/25/21105406/black-teachers-leave-schools-at-higher-rates-but-why

Barnum, M. (2018, March 16). *'Disciplinarians first and teachers second': Black male teachers say they face an extra burden*. Chalkbeat. Retrieved July 17, 2022, from https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/3/16/21104580/disciplinarians-first-and-teachers-second-black-male-teachers-say-they-face-an-extra-burden

Barth, R. P., Kolivoski, K. M., Lindsey, M. A., Lee, B. R., & Collins, K. S. (2013). Translating the Common Elements Approach: Social Work's Experiences in Education, Practice, and Research. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *43*(2), 301–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2013.848771

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member Checking. *Qualitative Health Research*, *26*(13), 1802–1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Blythe, T. (1998). *The teaching for understanding guide*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Bond, B., Quintero, E., Casey, L., & Carlo, M. D. (2017, May 1). *The state of teacher diversity in American education*. Shanker Institute. https://www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/teacherdiversity

Bristol, T. J. (2017). *Black male teachers: There aren't enough of them*. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/library/blog/1347

Bristol, T. J. (2018). To be alone or in a group: An exploration into how the school-based experiences differ for black male teachers across one urban school district. *Urban Education, 53*(3), 334–354. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917697200

Bristol, T. J. (2020). *Black men of the classroom: A policy brief for how Boston public schools can recruit and retain black male teachers.* http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/TravisBristol-PolicyBrief-BlackMaleTeachers.pdf

Bristol, T. J., & Mentor, M. (2018). Policing and teaching: The positioning of black male teachers as agents in the universal carceral apparatus. *The Urban Review*, *50*(2), 218–234. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0447-z

Britannica, T. E. of B. (2021). *Critical race theory*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory

Brockenbrough, E. (2011). Emasculation blues: Black male teachers' perspectives on gender and power in the teaching profession. *Teachers College Record, 114*(5), 1–43. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1000020

Brockenbrough, E. (2014). "The discipline stop." *Education and Urban Society*, *47*(5), 499–522. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124514530154

Brown, A. L., & Thomas, D. J. (2020). *A critical essay on Black male teacher recruitment discourse*. *Peabody Journal of Education, 95*(5), 456–471. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2020.1826120

Bryan, N., Johnson, L., & Williams, T. M. (2016). Preparing black male teachers for the gifted classroom: recommendations for historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). *The Journal of Negro Education*, *85*(4), 489–504. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.4.0489

Bullough, R. V. (2015). Differences? Similarities? Male teacher, female teacher: An instrumental case study of teaching in a head start classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *47*, 13–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.12.001

Burnham, K. (2021). *Culturally responsive teaching: 5 Strategies for educators*. Northeastern University Graduate Programs. https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/culturally-responsive-teaching-strategies/.

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(5), 545–547. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25158659/

Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). The trouble with teacher turnover: How teacher attrition affects students and schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *27*(36), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3699

Cherng, H.-Y. S., & Halpin, P. F. (2016). The importance of minority teachers: Student perceptions of minority versus white teachers. *Educational Researcher, 45*(7), 407–420. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.3102/0013189X16671718

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *38*(4), 785–810. https://doi.org/10.1086/669608

Christensen, T., & Lægreid, P. (2010). Complexity and hybrid public administration—Theoretical and empirical challenges. *Public Organization Review*, *11*(4), 407–423. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-010-0141-4

Claessens, L., van Tartwijk, J., Pennings, H., van der Want, A., Verloop, N., Den Brok, P., & Wubbels, T. (2016). Beginning and experienced secondary school teachers' self- and student schema in positive and problematic teacher–student relationships. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *55*, 88–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.12.006

Clandinin, D. J. (2007). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. SAGE.

Clandinin, D. J., Caine, V., Lassard, S., & Huber, J. (2016). Narrative inquiry: A relational research methodology. In D. J. Clandinin, V. Caine, S. Lassard, & J. Huber (Eds.), *Engaging in narrative inquiries with children and youth* (pp. 11–20). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315545370-1

Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475

Cook, D. A. (2013). The engaged dialogue: Reflections on preparing African American teachers for diverse classrooms. *Multicultural Perspectives*, *15*(1), 46–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2013.754302

Cottman, M. H. (2011, April 24). *Opinion: We need more black male teachers*. MenTeach. http://menteach.org/news/opinion_we_need_more_black_male_teachers

Cox, S., Parmer, R., Strizek, G., & Thomas, T. (2016). *Documentation for the 2011–12 schools and staffing survey* (NCES 2016-817). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch//pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016817

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 189*, 139–167.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 46*, 1241–1299.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE.

Critical race theory is in the news, which isn't good for critical race theory. (2020). National Review, *72*(18), 8.

Dancy, T. E. (2014). (Un)Doing hegemony in education: Disrupting school-to-prison pipelines for black males. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *47*(4), 476–493. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.959271

De Brey, C., Snyder, T., Zhang, A., & Dillow, A. (2021). *Digest of education statistics* (NCES 2021-009). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2021009

DeCuir, J. T., & Dixson, A.D. (2004). "So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there": Using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher, 33*(5), 26–31.

Delgado, R. (1997). *Critical white studies: looking behind the mirror*. Temple University Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2020). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (3rd edition). New York University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ggjjn3.7

Diversity. (2017). *One family, many faces*. Yellow ISD.

Duncan, A., & Lhamon, C. (2014, March). *Civil rights data collection 'data snapshot: School discipline.'* Civil Rights Data Collection. Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot School Discipline - Issue Brief March 2014 | Office of Justice Programs (ojp.gov)

Dupree, C. (2019). *Table of contents - Yellow ISD*. Yellow ISD playbook.

Dupree, C. (2021). *District information/diversity*. Yellow ISD.

Dutil, S. (2020). Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline: A trauma-informed, critical race perspective on school discipline. *Children & Schools*, 42(3), 171–178, https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdaa016

Editor, N. C. E. S. B. (2018). *NCES Blog*. IES. NCES Blog | The Digital Divide: Differences in Home Internet Access.

Edtrust.org. (2020). *The state of racial diversity in the educator workforce*. Educator Diversity State Profile: State of Texas. https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf.

Elementary School Teacher Demographics. (2022, April 18). *Elementary school teacher demographics and statistics [2022]: Number of elementary school teachers in the US.* Zippia. Retrieved July 18, 2022, from https://www.zippia.com/elementary-school-teacher-jobs/demographics/

Farinde, A. A., Allen, A., & Lewis, C. W. (2016). Retaining black teachers: An examination of Black female teachers' intentions to remain in K-12 classrooms. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *49*(1), 115–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2015.1120367

Feezell, G. (2012). Robust vocabulary instruction in a readers' workshop. *The Reading Teacher*, *66*(3), 233–237. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.01087

Ferguson, R. F. (2008). *Toward excellence with equity: an emerging vision for closing the achievement gap*. Harvard Education Press.

Fraser-Abder, P. (2010). Reflections on success and retention in urban science education: Voices of five African American science teachers who stayed. *School Science and Mathematics*, *110*(5), 238–246. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-8594.2010.00031.x

Fregni, J. (2019). *Students benefit from having teachers who look like them. Here's how.* Teach For America. https://www.teachforamerica.org/stories/students-benefit-from-having-teachers-who-look-like-them.

Fultz, M. (2004). The displacement of Black educators post-brown: An overview and analysis. *History of Education Quarterly*, *44*(1), 11–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-5959.2004.tb00144.x

Gay, G. (2001). *Preparing for culturally responsive teaching*. 001 AACTE Outstanding Writing Award Recipient. http://www.cwu.edu/teaching-learning/sites/cts.cwu.edu.teaching-learning/files/documents/PreparingforCulturallyResponsiveTeaching%2C%20Geneva%20Gay.pdf

Gay, G. (2005). Politics of multicultural teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *56*(3), 221–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105275913

Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M., Hyman, J., Lindsay, C., & Papageorge, N. (2018). *The long-run impacts of same-race teachers*. Institute of Labor Economics. https://doi.org/10.3386/w25254

Graham, S., Taylor, A., & Hudley, C. (2014). A motivational intervention for African American boys labeled as aggressive. *Urban Education*, *50*(2), 194–224. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914549364

Ginsberg, A., Gasman, M., & Samayoa, A. (2017). The role of minority serving institutions in transforming teacher education and diversifying the teaching profession: A literature review and research agenda. *Teachers College Record, 119*(10), 1–31.

Giroux, H. (2003). Spectacles of racer and pedagogies of denial: Anti-Black racist pedagogy under the reign of neoliberalism. *Communication Education*, *52*(3-4), 191–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/0363452032000156190

Graham, L., Brown-Jeffy, S., Aronson, R., & Stephens, C. (2011). Critical race theory as theoretical framework and analysis tool for population health research. *Critical Public Health*, *21*(1), 81–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2010.493173

Griffin, A., & Tackie, H. (2017). Through our eyes. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *98*(5), 36–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721717690363

Hammond, Z., & Jackson, Y. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin, a SAGE Company.

Heitzeg, N. A. (2009). Education or incarceration: Zero tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline. *Forum on Public Policy Online, 2009*(2), 1–21. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ870076.pdf

Appendix D

Supplemental Interview Questions

- What are your thoughts on this?
- What do you use to relate to students?
- Do you see yourself as a father figure?
- Are you an informal or formal mentor to black boys/girls on your campus?
- Are you an informal, formal mentor to other students on your campus?

The unique intersectionality examined in this paper holds insight for other women entering leadership and higher education, in addition to those working to create a more equitable field in higher education.

How & Why She Leads: Women Leaders in Higher Education During Crisis

Katrina Struloeff, PhD
Director of Growth and Impact, Catalyst
University of Pennsylvania

Kimberly Sterin, PhD
Post-Doctoral Researcher
Drexel University, School of Education

Christopher Fornaro, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student/Consultant

Abstract

This phenomenological study explores how three women in senior leadership roles within higher education administration navigate the overlapping crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased social unrest in America during 2020, and related economic instability. As a result of generations of discrimination towards women, there exists a gendered gap in leadership roles within higher education administration. The goal of this study is to highlight the ways women who have ascended to leadership roles in higher education administration demonstrate grit and grace, especially during this unique time of crisis. Collected through semi-structured interviews and viewed through an intersectional feminist lens, the data demonstrated two major categories: (1) How One Leads: leading with compassion and grace, leading by example, and leading through partnership; and (2) Why One Leads: prior experience in athletics, teams, and role modeling, knowing the possibilities and acting, and mission alignment/fit. The findings from this study provide insight into how women in higher education administration lead in times of crisis and lessons for effective leadership, regardless of a leader's gender, during future crises.

Introduction and Context

More than forty years after the passing of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, prohibiting the discrimination of women in higher education, there remains a continued gender gap in senior leadership. While there have been incremental steps toward equity, the systemic and social factors hindering women from acquiring and persisting in senior-level leadership roles within higher education cannot be overlooked (Choudry, 2019; Clark & Johnson, 2017; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Klenke, 2017; Porritt & Featherstone, 2019; Shields, 2004; Smith & Nkomo, 2021). Burkinsaw and White (2017) notably draw attention to the idea that "the gendered power relations at play in universities stubbornly maintain entrenched inequalities whereby, regardless of measures implemented for and by women, the problem remains" (p 1).

Research shows this gender disparity is exacerbated during higher-risk situations and times of crisis, a phenomenon known as the "glass cliff" (Bruckmüller et al., 2014). As the United States has found itself amidst a number of national and global crises in 2020, including social unrest surrounding racism, political upheaval, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of leadership has become even more vital. As Bannerji et al. (2000) demonstrate, universities are "sites for the reproduction of power and privilege" (p. 5). The goal of this paper is to highlight ways women in leadership in higher education administration navigate times of crisis, specifically racial and political unrest, economic instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

To understand how women lead during times of crisis, researchers must create spaces for the voices of women in higher education administration to be heard. Feminist intersectionality implores us to ensure research in this vein is moving forward by exploring similar research questions with individuals who have diverse and complex identities (Klenke, 2017). As Mavin and Yusupova describe in this statement, this research is vital:

> A future research avenue is not only to track the number of women in leader positions in various organisational sectors, before and after COVID-19 but also to look throughout the hierarchy at the ranks of precarious women to investigate how the current crisis is providing an environment where patriarchy is re-embedding. This will undoubtedly help to challenge the increasingly hierarchical and inequitable structures of organisations and academia. (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 742)

The unique intersectionality examined in this paper holds insight for other women entering leadership and higher education, in addition to those working to create a more equitable field in higher education.

Literature Review

"The ultimate measure of a [wo]man is not where [s]he stands in moments of comfort, but where [s]he stands at times of challenge and controversy." - Martin Luther King Jr.

When the World Falls Apart

2020 was a year of unprecedented crisis with the emergence and persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic: “The COVID-19 pandemic thrust upon the world, the workplace, and in this case, higher education, the necessity for a virtually immediate adaptation to remote work and remote learning” (Gedro, et al., 2020, p. 395). For women administrators in higher education, the shift to a virtual environment was only one of the major crisis leadership demands. For many women, the pandemic shifted the majority of the duties of childcare, elder care, and other home responsibilities onto their plates (Mayer & May, 2021; Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). Compounding the impact of the health crisis, the pandemic coincided with additional turmoil in the country. Galea and Abdalla (2020) paint an image of the drastic conditions in the United States:

> More than 110,000 people have died in the US because of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, a pathogen that was unknown just 6 months ago. Ubiquitous fear and anxiety that accompanied the emergence of the new coronavirus led to widespread limits on physical contact in attempts to mitigate the spread of the virus. That in turn brought the US economy to a halt, resulting in more than 40 million people filing for unemployment, approximating numbers not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the past month, the killing of several unarmed black men and women — Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd— has spurred widespread civil unrest, with night after night of demonstrations demanding reform of systems of policing that have disproportionately harmed black people for centuries. These 3 events, the pandemic, massive unemployment, and the recent protests, have occurred concurrently (Galea & Abdalla, 2020, p. 227)

Overall, COVID-19 has drawn attention to the pre-existing inequities and discriminatory policies and practices throughout our country, and the population has seen these come to a boiling point

(Mavin & Yusupova, 2020). Higher education women administrators have found themselves in the center of this perfect storm with an additional burden of social gender norms. With daily work moving and continuing online, these leaders have also been placed in a unique space of experiencing these many layers of crisis with their teams in a way previously unknown.

> We were sharing with colleagues our children, partners, living areas, dogs, cats, door bells, rows with older children, and shopping deliveries, including sofas and furniture...the overwhelming feelings were around inadequacy in ambiguity; not having the answers at work or at home (Marvin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 738)

As Collins et al. note, "the COVID-19 outbreak was neither unpredictable nor unforeseen" (Collins et al., 2020, p. 1073). This is also the case for social unrest and increased unemployment. The occurrence of these layered crises puts a spotlight on women in higher education administration and their leadership.

Women in the Leadership Roles & Patriarchy

Gender inequality in higher education can be seen through the underrepresentation of women in senior administration roles. In the United States, women represent only 34.4% of senior administration roles (NCES, 2018). Women transitioning to formal and higher roles of leadership has been slowed by cultural norms and socializing factors, specifically in male-dominated spaces, such as higher education (Clark & Johnson, 2017). While many causes have been identified when exploring the gap in women in leadership roles, including "socialization practices," "societal opportunities," lack of role models, and demands of family life (Klenke, 2017, p. 403), some social practices are still obstructing women from reaching senior leadership roles.

Researchers are calling for a refocus on gender equity in leadership roles at all levels in the wake of COVID-19 (Coscieme et al., 2020; Gedro et al., 2020). "These barriers have re-emerged with more power than ever before during COVID-19 and have tremendous impact on women" (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 740). Mavin and Yusupova (2020) outline how COVID-19 is a significant additional burden on women as they continually battle the patriarchy that maintains a status quo within higher education. Simpson and Kurma (2019) outline "the Teflon Effect," a metaphor for the way that "merit may fail to 'stick' to the bodies of women in management and leadership roles due to a misalignment between social identity (woman) and the nature of the job (leader/manager)" (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 742). This lack of stick may also shine light on the persistent realities of two other phenomena, the "glass slipper effect" (Ashcraft, 2013) and the "glass cliff" (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

The glass slipper effect, coined by Ashcroft (2013), refers to a lack of fit between the professional identities of a leader and that of a woman. Mavin and Youspova (2020) push this farther in their more recent exploration, highlighting the resilience needed in extreme conditions such as a crisis. In conjunction, the glass cliff phenomenon (Ryan & Haslam, 2007) outlines how women are often given leadership roles in high-risk situations with a known lower probability of success, and then the leadership capabilities and sustainability of these women are questioned. Put simply, how women are set up for failure within a patriarchal system (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). And the pandemic has proven to be no different: "COVID-19 destabilizes the progress made towards gender equality" (Mavin & Yusupova, 2020, p. 742). The high-stakes interplay of patriarchal systems and gender within higher education is even more salient as spaces of higher

education face significant budget cuts, financial and personnel costs of shifting to online platforms, and a possible long-term shift in the dynamics of the global workplace (Collins et al., 2020).

Leadership Characteristics

The unique situation of crisis leadership for women in higher education administration requires strong leadership characteristics. While a variety of characteristics are promising for leaders to succeed through times of crisis, research outlines three vital components, compassion, modeling, and partnership, that women leaders should embody in times of crisis as layered as the current situation (Dirani et al., 2020; Channing, 2020; Mavin & Yusupova, 2020; Spendlove, 2007; Stefan & Nazarov, 2020).

Compassion and Grace

Research has found that it is important for leaders to show compassion and grace for their employees during a crisis (Dirani et al., 2020; Spendlove, 2007; Stefan & Nazarov, 2020). Gedro et al. (2020) note that "leadership during crisis necessitates a sense of timing and the ability to toggle among a range of directive/agentic and collaborative/nurturing styles" (p. 404). Dirani et al. (2020) wrote that "leaders will need to understand each and every individual's problems separately and guide them to overcome them" (p. 9). The compassion given and space for emotional processing should also be unique to each individual. In times of extreme crisis associated with grief, such as the pandemic and racial killing, Rocco and Shuck (2019) argue that leaders should make space for their employees to express grief in order to maintain a healthy workplace environment.

An additional layer of working remotely requires an additional layer of understanding from leaders. In particular, Dirani et al. (2020) state that during the pandemic, leaders need to be aware that it "may be challenging for employees to separate their work from challenges at home" (p. 9). Dirani et al. (2020) suggest that leaders should reach out to employees at home virtually on a consistent basis to ensure connection and understanding. One of the participants in Gedro et al.'s (2020) interviews expressed this in the following context:

> Although I could not remove the stressors associated with illness, financial insecurity, job loss, and changes to daily family life; I could promote a virtual work environment that encourages support and self-care. (Gedro et al., 2020, p. 397)

Ultimately, research demonstrates that leaders must express empathy by connecting with their employees in this unique environment, no matter the stressors or barriers.

