

## ABSTRACT

BLACK, BELINDA S. Women Who Lead At A State Education Agency: Five Lives.  
(Under the direction of Dr. Kenneth Brinson, Jnr.)

This is an educational leadership study based on the lives of five women who held the post of director or higher in a State Education Agency. While much has been written about women in school and district administration, less is known of women who fill the top posts in administration at the state level. This study examines five such women leaders' lives and careers in detail. The study is conducted from a feminist point of view, using a life history approach. The women who participated in this study shared stories of their childhood and upbringing; they described their early schooling experiences, and they talked about the significant relationships in their lives. They spoke of obstacles and opportunities, and of pivotal events that shaped them. The research resonates with their voices and focuses on the role of gender, diversity and gender equity in educational leadership. Findings reveal the values, perspectives, goals, and behaviors of a group of women who range in age from 45 to 60. The study explores their early perceptions of gender, race and class, and how each influenced their lives and careers. Each woman provides her input in defining a feminine leadership style. The study concludes with a discussion of post-heroic leadership, feminization of an organization, and a leadership primer for girls and boys and their parents, based on the findings from the life history research.

**WOMEN WHO LEAD AT A STATE EDUCATION AGENCY:  
FIVE LIVES**

by  
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## CHAPTER ONE: AN OVERVIEW

### Introduction

A new psychological theory in which girls and women are seen and heard is an inevitable challenge to a patriarchal order that can remain in place only through the continuing eclipse of women's experience. Bringing the experiences of women and girls to full light, although in one sense perfectly straightforward, becomes a radical endeavor. Staying in connection, then, with women and girls—in teaching, in research, in therapy, in friendship, in motherhood, in the course of daily living—is potentially revolutionary. (Gilligan, 1993, p. xxiv)

In April 2003, a session at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association celebrated the memory of Congresswoman Patsy Mink from Hawaii, who was largely responsible for shepherding the Title IX legislation (promoting educational equity for girls and women) through the United States Congress to become law. “Patsy Mink stood up and showed up for girls and women, often outnumbered and sometimes outmaneuvered. But she persisted, cajoled, humored and demanded of her colleagues that Congress attend to the business of over half its constituents” (Gandy and Reuss, 2002, p. 1). At the American Educational Research Association Presidential Invited Session in her honor, six women scholars and researchers spoke about the status of gender equity in today's schools and stressed the need to continue the fight for equity in the spirit of Congresswoman Mink. Each speaker focused on a distinct problem related to gender inequity that still exists in public education, e.g., high school policies affecting pregnant girls' schooling. Catherine Marshall, noted qualitative research author, feminist scholar, and professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, chaired the session. She expressed a theme common to all the



presentations when she commented on the barriers to gender equity that remain in place in education today. “We know policies aren’t implemented when they conflict with the implementers’ values” (Marshall, April 22, 2003).

I stand in the large, comfortable outer office of the Chief State School Officer of a southeastern state. On the wall in front of me hang the 15 photo portraits of each of the state’s former chief school officers. The first, in sepia tones, shows a balding gentleman with a long beard, whose term as Superintendent began in 1852. The photos are a parade of faces representing the generations of educational leaders who have led the state’s schools, and they are all men. Having taught in this state for 15 years, and having worked in this State Agency for 12 years, I know that there has never been a woman in the office that these men held. As I examine the faces of these men I wonder what kind of leaders they were and what difference each one made in the lives of the public school children in the State.

I know that women in this state have led in education in many capacities. I wonder why a woman’s photo is not on the wall before me. Though their faces are not pictured here, there are women here in this State Education Agency who have risen to positions of leadership whose stories can inform others.

Marshall (2000) argued that research on women in educational leadership has a great deal to offer, especially in these times when policy, practice and theory are constantly challenged. She says that such research brings to the surface the anxieties of educators who must integrate their private emotions and values with the public demands placed on leaders. Incorporating women’s perspectives, according to Marshall (2000) is promising for “urgently needed alternative models of leadership” (p. 701).

In reviewing literature on women in educational leadership, Shakeshaft (1989) revealed shortcomings in the previous research. She criticized earlier theories describing how women and men manage in education. “What is not investigated in these studies, what isn’t even conceptualized, are the activities that women undertake and their motivation for doing so that are in addition to and different from those that men perform” (p.167). She developed a model to illustrate the paradigmatic shift that she believed was necessary to conduct more meaningful research on women in educational administration. Her model reflected the gradual change from a total absence of women documented (counting heads) to a transformed theory that incorporated both male and female experiences in educational administration. The data gathered from women’s perspectives, which challenge existing theories by incorporating men’s and women’s experiences together, lead to a reconceptualization of educational leadership.

Shakeshaft (1989) argued for more research of women in educational leadership. She contended that more research on women administrators was critical for training programs, for practice, theory and research in educational administration. Further, she recommended that research on the styles of women administrators be supported and encouraged.

Until we fully understand how women and men interact not as people but as members and representatives of their gender, we’re not going to understand the implications for organizational practice. The impact of sexuality on effective leadership in organizations needs to be studied and understood. (p. 215)

Marshall (2000), reflecting on the epistemological framework of research on women in educational leadership over the past 30 years, maintained that the research questions built upon the traditional paradigm “constrained curiosity, and evaded the realities of people’s

lives” (p. 699). She applauded recent qualitative studies where the focus shifted away from “outdated, male-normed theories” and where women were placed at the center of the research (p. 700). In doing this, Marshall contended “we encounter the possibilities of leadership values, perspectives, goals, and behaviors from women’s experience” (p. 700). The call for additional research on women in educational leadership was expressed in much of the literature on women in educational administration and leadership. (Shakeshaft, 1989; Grogan, 1996; Marshall, 2000; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001b) Additionally, Gilligan (1993) maintained that research was needed on adult women in general: “Among the most pressing items on the agenda for research of adult development is the need to delineate in women's own terms the experience of their adult life” (p. 173).

This dissertation is a study of adult women in roles of educational leadership at a State Education Agency. These women manage, direct, and oversee curriculum and school reform, exceptional children’s services, statewide educational communication and information, and the training and licensure of quality professionals in the public schools.

This study falls within the fourth stage of Shakeshaft’s model for paradigmatic shift, where women are studied “on their own terms” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p.13). I conducted the research for this study from a feminist perspective. Sandra Acker (1994) provided the following assumptions culled from a number of sources to explain feminist research, and these general assumptions guided my research, some to a greater degree than others.

1. Feminist research involves an acute state of awareness of the injustice women suffer because of their sex.
2. The purpose of this research is to improve women's lives.

3. Feminist research asserts the centrality of women and of gender to all aspects of human existence.
4. It rests on the belief that existing knowledge and techniques are deficient and need revision.
5. Women's experience in patriarchal society is the starting point for research: the personal is political and valid.
6. The researcher should enter into the same space as her subject, rather than taking up a powerful or detached position. (p. 57)

Acker (1994) noted that these assumptions were potentially contentious but she maintained that in order for new gatekeepers to replace the old in determining what is proper research, guidelines or criteria such as these were necessary. Women were obviously central to my research and my research questions centered on gender issues (Assumption #3). This dissertation addressed the need for more research on women in leadership (Assumption #4). In this study, women's experiences were explored at a personal level, through life history, but also in the political context of leadership in a State Education Agency. Leadership, a concept which is sometimes construed to be patriarchal in origin, is the starting point of this research (Assumption # 5).

Assumptions #1, #2, and #6 also guided this study, but to a lesser degree. The first assumption, that women suffer injustice by virtue of their sex, is basic to all feminist research. It is not my intent to argue the nuances of sex versus gender. I assume that "sex" implies biological function, while "gender" conveys a socio-cultural context. Acker provides no explanation for her inclusion of both terms in her list of assumptions. Some feminists argue for the necessity of distinguishing between sex/gender, while others argue for its

dismantling (Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkowitz, 1997). The need for the sex/gender distinction has been questioned by recent feminist theorists, but “every society must and does distinguish at least two kinds of body” (Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkowitz, 1997, p. 104). According to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2001), “*Gender* is cultural and is the term to use when referring to men and women as social groups” (p. 63). That is the intended purpose of the use of *gender* in this study.

The research conducted for this study improved the lives of the women who participated in it (Assumption #2): They were given an opportunity to reflect on and analyze their own leadership, and to have a say regarding their lives and leadership experiences. The participants were given an interview guide early in the study, which gave them the opportunity to “reflect on and re-evaluate experiences” (Maynard, 1994, p. 17). Their reflection and self-analysis probably had a therapeutic effect, and may have led to empowerment. According to Maynard (1994), this may be “literally helping to give people knowledge, energy and authority in order that they might act” (p. 17). In this way, too, it is probable that other women’s lives may be improved: other researchers or readers who glean insight into their own political or personal experiences will benefit from this study. The lives of my daughters and other younger women who aspire to work and live in a reconceptualized woman’s/man’s world may be improved.

As a researcher, I avoided detachment and studying down (Assumption #6). I conducted this research as a colleague of these participants, which means that we, researcher and researched, occupied spaces in close proximity.

Finally, as Maynard (1994) pointed out, even if this research had little impact on the lives of the researched or the researcher, it may be important for the group the participants

are members of, which in this case is women who lead in education. Some leadership experts state that women leaders experience what all leaders experience, but more strongly (Center for Gender in Organization, 2002c). They argued that exploring the experiences of people outside the norm, i.e. women leaders, was a way to use diversity to learn more generally about the people within the norm, i.e., all leaders. The study presented here of women's lives and leadership fits well within the emergent gender equity model for educational research where it bridges two categories: leadership for gender equity, and gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality (see Figure 1).