Example (Modeling)

A second component of leadership highlighted throughout literature as important during this complex time of crisis is that of modeling. By modeling behaviors or leading by example, leaders have a powerful opportunity to reflect and demonstrate for their team how to persist and grow within a crisis. In his book, Baldoni (2008) names leading by example as the most important leadership trait among successful leaders. Research has shown that leading by example, specifically rather than leading only by words, shows significant positive effects on team cooperation and increased contributions (Dannenberg, 2015).

Within the context of the complex crisis of social, political, and racial unease, Channing (2020) highlights that there is an urgency in leaders leading by example. Specifically, Channing notes ways that this must happen for leaders moving forward:

> Leaders must be willing to examine their own contexts, collaborate with all constituencies, and reflect upon their own implicit biases to develop policies and practices that make sense for their organization and that will lead to greater equity and better environments on their campuses. Cultures do not change overnight, so commitment to long-term investigations of best practices for mitigating implicit biases is necessary because they cannot be completely eliminated. (Channing, 2020, pgs. 52-53)

Leading by example is how leaders can gain traction in changing systemic issues of inequality, racism, and sexism. But to do this, women require additional grit demonstrated through perseverance and determination, especially in harsh and unsupportive environments.

Partnership

The final piece of the leadership trifecta demonstrated through literature is the value of partnerships while leading through a crisis. Hendrickson et al. (2013) press leaders within higher education to take note from corporate public relations crisis strategies and build relationships with external partners to not only be in tune with the world outside of academia but to be effective in sustaining through crises. The importance of building bridges with outside partners and its extreme value in times of crisis is highlighted in Gedro et al. (2020). This culmination of crisis, from a pandemic to racial killings to drastic economic downturns, requires an additional level of partnership for collaboration to ensure experts are involved in an organization's problem-solving and systemic change (Ospina & Foldy, 2010).

Crisis Preparation for Leadership

Research outlines how leaders who are the most successful during crises are those who have anticipated the probability of impending change and are situated to be flexible and innovative (Dirani et al., 2020; Stern, 2013). “At the institutional level, the pandemic brings into the spotlight the role of leaders and leadership in reshaping their organizations to survive during and after the crisis” (Dirani et al., 2020, p. 11). Stefan and Nazarov (2020) found that during a crisis, “leaders must have a clear goal-oriented vision, be risk-averse, and present innovative long-term strategic thinking to gain a competitive advantage” (p. 522). Pre-planning allows leaders to make decisions and strategize without the weight of crisis. Additionally, through planning and preparation, leaders may have input from other team members and experts to ensure the most successful options for possibilities in the future.

Mission Alignment and Fit

The importance of individual choice, fit, and mission alignment has been highlighted repeatedly in examining the narratives of women leaders (Klenke, 2004). For the purpose of this exploration, fit is viewed through the concept of destiny as defined by Viktor Frankel, author-psychiatrist. Destiny is “the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled” (Frankl, 1959, p. 127). Intertwined in literature with the concept of destiny is the concept of women leaders having mission-driven pathways, particularly when individually reflecting on their experiences (Burgman, 2018; Curry, 2000; Jaworski, 1998). Literature also outlines how a sense of destiny may assist women leaders in being more resilient, having increased self-efficacy, and

approaching barriers with a solution-based mindset (Glowacki-Dudka et al., 2016; Lowe, 2011; Redmond et al., 2017). In her personal reflections, Burgman (2018) explores how, specifically for women leaders, "working within higher education has a transformation story that connects to institutional mission, vision, and values" (p. 21). Overall, research focuses a strong light on the vital components of destiny and mission alignment for successful women leaders

Conceptual Framework

For this study, an intersectional feminist framework was used to amplify the voices of women in higher education administration as they reflect on their leadership during times of complex crisis. Intersectionality hinges on an individual's personal and group identities contributing to a unique experience (Breslin et al., 2017). Through an intersectional exploration of how women navigate leadership within higher education administration during a crisis, the overlapping categories demonstrate a "dynamic interaction between individual and institutional factors" (Hancock, 2007, p. 64). Using a feminist intersectional framework allows for investigation of how uneven power relations shape structural manifestations of oppression (i.e., classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism)" (Agosto & Roland, 2018, p. 259).

Intersectional feminism is grounded in the concept of shared oppression. "Under capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restricts women's behavior in some realms even as freedom from limitations is allowed in other spheres" (Hooks, 2000, p. 5). This research explored the phenomena of White women in higher education administration and their navigation of the overlapping crises of the pandemic, the racial unrest, and the economic emergency through the merged framework of intersectionality and feminism.

Research Purpose and Questions

This paper highlights ways women* leaders navigate a particular time of layered crisis while persisting in their senior leadership roles in higher education administration through the exploration of the following two research questions:

> **RQ1:** What leadership characteristics do women senior leaders in higher education administration aim to embody during times of crisis?
>
> **RQ2:** How does the personal mission and vision of women leaders in higher education administration roles impact their actions and response during times of crisis?

Positionality

Reflexivity in critical research, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is instrumental in describing how the researcher and process can shape the data due to previous assumptions and experiences. The lead researcher for this project is a queer, White female education researcher with a background in K-12 administration and nonprofit leadership. Having experienced sexism and the interplays of power and privilege within leadership in her own career pathway, the researcher approached the collection of data, aware of her possible bias. Prior to conducting the interviews, the lead researcher had interacted with two of the three participants. All interviews were framed conversationally, which allowed participants and the lead researcher to establish a relationship of support and care. At the end of each interview, the participants demonstrated support for the lead researcher by encouraging the pursuit of leadership, offering resources and networks, and suggesting future research areas. This natural support and demonstration of

sending the elevator back down for a woman leader embodies the importance of women in senior leader roles acting as allies, advocates, and mentors for other women leaders.

The second author is racialized as white, of Jewish heritage, gendered as a cis-gendered female, able-bodied, and has a background as a K-12 public school teacher. As both a teacher and education researcher, she has taken on various leadership roles that have given her insight into effective management styles. The third author is a White male doctoral candidate who has taken a hiatus from academia to pursue consulting. He has spent over 15 years as an educator, administrator, and researcher in STEM education.

Methods

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to amplify the stories of women in higher education administration roles. Through semi-structured interviews, these women were able to share their experiences during a time of crisis. Participants were chosen in a two-step sampling method. Participants were selected through a process of convenience and snowball sampling (Saldaña, 2015).

Site and Participants

The site for this research was a large, R1, private, predominately White institution (PWI) in the Mid-Atlantic. Each of the three participants are White women and between 50-70 years old. The women hold various leadership roles across the PWI and individually have over 20 years of leadership experience across varying higher education spaces. Participants' profiles are provided in Table 1. Additionally, the women all hold terminal degrees. During initial participant interviews, snowball sampling was utilized to find additional participants.

Table 1.
Profiles of participants

Pseudonym	Age Range	Experience in Higher Education Administration	Role description
Fey	60–65 yrs.	24 years	Supports the faculty and curriculum by providing leadership to university's campuses and academic programs
Mary	65–70 yrs.	37 years	Responsible for providing strategic direction for neighborhood and civic engagement initiatives
Quinn	60–65 yrs.	17 years	Manages administrative functions and strategic components of the college, as well as leading fundraising and donor cultivation

Data Collection and Analysis

This phenomenological study used qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data. Each participant took part in a series of two semi-structured interviews with the lead author that lasted approximately 30 minutes via a web-based video platform. The first interview encouraged participants to reflect on their personal experiences and processes in becoming women leaders in higher education, including motivations and the navigation of barriers. The second round of interviews was focused on the participants' experiences of the interplay between power and privilege in higher education administration leadership and, specifically, during this time of crisis. Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on how the COVID-19 pandemic, the instances of police brutality, and the corresponding response through Black Lives Matter protests and related political unrest impacted their leadership in higher education administration. Lastly, the second interview was utilized to revisit, clarify, and further develop themes from the first interview.

The lead author engaged in active journaling after each interview to reflect on the conversations and to refine questions for the subsequent interviews. Once interviews were complete, they were transcribed and cleaned by the lead author before coding. All three researchers engaged in the data coding and analysis process. For the initial pass, each researcher read and coded the interview transcripts based on their smallest possible units (Saldaña, 2015) using a collaborative coding software. After the open coding pass, the researchers applied an in vivo coding pass and then a values coding pass. The researchers came together between passes to discuss how axial coding would proceed. Through this discussion, the researchers compared and evaluated their various codes, eventually coming to consensus as they grouped the codes into overarching themes (Saldaña, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this study was addressed through increasing credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in a variety of ways. Conducting a set of two interviews allowed the lead researcher to connect, clarify, and follow up on certain topics to increase credibility. Additionally, member checking was utilized during and after the second interview (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To address issues of confirmability, the researchers met to discuss their individual codes. In these meetings, the researchers shared their analytic memos from journaling. As a result, individual codes were refined and developed into categories, themes, and findings, as suggested by Saldaña (2015), and were triangulated with the lead researcher's field notes.

Dependability was addressed by the research team examining the lead author's audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researchers discussed the lead author's process of participant selection, interview protocol, and initial codes that emerged through reflective journaling. Finally, findings were written up with a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) in mind to increase transferability. Detailed field notes were written out during and after each interview by the lead researcher to describe the data collection process (Billups, 2020).

Findings

Through the two sets of interviews, the women shared their experiences and were able to reflect on their leadership in this time of crisis. Two themes distinctly emerged through the analysis: (1) How One Leads and (2) Why One Leads.

How One Leads

The three women interviewed for this study demonstrated certain leadership characteristics that proved critical during a time of crisis due to heightened social unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. The women's reflections led to the emergence of the following categories of findings within leadership characteristics: leading with compassion, leading by example, and leading through partnership.

Leading with Compassion & Grace

In order to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic, people had to make sudden changes to their familiar working and social routines. As many workplaces and institutions shifted to a virtual environment, many people had to make significant living adjustments and navigate challenging circumstances in order to meet the demands of both work and school. The three women leaders in this study explained that leading with compassion and grace was particularly important during this time of crisis. When describing her adjustment in leadership mentality during this time, Fey emphasized the need for empathy:

> *I think COVID has made us all a little softer in a really good way to be like, "You got to take care of your family." So I think you have to know your people and enjoy them and laugh with them.* (FeyInt2)

This increased understanding for putting family first and the elevated need to know your staff was echoed by the two other participants, Mary and Quinn when describing their leadership styles during the crisis. One way that Mary has led with compassion is by accommodating the schedules of working parents to extend beyond traditional work hours.

> *And, of course, now we have so many working parents who are going crazy with their kids and really needing to say, "Families come first. You figured that out. We're going to be fine." And I know for some of my folks who have young children, I don't hear from them during the day, but at nine o'clock, all of a sudden, I get 10 emails. It's like, "I got that."* (MaryInt2)

During pre-pandemic times, the culture of the workplace might not honor such communication habits as Mary described above. However, during this time of crisis, Mary chose to extend grace to her working parents, who benefit from adjusted expectations on workplace demands, such as available working hours. Similarly, Quinn, the participant who does not have children, recognized the importance of being empathetic for staff managing kids at home along with their workload as she discussed her thought process when approaching her team as her institution moved to remote working.

> *I wanted them to make the decision that was most comfortable for them based on family situations. But if you really deep dig into that, all my senior admin have kids at school age, right? And so that impacts them. Because it's hard to find childcare now, is it safe childcare? There's just so many decisions, right? And so, I actually feel … empathetic to*

> *what they're going through because they have to school, their children, they have to do their job full time, right? So, it's just so chaotic, I'm sure, for all of them.* (QuinnInt2)

While the participants gave their compassion to all staff members, their compassion for their women employees was distinct. Part of leading with compassion includes understanding the additional burdens that women navigate in a society with historically gendered roles. As women themselves, the leaders in this study are able to have a deeper understanding of the additional workload that women have beyond most men. This "second shift" often includes increased domestic responsibilities and caretaking duties for children and family members (Hochschild, 1990). One participant, Fey, expressed her exhaustion with the burdens of the second shift, particularly in contrast to the experiences of some of her male colleagues during this crisis. In her reflection, Fey specifically discusses how some male colleagues, and one in particular, have not equally shared the burden of going to the grocery store, a domestic task that has become relatively risky during the pandemic.

> *He has not been to the grocery store in eight months, six months. He just does not do that. So the level of work and the level of what I have had to contend with is completely different than most of my male colleagues, the president, and especially at the highest level because people have wives.* (FeyInt2)

Their shared identity as women gives these leaders added insight into the challenges their female staff may be experiencing. Leading with graceful compassion is an important leadership characteristic, especially as women's burdens may have become exacerbated during the pandemic.

In addition to responsive expectations of their staff, the women leaders in this study also implemented new practices as a way to lead with compassion during this unprecedented time. For example, Mary began sending a Monday morning email to her staff to express understanding and encouragement.

> *One of the things that I have found myself doing is actually not on a political level at all but on a humane level. In March, when we went into lockdown mode, the first week I wrote to my staff, which is about 30 people give or take, and I just wrote an email for Monday morning saying, "Hey, it's going to be okay." You know? And then the second week, I wrote another email to kind of say, "Hey, we're going to be okay." So here we are, it's week 27 and every Sunday I write an email to the staff that gets sent at six o'clock in the morning on Monday morning to my entire staff saying, "it's going to be okay. You guys are great. I really appreciate who you are.* (MaryInt2)

When reflecting on this new email practice, Mary expressed how emotionally exhausting it has been but also emphasized how important it is for leaders to recognize shared humanity with their staff during a time of crisis.

> *I think if I had known how long we were going to be home, I probably wouldn't have gotten into it. But it also reflects my basic position, which is basically humanity matters. And that's why social issues and social justice are so important, because people's basic humanity matters.* (MaryInt2)

Mary's belief that "humanity matters" guided many of her leadership decisions during this time. All three participants in this study lead with compassion and grace in order to best support their staff through crisis.

Leading by Example

All three women discussed how they strive to lead by example. Reflecting on her leadership experience during the pandemic, Fey discussed how much leadership by example matters and emphasized that "*it matters more in a crisis*" (FeyInt2). One way the women leaders discussed how they lead by example was by sharing how they are taking care of themselves and stressing the need for their staff to do the same. Mary describes how she communicates this idea to her staff, specifically in her Monday emails:

> *But I've also used it to say to them, "look, if things are getting too tough, take some time out during the day, go take a walk. It's okay." I've written to tell them, "look, if you've got kids at home and you need to have some time during the workday, no problem." You've got to be taking care of yourself first... I think it has been part of my gesture as the leader of an office to stay in regular touch, to encourage people, to make sure they're not feeling overly stressed, to give them permission to be upset or anxious, or just to want to walk away from their desks.* (MaryInt2)

Fey also referred to the idea of taking care of oneself first through using a common understanding of putting on your mask first as if in an emergency flight situation.

> *The idea that if I was on a plane that was going down, that the first thing I would do would not be to help my child is like, "You've got to be joking." I just can't even imagine that. But the truth of the matter is that you have to take care of yourself, put your own mask on first before you can help anybody else… I have been all about taking care of other people, my children, my students, organizations that I support, whatever. And I should do all of that, yes, but I am better at doing that; I'm a better person, I'm a happier person, which enables other people to be better if I put my own mask on first…it's made me a better leader, it's made me show up well. You need to show up well as a leader.* (FeyInt1)

All three women discussed ways that they have taken care of themselves during the pandemic, not only to sustain themselves personally but also to lead by example. Taking breaks and vacations were methods shared among all participants. Fey discussed how she encourages her staff to take vacations and modeled that herself:

> *I was meeting with my staff, and somebody is going on vacation. And we're like, "Yes, go, go take a real vacation." She's the director of the teaching learning center at the first week of classes. She put on 10 workshops in two weeks when we shifted to remote teaching, and she's just done. So I try to model for them what they should be doing. And when I went on vacation for four days, when I took Margaret up to college, and then had Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And I was like, look, unless something's burning, don't call me." I need a little time away, so I want that for them, and I try to model that.* (FeyInt2)

Similarly, Mary said that when she went on a week-long vacation, she sent a picture of her and her partner with their rented RV to her staff. By sharing her joy from vacation, Mary hoped to

encourage others to not only feel comfortable taking a vacation but also to feel good about sharing it with coworkers. Mary purposefully modeled this behavior to set a cultural norm that values taking time to rest and rejuvenate.

To address how best to lead by example for working parents, the two women who had children in this study discussed the value of boundary setting. The two participants shared that while managing work from home with family members in the house has been a struggle, they felt it was important to set boundaries and healthy routines as an example for their staff to follow. For instance, when Fey's two daughters came to live at home due to the pandemic, she found that she needed to designate certain areas for work and non-work in her house to "*to maintain some sense of normal"* (FeyInt2). Fey, Mary, and Quinn shared that they lead by example through practicing self-care, taking vacations, and setting boundaries within the home during this time of crisis.

Leading through Partnership

The third leadership characteristic that emerged through the interviews with these three women leaders was leading through partnership. The women leaders explained that recognizing one's own limitations and knowing when to access outside experts are meaningful characteristics of an effective leader. They shared that leading through partnership became especially important during this time of crisis, where they were called upon as leaders to guide staff through areas that may have been beyond their expertise. For example, in response to the social unrest that occurred during the summer of 2020, Quinn decided to partner with an outside organization to help her support her staff through discussions about systemic racism within their institution.

> *...shortly after George Floyd, we had those couple of sessions. We internally in the school wanted to look at systemic and structural issues of racism in our school, and then take a look systematically at our policies and practices and all that. So, we're not experts; none of us are. So I've contracted with a company. I think it's the [Name of Organization]; they're professionals at doing...critical conversations.* (QuinnInt1)

Likewise, through her leadership position, Mary also engaged with anti-racist professional development after the surge in Black Lives Matter protests over the summer. When reflecting on her participation as co-chair of her institution's Anti-Racism Task Force, Mary divulged that "*I've really benefited from the other leaders on our Anti-racist team." Mary recognized her own limitations as a White person and valued the opportunity to work with and learn from others who are more versed on anti-racism practices*" (MaryInt2).

The women leaders in this study believed it was crucial to lead through partnership, especially when the circumstances called for expertise that was beyond their capacities. Leading through partnership was particularly key during this time of crisis that intensified certain issues and made proper expertise all the more important.

Why One Leads

As Stern (2013) notes, one of the primary tasks of leadership during a crisis is preparation for the anticipation of a possible crisis. The women leaders in this study were direct in pointing out that leadership during high-pressure, demanding, and crisis situations was not a new experience for them. They had, in fact, trained for this through years of preparation, struggle, and growth. The anticipation and preparation for possible crises are the markings of a strong leader (Stern, 2013). The leaders, when asked what resources or skill sets they drew upon for this time, outlined how

they felt they had prepared and trained for crisis through life experiences, role-modeled behaviors, and previous crisis experiences.

Athletics, Teams, and Role Modeling

Each woman mentioned their involvement and role as a leader in team sports, highlighting the lessons learned within high-stress situations. While all three spoke to this, Fey expressed it most vividly.

> *As a former athlete, you have to perform…if you're used to performing under pressure, that's really good training for this, that capacity to say, "Yeah, okay, I'm tired, but the clock will go out by whatever time, or I'm going to stay up late or whatever." And there are people who don't do that. I mean, and that's just, people are different, right. People who crumble under that pressure. And so for me, the athletic training was part of that.* (FeyInt2)

The role of athletic participation also ties in at a team level. Although a leader of her own team, each woman also recognizes that she is a part of a larger team through the University. As a leader, she is also in spaces where she is not leading and can use other leaders as a role model. Mary highlights that in the discussion of another woman leader that she supports in a team role, "*we set it up so that she was the leader and we were supporting her, and she really is leading us. It's a good team. And I think, for me, it's been great to have that as a resource*" (MaryInt2).

Quinn also gave credit to past leadership, including watching her parents in their leadership roles as business owners and managers. "*I learned a lot from them about their dealing with crises and working under pressure…. I had good role models. And then I think just throughout my career, I just had different mentors at various stages of my career and watched and learned from them*" (QuinnInt2).

Fey outlined current role modeling within the University that she benefits from as a leader with other leaders through crisis as a team.

> *At the end of the day, I was saying that leadership matters. It matters more in a crisis. And so being part of those leadership calls in the morning, the crisis management calls with the president and watching him model being patient, and also insistent that we get it right, all kinds of things. It's been an incredible learning experience and made me even more grateful to be at a place where I think there's good leadership.* (FeyInt2)

Role modeling and observation of other successful leaders provided these women with examples and preparation for their time in the leadership roles.

Knowing the Possibilities and Acting

Another key component to preparing for crisis as a leader is having a readiness for the possibility of crisis (Stern, 2013). These women each addressed readiness extensively in their interviews. In her second interview, Fey outlines that while the pandemic was the overarching crisis, the underlying components of issues were already existing and thus not surprising.

> *We knew we were heading into something that was going to be different, right?... I would say this over and over and over again: COVID simply amplified. If you had a problem before, COVID just put a finer point on it, just amplified it in a way that nothing else*

> *quite can. So, any change, any problems that you had, any issues … are just going to be amplified by a crisis like COVID.* (FeyInt2)

Quinn also addressed contingency planning and anticipation of crisis. Through her lens of leadership keeping her team employed and holding equitable standards was vital, as can be seen in these interview excerpts:

> *We had to make a lot of budget cuts in university, I've done it before because I was a dean before. So I knew how to do it. So, I made decisions on cuts that affected everybody. I didn't go to just faculty and say, "I'm going to make these cuts," and then not cut anything for staff. I made it equitable, and that good will sharing of the cuts.* (QuinnInt2)

> *I cut research releases, I did everything, I made a lot of cuts, and asked people to make a lot of sacrifices so I didn't have to let anybody go. That was my goal. I didn't want to let anybody go during this period of time. And I was able to do that. My other colleges and schools couldn't. And the one thing about me is that I'm the best under pressure. That's where I'm best.* (QuinnInt2)

With the anticipation of crises, as well as past experience navigating crises, allowed these women leaders to keep their priorities while moving forward toward the organizational goals and mission.

Mission Alignment and Fit

It cannot be overlooked that each of these three women highlighted the overall importance of their personal mission alignment with the mission of their role within the university. As mission-driven individuals, these leaders have dedicated their careers to their values. Quinn noted this in her first interview, "*I've been very lucky to be able to get at the issues that really interest me and drive me… it's a very personal motivation. I want to use our resources to support a community with really high ambitions but significant challenges*" (QuinInt1).

This strong mission fit was highlighted by each participant in their own words. This is demonstrated in this excerpt from Mary's interview, "*I'm very motivated by that same idea that the purpose of higher education should be to provide solutions for the public good… exactly the job that I have*" (MaryInt1). Fey phrased it succinctly when asked about her motivation to work in higher education, "*I don't know, it's just where I felt like I belonged*" (FeyInt1). Mission alignment for these women leaders is multifaceted, and its importance magnified during crises. This was addressed by both Mary and Fey in their first interviews during the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis and during the country's social and political unrest of Spring 2020:

> *As a leader I'm supposed to have my own personal mission of what I'm about… I don't have that well-crafted yet, but I think that I, for whatever reason, get a kick out of making things run really well, and creating environments where other really smart people can do their best work. I think that my job is to create an environment … to succeed and excel, and that means removing barriers, that means enabling people* (FeyInt1).

> *…find where your best self is. We all can do certain things, but you can get into situations where you're performing in a particular role, and it's not a particular part of you that makes you feel good, that makes you feel your most creative. … turns out that*

> *I'm my best self when I'm part of a team, I'm my best self when I'm thinking and coordinating things and bringing plans together and motivating people…I had a mission… to be as part of a team, as a leader, and encouraging people to think outside the box* (MaryInt1).

With leaders, these women see their role during times of crisis, and calm, as vital. As Fey said, "*I liked the mission of the place. That's just been even more important now*" (FeyInt2).

Limitations

As a small-scale narrative study there are limitations that need to be considered if transferring the findings to other settings. While the findings do align with previous research on leadership in crisis, three important limitations for transferability should be noted. First, the sample of participants in this study were all White females. Thus, they only represent one small group within higher education leadership. Additionally, the participants are leaders at a single PWI in the mid-Atlantic region, which might detract from the transferability of findings to other institutions and regions. Finally, the women were all leaders in higher education, and findings may not be applicable in K-12 settings. Overall, each of the individual experiences of these women is unique, but there is a shared essence that may provide insight for women leaders in crisis in many contexts.

Implications and Future Research Directions

This paper provides critical insight for women leaders in higher education administration, especially during times of change and crisis. By taking an in-depth view of these women's experiences, this paper illustrates the realities of how crisis leadership has been redefined by women in a male-dominated space. This exploration is also important for those outside of these roles to gain insight and be called upon to be active advocates, allies, and champions for women in leadership. As more women ascend to leadership roles across disciplines and platforms, it's clear that their experiences navigating crises will be important to understand and learn from moving forward. The findings from this study lead to several implications for effective leadership during a crisis and for future needed research directions.

Future Leaders: Leadership needs to plan for future crises.

One of the key takeaways from the reflections of the women leaders included in this study on their experiences of crisis management is that they all had certain contingency plans in place in anticipation of a crisis. While the specific challenges of the pandemic are certainly unique and were largely unforeseen, the global crises of this nature were predictable (Collins et al., 2022), and these women leaders in higher education administration were ready to address them. In approaching this crisis, the women leaders drew upon their previous experiences handling such difficulties like budget cuts and altered working environments in order to manage this exacerbated scenario. Their backgrounds in athletic participation prepared them for high-stress situations where they needed to make tough decisions while also supporting their staff teams. Future leaders need to anticipate the possible intensity of a crisis and the flexibility needed to manage it as a part of their routine leadership planning. Including potential contingencies before a crisis hits can be beneficial to leadership, their staff, and the organization as a whole.

Future Leaders: Leading with compassion and grace needs to be valued and viewed as a non-gendered crisis leadership skill.

Of the several advantageous leadership characteristics demonstrated by these women leaders, leading with compassion and grace stood out as particularly important in the context of the pandemic and social unrest crises. The empathetic practices these women leaders implemented and built upon to meet the needs of their staff during this time of crisis should serve as examples for future leaders, both male and female alike. Since effective leaders have historically been characterized by stereotypically male traits, leading with compassion has sometimes been viewed as a weakness rather than a strength. However, the findings from this study indicate that leading with compassion can be beneficial for an organization, especially when enduring an ongoing, emotionally draining crisis.

Future Research: There is a need for more research specific to women and women from diverse social groups in higher education crisis management.

While the field of research on women in crisis leadership is emerging and holding attention in the social sciences, there is more to be done. Feminist intersectionality implores us to ensure research in this vein is moving forward by exploring similar research questions with women of color, within the LGBTQAI+ community, and with leaders of varying physical and cognitive abilities. Their unique intersectionality holds insight for other women entering higher education administration and other organizational leadership positions. Researchers have begun to show the power of having women in leadership roles, especially during crisis management (Meagher et al., 2020; Huang, 2021). As noted by Gabster et al. (2020), "Finally, and most importantly, recognize that women from ethnic minority groups face additional challenges in academia and take structural action to provide support and address these challenges." Future research should be done to explore the specific ways women with additional marginalized identities navigate leadership positions in general and during times of crisis.

Future Research: There is a need for a post-pandemic reflection on what lessons have been learned in crisis management for leadership in higher education administration.

While the findings from this research study provide significant insight into the ways women leaders in higher education administration navigate heightened crises, additional research should be done once the main constraints of the pandemic have subsided. This study gleaned critical reflections from women leaders while they were still immersed in the daily chaos of the unique crises of 2020. Future research should be done after some time has passed and these women leaders, as well as others, are able to look back on this period and reflect back critically.

Conclusion

The exploration of women leaders in higher education during times of crisis is a rich area of research. As the world continues to change, globalize, digitize, and accelerate, quality human-centered crisis leadership will continue to be vital. Through this study, a brief glimpse of the complexities of crisis and leadership through compassion and grace, by example, and with collaborative partners has been investigated. The value of empathy and human connection, especially when the crisis landscape is tied to social constructs and individual health, has been demonstrated through the experiences of these women leaders. Additionally, as discussed, leadership must foresee crises and establish partnerships and build internal capacity prior to the emergence of crisis. As Fey highlights in her second interview, leadership, especially in crisis demands perseverance and stamina from leaders.

> *This situation is not for the faint of heart…My boss called us and just was like, "Yeah, it's going to be like this for a while. Get used to like." There's no apology in that. There's no like, "Oh, you poor thing or whatever." But you have to be tough, and you do have to just realize it's like when you're a parent, and you're like, "Yeah, I'm just not going to get any sleep, and then I'm going to go to work the next day because I have to, even though my kid was up in the middle of the night." That's just where I'm at, and you deal with that.* (FeyInt2)

Personal and organizational mission fit provide room and motivation for persistence during difficult times. Leadership is not for the faint of heart. It requires grit and grace. It is within crisis that an individual's leadership qualities are forged and tested.

References

Agosto, V., & Roland, E. (2018). Intersectionality and educational leadership: A critical review. *Review of Research in Education*, *42*(1), 255-285.

Ashcraft, K.L. (2013). The glass slipper: 'Incorporating' occupational identity in management studies. *Academy of Management Review, 38*(1), 6-31.

Bannerji, H., Carty, L., Dehli, K., Heald, S., & McKenna, K. (1992). Unsettling relations: The university as a site of feminist struggles. South End Press.

Baldoni, J. (2008). *Lead by example: 50 ways great leaders inspire results*. AMACOM Div American Mgmt Assn.

Billups, F. D. (2019). *Qualitative data collection tools: Design, development, and applications* (Vol. 55). Sage Publications.

Breslin, R. A., Pandey, S., & Riccucci, N. M. (2017). Intersectionality in public leadership research: A review and future research agenda. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, *37*(2), 160-182.

Burgman, R. (2018). Woman* leader: Future perfect continuous. *About Campus, 23*(5), 21-24.

Burkinshaw, P., & White, K. (2017). Fixing the women or fixing universities: Women in HE leadership. *Administrative Sciences*, 7(3), 30.

Bruckmüller, S., Ryan, M. K., Rink, F., & Haslam, S. A. (2014). Beyond the glass ceiling: The glass cliff and its lessons for organizational policy. Social issues and policy review, 8(1), 202-232.

Channing, J. (2020). What about your kids and your husband?: Gender-blind sexism in women higher education administrators' narratives. *Education Leadership Review, 21*(1), 41-56.

Choudry, S. (2019). Concrete ceilings and kindred hosepipes: Understanding the experience of BME female leaders in schools. *10% braver: Inspiring women to lead education*. SAGE, 55-65.

Clark, K. L., & Johnson, A. T. (2017). Surrendering to gender in education? complacency and the woman leader. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, *215*, 1–27.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6th ed.). Routledge

Collins, A., Florin, M. V., & Renn, O. (2020). COVID-19 risk governance: drivers, responses, and lessons to be learned. *Journal of Risk Research*, *23*(7-8), 1073-1082.

Coscieme, L., Fioramonti, L., Mortensen, L. F., Pickett, K. E., Kubiszewski, I., Lovins, H., & Wilkinson, R. (2020). Women in power: female leadership and public health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. MedRxiv.

Curry, B. K. (2000). *Women in power: Pathways to leadership in education*. Teachers College Press.

Dannenberg, A. (2015). Leading by example versus leading by words in voluntary contribution experiments. *Social Choice and Welfare*, *44*(1), 71-85.

Diehl, A. B., & Dzubinski, L. M. (2016). Making the invisible visible: A cross-sector analysis of gender-based leadership barriers. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 27(2), 181-206.

Dirani, K. M., Abadi, M., Alizadeh, A., Barhate, B., Garza, R. C., Gunasekara, N., Ibrahim, G., & Majzun, Z. (2020). Leadership competencies and the essential role of human resource development in times of crisis: A response to Covid-19 pandemic. *Human Resource Development International, 23*(4), 380-394.

Frankl, V. E. (1959). The spiritual dimension in existential analysis and logotherapy. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 15*(2), 157.

Gabster, B. P., van Daalen, K., Dhatt, R., & Barry, M. (2020). Challenges for the female academic during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Lancet*, *395*(10242), 1968-1970.

Galea, S., & Abdalla, S. M. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment, and civil unrest: underlying deep racial and socioeconomic divides. *Jama*, *324*(3), 227-228.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. Basic Books.

Gedro, J., Allain, N. M., De-Souza, D., Dodson, L., & Mawn, M. V. (2020). Flattening the learning curve of leadership development: reflections of five women higher education leaders during the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020. *Human Resource Development International*, *23*(4), 395-405.

Glowacki-Dudka, M., Murray, J., Gray, J. I., & Johnson, S. (2016). Indiana women of achievement: using self-directedness, self-efficacy and self-determination to explore opportunities for leadership. *International Journal of Lifelong Education, 35*(6), 682–697.

Hancock, A. M. (2007). When multiplication doesn't equal quick addition: Examining intersectionality as a research paradigm. *Perspectives on Politics, 5*(1), 63-79.

Hendrickson, R. M., Lane, J. E., Harris, J. T., & Dorman, R. H. (2013). *Academic leadership and governance of higher education: A guide for trustees, leaders, and aspiring leaders of two-and four-year institutions*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Hochschild, A. R. (1990). *The second shift: Inside the two-job marriage*. Penguin Books.

Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Pluto Press.

Huang, P. H. (2021). Put more women in charge and other leadership lessons from COVID-19. *FIU L*. Rev., 15, 353.

Jaworski, J. (1998). Destiny and the leader. *Insights on Leadership: Service, Stewardship, and Servant Leadership*, 1-11.

Klenke, K. (2004). *Women and leadership: A contextual perspective*. Springer Publishing Company.

Klenke, K. (Ed.). (2017). *Women in leadership: Contextual dynamics and boundaries*. Emerald Group Publishing.

Lincoln, Y. G., & Guba, E. G. EG (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Lowe, M. E. (2011). Breaking the stained glass ceiling: Women's collaborative leadership style as a model for theological education. *Journal of Research on Christian Education, 20*(3), 309-329.

Mayer, C. H., & May, M. S. (2021). Women leaders transcending the demands of Covid-19: A positive psychology 2.0 perspective. F*rontiers in Psychology*, 12, 647658.

Mavin, S., & Yusupova, M. (2020). Gendered experiences of leading and managing through COVID-19: Patriarchy and precarity. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*. *35*(7/8). 737-744.

Meagher, K., Singh, N. S., & Patel, P. (2020). The role of gender inclusive leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic to support vulnerable populations in conflict settings. *BMJ Global Health*, 5(9), e003760.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th Ed). John Wiley & Sons.

National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Data Center (NCES) (2018), "Full-time instructional staff, by faculty and tenure status, academic rank, race/ethnicity, and gender (Degree-Granting institutions): fall 2018", Fall Staff 2018 Survey, available at: https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data.

Porritt, V., & Featherstone, K. (2019). *10% braver: Inspiring women to lead education.* SAGE.

Ospina, S., & Foldy, E. (2010). Building bridges from the margins: The work of leadership in social change organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *21*(2), 292-307.

Redmond, P., Gutke, H., Galligan, L., Howard, A., & Newman, T. (2017). Becoming a female leader in higher education: investigations from a regional university. *Gender and Education, 29*(3), 332-351.

Rocco, T. S., & Shuck, B. (2019). Death and dying: Grief, compassion and workplace responses. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development, 32*(1): 1–4. doi:10.1002/nha3.20268.

Ryan, M.K., & Haslam, S.A. (2007). The glass cliff: Exploring the dynamics surrounding the appointment of women to precarious leadership positions, *Academy of Management Review, 32*(2), 549-572.

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications.

Shields, C. (2004). Dialogic Leadership for Social Justice: Overcoming Pathologies of Silence. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(1), 109–132.

Smith, E. L. B., & Nkomo, S. M. (2021). *Our separate ways: Black and white women and the struggle for professional identity.* Harvard Business Press.

Simpson, R., & Kumra, S. (2016). The Teflon effect: When the glass slipper meets merit. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, *31*(8), 562-576.

Spendlove, M. (2007). Competencies for effective leadership in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management, 21*(5), 407-417.

Stefan, T., & Nazarov, A. D. (2020, November). Challenges and competencies of leadership in Covid-19 Pandemic. In *Research technologies of pandemic coronavirus impact* (RTCOV 2020) (pp. 518-524). Atlantis Press.

Stern, E. (2013). Preparing: The sixth task of crisis leadership. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *7*(3), 51-56.

Society expects women to be meek and mild, yet there must be tenacity to run a traditional high school campus, which is where the barrier lies for women high school principals. Learning how to navigate potential barriers are a necessary part of the pathway to the high school principal role and actionable implications for aspiring leaders.