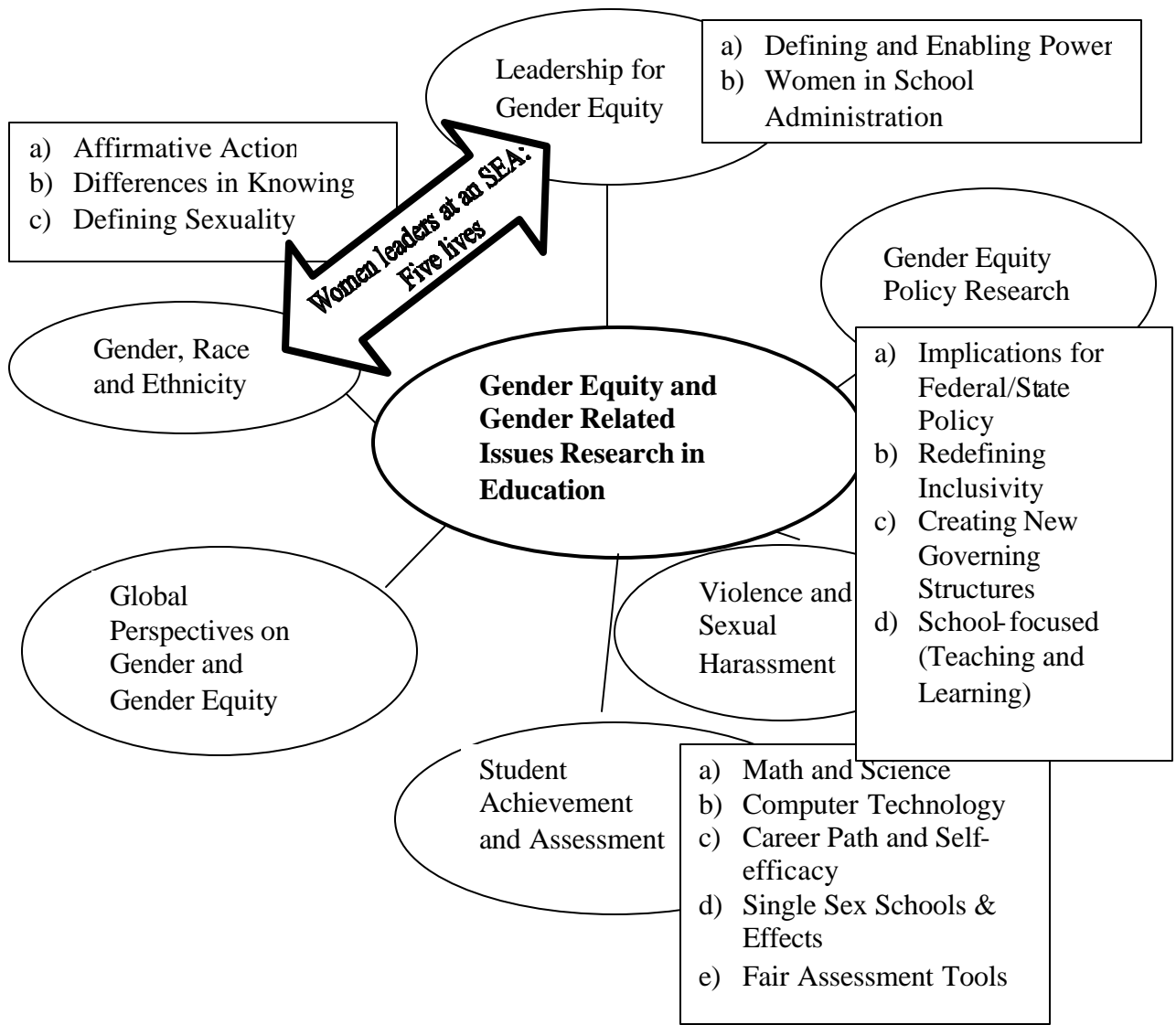


Figure 1. Emergent gender equity model of educational research.  
 (Benham, Frazier-Wilcox, & Murakami-Ramvalho, 2003)

The participants in this study are staff members of a State Education Agency, an arm of state government that has largely gone unstudied nationally, according to the Institute for Educational Leadership (2001a). The State Education Agency in this study bears major responsibilities for statewide educational policy implementation and oversight of public education. The Agency administers a statewide high stakes testing and accountability program and like other states, this Agency implemented the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 during the course of this study.

A national task force studying state leadership of education a few years ago (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001a) commented on the role the state education agency played:

Lamentably, few kind words are written or spoken in support of these largely anonymous agencies and the hierarchies of career civil servants who comprise them. Yet, whether esteemed or not, they are the vital links connecting districts and schools to the main resources and guidance they receive from non-local sources. (p. 10)

State bureaucrats who implement policy may seem relatively unimportant as educational leaders. However, the task force on state leadership claimed that “today’s state education leaders, both elected and appointed, are tackling some of the toughest assignments in the recent history of public education” (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001a, p. 1).

Detractors are quick to criticize educational leadership at the state level, especially when rigorous standards and high stakes testing are discussed. A report on teacher leadership maintains that educational leadership “needs all the help it can get. Whether at the level of the school building, district, or state, today’s education leaders have few admirers,



many skeptics, and a lot of tough critics” (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001b, p. 9).

Furthermore, the task force on state leadership maintained that:

Incumbents are often savagely labeled by the media, in particular, as (pick one or a combination) unimaginative, dictatorial, risk-averse, imperious, regulation-addicted, initiative-squashing, power-hungry, anti-intellectual, time-serving bureaucrats wedded to a past that modern leadership doctrine outgrew decades ago. (p. 9)

Whether warranted or not, such labeling offered evidence that the notion of failure in educational leadership had taken root with the public. Thus, strengthening leadership and expanding and improving the leadership pool have been identified as key areas of state leadership that needed attention (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001a). This study contributed relevant findings on leadership in State Education Agency and informed the notion of success or failure.

This study also addressed the possibility of an alternative leadership model to the traditional masculine model. Grogan (1996) argued that “empowering” leadership is a non-traditional concept that doesn't fit well within the existing hierarchical structures that reinforce our current leadership approaches. She contended that we need to know more about feminine leadership models, and others agreed. Kelleher, Rao and Stuart (1999) believed that “organizations, having been created largely by and for men, tend to be driven by assumptions that reflect the values and life situations of men and of idealized masculinity” (p. 78). Perry (1993), referring to the paucity of role models for women in leadership, said that women must “develop their own style, with precious few role models to whom to look, but with a confidence in all that is best in them and in their sex” (p. 91). Antonucci (1980)

addressed the importance of female role models in the development of leadership skills, citing that many of the same factors critical to a child's socialization are also relevant to adult socialization, which has implications for girls' and women's self-perceptions. Eacker's (1990) study supported these findings. Kolb & Merrill-Sands (2001) believed that women must understand how gender norms shape perceptions of leadership and effectiveness in organizations. Once aware of the norms that shape leadership, women can anticipate the challenges that may emerge. Such information benefits all leaders, according to an early handbook on School Leadership (Coursen, Hadderman, Jeffress, and Mazzarella, 1989):

Other leaders need to become aware of the special problems faced by their female and minority colleagues so that they can offer support to those who have achieved leadership positions and to those who aspire to such positions. Finally, women and minority leaders and those seeking to become leaders need to understand more about the situation that exists outside their own subjective experience. If the path seems blocked they need to know that there is some hope. If the path seems easy, they need to know that others still face obstacles. (pp. 86-87)

Blount (1998), in her history of women and the superintendency charged that the power structures within schools must be understood. She contended that students observe these power structures and their observations have implications :

They understand that administrators are usually men and teachers women; thus they absorb profound lessons about the roles men and women are expected to fill in our larger society....Gross inequities in one part of the educational system will inevitably be perpetuated in others. A truly fair

system for female and male students will not exist until we question the deeply rooted tradition of denying women power in public schooling. And then we must change it. (p. 169)

This research offers a fresh look at educational leadership from the perspective of women leaders at a State Education Agency, so it is a departure from the studies that focus on the superintendencies. In this study, women leaders related their experiences in light of their values, perspectives, goals, and behaviors as women professionals in education. The study provides a close-up view of these women who lead at the state level and who daily face the challenges of statewide educational leadership and policy implementation. Much of the previous research on women in educational leadership (Shakeshaft, 1989; Grogan, 1996; Brunner, 1999; Marshall, 2000, and Faulconer, 2003) focused on women in the superintendency. Marshall (2000) cautioned those who looked at women in leadership in the superintendency, that leadership in that position “passes through unnatural filters” due to the prevailing notions of leadership as male leadership. She advocated studying leadership in the classroom or wherever women are “on the job” (p. 701). This research followed suit, studying women who were in positions of leadership at a State Education Agency.