Disparity of Representation and the Pathway to the Principalship: The Phenomenological Experience of Female High School Principals

Dr. Crystal Deaver
Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Lake Worth Independent School District

Dr. Melissa Arrambide
Professor
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Dr. Teresa Farler
Assistant Professor
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Dr. Jennifer Dyer
Professor
Assistant Dean of Graduate School
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Dr. Elsa Villarreal
Assistant Professor
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Abstract

The superintendent role in Texas is a position that few women, in comparison to men, obtain in their educational leadership journey. Even though women are statistically more prominently employed as teachers in K–12 public education in Texas, women are not equally represented in the superintendency. This disparity of representation starts at the educational leadership level of the principal. Since the vast majority of educational leaders who move into the superintendent role were once principals at the high school level, women are at a clear disadvantage because the high school principal role is statistically likely to go to men more often than women in Texas. A review of the literature identified a need for further study regarding the pathway to the high school principal role and the barriers that the pathway holds, especially for women in Texas. The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore the career pathways of current female high school principals in Texas and determine the barriers these women have faced along the way. Through the use of hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher will strive to determine and understand the essence of the lived experiences portrayed by the participating principals in relation to the phenomenon of social role theory in Texas. The researcher will use semi-structured interviews and NVivo software in order to allow each participant to describe the lived experience of becoming a high school principal in Texas and collect themes and nodes of their responses.

Introduction

The number of women obtaining degrees and qualifications in education today is higher than men, yet they are not advancing as rapidly as men into leadership roles that require advanced degrees and qualifications (Gipson et al., 2017). The National Center for Educational Statistics

(NCES, 2001) noted that women comprised 76% of the nation's teachers in the 2017–18 school year. However, according to Burton and Weiner (2016), only 52% of principals in elementary and middle schools are female, and only 30% of high school principals are female. Although women are obtaining the educational qualifications needed to be leaders, statistics reveal a disparity of women being recommended for placement in school or district leadership roles. Men typically inhabit the leadership role, especially on the high school campus, and "despite legislation that had promoted equal opportunity, affirmative action, and support of women's professional aspirations, women have continued to be the minority in public school administrative positions" (Roser et al., 2009, p. 2). According to Gipson et al. (2017), women are more likely to engage in work that is relational and driven by purpose than men, and "women leaders are also rated as better at developing others, as well as inspiring, and motivating others, building relationships, and collaboration and teamwork than their male peers" (p. 44). Likewise, Brunner and Kim (2010) indicated "women should fill higher administrative positions because women's leadership styles often better support current democratic/participative organizational reform/development" (p. 278). The purpose of the study was to identify possible trends that can comprise a pathway to high school principalship for women to follow. This purpose is backed by the significance of this study, which outlines how women are still not equal to men in obtaining education leadership positions.

Statement of the Problem

Despite holding the majority of doctoral degrees and classroom teaching positions in Texas, women educators are underrepresented in superintendent positions when compared to their male counterparts (Council of Graduate Schools, 2021). This disparity of female superintendents is a problem that can be attributed to females not having the high school principal experience needed to become superintendent (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Texas women educators comprised 76.14% of classroom teachers during the 2020–2021 school year (TEA, 2021). According to the TEA (2021), out of the 4,789 elementary principals in Texas, 3,915 of them are women, which is a staggering 81.74%. In contrast, females make up only 42.57% of high school principals, or only 730 out of 1,695. During the 2020–2021 school year, females held 323 of the 1,202 Texas superintendent positions, or 26.8%. These data indicate that women are twice as likely to hold an elementary principal position over a high school principal position in Texas and are half as likely as men to hold the position of superintendent. This information is vital because, according to Farmer (2007), the pipeline to the superintendent position is at stake for women since the elementary principal position is less likely to prepare them for the superintendent-level position. Specifically, 46% of sitting superintendents in 2020 indicated they had been high school principals (Glass et al., 2000).

Women have long comprised the majority of principal preparation programs, thereby indicating that women have been interested in positions and roles in educational administration yet do not land those roles as often as males (Logan, 1998). Eagly and Wood (2012) discussed how "even highly qualified women may be judged to lack the attributes necessary for success" because of the social perceptions and the role gender plays in society (p. 470). Sanchez and Thornton (2010) illuminated the concern of not including women in the highest forms of leadership when they stated, "Until there is a more equitable distribution of women in the highest levels of educational leadership, we are sending a message that says women's leadership is still not much valued" (p. 9). The fact that women are not represented at a level equitable to their male counterparts in high

school principal roles hinders their voice from being heard and hinders changing policy and expectations for a field that needs change (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the paths taken and the obstacles faced by current female high school principals in Texas in becoming principals. A phenomenology study was designed to gain access into the conceptual essences of a common phenomenon or human experience (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). In this study, the phenomenology approach brought the human experience, or phenomena, of female high school principals in Texas to the forefront as common themes in their pathways are interpreted (Creswell, 2007). Insight into the experience of current female high school principals and their pathway to becoming a high school campus principal will be beneficial to women who aspire to attain a superintendency yet do not know how to start the journey.

This phenomenological study was conducted through the lens of social role theory because "it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality" (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 26). Reality of an experienced phenomenon is based on and comes from human experience, which is socially developed and constructed; thus, social role theory is an appropriate lens for interpreting the essence of the phenomenon (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Social role theory is based on the concept of women filling stereotypical roles in society, and as a result, women continue to be marginalized in society's positions of power (Eagly & Wood, 1999). This lack of representation needs to be studied so more women are able to break through the barriers that maintain disparity in the representation of female high school principals and superintendents (Hoyt & Simon, 2011). Within this study, women described their personal paths to the high school principalship position. The intent of the researcher was to explore, understand, and identify a common pathway aspiring female administrators can take to advance into high school principal roles. Furthermore, the researcher sought to understand how these women were able to act upon and overcome any obstacles they faced along the way in their journey to becoming high school principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1. Based on participants' lived experiences, what common trends are revealed in the pathways to leadership from current female high school principals participating in this study?

2. What barriers/obstacles, if any, do current female high school principals reveal in their experiences regarding the pathway to principalship?

Review of the Literature

The phenomenon of social stereotypes and roles, as established by social role theory, plays an important role in explaining the experiences of female high school principals. This phenomenon needs to be understood in order for the essence of the collective experiences and trends to be gathered from the researcher (Creswell, 2014). After first establishing the theoretical framework

of social role theory, the literature review can then delve deeply into both the role of the school principal and district superintendent, as established by the TEA. This objective looks into what the TEA expects from its district and campus leaders will provide insight into expectations set forth for administration in the Texas Administrative Code (TAC). In order to understand the role of both campus and district leadership, one must also understand the qualifications of the positions as well, so a look into certification and degree qualifications is analyzed for both the principal and superintendent role in Texas.

Theoretical Framework: Social Role Theory

The theoretical framework that guided the researcher was driven and informed by research conducted on the topic of women in leadership, with a specific emphasis on the pathway to the high school principal role. Social role theory was used to outline stereotypes surrounding gender, roles the male and female genders typically play in society, and the differences and similarities between the different genders (Eagly & Wood, 2012). The theory has been deeply studied by many researchers, and Eagly and Wood (2012) indicated the theory "in brief . . . argue[s] that sex differences and similarities in behavior reflect gender role beliefs that in turn represent people's perceptions of men's and women's social roles in the society in which they live" (p. 459). Furthermore, Burton and Weiner (2016) stated, "The social role stereotypes of *women take care and men take charg*e impact biased evaluation of women in leadership positions and are both pervasive and resilient" (p. 3). Consequently, this theoretical framework outlines the perspective of this study: the part that the social role plays in gender equality in the school leadership role of principal.

Gender roles framed by social role theory play an integral part in this research. Eagly and Wood (2012) named gender roles as the fabric of the social role theory—one wherein men are agentic and women are communal. Specifically, men are seen as "engaging in activities that are marketable in the paid economy," and women are seen as "engaging in domestic behaviors such as childcare, cooking, and sewing" (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p. 466). This concept of women being the homemaker and men being the breadwinner is localized to the immediate society, but many within society think this viewpoint or perspective of gender roles is natural and global in nature (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Furthermore, these gender roles are typically established in early childhood and are fostered as a child grows into adolescence and young adulthood; thus, the concept of social roles based on gender is perpetuated (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Texas Education Leadership Requirements

Texas Requirements for Superintendency

According to TAC 19 of the TEA (Superintendent Certificate, 2009), "The holder of the Superintendent Certificate issued under the provisions of this chapter may serve as a superintendent, principal, or assistant principal in a Texas public school" (§242.1[d]). A superintendent candidate must be able to meet specific requirements in order to be certified as a superintendent in Texas, according to TAC 19 of the TEA, Section 242.1. In order to become certified as a superintendent in Texas, one must pass the certification examination based on standards outlined by TEA. Additionally, the candidate must complete an approved preparation program for superintendency and hold a minimum of a master's degree from an accredited college or university. If the candidate does not hold a principal certification (or equivalent issued

by another state or country), they must have three years of leadership or manager experience in a public school district, which must be verified and approved by TEA. Once this certification has been obtained, the superintendent candidate must be able to exhibit competency in the following areas: instructional leadership; administration, supervision, and communication skills; curriculum and instruction management; performance evaluation; organization; and fiscal management (Superintendent Certificate, 2009).

Role of the Superintendent in Texas

The role of the superintendent in Texas includes knowledge and skills identified by TEA as learner-centered that encompass the following areas: values and ethics of leadership, leadership and school district culture, human resources leadership and management, policy and governance, communications and community relations, organizational leadership and management, curriculum planning and development, and instructional leadership and management (Superintendent Certificate, 2009). These standards for competency are also the foundation for the curriculum and coursework for the superintendent preparation program and certification exam, which are required for superintendent status to be an option in Texas (Superintendent Certificate, 2009).

Texas Requirements for Principalship

According to TAC 19 of the TEA (Superintendent Certificate, 2009), "The holder of the Principal Certificate issued under the provision of this chapter may serve as a principal or assistant principal in a Texas public school" (§242.1[d]). A candidate is eligible to receive a standard principal certification upon completing five eligibility criteria, the first of which states a candidate must successfully complete the appropriate examinations required, which are the comprehensive examinations identified by the SBEC (State Board for Educator Certification) (Professional Educator Preparation and Certification, 2009). The possible examinations, as identified by SBEC, are *268—Principal as Instructional Leader TExES* and *068—Principal TExES* (Professional Educator Preparation and Certification, 2009, §230.21[e]). The second qualification criterion for a principal is to "hold, at a minimum, a master's degree from an accredited institution of higher education" (§241.20). The third criterion for a candidate seeking principalship is the need for the candidate to have a valid teaching certificate. The fourth requirement for a candidate to be eligible to receive a standard principal certificate is that the candidate must "have two creditable years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher" (§241.20). The last requirement for principal certification is to "successfully complete a principal preparation program" (Principal Certificate, 2009, §241.20[5]).

Role of the Principal in Texas

The requirements under the last criterion for certification include the sections of 19 TAC, wherein one can find the standards of a principal preparation program required for principal certification: (a) *school culture,* (b) *leading learning,* (c) *human capital,* (d) *executive leadership,* (e) *strategic operations,* and (f) *ethics, equity, and diversity* (Principal Certificate, 2009). Section §241.15[a] points out that "the standards also serve as the foundation for the individual assessment, professional growth plan, and continuing professional education activities required." These standards will be discussed in depth in the upcoming paragraphs to establish an expansive view of the role of the principal, according to Texas and the TEA.

Women in Educational Leadership

History

In the early 1900s, a clear divide existed between the "division of labor among administrators and teachers"; even though "historically, women have been the majority in the teaching profession," for the most part, women maintained their teacher roles and men moved into the administrative roles (Roser et al., 2009, p. 1). Thus, women assumed a nurturing role in the classroom, and the men of the early 1900s became the administrators who made decisions and were the "bureaucrats and disciplinarians" of the schooling system (Roser et al., 2009, p. 1). According to Roser et al. (2009), in 1928, 55% of principals in elementary schools were women. However, as Roser et al. indicated, "Interestingly, there was then a sharp decline in the number of women holding a principal's position," and that decline was from 1928 until 1984, when only 18% of women held principal positions (p. 2).

Historically, research data have repeatedly demonstrated the inequality of women represented in the public administration and campus leader roles (Mouton, 2011). These data are more evident on the high school level (Mertz, 2006). In the 1930s, "women occupied 55% of elementary schools, 12% of junior high schools, and 6% of high schools" principalship (Mouton, 2011, p. 58). Mouton (2011) found that at the time of her research, "women held 73.5% of elementary positions, 41.3% of junior high positions, and 29.8% of high school positions" (p. 58). These data indicate that over a period of 80 years, from the 1930s to the early 2000s, "the greatest increase for women occurred in the junior high school positions, which accounted for a 29.3% increase overall. The second increase in positions occurred at the high school level as women have gained an increase of 23.8%" (Mouton, 2011, p. 58). Despite all the advancements in technology, civil rights, and civilization as a whole, Mouton's 2011 study further demonstrates that women are still more prevalent in elementary principal positions, indicating little change in the 80-year span.

Current Positions Held

According to Mouton (2011), in 2000, collected data indicated that women held the vast majority of elementary campus principal positions (73.5%), as determined by the U.S. Department of Education. Mouton stated, "At the junior high level, men outnumbered women with 58.7% male principals. High school results indicated that men also outnumbered women, with 70.2% being male principals" (p. 27). These gaps in the elementary to high school level of leadership are concerning to women who desire the high school level of principalship.

In a study conducted by Mouton in 2011, the researcher found "males are statistically more likely to lead Texas schools that are categorized by TEA as middle school, junior high or high schools," or what is often referred to as secondary schools (p. 57). The study also found statistical significance in the size of schools that were led by both men and women. Mouton (2011) noted, "This study also found that males are statistically more likely to head Texas schools with enrollment of more than 2000 students," and, in regards to female principal student enrollment numbers, their campuses are typically less than 1,000 students. (p. 58).

Some critics of gender research argue that the best candidate for the job must be the one who is granted the position, which is why more men occupy the high school principal role over their

female competitors. Mouton's 2011 study revealed "males are statistically more likely to head schools that are rated Unacceptable in the Texas accountability system" and "females head schools that are rated Acceptable, Unacceptable, and Exemplary in the Texas accountability system" (p. 57). Mouton (2011) also discussed how this aspect of the research does show some limitations due to the fact that female principals at the high school level are less numerous than men.

Pathway to the Principalship

Trends

An analysis of who is most likely to become a principal (based on data) and then a look into the positions held by women leaders will begin to establish the pathway one can take to become a principal. Based on data from Bastian and Henry's (2014) research on North Carolina's principalship, the average age of first-time principals is 41 years of age. In their study of 981 principals, 880 of them were former teachers within the school district who had taught for approximately 8.5 years on average.

Other demographic data worth mentioning were compiled by Davis et al. (2017), who indicated that women are less likely than men to obtain the position of principal, and women of color even less likely. More specifically, "the pathway to the principalship disfavors females even when controlling for a host of other factors" (p. 12). Davis et al. went on to state, "Females of color are especially disfavored in their likelihood of transitioning from certificate holder to principal" (p. 231). Contrary to what Bastian and Henry (2014) found in their research, which noted that first-time principals are 60% females, Davis et al. (2017) noted, "Our findings suggest that White men would have the most opportunity when they decide to pursue the principalship" (p. 231).

Furthermore, those teachers completed a principal training program, and on average, it took 5.12 years from the time of their degree attainment to when they received their first principalship (Bastian & Henry, 2014). These data are also supported by Davis et al. (2017), whose Texas study on the pathway to the principalship indicated most leaders become a principal around 4 to 6 years after interest in the program is shown. The degrees earned in Bastian and Henry's (2014) study was broken down as follows: "67% of the first-time principals earned a master's degree from an in-state public institution as their last degree," and "the last degree for nearly 89% of our sample was a master's," and "approximately 14% of individuals earned their last degree out-of-state" (p. 618). Moreover, 918 of the 981 principals also held the title of assistant principal for an average of 4.15 years prior to advancing into the principal role (Bastian & Henry, 2014).

Importance of High School Principalship

In a collection of over 350 respondents to a survey on the pathway to superintendency in Texas, Farmer (2007) found that the most common link between the top five pathways all included the high school principalship. Specifically, 66% of the pathways to the superintendent position included the prerequisite of being a high school principal (Farmer, 2007). Farmer indicated that males made up 91% of respondents and females 9% of respondents. Furthermore, only six respondents, or 1.87%, who were current sitting superintendents at the time of the survey indicated their pathway was by way of an elementary principalship and not a high school principalship or director position (Farmer, 2007).

Farmer's 2007 research indicated that the high school principal position was the most important position in a superintendent's path to their current position. Specifically, "findings implicated that aspiring superintendents should seek secondary school principal positions, particularly high school principal positions, as requisites for the Texas public school superintendent position" (Farmer, 2007, p. 12). These superintendents' responses to Farmer's survey also identified "the secondary principal position . . . as the key preparatory position for the superintendency regardless of district size" (p. 12). It is also worth noting that "even though women have over a year more experience on average before being promoted to assistant principal, they are less likely to be promoted to high school principal, and when they are, it is after a longer assistant principalship" (Bailes & Guthery, 2020, para. 1). Specifically, Bailes and Guthery (2020) stated, "While women comprise half of high school assistant principals, they are less likely than men to be promoted to principalships at that level" (para. 6).

History of Gender Bias in the Workforce

The Glass Ceiling

According to Grover (2015), "The term 'Glass Ceiling' was coined in 1979 . . . during a conference of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press as a part of discussion on discrepancies between written policies of women promotion and action opportunities for women at Hewlett & Packard" (p. 1). This term is described as "the seen, yet unreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements" (Grover, 2015, p. 1). Obviously, the history of gender bias in the workforce is critical for this proposed research because it establishes the context of what women are up against when pursuing the role of principal in education.

Historical Trends

The last 100 years have brought a number of changes to the U.S. workforce and the women within the workforce. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2021), the Women's Bureau was established on June 5, 1920, by Public Law No. 66-259. This department was created to "formulate standards and policies which shall promote the welfare of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment" and is the only federal bureau to exist for the purpose of women's rights in the workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

During World War II, many men were taken out of the assembly-line workforce to fight in the war, which left women to take up these roles and engage in a part of the workforce they had not been privy to until this tumultuous event. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, women started making their way into the workforce in more male-dominated fields, such as "science, social work, mathematics and statistics, legal work, and even police work" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021, para. 14). Then, in the late 1950s and 1960s, the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor began to focus on college education and traditional training for women to be gainfully employed in the workforce alongside their male counterparts.

The 1960s was a decade filled with political gains by the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, beginning with the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1963. This law, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission of the United States, was the first law that made it

illegal to pay men and women different wages based on the same work. The victory was short-lived once women realized that legislature and practice, or perceptions, were much different from reality (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

In the 1970s, the Women's Bureau "provided staff support for the President's Fifty States Project, an effort to help states identify sexually discriminatory provisions in their statutes, and supported the fight for passage of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021, para. 16). At this time, the department also stepped in to ensure proper training and opportunities for women were established as a result of the previous decade's legislature and learnings.

In the 1980s, the Women's Bureau worked with organizations in the workforce to provide onsite childcare for their female employees and worked with women who had been successful in climbing the ladder so they could mentor other women with the same aspirations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). In the 1980s and 1990s, the notion that women should be contributing members of society in both a career aspect and a family aspect was introduced, so much information on how childcare and offerings of reasonable work hours provided a guiding force during those two decades (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

Modern Trends

In the 2000s, women were still fighting for the same rights they had been fighting for since the 1920s: equal pay, equal opportunities, and flexible work days (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). Specifically, in 2010, the "Women's Bureau's vision was to empower all working women to achieve economic security by preparing them for higher-paying jobs, promoting equal pay, promoting workplace flexibility, helping women veterans reintegrate into the workforce, and helping vulnerable women" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021, para. 19). Since the late 2010s through present day, the Women's Bureau's priorities have "included expanding opportunities for women in the world of work through an increase in the size and type of apprenticeship models, access to affordable, high-quality child care options and the enactment of national paid leave" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021, para. 20).

Although the workforce has changed and evolved, it is obvious that a struggle still remains for the Women's Bureau. Women face some of the same challenges in 2021 that they faced in 1921. Workforce development is still a major issue in today's society, and gender bias still exists in spite of over 100 years of research and advocacy (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

Leadership Differences Between Men and Women

Two overarching stereotypes that encompass leadership tendencies exist—*communal* and *agentic* (Eagly, 2020). Agentic tendencies include directness, dominance, and assertiveness (Eagly, 2020). In regard to agentic behavior and how it relates to leadership, agentic individuals exhibit "behavior that is independent, masterful, assertive, and instrumentally competent" (Eagly et al., 2003, p. 572). On the other hand, communal tendencies include warmth, kindness, and inclusivity (Eagly, 2020). In regard to communal behavior and how it relates to leadership, communal individuals exhibit "behavior that is friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and expressive" (Eagly et al., 2003, p. 572).

Female Leadership Strengths

The leadership tendencies of women that are considered stronger than their male counterparts were described by Rey (2005) as follows: "Woman leaders are acknowledged as possessing entrepreneurial vision and effective communication skills, and operate from a reward power base, which results in a work atmosphere where all individuals are motivated and work together to achieve the organization's mission" (p. 9). This type of leadership goes against the typical leadership style based on dominant behaviors and what Rey (2005) referred to as "material superiority" and instead is a leadership style that "values . . . sustainability, diversity and human rights"—in other words, an alternative leadership style (p. 10). This alternative leadership style is aligned with female leadership styles by Rey, who stated, "There is remarkable overlap between the kinds of traits posited as desirable for this alternative leadership with the characteristics typically associated with women's leadership" (p. 10). Unfortunately, even with all the literature and research that supports women potentially being better leaders than men, women still face many obstacles in attaining leadership roles.

Female Leadership Barriers

In a 2007 empirical research study, Shakeshaft et al. asked why the "higher you go, the fewer you see" syndrome for women in school administration still exists in today's society despite the fact that initial studies were conducted nearly three decades prior. Their research identified the following different types of barriers faced by women, each of which will be explored below: *lacking in confidence*, *lack of motivation or aspiration*, *family and home responsibilities*, *working conditions or sex discrimination*, *lack of support or encouragement*, *socialization and sex role stereotypes*, *finances for training*, and *lack of mentors in hiring or promotion processes* (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). These findings were also supported by Derrington and Sharratt (2009), who indicated two of the top barriers to women superintendents in California were (a) not willing to relocate due to family or spouse's career and (b) balancing work with family. Derrington and Sharratt (2009) also indicated that while the home and family balance is difficult for younger women who seek the superintendent position, they concluded this dynamic did not improve with age because the aspiring female's parents aged and required more care, most of which she would be responsible for later in her career.

Subordinate Perceptions of Women Leaders

Regardless of the research-based findings of a woman's leadership style being preferred over a man's, "women mainly perceive other women as rather emotional, aggressive, high in dominance and more effective, but still would not prefer to work for them" (Brinia, 2011, p. 40). However, in contrast to those negative results, Crites et al. (2015) surveyed 135 people on their perceptions of a leader's concern for people and the concern for production, and then the researchers ran a reliability test (Cronbach's alpha) to verify the results' validity—.80 for the male leaders and .83 for the female leaders. The overall indications for this research showed a slight preference for female leaders from female subordinates and no preference from male subordinates regarding their boss's gender (Crites et al., 2015). This juxtaposition in research is another indicator of a complicated system that varies depending on the research and values instilled within society and personal beliefs.

Methods

A qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to illuminate meaning and understand the essence of the lived experiences as portrayed by the participating principals. According to Kafle (2011), "The term essence refers to the essential meanings of a phenomenon; that which makes a thing what it is" (p. 189). The use of a phenomenological methodology has allowed the researcher to illuminate rich descriptions, personal meanings, and the essence of lived experiences related to female high school principals in Texas. Peoples (2021) described the process of phenomenological research in the following manner: "Through participants' vivid depictions of their experiences, phenomenological researchers construct a meaningful reality through data analysis" (p. 3). Creswell (2014) described the process as the researcher describing the lived experiences of participants through the lenses of philosophy and psychology.

Design of the Study

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather descriptive narratives regarding the lived experiences of female high school principals. The data collected from the semi-structured interviews was coded using the NVivo software program. NVivo is a software program used to uncover patterns and develop themes from the information that is input into the system's software. NVivo was used to assist in data interpretation, thereby establishing common themes noted during the participant interviews and storytelling. This process was done through the submission of the transcripts, transcribed from the recorded audio, and interpretation of the participant's answers into codes for theme emergence. All of this was done through NVivo's coding capabilities. The identified theme was viewed through the phenomenological lens of social role theory, thus answering the aforementioned research questions.

This interpretive analysis of data is called interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), and according to Smith and Osborn (2008), "The aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world" (p. 53). This research was designed to use hermeneutic phenomenological research combined with IPA data analysis as an interpretive or descriptive method in order to gain insight from high school female principals regarding their journey to their current roles. By seeking to understand the essence of the lived experiences of the female high school principals, the researcher used these in-depth, semi-structured interviews to determine barriers along the female leaders' path. In this research, the phenomena studied are the experiences of female leaders in the high school principalship role in Texas and the pathways and barriers they faced as they navigated the social roles of women in society.

Study Participants

This method of sampling is purposeful criterion-based sampling, according to Creswell (2013). For Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling is the best approach to qualitative research, an approach that is even more specific at the phenomenology-level of research. This study had five participants. Participants in this study are current female high school principals in Texas. These women are principals at traditional high schools and neighborhood schools that contain Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. These campuses are not specialized campuses but rather public schools in a public school district in Texas. In order to recruit these participants, the researcher located the candidates in the TEA's principal contact lists and emailed the qualifying principals information

on the research and details requesting their confirmation of the participant criteria. Once that criteria was confirmed, the researcher then submitted the paperwork and releases needed for the participants' participation in the research to commence. These participants were selected by purposive sampling, which assisted the researcher in answering the research questions related to the phenomenon and social role theory (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection

Through the collection of interview responses collected by the researcher in the aforementioned semi-structured interviews, the researcher gathered the lived experiences of female high school principals in Texas. This process was completed via video-conferencing so the researcher could witness and note body language, tone, and any other nuance of the participant that was not vocally stated. The researcher recorded the interviews and transcribed the interviews for data analysis. These steps are both critical in IPA because the use of NVivo requires the transcription for the development of codes and themes and gives the researcher more time with the transcripts to ensure the hermeneutic circle of analysis was implemented.

Treatment of Data

The researcher inputs the full transcript of each interview into the NVivo software program, a program that is able to assign themes to the common codes in the data—data, in this case being, the transcripts of the interviews. The software enabled the researcher to code the transcripts in the software program, which were then analyzed for accuracy through reviewing transcripts and comparing the interpretations. The most appropriate code to use in this study is the themes previously mentioned through the literature review, considering that the researcher is looking for common themes in the responses of participants as they relate to their lived experiences. The analysis of these data focused on the topics of the two research questions: pathways to the high school principalship for female leaders and barriers and obstacles faced along the way.

Findings

Nine themes were identified through the inductive coding process using Nvivo software. These nine emergent themes spanned two research questions once the data was interpreted and analyzed for codes and themes. The researcher considered the previous studies regarding barriers and obstacles to women in leadership positions to the themes that began to emerge from this research. This consideration of previous research is what assisted the researcher in the development of the research questions that were asked of the participants. The researcher utilized some of the existing body of research's findings and concepts of social role theory to develop the research questions. In Table 1, the researcher illustrates the first of two research questions and the themes that emerged from this research as they connect to research question 1.

Table 1
Emergent Themes for Research Question 1

Research Question 1	Themes
RQ1: Based on participants' lived experiences, what common trends are revealed in the pathways to leadership from current female high school principals participating in this study?	Emerging Theme 1: Advancing titles through lower grade levels Emerging Theme 2: Pathway preparedness

The second research question was in regard to the barriers and/or obstacles the high school female principals faced along the way in their pathway to the principalship in the state of Texas. This research question yielded seven emerged themes based on the open-ended interview questions. In the following Table 2, the second research questions with the emerged themes are presented.

Table 2
Emergent Themes for Research Question 2

Research Question 2	Themes
RQ2: What barriers/obstacles, if any, do current female high school principals reveal in their experiences regarding the pathway to principalship?	Emerging Theme 1: Capitalizing on mentorship Emerging Theme 2: Working conditions/discrimination Emerging Theme 3: Family and home responsibilities Emerging Theme 4: Aspirations and confidence Emerging Theme 5: Sex role stereotyping Emerging Theme 6: Financial support Emerging Theme 7: Opportunities for growth and advancement

In Table 3, the researcher indicates which participants experienced the emergent themes of the first research question based on their responses to the guiding questions asked within the interview process.

Table 3
Participants' Mentions or Experiences of Themes Related to Research Question 1

Emerging Theme	Participant				
	A	B	C	D	E
Advancing titles through lower grade levels	x	x	x	x	
Pathway Preparedness	x	x	x	x	x

Note. Participants (N=5) were assigned pseudonyms (i.e., Participant A, Participant B, etc.) to protect their rights to confidentiality. An "x" indicates the participant made comments in the interview related to the designated theme.

Emerging Theme 1: Advancing titles through lower grade levels

The first theme that emerged for research question number one was the theme of current female high school principals advancing their titles in their careers through lower grade levels. An example of this is a high school teacher moving into an assistant principal role at the middle school level prior to advancing to assistant principal at the high school level. The leader first advances her title, teacher to assistant principal, and does it through going down in grade level, from high school to middle school. It is then, that our participants begin to then move back up the grade levels towards the high school position of principal.

Emerging Theme 2: Pathway preparedness

The second theme that emerged from the first research question was pathway preparedness. The interview question that prompted the responses that this theme emerged from was, "As an acting female high school principal, what recommended steps should a female leader consider in building a pathway to the high school principal position?". This question was initially intended to spark thought regarding barriers and obstacles, as that was the next research question that the interview was moving towards, but the responses aligned with the steps to take to be ready for the position when it became available, hence pathway preparedness. All five participants shared experiences and the need to be prepared, which is what assisted in the development of this theme.

Table 4
Participants' Mentions or Experiences of Themes Related to Research Question 2

Emerging Theme	Participant				
	A	B	C	D	E
Capitalizing on mentorship	x	x	x	x	x
Working conditions/discrimination	x	x		x	x
Family and home responsibilities	x	x	x	x	x
Aspirations and confidence	x	x	x	x	x
Sex role stereotyping	x	x		x	x
Financial support			x	x	x
Opportunities for growth and advancement	x	x	x		x

Note. Participants (N=5) were assigned pseudonyms (i.e., Participant A, Participant B, etc.) to protect their rights to confidentiality. An "x" indicates the participant made comments in the interview related to the designated theme.

Emerging Theme 1: Capitalizing on Mentorship

The body of research surrounding mentorship describes how there is a lack of mentors for women leaders, especially principals. As the researcher reviewed the transcripts and holistically evaluated and interpreted the statements of the participants, the theme of not only mentorships emerged but the themes of capitalizing on those mentorship relationships. Every participant alluded to the need for a good mentor and the benefits that the relationship can reap. Additionally, mentorship codes were found in all five transcript files and were referenced a total of fifteen times in the five interviews.

Emerging Theme 2: Working conditions/discrimination

This theme encompasses discriminatory remarks that current female high school principals have experienced based on their gender and working conditions that they have faced that were sub-par compared to their male counterparts. This theme developed based on coding that aligned to discrimination but not stereotypes, which is another theme that will be discussed within this chapter. The codes for this theme were mentioned in four of the transcript files and referenced seven times overall in those four transcripts. When asked if this was a problem or if they had faced any barriers or obstacles regarding discrimination or working conditions because they were

women, some of the participants would initially respond “no,” however when the researcher let the silence settle in the interview, the participants would then begin to discuss instances where discrimination did occur.

Emerging Theme 3: Family and home responsibilities

All five participants discussed the role of family and their home-life in their interviews. This topic came up when the specific question was asked, as well as multiple other times during the interviews. Family and home responsibility codes were found in all five transcript files and were referenced or coded twenty-one times in those five interviews. Additionally, all five participants indicated their family and home responsibilities were a factor, at some level, in the career moves they have made over the years.

Emerging Theme 4: Aspirations and Confidence

Previous literature allures to female leaders lacking confidence or the aspiration to move into higher levels of leadership within education; however, this was not the case with the experiences of the participants in this study. On the contrary, the idea of aspirations and confidence was breached in all five participant interviews, and this theme had nine different references, despite there being only one question about it on the semi-structured interview questions. The participating female high school principals did not lack aspirations or confidence but were rather proud of their abilities and used that as motivation for their advancement in positions within the education field.

Emerging Theme 5: Sex-Role Stereotypes

This barrier to female high school principals is evident in all but one of the participants. The codes that combined to make this theme were evident in four of the transcript files and had thirteen references to sex-role stereotypes. Assumptions made about a female leader, based on her gender and the role that gender plays in society, are a barrier for women high school principals.

Emerging Theme 6: Financial support

Financial support was a theme that came up when the codes started to appear for the following questions asked during the interview:

> Did you have all the support and financial resources you needed to advance your career to this level? If not, what were you missing that would have helped you be more successful along the way?

These codes appeared in three different transcripts but were mentioned eleven times in those three. Two of the participants indicated this was not a financial barrier or obstacle to their success but rather a support of the district they were in at the time.

Emerging Theme 7: Opportunity for growth and advancement

While the theme or barrier of opportunity for men versus women was not explicitly discussed as

a barrier in the previous literature review, it is an understood barrier. This theme emerged as a barrier or obstacle as coding ensued due to the fact that the majority of the participants either discussed openly or alluded to it in their interviews. This theme is essentially the proverbial "glass ceiling" that is so often referenced when reviewing research regarding gender and leadership. The codes that align with these themes were present in four of the transcript files and were referenced thirteen times within those four files.

Social Role Theory and Research Findings

Social role theory indicates women are to have stereotypical nurturing roles in society, and they are to behave as nurturers, not powerful or direct campus leaders. This study has found that the stereotypes that are supported by the social role theory are also the lived experiences of our participants. Though not all participants saw this as an obstacle or challenge, most found themselves up against the societal expectations of the communities they serve. Additionally, the female participants were assumed to have certain nurturing characteristics when they were announced to the general public as the new campus leader. With remarks about being meek or soft, many of the participants had to establish their approach to leadership not only to their campuses and faculty/staff but to the general public as well.

Social role theory was also found in the expectation of the female principals to decide between family and career in some cases. Society expects women to be the caretakers of the children in the family, and for the majority of participants, this affected their career-based decisions. Many of them put off moving into the high school principal role in order to raise their children and be present as a mother, exactly what is expected from the social role theory. The findings of this research assist in establishing validity to the theoretical framework and establishment of societal views and expectations for women, both at home and in the workforce.

Conclusions of Findings

All of the female high school principals interviewed in this research vocalized the need to be prepared to move into the next role or the next career step in the pathway at any given moment. All of the female leaders also discussed the need to learn and grow in order to be prepared for that "next step" in the leadership journey. All but one of the female leaders in this research had to drop into the lower-grade principalship in order to move back up to their preferred level of high school.

Additionally, all of the high school female principals in this study indicated the lack of a mentor was a barrier for women, as they emphasized the importance of capitalizing on the mentorship relationship for aspiring female leaders. All of the female leader participants also indicated their family and home obligations affected their career choices at some level. While some of the female leaders did not indicate it was a barrier or obstacle, their answers indicated they would have chosen differently had their family circumstances been different. This is the essence of their experience; the interpretative analysis of the data resulted in an emerging theme despite some of the participants being adamant their family obligations were not a hindrance to them. Like family responsibilities and the importance of mentorship, all participants also indicated they did not lack the confidence and/or aspirations to become the leaders they are today, despite what the body of research indicates.

Most of the women, four out of five, experienced gender discrimination or poor working conditions, sex-role stereotyping, and the perceived lack of opportunity for growth in their career pathways. While one of the female participants attributed the discrimination to people being "rude" rather than naming it discrimination, it was apparent in her interview that the commentary from the public was in regards to her gender and ability to perform the duties of high school principal due to her being female. The other participants were well aware of the perceptions of others and indicated this was a clear barrier for them along their journey. The other participants also experienced societal expectations, which correlates with social role theory, of women needing to be with their families and raising their children. Another sex-role stereotype that emerged from the experiences of the participants was that of behavioral expectations for women versus those of men. Society expects women to be meek and mild, yet there has to be tenacity to run a traditional high school campus, which is where the barrier lies for women high school principals. All but one of the participants indicated they had experienced the barrier or obstacle of being one of the first or the first female high school principals in their school or district. This perceived lack of opportunity to make it to the top ties in with the idea that women are not confident or have the same aspirations as their male counterparts. The lack of women in the upper levels of leadership, at the campus level and the district level, has led to them perceiving their gender as a barrier or obstacle to overcome in order to achieve their aspirations.

Lastly, only some of the women indicated they had the support and financial backing to advance their careers. The three female leaders who felt they had the appropriate support were able to use district resources of time and money to ensure they received the degrees needed to move up in their leadership journey. The other two women financially paid for their degrees and worked on their own time to achieve them.