#### Purposes of This Study

One purpose of this study was to hear the voices of women leaders. The women presented here related their stories in their own voices. Gilligan (1993) made a compelling case for listening to women. Women’s voices were central to her research because, as she explained:

It was this choice to speak which interested me. Women’s discovery of the problems that ensue from rendering oneself selfless in order to have

“relationships” was momentous in releasing women’s voices and making it possible to hear what women know. It was like seeing under the surface or picking up the undercurrents of the human conversation: what is known, and then not known, felt but not spoken. Women’s choices not to speak or rather to dissociate themselves from what they themselves are saying can be deliberate or unwitting, consciously chosen or enacted through the body by narrowing the passages connecting the voice with breath and sound, by keeping the voice high in the head so that it does not carry the depths of human feelings or a mix of feelings and thoughts, or by changing voice, shifting to a more guarded or impersonal register or key. Choices not to speak are often well-intentioned and psychologically protective, motivated by concerns for people’s feelings and by an awareness of the realities of one’s own and others’ lives. And yet by restricting their voices, many women are wittingly or unwittingly perpetuating a male-voiced civilization and an order of living that is founded on disconnection from women. (pp. x-xi)

The women presented here described their journeys from girlhood to the present day, where they hold positions of leadership at a State Education Agency. This research also examined the sociological and cultural influences on these diverse women as they grew from girlhood to womanhood in the American South. The women shared their stories that reflected their socialization, depicting the influences of stereotyping and gender myth-making on their upbringing. Gilligan (1993) illustrated one phase of girls' socialization, the relational impasse:

[W]e began to witness girls edging toward relinquishing what they know and what they have held fast to, as they come face to face with a social construction of reality that is at odds with their experience, so that some kind of dissociation becomes inevitable. Girls' initiation or passage into adulthood in a world psychologically rooted and historically anchored in the experiences of powerful men marks the beginning of self-doubt and the dawning of the realization, no matter how fleeting, that womanhood will require a dissociative split between experience and what is generally taken to be reality.

(p. xxi)

It was critical to this research to elicit such experiences from the participants. Their experiences as girls formed the backdrop to their adult lives and the kind of leaders they became.

Another purpose of this research was to examine what “is,” and what “has been” for these women in light of their statewide leadership. Schofield (1990) argued that through examining what is and what has been, we may be able to generalize to what “may be” by thinking about what current trends suggest about the future (p. 214). She explained that such generalizing is possible by “locating situations that we know or expect to be ideal or exceptional on some a priori basis and then studying them to see what is actually going on there” (p. 217). This study contributes to what is known about educational leadership from a state education agency perspective, where “educational leadership is essential, and its importance and needs must become more visible and better understood” (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001a, p. 24).

The following research questions guided this study:

- ✍ What are the values, perspectives, goals and behaviors of women in educational leadership positions at a State Education Agency?
- ✍ What role does gender play in educational leadership at a State Education Agency?
- ✍ What roles do diversity and gender equity play in educational leadership at a State Education Agency?

A critical examination of these women's lives and leadership may help to shatter stereotypes, and in this regard, the research is "truly feminist" because it may evoke change through activism and consciousness-raising (Wolf, 1996, p. 5). The findings presented in this study created a dissonance that Biklen (1980) described as positive:

It creates an atmosphere in which varieties of leadership styles, the nature of good leadership, and the goals of educational leaders can be openly examined and discussed. The debate provoked, then, causes a healthy examination of the nature of the profession and of the means of access to it. As people discuss the pool from which leaders are drawn, questions about the teaching profession itself will necessarily be raised. And again, the quality of education as a whole comes into focus. (p. 20)

Teaching has long been viewed as women's work. Interestingly, however, in this feminized profession, men have traditionally served as the managers or administrators, as Coursen, Hadderman, Jeffress, and Mazzarella (1989) explained:

Almost anyone who remembers “school days” has two images of school officials. The favorite teacher, in fact nearly every teacher, was probably a woman. But the feared and revered final authority, the principal, especially in high school, is likely to have been a man. When the memory then turns to the race of the principal, the pattern of the white, male school administrator begins to emerge. (p. 85)

In 1980, less than 1% of school districts in the United States were headed by women. There seemed to be an unwritten policy that women always be assigned “women’s work” instead of executive responsibilities (Coursen, Hadderman, Jeffress, and Mazzarella, 1989, p. 89). In 2002, according to a statistical profile in the state where this study was conducted, there were more than 2,500 principals who were women, and only slightly more than 2,000 who were men. There was increasing disparity, however, nearer the top of the educational hierarchy: Men outnumbered women nearly 9 to 1 as school district superintendents across the state, filling more than 87% of the positions. As stated earlier, a woman had never held the post of Chief State School Officer.

A recent study of women who were qualified for district superintendencies in the state reported a “feeling of different expectations for men and women” (Faulconer, 2003, p. 93). The women in Faulconer’s (2003) study also indicated that they believed that many boards of education and community members had preconceived notions about women as superintendents. Although my study of women in leadership did not focus on women who aspired to the superintendency, it provided insight into gender equity issues and barriers that exist for women who aspire to these top leadership roles in school districts.

Recent educational task force (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001a) recommendations at the national level have called for better preparation of state leaders, leveling a claim that training at this level “tends to perpetuate the *de facto* segregation of role groups from each other, thus leading to skewed levels of knowledge and perception about other elements of the state policy system” (p. 17). Findings pertinent to the preparation of state leaders are presented in my study. Recent studies (Kolb and Merrill-Sands, 2001) suggested that on the basis of leadership skills alone, men could beneficially learn from women.