Implications for Practice

While a single phenomenological study cannot provide a sound basis for the practice of increasing acceptance and thus a representation of women in the high school principal role in Texas, this study (and other studies with similar findings) would suggest there are steps that can be taken to assist in this phenomenon. Specifically, this study suggests aspiring female leaders need to seek out a female mentor who has experience at the high school level of campus leadership. Another implication for aspiring female high school principals is to be aware of the obstacles that will likely be encountered along the way, whether that be the lack of opportunity in district leadership or campus leadership or the need to ensure one's finances are able to fund the needed graduate work and certifications needed for the principal role. Awareness allows the aspiring leader to pro-actively establish a plan to address the obstacles when they do arise. Another way the aspiring female high school principal can prepare for the role, as evidenced by the study's findings, is to learn and prepare for the role before it is time to step into it. Knowing that working conditions, gender stereotypes, and sexual discrimination are likely to be present in their journey, the aspiring leader can mentally prepare for the barrier. Learning how to navigate potential barriers is a necessary part of the pathway to the high school principal role and actionable implications for aspiring leaders.

References

Bailes, L. P., & Guthery, S. (2020). Held down and held back: Systematically delayed principal promotions by race and gender. *AERA Open*, *6*(2), 233285842092929. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858420929298

Bastian, K. C., & Henry, G. T. (2014). The apprentice: Pathways to the principalship and student achievement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *51*(4), 600-639. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x14562213

Brinia, V. (2011). Female educational leadership in primary education in Greece: A theoretical framework based on experiences of female school leaders. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 39*(3), 37-58. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513541211201988

Brunner, C. C., & Kim, Y. (2010). Are women prepared to be school superintendents? An essay on the myths and misunderstandings. *Leadership for Social Justice and Democracy in Our Schools*, *5*(8), 59-92. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506335278.n4

Burton, L. J., & Weiner, J. M. (2016). "They were really looking for a male leader for the building": Gender, identity and leadership development in a principal preparation program. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *7*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00141

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Study guide for research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches by Creswell, John W., ISBN 9781412965576* (3rd ed.). Academic Internet Pub.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J.W. and Miller, D.L. (2000) Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. Theory into Practice, 39, 124-130. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2

Crites, S. N., Dickson, K. E., & Lorenz, A. (2015). Nurturing gender stereotypes in the face of experience: A study of leader gender, leadership style, and satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict*, *19*(1), 1. https://www.proquest.com/openview/a1535815858bbebdf39122f4000a92be/1?pq-

Davis, B. W., Gooden, M. A., & Bowers, A. J. (2017). Pathways to the principalship: An event history analysis of the careers of teachers with principal certification. *American Educational Research Journal, 54*(2), 207-240. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216687530

Derrington, M. L., & Sharratt, G. (2009). Female superintendents: Breaking barriers and challenging life styles. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, *75*(2), 8-12. https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:140833501

Eagly, A., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. In P. A. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 458-476). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n49

Eagly, A. H. (2007). Female leadership advantage and disadvantage: Resolving the contradictions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *31*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2007.00326.x

Eagly, A. H. (2020). *Once more: The rise of female leaders*. American Psychological Association. http://www.apa.org/research/action/female-leaders

Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & Van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: A meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*(4), 569-591. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.4.569

Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (1999). The origins of sex differences in human behavior: Evolved dispositions versus social roles. *American Psychologist, 54*(6), 408–423. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.6.408

Eagly, A. H., Wood, W., & Diekman, A. B. (2000). Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal. In T. Eckes & H. M. Trautner (Eds.), *The developmental social psychology of gender* (pp. 123-174). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Farmer, T. A. (2007). *The secondary principal position: Preparatory position for the superintendency* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Tarleton State University.

Gipson, A. N., Pfaff, D. L., Mendelsohn, D. B., Catenacci, L. T., & Burke, W. W. (2017). Women and leadership. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *53*(1), 32-65. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886316687247

Glass, T. E., Bjork, L., & Brunner, C. C. (2000). *The study of the American school superintendency 2000: A look at the superintendent of education in the new millennium*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Graduate enrollment and degrees. Council Graduate Schools. (2022, February 11). Retrieved April 7, 2022, from https://cgsnet.org/graduate-enrollment-and-degrees/

Grover, V. (2015). Glass ceiling: A reality for women in workforce. *Research Dimensions*, *2*(6), 1-6. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275260348_Glass_Ceiling_A_Reality_for_Women_in_Workforce

Hoyt, C. L., & Simon, S. (2011). Female leaders. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *35*(1), 143-157. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684310385216

Kafle, N. P. (2011). Hermeneutic phenomenological research method simplified. *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *5*(1), 181-200. https://doi.org/10.3126/bodhi.v5i1.8053

Kruse, R. A., & Krumm, B. L. (2016). Becoming a principal: Access factors for females. *The Rural Educator*, *37*(2), 28-38. https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v37i2.269

Logan, J. (1998). School leadership of the 90s and beyond: A window of opportunity for women educators. *Advancing Women into Leadership*, *3*. https://doi.org/10.21423/awlj-v0.a51

Mertz, N. T. (2006). The organizational socialization of assistant principals. *Journal of School Leadership, 16*(6), 644-675. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460601600601

Mouton, S. (2011). *Exploring relationships between secondary school principals' gender and campus ratings in the Texas accountability system* [Doctoral dissertation]. https://uh-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/10657/272/MOUTON-.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2021). *COE—Characteristics of public school teachers*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr

National Science Foundation. (2020). *Women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in science and engineering: 2019.* https://ncses.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf19304/digest/field-of-degree-women

Peoples, K. (2021). *How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide*? Sage.

Principal Certificate, 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 241 (2009). https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=19&pt=7&ch=241

Professional Educator Preparation and Certification, 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 230 (2009). https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=19&pt=7&ch=230

Rey, C. (2005). Women, gender and leadership. *Agenda*, *65*, 4-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2005.9674614

Roser, V., Brown, M., & Kelsey, C. (2009). Principal gender as related to campus size, level, and academic rating. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, *29*(10), 2-14. https://doi.org/10.21423/awlj-v29.a287

Sanchez, J. E., & Thornton, B. (2010). Gender issues in K-12 educational leadership. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, *30*(13). https://doi.org/10.21423/awlj-v30.a303

Shakeshaft, C., Brown, G., Irby, B., Grogan, M., & Ballenger, J. (2007). Increasing gender equity in educational leadership. In *Handbook for achieving gender equity through education* (pp. 133-160). Routledge.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretive phenomenological analysis. In *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2nd ed., pp. 53-80). Sage.

Superintendent Certificate, 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 242 (2009). https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=19&pt=7&ch=242&rl=Y

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The education system of today requires grit to stay the course. The leader knows when to push in, and the follower absorbs the lessons. Both the leader and the follower are improving in the idea of healthy striving which is rooted in grit and challenges.

Today's Leader: Women Made Of Pearls, Grace And Grit

Dr. Jean Bahney
Assistant Professor
Buena Vista University

Dr. Bethany Logan
Director of Curriculum
Smithville Independent School District

Abstract

This article explores the components of pearls of leadership that require grit and grace. How leaders initiate relationships and lead change will test the fabric of themselves and others. Ultimately, the leader is the critical factor in making change and allowing grace for themselves and others along the journey. The metaphor of pearls is used throughout the article to demonstrate women in leadership and the legacy they leave for subsequent generations of leaders, teachers, and students.

Keywords: grace, grit, leadership, change, consensus

Today's Leader: Women Made Of Pearls, Grace And Grit

As the famous quote attributed to Billie Jean King says, "Champions keep playing until they get it right." (King, 2023). The same is true for leaders. One does not start as a leader; one develops into a leader, a pearl through grit and grace. Why do leaders need to operate with grit, grace, and tenacity? Grit, tenacity, and "keeping on" are all part of the skills of leadership. Embracing grace and grit within leadership requires connections with people, giving grace when skills are developing, and being responsive to change. Just as the creation of a pearl requires tremendous pressure, uncomfortable sharp edges, and tender care, so too does our work in schools have the same demands. How we build relationships during challenging times establishes the groundwork for this journey of grace and grit.

To counter the demands of day-to-day school improvement, leadership must first focus on the connections and the trust one builds. Trust originates in the willingness of all stakeholders to see the need for students to progress forward, not to feed the ego, but for the specific purpose of students. This idea applies not only to a professional setting but also personally. Making positive change hinges on your ability to shift the dynamics of a negative situation into a healthy, productive atmosphere. The ideas and vocabulary used in discussing issues and even in daily conversation, the phrasing and nuances of the dialogue provide a common bias for trust and support a connection that allows for ideas of commitment and vision. Time and connections develop relationships. Relationships give a foundation for trust to navigate through daily pressures, similar to pearls, which build slowly with continuous support over time; people need the same care during seasons of change.

Leaders sometimes need to start over in relationship building, try again, allow more time, and, in short, get some "grit" to continue to develop the school and the consensus needed to get the changes approved. Building a culture of feedback allows one to layer grace over the sharp

edges to allow for differences among people, teachers, students, stakeholders, etc. Likewise, change is produced in a culture of positive feedback. Grace emerges from the actions of the leaders in those critical moments. The essential definition of grit is the ability to pivot, move forward, and stay the course. This process is akin to the creation of the pearl when a clam experiences many challenges or irritations as things are rough and pointed in transitions. Only time and grace act upon the irritants that shape them into a smooth, valued possession, a treasured beauty.

Leaders assist teams in navigating strenuous situations and circumstances with clear purpose and direction. Leaders must decide to step back or change with the flow to continue to build more support in new areas, seek different connections, re-establish firm parameters, or embrace new tools and ideas. Grit is what we call it when the decision to go forward occurs. The "rebranding or reaffirming connections and relationships demands time and work on the part of the leader. A byproduct of connection building is relationships, whereas providing ongoing support builds trust.

Establishing a climate of valued relationships, consistency, and follow-up determines the leader's success. These ideals take grit and dedication, which permeate into every classroom, every campus, every district, and every aspect of leadership. Each team member is different, just as pearls come in many shapes, colors, and forms. The consistency of the shell around the pearl keeps the treasure safe. Forbes contributor Cari Coats (2019) suggests that leaders need to modify to find what makes them effective and use their warmth and empathy to support the development of grit. Empathy provides the emotional safety needed to push to the next level to continue to develop.

Recognizing the positive potential of various members and informal leaders is an initial step in building connections. Susan Scott (2004) states, “Conversation is the relationship.” (p. 6). Listening closely to discover needs and deep concerns helps to provide avenues to interact authentically with individuals. This process has to start over at the beginning of each team-building session. Grit and courage are required to put oneself out there in every meeting and every interaction. While uncomfortable, this process is needed to bring organizational change.

Change challenges all stakeholders to be uncomfortable for long stretches. Just as pearls are sandy and gritty before they experience the smoothing of continual coating and pressure, establishing relationships can be viewed through the same lens. Change often begins in small groups or one-to-one settings. The leader must show a degree of vulnerability within the change process. Showing the authentic and "real" self to start the relationship on the part of the leader is the foundation of relationships. Relationships and change are transactional and need time. The key to student success has always been working with people as opposed to working with people as if they are disposable. Strong leaders understand where people are in their personal and professional journeys. Elena Aguilar (2016) posits in The Art of Coaching Teams that the assumption of shared values between stakeholders and leadership can influence or hinder change if the lines of communication and adaptability on all sides are not open and intact.

Building relationships is moving forward with grace. Grace allows us to try multiple avenues or pathways. The key is to continue to work on honoring those around you and respond with acceptance and grace even when there are challenges.

In school improvement, our objective as leaders is to coach administrators and teachers for improved practice, which results in student progress. Negative reactions from stakeholders can occur when critical conversations are taking place. How leadership responds can establish positivity and redirect negative feelings into productivity. Open a vulnerable side within yourself to which individuals can reach out and respond. Trusting the relationship-building process and having crucial conversations at the right time will empower you as a leader and those you lead. The process will take grit and grace. Your 'pearls' are the people you have relationships with who provide care and support to students.

Understanding the need for positivity and the perspectives of others under pressure lays the groundwork for creating something of great value: the pearl. As one gives grace by avoiding negative comments or remarks that wound, the learning leader practices asking enough questions to refine thinking processes. Although easier said than done, grace requires this of us as leaders. "Leaders are learners. They learn from their failures as well as successes and make it possible for others to do the same" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 20). The foundation of grit is the willingness to learn and transform and the leader's ability to coach team members through grace.

One of the specific types of change that requires grace and grit is when entire organizational systems must transform. Transformation, initiated by the leader and cultivated through a growth mindset, is simply an opportunity to use these skills over time in a pressured environment. The leader coaches new skills, provides support, and builds capacity in people, their 'pearl.' Poutiatine (2009) outlines nine principles of transformational leadership. Six of these principles align with the ideals of leadership, grit, and grace:

- Transformation requires assent to change.
- Transformation always requires second-order change.
- Transformation involves all aspects of an individual's or organization's life.
- Transformational change involves letting go of the myth of control.
- Transformational change involves some aspect of risk, fear, and loss.
- Transformation is always a movement toward greater integrity of identity– a movement toward wholeness (p. 190).

Transformational leadership necessitates the leader and participants to be open to coaching, adapting behaviors, and letting go of tightly held points of control. Simply stated, this kind of leadership embodies grace and grit. Coaching leaders and igniting change conversations requires a change in approach and dialogue. When restating and agreeing with an individual by saying, " Yes, that is …." and then adding, " But if we change…." People hear the phrase after "but…." which is exclusionary of the original affirming statement. The rapport breaks; trust levels drop. The script changes to, "Yes, that is…" followed by "and……". With the phrasing of "and…" options for positive discourse are open. The speaker is extending the thought instead of redirecting the idea. Using the "and…" option is an affirmation of people emotionally and professionally. Grace is given and received.

When leaders build capacity with employees, positive change occurs, even if the process is not linear. We create our 'pearls' each time we build people up and empower them to obtain new skills. As quoted in Harvard Business Review, in an article on leadership development by

Monique Valcour (2020), she posits, "Occupying a leadership position is not the same thing as leading. To lead, you must be able to connect, motivate, and inspire a sense of ownership of shared objectives. Heightening your capacity to lead others requires seeing how you think and act and how your behavior affects others." (Valcour, 2020). Understanding how a leader's individual actions impact teams determines the culture of acceptance and grace.

The ability to give grace is related to the grace that one feels. When grace is received, it is easier to give to others. The question begs how one can receive grace in this "continuous journey of personal development? " (Valcour, 2020). It would be ideal if those around us in supervisory positions gave us grace. What a fabulous world this would be if every Board of Trustees meeting started with a 15-minute round of accolades for the work of the Superintendent, and the praise drifted down throughout the organization! That is somewhat unrealistic. An alternative is to give grace to oneself first. In a podcast, "How Does Your Energy Impact How You Lead and Show Up with Ingrid Messner," Ingrid Messner, a noted author whose book "Naturally Successful Leadership: Showing How to Engage Your Energy, Influence Others and Create Positive Impact" shared her thoughts on how we give grace to ourselves through our sleep patterns, food use, nutritional supplements, and exercise that we do regularly. She suggests we maximize the areas we need to develop and recharge our energy. The author notes we need to respond to the unconscious longing. The leader can enter the room with "Leadership energy" (Messner, 2020) and naturally encourages others to take up the cause.

This energy comes from within the leader. "If you lead yourself well, you can lead others." (Messner, 2020). One needs to know how to respond to oneself. It may be free time in nature where the sounds, sights, and smells help a person to gain clarity of meeting her own needs, mentally and physically. As you consider how pearls are cared for, careful attention to routine and environment is part of the ritual of care. Daily rituals, environment, and work-life balance can impact insight and self-reflection.

In challenging, stressful situations, the human response is to retract into survival mode to ensure safety. Stress affects our understanding of the environment or context of the interactions and others. As a leader becomes more in balance and stress levels drop, she becomes more aware of the context in which we operate. This balance allows one to establish relationships "with you as a person, not a role." (Messner, 2020). The connection to others is binding. Renewed energy in one's personal life can convert to "leadership energy." The typical response is that time is limited. A short amount of time is sufficient. Great leaders know how to give grace to others, but more importantly, grace starts with self first. Grace allows us to respond differently and to give grace more frequently to others. Giving grace to oneself covers the blemishes within oneself in ways that a clam covers an irritant, taking the first steps toward the creation of a pearl.

Wearing pearls is associated with persons of grace, intelligence, and affluence. Pearls are a symbol of value that remains over time but are not flashy jewels. They are the soft-spoken signs of one who is comfortable with who she truly is and who knows where she wants to achieve and what she represents. Grace is a prerequisite to wearing the pearls of wisdom with character.

Pearls transcend time, as do quality teaching and learning. Pearls in leadership are akin to the

family heirloom, passed down from generation to generation. The culmination of teaching, learning, and leadership creates the strand of pearls that we wear as leaders and pass down to subsequent generations. Just as Queen Elizabeth II wore pearls every day, her heirs now bear her pearls and the burden of leading in a time of change. We have pearls within leadership. The work we engage in under pressure yields great rewards. We work with students individually, by student expectation, to ensure our 'student pearls' will be ready to supersede challenge and struggle. The education system of today requires grit to stay the course and grace enough to step into the moment and accept outcomes.

Cultivating pearls of grit and grace in others is a process in which both leader and follower grow together. The leader knows when to push in; the follower knows when to absorb the lesson. Both individuals contribute to the interaction but grow in leadership in different modalities. Allowing ourselves, both leader and follower, the permission to participate in this kind of relationship is unsettling and thought-provoking. These are the essence of reflection, a continuous process of developing grit. In her book The Gifts of Imperfection, Brené Brown comments, "Healthy striving is self-focused: "How can I improve?" Perfectionism is other-focused: "What will they think?" Being open to improvement as leaders and as leaders of organizations requires the idea of healthy striving towards grit, grace, and leadership. Healthy striving is rooted in grit and challenges us as leaders to keep going when it is difficult.

In summary, fully understanding leadership through the paradigm of grace and grit is based on our connections with people, giving us the grace to fall forward and expect the constancy of change. Keep reaching out to build relationships. Be the champion for students. Keep asking questions to build capacity in people. When your energy is low and you feel like you cannot persevere, remember your pearls. Your pearls developed through grit, grace, and perseverance within your daily leadership are your legacy.

References

(2023, September 23). *Billie Jean King*. Retrieved from https://www.azquotes.com/quote/158677

Aguilar, E. (2016). *The Art of Coaching Teams-Building Resilient Teams That Transform Schools*. Jossey-Bass.

Brown, B. (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection.* (1st ed.). Simon and Schuster.

Coats, C. (2019, August 12). Grit And Grace: A Power Combination For Women Leaders. *Forbes*. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2019/08/12/grit-and-grace-a-power-combination-for-women-leaders/?sh=4618914a404a

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (2007). *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (6th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Messner, I. (2021). *Naturally Successful: How Wise Leaders Manage Their Energy, Influence Others and Create Positive Impact* (1st ed.). Grammar Factory Publishing.

Poutiatine, M. I. (2009). What is transformation?: Nine principles toward an understanding of the transformational process for transformational leadership. *Journal of Transformative Education*, *7*(3), 189-208. https://doi.org/10.1177/15413446103852

Scott, S. (2004). *Fierce conversations: achieving success at work & in life, one conversation at a time* (4th ed.). Berkley Books.

Valcour, M. (2020, November 4). Anyone Can Learn to Be a Better Leader. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2020/11/anyone-can-learn-to-be-a-better-leader

Revive is the time we venture out of our silos into this new shared and safe space created by our student leader. Through conversation and laughter, we return to our tasks with a fresher perspective. Somewhere between individual grit and organizational grit, you will find Tarleton Fort Worth Revive Wellness grit.

Revive Wellness: A Satellite Campus' Perspectives on the Intersections of an Accidental Interdisciplinary Team's Grace and Grit

Patricia J. Rodriguez
Graduate Student, Kinesiology
Tarleton State University

Dr. Sarah Maben*
Associate Professor, Communication Studies
Tarleton State University
*Corresponding Author

Dr. Melissa Roberts Becker
Professor, Curriculum and Instruction
Director of Extension and Off-Campus Education
Tarleton State University

Dr. Rhonda Dobbs
Associate Professor, Criminal Justice
Tarleton State University

Alexandra Geertz
Associate Registrar, Curriculum and Graduation
Tarleton State University

Dr. Shannon Stoker
Instructional Designer
Tarleton State University

Abstract

Women from a wellness effort at Tarleton State University's Fort Worth campus share how the program has affected their mental and physical wellness, along with other intersectional benefits of bringing together an interdisciplinary team of administrators, staff, and faculty under the guidance of one student leader. The grit and grace of one student leader motivated staff and faculty members of a satellite campus to train daily. The outcome was more than wellness; it was a community of colleagues and a collective grit.

Revive Wellness: A Satellite Campus' Perspectives on the Intersections of an Accidental Interdisciplinary Team's Grace and Grit

To encourage more employee movement and combat the sedentary nature of office work, universities, and other workplaces use a variety of wellness programs to assist employees with their overall health. Increased health benefits from regular physical activity impact individual employees and the institution. For individuals, the added movement from a wellness program can help by lowering risks for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. Employers benefit from healthier and more productive employees, and generally speaking, "healthy employees cost you less" (Berry, 2010, para. 3). For busy university and school executives, it takes grit and grace to maintain an individual wellness program or an institutional one.

At Tarleton State University, the wellness program is called Revive Wellness, and its mission is to transform employees' "personal health and wellness by inspiring change, teaching personal ownership, and empowering behavior change through educational excellence" (Revive Mission Statement, n. d.). Tarleton's program began on the Stephenville campus and then extended to an outreach campus in Fort Worth. At its core, the program includes daily workouts over lunch, wellness incentives, and fruit available for all employees in break rooms. What really happens is so much more. Below, five participants who represent faculty and staff from various disciplines and one student leader express in their words what Revive Wellness means to them and their health journeys.

Sharing Persistence, Building Confidence in My Craft

During my time at Tarleton, I've had the privilege to be a student volunteer turned graduate assistant for the employee wellness program Revive Wellness. In these classes, I am able to put my learning to use by instructing health and wellness classes for staff and faculty on the Tarleton Fort Worth campus. To be honest, I was not sure what the outcome of this was going to be. It has been an amazing experience, to say the least. I have made great connections with the staff and faculty — and not only the participants who show up to classes. But to all the ones I have come in contact with across campus. It has truly been an honor to be involved in helping to guide them in their wellness journeys.

I have always enjoyed working out and trying to stay healthy. It is great that I get to do the same and help to run a program for the School of Kinesiology. The mentors I have acquired throughout my journey have taught the value of self-worth and tenacity. I never figured at my current age that I would go back to doing something I loved so much as a teenager. I let so much get in my way when I ventured into adulthood, and to gain it all back has been a long and hard road. Yet, it is a road I do not regret taking.

I am able to show my children that it does not matter the age of the person but what matters is the heart of that person. To go after what you also wanted to do, not because of the monetary gratification but because of the internal gratification it can bring. It is not simply about teaching people how to exercise but why it truly matters to do such things. Wellness is much more than physical but also emotional, mental, spiritual, and financial.

I teach a series of workout classes, from cardio and weights to Pilates stretching. We also watch and practice YouTube videos on yoga or Zumba. But during these exercises, we as a group get to learn from one another. We share information from our own workout experiences and pull helpful hints or ideas to make our workouts better. I listen to each of these women to modify our workouts to make sure they succeed. I make sure they get the best workout suited for their functionality. I do not set a prior routine before class begins because I like to ask them what they would like to work on today and what they feel needs improvement.

These sessions are not your regular group workouts. We gain so much from these sessions and not just physical health. We laugh, we cry, we sweat, and we have a great time. The time spent helps me to practice my techniques and put my schooling to use. Every session has some sort of excitement, and we never have a training session without laughter, especially if yoga is involved. I also receive grade-A mentorship from the women I train. They encourage me to do my best and teach me about certain connections I can make. They never let me down when it comes to building my confidence in my craft.

Our Revive sessions offer a little of something for everyone involved. We seem to hold so much stress throughout our day, but once we get started, it all disappears for that limited amount of training time. This helps us to cope with the rest of the day and even the week. We talk about everything and anything while training, and in turn, it makes us better for it. We become more physically active working through the stress, and we laugh and release all those happy hormones that make us smile.

I, too, am also able to let go of the stress of the day and even the week when I host a Revive training session. These sessions allow me and others to vent whatever ails us with discretion and help guide each other through it. This group has saved my sanity plenty of times and made me almost lose it as well. I would not have it any other way with them.

No matter how tough the training sessions become, participants come back each day and are ready to continue with their wellness times. Even if I come down on them for skipping a session with me, they find the time to train on their own. If I have to cancel a session, they will still get together and train together. It makes me feel good inside that my persistence has rubbed off on them, and they want to train with or without me.

Being able to advocate for this program means a lot to me. Not only was I learning how to train people in areas higher than me, I was able to connect with them as well. It did not become the teacher/student relationship. It has grown into a meaningful connection of the minds.

My participants are my faithful, and I appreciate, admire, and treasure them all. I do not think I could have made it this far without their guidance. My fabulous mentors, Amy McKay and Audrey Johnston, push me to my limits and help me push past them as well. They never give up on me and are always there to lend a helping hand. They are true leaders who lead by example. I am forever grateful to be in their circle.

Patricia Rodriguez
Kinesiology Graduate Student

Persistence Through Community

I do not remember when I started attending Revive Wellness workout sessions, but I do remember it was under mild peer pressure to fill a slot on a Bingo card for “bring a friend.” I went that day with the intention of helping out and the thought that I probably would only go that day. Much to my surprise, I have been back every day I could since then. I found so much more that first day and every day since then than I expected. I knew I needed to be better about working out. At the time, I equated Revive with physical well-being. And it most certainly is that. I am more mobile, feel stronger, and more self-assured than before I started participating.

I also quickly learned that was only part of the story. The main reason I persist with Revive is the sense of community and the mental well-being that is fostered in our group. Most of the participants in our group likely would not have interacted much without Revive, and if we did, it would be for very specific and finite work activities. We were in our respective silos that universities are so good at creating. But, this program brought us all into one room at the same time, not to focus on a work task but to focus on ourselves and our overall well-being. I have personally experienced the most difficult year of my life, and this group has picked me up emotionally through both personal and professional challenges. They have listened, advised, and distracted me when I most needed it. Yes, the physical activity has produced endorphins, but it is

the people and support within the group that have been the most emotionally impactful for me. Every single time I attend a Revive session, I feel better when I leave the room than when I entered. I hope that I have offered the same to each of them along the way.

In a larger, less personal sense, I believe Revive has helped to break communication barriers between the entities that are represented in the group. Too often in large organizations, we remain in our own area, venturing out only when necessary and for finite purposes. Through exposure to people from different offices and entities, I have learned more about the university as a whole than I think I learned in the previous nine years, not because I wasn't paying attention but because I wasn't regularly interacting with people from other parts of the university to learn about all that they do.

Rhonda Dobbs
Criminal Justice

Consistency and Accountability

The Revive Program in Fort Worth has enriched my life in so many ways. I have never worked for a company that valued wellness time as much as Tarleton State University. The 30-minute break to move my body and socialize improves my physical health, stress levels, networking, and friendships and provides a mental break in between my day to re-energize and stay motivated for the afternoon. When I first started at Tarleton five years ago, there was a group of about 10 employees in Fort Worth who were regularly involved in the Wellness Program. We would alternate days between Walking Club and CrossFit fitness classes. It was so nice to have that break in the day, breathe some fresh air, and visit with co-workers who quickly became dear friends.

Since moving buildings, Fort Worth has gained a kinesiology graduate assistant who plans daily workout routines for our group. The schedule planned by our graduate assistant provides days for cardio walking, resistance training, and stretching to get the full wellness benefits throughout the week. I really enjoy the friendships I've made through this group, as well as the networking opportunity to learn from colleagues in other departments. Our Graduate Assistant provides additional articles and activities to do from our desk or from home if we are not able to make it to every session. She maintains communication with each of us to encourage our attendance in the daily activities. Tarleton Fort Worth did have a couple of years where we did not have anyone on campus to lead the activities. During that time, our walking group was much smaller, but I would block out time to walk with a co-worker each day at lunch. As positions change and people leave or switch roles, it can be difficult to maintain that consistency every day. I've really enjoyed having a Graduate Assistant available to coordinate activities and help hold us accountable to the group because I always feel better after I go to one of the sessions.

Alexandra Geerts
Associate Registrar for Curriculum and Graduation

Facilitating Conversations of Grit and Glory

Through a communication lens, the Revive Wellness project provides a backchannel for organizational communication. Even on a physically smaller satellite campus, we are spread over

floors, wings, departments, and schedules. However, many days you can attend Revive is the time during the week when we connect as colleagues. It is the face-to-face interaction that many of us crave, especially after pandemic life.

While I tend to disagree with a deficit outlook for computer-mediated communication, the added face-to-face component of Revive gives us more time for discussion for understanding, idea development, and comradery. We move beyond the technical communication (Buber, 1923/1996) needed to conduct our daily tasks and begin a deeper dialog. It is through informal communication that so much more is occurring like ad hoc mentoring, activism, and information flow. It is through this conversation that you begin to see your colleagues as more than the tasks they accomplish for the university.

During Revive time, we venture out of our silos into this new shared and safe space created by our student leader. Hierarchy is flattened, and we follow the fitness guidance of a kinesiology major practicing her craft. A gaggle of faculty and staff are typically challenging to wrangle, and yet she keeps us focused on our goals of increased movement for our overall wellness. She is well-versed in redirecting any whining and motivates each of us individually as well as the group. She is an exemplar of leadership in place (Wergin, 2007). Her title affords her little built-in authority, but she leads from where she is. Now a graduate student, she continues to lead tenured professors and long-standing staff. I see similarities between her coaching style and my teaching style. She meets us where we are, adapts to our needs, and gently challenges us, always noting progress and celebrating our successes.

Once a week, we bring yoga mats for stretching in an available classroom space. During a step challenge one month, we walked a loop around our developing Fort Worth campus. Then, we found YouTube videos for quick steps inside during the Texas heat. For most of us, the physical aspect is secondary to the mental health reset mid-day. Through conversation and laughter, we return to our tasks with a fresher perspective. Revive uses the slogan of Healthy Happens Here, but I would say Happiness Happens Here. The group makes me smile and laugh mid-day and connects me to my colleagues and my campus.

The sense of belonging created by such wellness programs is one for satellite or outreach campuses to consider. Translating every event from main campus to outreach campuses is not sustainable, but a core group with a strong leader and advocate can extend wellness activities to other campuses with a little grace and grit.

Sarah Maben
Communication Studies

Grit: Courage, Resolve, and Strength of Character

Over the past few years, I transitioned from the face-to-face university classroom to an administrative role and teaching online. As such, I spend a great amount of time sitting in front of a computer. The Revive program at Tarleton State University has provided many tools to combat the stagnant effects of this work style. I received a large stability ball to use at my desk and stretching exercises to use throughout the day. I also requested a stand-up desk converter which encourages change in positions. Through a wellness grant from the Texas A&M University system, I received tennis shoes, one pair each year, for the past two years. All these initiatives were led by Tarleton's Director of the Revive Employee Wellness Program, Amy

McKay. McKay continued to develop effective strategies to support the health and wellness of all employees, even at our off-campus instructional sites.

McKay shared a student-worker, now graduate assistant (Patricia Rodriguez), with the off-campus site to which I am assigned. Even considering the positive efforts of previous semesters, having Rodriguez's personal presence on campus each day has inspired my journey to health and wellness. She plans a variety of engaging workouts four days each week, open to graduate assistants, staff, and faculty.

Since the participants of our group have multiple appointments, a calendar invitation was shared for the workout sessions. By placing the sessions on the calendar, the time commitment became a priority. We also received email/text reminders, which increased accountability. During the workouts, we shared our individual desires for different aspects of personal health and wellness. Over time, we were encouraged to extend our efforts, moving beyond our comfort zone. Step challenges, yoga sessions, and weight-bearing exercises are a few of the areas for engagement. Revive offered several team competitions, and we were inspired to win. As a result, we built a unique camaraderie that would not have occurred without Revive.

The mission of Revive is to transform the lives of Tarleton's employees. During this program, I have been encouraged to improve my personal wellness through new habits and a better understanding of health and nutrition. I continue to add to my healthy activities outside my workout team, after work hours, and on the weekends. The impact of Revive now reaches beyond my personal health to include my family and friends. Through this program, I have developed true grit: the courage to extend healthy efforts, resolve to participate each week, and develop my strength of character to continue healthy behavior outside my workday. I believe Revive accomplishes its vision: A premier comprehensive wellness program…with a keen focus on employee health, success, productivity, and retention.

Melissa Roberts Becker
Academic Affairs

A Community of Grit and Grace in a Time of Transition

Learning a new career at almost 50 years old is not an easy task. Executing a different job description, navigating an unfamiliar environment, and building a peer network are part of the expected territory when changing jobs. What was not expected was the amount of time I would be stationary. As a former teacher and principal, I was always moving, never static. My new job as an instructional designer was on the other end of the movement pendulum, with my eyes fixated on computer screens and my gluteus maximus stuck to the seat of a chair. Before long, the highlight of my day was when Apple would prompt me to stand up. To keep from becoming one with my chair, I began to take short walks at lunch. While I enjoyed being able to get up and move, it could be boring and sometimes hard to stay motivated. If the weather was not cooperative or I was in the middle of a project, it was easy to just keep working. Then, I found out about Revive.

Revive is a university-sponsored program aiming at promoting health and wellness among Tarleton employees. Some of the benefits offered by Revive include fresh fruit, fitness classes, t-shirts, and Wellness Release Time. The Wellness Release Time program encourages employees to participate in a wellness activity for 30 minutes a day, three times a week. When I found out

about the program, I jumped at the opportunity to take part because I believed it would hold me accountable to get up from my chair and move.

When I started the program, I faithfully walked around the campus by myself. I work at Tarleton's Fort Worth Campus, which is a fraction of the size of the main campus in both structure and people. I assumed no one else was participating in the program until Patricia Rodriguez came by my office to introduce herself. She was our library's student worker and a kinesiology major. Patricia wanted to start a Revive group on our campus and asked if I wanted to join the group. Without hesitation, I answered, "Yes."

My only expectation for the group was walking together a few times a week. Thankfully, Patricia had higher aspirations and went above and beyond organizing a walking group. She created a schedule and sent daily reminders to keep us motivated. As time went on, we added additional activities, including Yoga, Pilates, and light weights. As a kinesiology major, she was able to give us guidance on proper exercise techniques and supported our fitness activities outside of work. And, when Revive offered incentives and team competitions, Patricia led the charge in tracking our fitness goals to help us claim the prize.

While the incentives and overall improved fitness have been worthwhile, the best reward from Revive was also the most, again, unexpected. Our small Revive group has become a community of grit and grace. A community where faculty and staff come together to work our bodies, stretch our minds, and feed our souls—and maybe laugh a little, too. After all, it is hard not to laugh when you are doing a downward-dog pose in a dress. I truly did not know what I was missing until I joined the Revive group. What started as a means for me to get out from behind my desk has become a much-anticipated part of my day where I get to do work life with friends.

Shannon Stoker
Instructional Consultant

Discussion

Revive has been a constant during various transitions for its attendees, who help run all parts of the university. The microcosm represents faculty, staff, and one student and the determination it takes to focus on wellness and self-care in the midst of never-ending to-do lists. One member says the core participants remind her of a quote from Lillian's character in the movie Bridesmaids: "This is such a stone-cold pack of weirdos, and I am so proud!" A stone-cold pack of weirdos may not be a description everyone desires, but it fits the tenacity and comic relief of this mid-day workout team.

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends at least 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week, plus muscle-strength activities at least two days a week (Top 10 Things, 2021). Overall, the mantra is "move more and sit less" (Top 10 Things, 2021). Through Revive participation, we meet these goals and exceed them. Some of us would revert to a sedentary pre-Revive lifestyle without the program and its leadership. Mama et al. (2023) suggest a staircase approach to reducing sedentary behavior among previously low-active individuals. The premise is that you get people moving bit by bit, and then as they become more able, you introduce light-intensity physical activity and then move toward moderate activity. Through our writing process, we figured out that our student leader had been moving us successfully up the staircase. This is grit at its finest. Through Patricia's tutelage, the group

members are now lifting weights and pursuing other strength training. Additionally, she is the campus champion for wellness and Revive. Weinstein (2022) noted that "it may be that only strong internal champions can ensure the resilience" of wellness programs (p. 9).

Grit and Culture Connection

From the participant narratives above, we see threads of intersectionality between wellness, mentoring, and interdisciplinary engagement. All of these require elements of grit and grace. They do not occur without intention and repeated measures. Duckworth et al.'s (2007) definition of grit is focused on perseverance and passion toward a long-term goal. "Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress" (p. 1087). Our Revive team has not been together long enough for a true definition of grit, but we all represent and bring forth experiences for collective grit. Luning et al. (2022) created a model for organizational grit. While built on exploratory research of a military sample, the authors identified a model for a culture of grit: team core values, a willingness to learn, training and deliberate practice, positivity despite set-backs, achieving team goals, team unity, and professional pride (Luning et al., 2022). Somewhere between individual grit and organizational grit, you will find Tarleton Fort Worth Revive Wellness grit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Tarleton Fort Worth Revive Wellness program has benefited participants in a variety of ways. From their narratives, this collective determination exemplifies the tenacity required to prioritize self-care amidst the demands of university life. Their journeys toward improved wellness, accompanied by ad hoc mentoring and student-faculty-staff engagement, underscores the intersectionality of individual and organizational health, which benefits the university system as a whole.