This study also explored notions of gender, race and class. Three of the women in this study were White Euro-Americans, one was American Indian, and one was a Black African American. Dillard (2000) argued that African-American women's stories were legitimate and powerful bodies of knowledge that have been excluded from most social science research and practice. Their life stories, she claimed, had much to offer: “The legacies raised up in life-note narratives—of precious mentors, mothers, comrades, and colleagues—suggest a strong historical ethos of commitment to transformative work through our research, teaching, and leadership” (p.7).

It was important to include diverse leaders in this study because research (Coursen, Hadderman, Jeffress, and Mazzarella, 1989) indicates that:

Staffing policies are as important to the educational process as curriculum.

The best policy decisions will come from administrations that include a variety of points of view. Women or members of minority groups have unique perspectives on certain problems, perspectives that can broaden and enrich the decision-making process at every level. In fact, a diverse staff may



even help shape more desirable curricula. For example, women have a special sensitivity to sexism in study materials, just as nonwhites are more sensitive to racism. (p. 86)

The voices of the diverse women leaders heard here may provide a springboard for dialogue on issues of gender and work in education, particularly at a state level. The life histories of these diverse leaders offered rich data on diversity in the educational setting and they may inform efforts at closing the achievement gaps between the different racial groups.

These stories may influence other educators who aspire to become leaders beyond the classroom; these voices may inform other younger girls, boys, their parents, and other men and women who seek careers in educational leadership. A recent article in *Business Week* (Conlin, 2003) reported that a new gender gap favoring girls spans every racial and ethnic group in public education, resulting in an educational edge for girls. Interestingly, the educational edge has not yet shattered the glass ceiling: Men continue to dominate the highest-paying jobs.

This work presents five examples of women who have become key players in the politics of education at the state level, where “organizational relationships and mindsets that once guided policy in state capitals are weakening as powerful new players and issues enter the game and threaten to shatter its ground rules” (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001a, p.1).

### Summary

This study focused on women who were leaders at a State Education Agency. These women’s stories unpacked and examined gender, class and racial issues related to the obstacles and opportunities faced in their journeys to leadership. The women reconstructed

and shared their realities—describing what they faced along the way to ultimately gaining positions of rank within a State Agency. Their voices spoke to how American societal, cultural, and economic forces in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shaped their world and continue to shape their work in education. As Bloom (1998) said,

The importance of focusing on women's lives in their personal narratives is great: They illuminate the course of a life over time and the relationship between the individual and society; they demonstrate how women negotiate their “exceptional” gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime; and they make possible the examination of the links between the evolution of subjectivity and its shifts and changes and the development of female identity. (p.146)

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The literature review is divided into three sections: 1) Gaining meaning from experience: Women's Knowing; 2) Gender and Organization, and 3) Gender Identity and Leadership. This study touched upon many aspects of women's personal and professional lives as members of a specific gender group and as political beings within organizations. The literature pertinent to this study covered a broad range of topics, from how women construct knowledge to how they behave as organizational leaders. I examined literature on women's psychological development, women's voice, women's vision, women as educators, women in management, and numerous works on women as educational leaders. This literature review is a broad brushstroke encompassing several discourses, i.e., the "historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs which frame and determine social knowledge and understanding" (Halford and Leonard, 2001, p. 21). I included literature that informs gender, knowledge and identity, literature that informs women in organizations, and literature that informs women in educational leadership. I also included several works on women in the superintendency to bolster my argument that this study was justified. I included feminist works and literature that informs life history methodology in my discussion of methodology in Chapter Three.

#### *Gaining Meaning from Experience: Women's Knowing*

Gilligan (1993), and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986, 1997) wrote about hearing women's voices, understanding women's ways of knowing and how girls and women construct meaning from their experiences. Their works spoke to the self-actualization of women and were relevant to this study. Gilligan (1993) focused on the

psychological development of women, describing how young girls grew silent during adolescence:

At fifteen, however, she could see the logic in a way of speaking about moral conflicts that she also saw as threatening to relationships and out of touch with reality, a way of reasoning that required making a series of separations, that began to alter her relationship with herself and to cloud her sense of reality.... This change of mind and also of heart, which we observed repeatedly among girls in adolescence, led my colleague, Annie Rogers to speak of girls' losing their 'ordinary courage,' or finding that what had seemed ordinary—having a voice and being in relationship—had now become extraordinary, something to be experienced only in the safest and most private of relationships. This psychological seclusion of girls from the public world at the time of adolescence sets the stage for a kind of privatization of women's experience and impedes the development of women's political voice and presence in the public world (p. xxii).

Weiler (1988) contended that girls experience the power of class, race, and gender very early, and thus they define "common sense" reality and limit their choices (p. 77). She saw a theme of "being acted upon" whereby girls' experiences with families, teachers and other adults made it difficult for them to work out conscious choices as to careers and study. "This is particularly obvious in the web of forces that led these women to give up other options (and sometimes, of course, they had no options) to become teachers" (p. 77). These ideas had important bearing on this study of women at a State Education Agency. A close look at the women in this

study will reveal how they made decisions based on their reality. Their choices, too were limited, and they were influenced by families or significant others. Their decisions were impacted by sociological forces which Weiler described as “dominated by male hegemony” (p. 77).

Gilligan’s (1993) work was central to my research because I wanted to hear the voices of women leaders in education talking about their lives and their choices. Her work also inspired Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) to find out how women constructed knowledge. In their work, *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, these authors presented five major epistemological categories that described how women know and view the world. These categories ranged from silence, i.e., women who lack voice and were at the whims of external authorities, to constructed knowledge, where women were the creators of knowledge. *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1997) made a compelling case for how women come to understand their world. An important limitation to the study is acknowledged by the authors, who state that “why and when women shift from one mode of knowing to another, as many of our women evidently did at points in their lives, is . . . not well addressed by our data” (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 15). The authors made it clear that their categories were not fixed or exhaustive and that other researchers may organize data to denote different categories. This work was useful to my study because it provided a schema for understanding how women as a diverse group come to know their world. It provided examples that proved valuable in understanding some of the women included in this study, like those denoted as separate knowers, or “tough-minded” women, like doormen at exclusive clubs:

They don't want to let anything in unless they are pretty sure it is good. They would rather exclude someone who belongs to the club than admit someone who does not. Presented with a proposition, separate knowers immediately look for something wrong—a loophole, a factual error, a logical contradiction, the omission of contrary evidence.

(Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1997, p. 104)

The authors pointed out that even women who have progressed through stages of knowing to become constructed knowers feel silenced at times. “In our society, which values the words of male authority, constructivist women are no more immune to the experience of feeling silenced than any other group of women” (p. 146). They argued that most constructivist women feel compelled to communicate why they see things as they do, even if they fear no one hears them.

Leslie Bloom (1998) wrote about methodology and narrative interpretation from a feminist standpoint. She described one such constructivist woman who felt silenced.

Sandy's questions about how, as a woman, she should speak, act, and react in the presence of male bosses and colleagues are profound. They illustrate how patriarchal power disempowers strong, intelligent, capable women like herself. Her questions about her own reasonableness and her fear of responding with intuition and emotion remind us how, under patriarchy, misogynist concepts of women as “bitch” and “irrational” have the effect of becoming the truths of femaleness. (p. 111)

*Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1997)

identified common themes related to women's learning experiences that were described as

distinctively feminine. Among those were the women's perceptions of the relative unimportance of their firsthand knowledge in formal school settings; the powerful learning that emerges from out-of-school learning experiences, like childbearing or child rearing, and the discrepancy in the kind of knowledge required in school versus the kind required in personal relations. Lived experience was an important part of what these women knew and valued.

*Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1997) also argued that:

Educators can help women develop their own authentic voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience; if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. These are the lessons we have learned in listening to women's voices. (p. 229)

This was most pertinent to my study, because it focused on the role of educators in aiding women in gaining their voice.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1996), in *Knowledge, Difference, and Power*, addressed the "electrifying effect" of their earlier work, *Women's Ways of Knowing*. This subsequent volume was a collection of essays written by other women in response to *Women's Ways of Knowing*. The earlier work had presented an alternative way of seeing the world, even if it did present a world that was "dualistic and dichotomized" (Belenky,

Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1996, p. 151). Some charged that “such a generalized view of women and men played into more simplified and essentialist views of gender that erased both differences among women and commonalities among women and men sharing similar histories” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1996, p. 151). I kept these critical comments in mind as I conducted my research for this study, trying to avoid essentialist views of gender.

The essays included in *Knowledge, Difference, and Power* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1996) were of interest in my research because they offered a critique of White feminist philosophy and added the perspectives from women of color. For example, Bing and Reid (1996) leveled a claim against feminist theorists that

feminist discourse has primarily emanated from White educated women who accept the middle-class perspective. While there has been some lip service noting that it is important to include the experiences of diverse women, the writings fail to reflect a fundamental premise—that for women of color, race, class and gender subordination are experienced simultaneously and that the oppressors of women of color are not only their male counterparts, but also White males and White females. (p. 189)

Eacker (1990), in her work on women in higher education, reported an experience that offered evidence of how White middle class women as researchers may be perceived by women of color. She described an interview where she “was pointedly told that White women are as racist as White men” (p. 63). The experience proved useful for Eacker, however, because “it was in this interview that I came to understand, for some short period of time, the feeling of being excluded, of being ‘the other’” (p. 64).



I intentionally chose racially diverse women leaders for my research in this study, so I had to be sensitive to concerns of diverse women, and aware of how they may perceive me as a White feminist researcher. Though this study is limited in the number of participants, I explored issues related to race and class as well as gender. Each participant was encouraged to tell her story as it related to her knowledge and awareness of race and class and how each may have influenced her life. Furthermore, my own experiences related to racial and class differences provided an awareness and sensitivity to some of the issues they discussed.

### *Gender and Organization*

Weiler's (1988) work documented feminist teachers and administrators at work in classrooms and schools. Her goal was to uncover the nature of women's experiences in patriarchal institutions. She focused on women at work in educational settings as she observed public high school classrooms in America. She saw evidence of what she called a dialectic of determinism versus freedom. Weiler used this example to illustrate how the tensions that are manifest in American society were "constantly manifested in classroom discourse" (p. 153). She used the example of such power struggles in the classroom to illustrate the need to struggle against oppression in all spheres.

Colgan and Ledwith (1996) discussed power and found it central to the paradigm of gender in organizations. They questioned whether the patriarchal nature of organizations could be changed and described a research paradigm for the study of women as organizational change agents. Their theories of "integration, co-option, and working within" illustrated how women could achieve change in organizations (p. 14).

Jill Blackmore (1995) explored another theory of integration. She studied policy-making in Australia, where Femocrats, aptly named women who were both feminists and

bureaucrats, actively promoted gender equity as they carried out their roles as State Education Department workers.

Halford and Leonard (2001) pointed out that what we know about being human or masculine or feminine can be seen in studying organizations. They asserted that gender is constructed differently in different types of organizations: the Army, the bank, or the CD store. The use of space, individual appearances and the way individuals present themselves are defined in terms of these differences. Black feminists, they argued, deconstruct the discourses of gender in organizations to show the embedded Whiteness in organizations. Halford and Leonard (2001) also suggested that the relationship between gender and organizations could be better understood through exploring the question of power:

Indeed, it is in the very nature of organisations that they (attempt to) systematise power relations between members, bestowing official rights of power to certain individuals over others, validating certain cultural and/or normative beliefs or discourses and not others. Further, since organisations wield power themselves, organisational power strengthens gendered power, so in instances where men manage, good management may come to be seen as masculine. (p. 26)

Taylor Cox (1994) presented a framework for studying cultural diversity within organizations and posed his thesis that diversity is good for organizations. He presented findings from different studies of the effects of phenotypes (observable appearances), like differences in skin color tones on members of organizations. He offered propositions for discussion that proved relevant within this study of diverse women leaders. He proposed, for example, that persons different from the majority group within the organization tended to

have less favorable work experiences and career outcomes. Further, he maintained that there was an inverse relationship between the amount of distinctiveness of an individual and career outcomes, and that strong identification with the majority culture would enhance one's career.