References

Barry, L. L., Mirabito, A. M., & Baun, W. B. (2010, December). What's the Hard Return on Employee Wellness Programs? Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2010/12/whats-the-hard-return-on-employee-wellness-programs

Buber, M. (1996). *I and thou* (W. Kaufmann, Trans., 1st Touchstone ed.). Touchstone. (Original work published 1923).

Duckworth, A., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087-1101.

Joyce, L. (2023). Mental Health and Wellness: New Approaches to Employee Mental Health: Innovative solutions to strengthening workplace well-being, building a culture of acceptance, and breaking the stigma of mental health. *Employee Benefit News, 37*(2), 17.

Lindert, L., Kyung-Eun (Anna) Choi, Pfaff, H., & Zeike, S. (2023). Health literacy at work – individual and organizational health literacy, health supporting leadership, and employee wellbeing. *BMC Health Services Research, 23*, 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-023-09766-0

Luning, C. R., Attoh, P. A., Gong, T., & Fox, J. T. (2022). A Culture of Organizational Grit From the Perspective of U.S. Military Officers: A Qualitative Inquiry. *Armed Forces & Society, 48*(3), 542–570. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X20985197

Mama, S. K., Soltero, E. G., & Joseph, R. P. (2023). Reducing Sedentary Behavior and Increasing Physical Activity Among Low Active, Underserved Adults: A Staircase Approach. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, *20*(8), 677-679. Retrieved Sep 5, 2023, from https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2023-0171

Revive Mission Statement. (n. d.). https://www.tarleton.edu/wellness/

Rubery, P. T., Ramirez, G., D'Agostino, C. R., Vasalos, K., & Thirukumaran, C. (2022). A workplace wellness program at an academic health center influences employee health, satisfaction, productivity, and the rate of workplace injury. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 95*(7), 1603-1632. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-022-01865-5

Top 10 Things to Know. (2021, August 25). Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd ed. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/physical-activity-guidelines/current-guidelines/top-10-things-know

Wergin, J. (2007). Leadership in place: How academic professionals can find their leadership voice. Jossey-Bass.

Our educational system is being tossed about more and more, in peril of sinking under all the responsibilities being imposed. Sound the bell. No bureaucrat will send a lifeboat. They are not in the storm. The answers are found within the crew, our very own educators.

Send a Lifeboat: We Are Drowning

Dr. Elizabeth A. Clark
Associate Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Accountability
Birdville ISD

Introduction:

Imagine a large ocean liner, much like the modern cruise ships. The ship sets sail with a full crew and excited passengers, each thinking this will be a fantastic voyage. However, the ship begins to enter troubled waters. The wind picks up, and the waves become large and constant. Soon, the ship is amidst a massive hurricane, and everyone aboard is tossed about, with no end in sight. Fear and trepidation set in, and everyone begins to doubt their ability to survive and come through the storm in tack.

This metaphor is a perfect description of the current educational system. Our educational system is being tossed about, taking on increasingly more requirements, at the peril of sinking under all the responsibilities being imposed. The captain and crew, our resolute educators, are navigating treacherous waters, and our school system, like the ocean liner, is not equipped to grapple with the burden that threatens to sink the entire vessel. As a precaution, the captain and crew are looking around for available "lifeboats." In other words, the load of regulations, sanctions, and accountability measures has become like a heavy anchor, dragging the entire system down and killing the spirit of those who are so committed to teaching and learning. Dedicated educators have become spectators of this travesty. As we watch the education ship struggle against the bureaucratic tempest, it is clear we need a lifeboat—a rescue plan to salvage what is left of an educational journey that should be a memorable voyage in a vast ocean of wonderful possibilities and scenic beauty.

This article is being written to sound the bell. As Texas state legislators have completed the fourth special session and are promised to be called back to Austin in February, no relief is in sight. Vouchers, better known as education savings accounts, will be the order of business. Instead of providing schools with the needed funding, aka lifeboats, the governor is demanding the passage of a bill that will divert scarce resources from the public school coffers. Rather than seeking solutions to the many challenges that are confronting educational leaders, the political machine in Texas is determined to weaken the public school vessel, leaving those who are leading school organizations through the storm of bureaucratic demands with little hope of saving the ship.

The Regulatory Maze:

The regulatory maze has touched every single department and program in the school system. It spans the spectrum of service, which includes finance, accountability, special programs, instruction, technology, transportation, counseling, human resources, safety, governance, and student management. I am certain that other critical areas can be added to this ever-growing list. The rules, regulations, and paperwork demands that have been added to each of the areas listed

above are daunting. There is an imbalance between the demands and the ability of the organization to stay afloat. The shift in Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) accountability alone is indicative of an area that has undergone tremendous change. For example, PEIMS has gone from four annual submissions to now a whopping fifteen within the last five years. PEIMS accounting is also tightly linked to weighted funding, which requires that every aspect of a student's profile be coded correctly, adding a tremendous amount of program monitoring to stay compliant. All these regulatory requirements have certainly outpaced any increases in the revenue stream. The results of such compliance have been a steading increase in the cost of doing business, which has been exacerbated due to high inflation and the competition that districts face in retaining critical staff. Unlike the private sector, schools have no way to increase revenue other than through increased enrollment and average daily attendance. Due to the intricate web of regulations that span from federal to state and local levels, the work has become increasingly more complex, more people-intensive, and, therefore, more cost-prohibitive.

It is time for us to stop and ask ourselves, what is the school's aim? Is it compliance or learning? While there is undoubtedly a need for regulations, have federal and state regulations riddled the system to the extent that now the focus is more about compliance? Have we created a system where educators do not have the bandwidth to focus on the "main thing," which is teaching and learning? The new curriculum standards, testing requirements, and accountability processes are enough to stretch the system to the point of imploding. The sheer volume and complexity of these rules and requirements, coupled with public demand, find educators totally overwhelmed.

Sanctions and Pressures:

In an era of heightened accountability, schools and educators face an array of sanctions for not meeting performance benchmarks. Standardized test scores, such as the State Test of Academic Achievement Readiness (STAAR), which is given to all Texas students in grades 3 through 8, as well as the five End of Course Tests (EOCs) in high school represent a substantial part of the accountability ratings. However, graduation rates and other metrics are also a part of the accountability ratings used to evaluate schools' and teachers' effectiveness. While accountability is crucial for advancing educational standards, the punitive nature of these sanctions can have detrimental effects on staff, school culture, and the school district community.

Educators feel pressured to teach to the assessments. Assessments are seen as not grade level- or age-appropriate. While educators want students to be college, career, and life ready, have we really had public discussions about what constitutes meeting grade level and/or graduation requirements? Might these things need to be viewed considering new and emerging technological advancements? Should one test or multiple measures be used to make important determinations about children and schools? Should standards be mandated, and everyone required to meet those standards at the same rate regardless of readiness to learn? Or should local communities have more flexibility in creating accountability measures that reflect community priorities and values? Is that not what private schools get to do? If we genuinely believe in personalization, then should our system be more flexible about moving students through the curriculum at rates that truly reflect students' readiness to learn the next set of expectations?

There should be a balance in curricular and assessment expectations. What price do we pay if all we do is focus on one measurable outcome? Will this current emphasis produce the next generation of citizens, leaders, and workers for the future job markets? As we rush to get students college, career, and military ready, are we also creating a stressful and overwhelming environment for educators that is unintentionally causing a decline in job satisfaction and teacher retention?

The Human Cost:

One of the major consequences of system overload is the loss of valuable human capital. Educators are leaving the profession because of what is being demanded by the bureaucrats and the public. When a significant portion of educators' schedules has to be dedicated to paperwork, documentation, and meetings to ensure compliance with various mandates, then we have lost our focus. Have the mandates become more important than the children we serve? If so, our moral and ethical compass does not point to true north and does not align with our professed values and beliefs. Providing educators time to do all the added tasks adds cost. Teachers are paid for 187 days. There is no way that 187 days equate to the time teachers spend in planning, attending professional learning, grading, tutoring, and conferencing with students so that individual needs are met. What would added time require? If the system's requirements have significantly changed, should not the system change accordingly? The obvious answer is yes. However, the school system is the same, frozen in time. We want higher levels of learning, but we are unwilling to foot the bill. The situation as it currently exists is untenable and emotionally draining to those who are working in the system. It is not just the teachers that are feeling the burden. The burden on the administrators not only hampers their ability to engage with students and teachers but also contributes to the burnout that is occurring at all levels, including the superintendency.

It is not simply in the professional realm where the bureaucratic overload is felt. Educators' mental and emotional well-being is also impacted. The constant turbulence that invades the school environment also contributes to educators' stress, anxiety, and burnout. The 2022 Texas Teacher Poll conducted by the Charles Butt Foundation found the following:

> "77% of teachers are seriously considering leaving their job in the classroom at this time. Unchanged from the 2022 poll, 81% of teachers feel their pay is unfair, with 56% of teachers citing this unfair pay as a major source of stress. Teachers' working conditions continue to raise concerns. Ninety-four percent of teachers cited poor pay and benefits, excessive workloads/long hours, and staff shortages as sources of personal stress" (2023).

Job stress comes with a high price tag for any organization. It affects people individually as well as collectively. Stress causes employees to make errors, show poor work performance habits, have mental health issues, burnout, and conflict within the workplace. If stress goes unaddressed, the collective collateral damage is seen in high turnover rates, increased absenteeism, disengagement, and poor morale. The culture of our schools is changing, and not for the better. In education, taking care of people is paramount. Teachers affect students. How they feel about

their work translates to how well they do their work. This, in turn, impacts student attendance, engagement, and ultimately learning.

Conclusion:

As education becomes increasingly regulated, educators are looking for a lifeboat. What can be done to save the ship? The following points are a call to action for all educators and supporters of public schools:

1. Present the facts about your district, your school. Show legislators the impact of what is being legislated. They may not understand the downstream implications of the laws they passed.
2. Educate the parents and community about the good things in your schools. They hear the bad all too often. That is what makes the news. Shout the good news!
3. Build a strong network of local supporters who are willing to speak out in support of public schools. This network becomes your advocacy group. Spend the time necessary to keep them informed and engaged.
4. Do not hesitate to write to legislators about your concerns. Use your parents and advocate groups so that your legislators hear from the grassroots. Politicians pay attention to the constituents who represent a voting bloc.
5. Do not be afraid to innovate and discover new ways to teach the content that students find engaging. Make innovation a priority, but keep parents informed and involved.
6. Invite politicians into the schools to visit and see the excellent work that teachers and students do. If they see it, they will believe it. Otherwise, they will believe the narrative they are told by someone other than you.
7. Use social media to your advantage. Your critics are using social media. Get your advocates to use social media to spread the good news about your schools and your teachers.
8. Use public forums to inform and discuss educational issues. Be transparent and invite parents and the community to be part of improving your school system.
9. Make the schools more public by being open and accessible, particularly to the senior citizens. Conduct public tours so that various constituents can see what is happening in the schools.
10. Engage business and industry so they see a viable pathway from the classroom to the workplace.

We must save the sinking education ship. The elusive lifeboat is a reevaluation of the current system, a restructuring of policies that allow educators to regain control of the ship and chart a course toward meaningful and innovative learning experiences. It will be too late if we wait for the lifeboat to come to us. The lifeboat is aboard the ship, ready to be launched. The lifeboat lies within the creativity and innovativeness of the educators aboard the educational vessel. The answers to the problems are best found within the crew, our resolute and dedicated educators. No bureaucrat will send a lifeboat. They are not in the storm. They have created the storm. As educators, we must be willing to unchain the lifeboat and do what is necessary to set sail toward a brighter, more innovative future.

References

Charles Butt Foundation: *The 2022 Texas Teacher Poll: Persistent Problems and a Path Forward*, CharlesButtFDN.org/2022TXTeacherForum.

Charles Butt Foundation: *The 2023 Texas Teacher Poll: Listening to the Educator Experience*, CharlesButtFDN.org/2023TXTeacherForum.

CREATIVE WORKS

Their grace, a beacon, a guiding light,
Through storms of change and endless night,
With patience and poise, they lead the parade,
With empathy, kindness, foundations laid.

Leading Women: Grit, Grace, and Pearls

Dr. Kathryn Washington
Assistant Professor
Lamar University

In the hallowed halls of wisdom's domain,
Where knowledge and dreams forever reign,
A tale unfolds of strength untold,
In women of leadership, their stories, bold.

With grit as their armor, they forge the way,
Breaking barriers, night and day,
In classrooms and boardrooms, they rise and shine,
Guiding young minds like stars align.

Their grace, a beacon, a guiding light,
Through storms of change and endless night,
With patience and poise, they lead the parade,
With empathy, kindness, foundations laid.

But in their hearts, there's something more,
A hidden gem, a treasure to explore,
Pearls of wisdom, cultivated with care,
In the depths of their souls, they proudly wear.

Each pearl a lesson, a lifelong quest,
To educate, inspire, and be their best,
A symbol of resilience, wisdom, and grace,
In the tapestry of leadership, they find their place.

With pearls and grace, they face the strife,
With grit and determination, they'll change lives,
These women in educational leadership, we revere,
For their strength, their wisdom, and the future they steer.

So let us celebrate, applaud and adore,
These women who inspire us evermore,
With grit, grace, and pearls, they'll continue to rise,
In the world of education, under endless skies.

Would it be worthwhile to say that I hope someday, someone would open my protective shell and note that all this work of continually smoothing out the edges has resulted in something worthwhile? Will they find the pearl of wisdom that now resides in my world of the sea?

A Pearl

Dr. Jean Bahney
Assistant Professor
Buena Vista University

Pearls are the prize of the ages, the symbol of refinement and wealth. A symbol worn by women who are leaders such as Queen Elizabeth II and Barbara Bush, former First Lady of the United States, quietly dignifies success. One would aspire to wear pearls with grace when receiving final accolades of life.

A Pearl

Irritating, disgusting…. What a stupid piece of sand, a bit of grit, has lodged in my life! The irritation is frustrating and requires so much effort on my part. I have coated it with my protective slime so that it will not irritate my sensitive inner balance. I was cozy in the shell of my world until this occurred, and now requires me to change. I can no longer go about my life as I did. That irritant is there. I cover it again. I repeat the process. I want it to be compatible with my inner soul to match with a sense of connectedness that allows all within my shell to function together smoothly and with a similar purpose in life.

How can a problem continue to need the smoothing of the rough edges to allow for the ability to move ahead into the important job of living? How many times will I need to go back and smooth the edges of that gritting intrusion until all work is in a synchronous forward movement? Do all the others have the same issue in this ocean of life? Is it something that only a few of us have the potential to truly impact?

Another coat is needed since I had not layered the coating with equality. The imperfect shape of that first gritty change needs to be more rounded and less intrusive. I layer another coat. The edges are becoming smoother and less irritating. One more layer might make this become truly acceptable.

I am more careful with this layer. I am getting better at smoothing the edges. Individual differences are being smoothed out so that discomfort lessens. I am just accepting this process with grace. It is becoming a part of me, a way that I live my life.

Would it be worthwhile to say that I hope someday someone will open my protective shell and note that all this work of continually smoothing out the edges has resulted in something worthwhile? Will they find the pearl of wisdom that now resides in my world of the sea? I hope that they do. For I am no longer just an oyster on the bed of the sea; I hold a rounded, valuable pearl that has been the product of years of work that has quietly been completed within my own shell of life. I hope that someday, someone will dive to the depths to bring all this work to light so that others might share and enjoy the fruits of my life, the pearl of grit, and the grace that has evolved.

Through hardships and through laughter, we shared our tales untold,
In the embrace of family, our spirits strong and bold.
In the vibrant hues of ristras, and the scent of pinon wood,
I found my true resilience, in the culture that I understood.

*The bold letters spell out the result of my father's grit, the dream my father had for me…**EDUCATION***

Weaving Life, Love, and Learning

LeAnne Salazar-Montoya, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

In the h**E**art of New Mexico, 'neath the desert's golden sun,
I was raise**D** strong and resilient, by my father, the only one.

In the tapestry of life, our Hispanic roots did run deep,
A c**U**lture rich and vibrant, in our memories, we'd keep.

With every step he guided me, through valleys and on peaks,
My father's love, a bea**C**on strong, through struggles and mystique.

He t**A**ught me to be sturdy, like the ancient cottonwood tree,
In the arid land of enchantment, where we both longed to be free.

Our hands were marked with labor, under the high desert sky, The rhythm of our voices, like mariachi songs up high.

From chiles to tortillas, our flavors danced with delight,
In the land of red and green, where day turns into night.

In the glow of luminarias, beneath the starry night, I learned the streng**T**h of heritage, by my father's guiding light.

He spoke of generations, of the stories we must bear,
In the land of New Mexico, where our pride was always there.

Through hardships and through laughter, we shared our tales untold,
In the embrace of family, our spirits strong and bold.
In the vibrant hues of ristras, and the scent of pinon wood,
I found my true resilience, in the culture that I understood.

With the Rio Grande as our witness, and the Sandias as our guide,
I stood tall and unwavering, by my father's humble side.

In the richness of our her**I**tage, and the love that we'd embrace,
I discovered my own strength, and the beauty of this place.

So, in the land of enchantment, where our roots forever gr**O**w,
I remain strong and resilie**N**t, in the footsteps of my hero.

In the classroom of life, he imparted wisdom's gleam, urging me to chase knowledge, like a river chasing its dream.

With his words as my compass, in education's embrace, I stride forth as an educator, empowered by his grace.

For my father, my guide, and the culture that I claim,
I am a product of New Mexico, forever strong, forever the same.

So, we use our experience to overcome, writing stories that share pearls of wisdom
*From us. To our daughters and son—**we overcome**.*

Over Time

Dr. Ugochi M. Emenaha
Associate Director of MAT, EC-6
Rice University

Pressure bust pipes, but how far do we take it when we are talking about life.

Twists and turns will happen in life.

With intervention, we know we can survive storms of varying size…

Storm-sized systemic iniquities will wash away when experience meets fight—

So, why do we wait?

We wait for faith.

We wait for space.

As a pearl waits, we wait for time.

Sands of wisdom, collect from oceans far off

To collect in the hands of each wave

Clammed together to save.

To save our faith.

To save our space, for we have been saved by grace.

So, we use our experience to overcome, writing stories that share pearls of wisdom

From us. To our daughters and son—we overcome.

We wait and together we are saved.