### *Gender Identity in Leadership*

Leadership is often considered to be a masculine concept, a vestige of patriarchy (Kolb and Merrill-Sands, 2001; Summers, 1997; Grogan, 1996; Hall, 1996; Harriman, 1996). Hall (1996) raises thoughtful questions about management as symbolic masculinity. She speculated that men who chose not to become managers in schools were less masculine, and argued for management to be viewed in terms of critical leadership, which she claimed was liberating, rather than controlling. Her study of six women leaders of schools in Great Britain showed that women managers in education behaved in ways that contributed to successful educational outcomes. She cautioned that findings such as hers could lead organizations to use "feminine" characteristics pragmatically to bolster continuing male privilege. By adding a few token women an organization may appear to have women's interests in mind. She argued that there is a real danger in women assuming "our day has come" because this may lead women to aspire to make it in a man's world "rather than in a man's/woman's world" (p. 5-6). Organizations may be making decisions to give women "power over" (masculine, patriarchal power) rather than "power to" (Hall, 1996, p. 5-6).

Ethical consideration and emancipatory praxis should be foremost in organizational decision-making, according to Hall. She contended that women who gain power but who are unresponsive to equity issues muddy the waters even more.

Perry (1993) pointed out that when she became a superior to middle-aged men she realized they felt a tremendous need for recognition and reassurance. She used this experience to point out that women who reach leadership positions must see themselves through the eyes of subordinates as they move into management positions. Perry argued that this did not mean that women had to adopt a masculine style or revert to feminine wiles or manipulative strategies. She challenged women to develop their own style.

Azzara (2001) believed that the heart of school leadership was the development of positive personal and community relationships. She argued that “every administrator needs to focus on people: People are the heart of our profession” (p. 64).

Maden (1993) described a special characteristic of women, contending that they had a kind of “operational flexibility” that equipped them well for modern management (p. 42). She believed that all women have to think about several things at different levels at the same time: “That’s why married women with children are quite remarkable if they manage to work through a career, because everything’s against them, but all that ability to juggle several different-sized balls in the air at the same time is actually something that’s built in” (p. 42).

Kolb and Merrill-Sands (2001) perceived the importance of strong relational and interpersonal leadership skills in restructured organizations with greater diversity, strategic partnerships, alliances and self-managed teams. They maintained that even though women excelled in these areas, these kinds of skills were not considered essential in the workplace, and that often what women contributed to the workplace was seen as natural and not a skill at all. (Kolb and Merrill-Sands, 2001).

Others, like Fletcher (2002), have agreed that women have certain special skills that give rise to certain expectations within the organization:

Women are often expected to nurture selflessly, to enable others while expecting nothing in return, to work mutually in non-mutual situations, and to practice less hierarchical forms of interacting even in hierarchical contexts. Thus, many women experience the so-called female advantage as a form of exploitation, where their behavior benefits the bottom line but does not mark them as leadership potential. (p. 3)

Brunner (1999) argued that men and women lead differently. Males and females live in different realities and have learned different socially appropriate behaviors. Kolb and Merrill-Sands (2001) pointed out an interesting paradox in leadership and advancement: although women were rated as well or better than men in critical leadership measures encompassing a broad range of competencies, the high ratings for women did not necessarily lead to promotions for them to top leadership positions. They also challenged a widely held and gendered belief that women were simply not interested in taking on leadership roles. Their survey of women showed that women were just as likely as men to accept a leadership role if offered.

Gross & Trask's (1976) study of gender-based findings in school management found that the quality of learning and the professional performance of teachers were higher in schools with women administrators. This may lead one to suppose that women would be holding top management positions in education. But as has been indicated earlier, men far outnumber women in school district superintendencies across the nation and in the state studied here. A recent survey (Archer, 2003) found that nationally, the percentage of women who were superintendents was estimated at between 12 to 15 percent, thus remaining close to what it was a century ago.

The same survey of female administrators in the U.S. suggests that the dearth of superintendents relates more to societal forces and the norms of the profession than to a lack of qualifications. Yet nationally, women account for about one-third of all assistant superintendents. (Archer, 2003)

Coursen, Hadderman, Jeffress, and Mazarella (1989) discussed the obstacles of negative attitudes and other insidious factors that may account for the scant numbers of women at the top. “Women who learn to ‘downplay their power, intellect and skill’ actually receive higher ratings from men than women who are seen as more competent” (p. 93). Elliott Garfinkel (1986) found that women superintendents valued competency over trust in contrast to males, who valued trust above other values. He claimed that such ideas lead to stereotypical thinking of men’s networks of loyal supporters. Coursen, Hadderman, Jeffress and Mazarella (1989) further added that:

While men have developed support networks for years, women have not done so. Men generally help other men climb the ladder—they take care of each other, they pass the lessons on, and they help others achieve positions of influence. Unlike the woman who must prove herself over and over again, once men get into the club, they are protected. (p. 94)

The survey mentioned earlier (Archer, 2003) pointed to similar findings. Women administrators who were surveyed talked about the masculine nature of the superintendency, even alleging that golf played a role: meetings of professional organizations often revolved around the sport, which was more popular among men than women. Some of the women claimed that golf was a gatekeeper to the superintendency. (p. 2)

Shakeshaft (1989), Grogan (1996), Blount (1998), Brunner (1999), Marshall (2000), and Faulconer (2003) addressed the scant numbers of women in the superintendency. Shakeshaft suggested in an early paper (1987) that the traditional school structure was antithetical to the ways women worked best and recommended several practices that may improve programs to better serve women. Brunner (1999) provided case studies of women who aspired to the superintendency, gained it and then left it. Grogan (1996), writing in a feminist post-structural framework, recognized a pattern in her research on women who aspired to the superintendency: participants saw themselves as having to negotiate a series of obstacles on the way to a position. Her research suggested that “women and others who were different would have to toil harder or do extra work to remove the obstructions that lay in their path” (p.26). She argued that empowering leadership cannot be practiced within existing “hierarchical, bureaucratic structures which reinforce the traditional, competitive, manipulative approaches to leadership with which we are so familiar” (p. 177). Marshall (2000) concluded that “the repressed truths about persistent under-representation of women in educational administrative positions, and the ways the scholars, the knowledge base, the professional culture have perpetuated this repression, are a naked embarrassment” (p. 699). Further, Marshall (2000) offered a strong rationale for continuing studies of women in educational leadership similar to the one conducted here:

By becoming accomplished professionals and bureaucrats, educational administrators rid themselves of passion and political stance. They learn to smooth over troublesome events and dilemmas (such as persistent inequities) to present a calming public face. Therefore, the shift in WEL [research on women in educational

leadership] to incorporating women's perspectives has been good for WEL and promising for urgently needed alternative models of leadership. (p. 701)

Faulconer (2003) addressed the question of why some qualified women chose not to pursue the superintendency. These women, she discovered, held negative views of the position, even though they had become certified candidates for it. Many of the women claimed that their personal goals were not aligned with their perceptions of what the job would entail. The women believed that the job would not mesh with their family responsibilities, especially if they had children. Faulconer's (2003) study participants were mostly married mothers, and some were grandmothers. The common factors they cited for not pursuing the superintendency included "(a) lifestyle issues, (b) age, (c) politics, (d) too removed from children, and (e) not a career goal" (p. 61). Many of the issues broached in Faulconer's (2003) study, such as spousal support, stereotypical gender roles, seeking a balance between home and professional life, are issues of feminist discourse that this study broaches as well.

Blackmore (1995) focused on the ways feminist educators conceptualized policy within the masculine decision-making culture of the Australian educational bureaucracy. Her contention that education policy needed more study supports my research. Blackmore (1995) found that women in bureaucracies can articulate their own value positions, an idea that changes the traditional notion of value-neutral decision-making process. She described feminist educators in policy making roles as bureaucrats, i.e., Femocrats, who were faced with competing demands of policy production and their personal concerns for human values, democratic principles and social equity. The women in Blackmore's (1995) study used dialogue and connections as strategic interventions to influence policy to make it more



equitable and fair—a radical departure from masculinist frameworks for policy-making. The emphasis on formal rationality constructed a particular hegemonic image of a good manager and policymaker that excluded women who were deeply concerned about human values and committed to personal agendas. This perception of the masculine bureaucrat emerged in this study as well. The women leaders in my study shared strong feelings about human values and doing what was right within the context of rational decision-making.

The Center for Gender in Organizations at the Simmons Graduate School of Management in Boston sponsored a seminar on a generation of professional women in leadership. Jill Silverstein (2001) described her research on women leaders of major corporations who leave their posts. She found that in their second decade of work, these women experienced disconnection –from their work, from other people, and from whom they felt they really were.

Laurie Slavitt (2001) spoke of learning from women leaders, and she identified common themes: These women worked harder than most people; they held themselves accountable; they had the courage to be themselves; they were optimistic; they looked for opportunities; they took risks, and they were willing to take responsibility for others.

According to Slavitt (2001), the women in her study had paths that varied; the women did not follow a career trajectory that was linear. Slavitt contended that for the women in her study, change was important. Slavitt found that there was no one “woman’s leadership style” (p. 5).

In another Simmons School of Management seminar, *Who Do We Follow and Why?* Patricia Romney (2002) described executive coaching as a process that led an already functional person to increased functioning. She claimed that coaching was a way to increase

a person's leadership skills and potential. Marion Hampton (2002), in the same seminar, described her work on women leaders' visibility and vulnerability. She argued that women leaders, because they were in the minority, were highly visible and could become the targets of others' projected vulnerability, adding that:

Ultimately, women leaders are watched very carefully. Will they stumble? Are they tough? Are they acting in sex-role appropriate ways? They are scrutinized intensely, both personally and in their role, which gives them little margin for error. But it is difficult to grow into leadership roles without making mistakes, which makes women genuinely vulnerable at work. (p. 2)

She went on to say that for women of color, visibility and vulnerability presented even greater problems. These women may be presumed less competent because some will assume that there were lower standards for hiring or promotion; such incorrect notions according to Hampton (2002) contended, led to even greater projections of vulnerability. She called for more exploration of diversity, claiming that knowing more about women's experiences outside the norm can be useful for teaching us about women inside the norm. She argued that women's experience can thus inform organizational learning, as well as women's learning.

Curry's *Women in Power: Pathways to Leadership in Education* (2000) presented a synthesis of many of the ideas presented in this literature review. Curry studied the contextual elements of women's developmental experiences, contending that meaning systems are both influenced by and located in culture. The women in her study described the way in which the social contexts of their environments at various periods of their lives influenced their emergence as leaders.

In her work, Curry (2000) described the process of becoming a leader as fluid, adaptive, and oriented toward individual development, dependent upon an individual's socialization and its influence on the construction of self. Her thesis meshed well with the works previously cited in this literature review that pertained to women's construction of knowledge and women's ways of becoming (Gilligan, 1993; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1997). Curry contended that for women who became leaders, they must have an acute awareness of self and socialization. Curry maintained that:

For women, leadership studies have largely told us how to rise above our circumstances, to rise above being women, in order to apply prescriptive behaviors. The value in the most demanding of organizational exchanges is a woman's ability to anticipate and mimic a masculine response. It is therefore reasonable that women ascending to leadership positions find themselves acutely aware of their own evolution, changing psychology, and immersion in old conflicts as the work of becoming is added to the burden of legitimizing their position among their followers. The point is that it does not require an extraordinary imagination to crystallize the image of woman as leader within conventions of feminism. (p. 2)

Curry claimed that each woman's journey through life is a personal one, where pathways are illuminated by retrospectives. Her remarks attested to the appropriateness of studying leadership through a life history approach such as the one conducted here.

My study, *Women Who Lead at a State Education Agency: Five Lives* adds to the literature presented in this review in several ways. The women in my study are leaders at a State Education Agency who are ethnically diverse but who share a common southern (U.S.) heritage. Their stories add to the literature of how women gain knowledge. They offer

examples of how they came to know what was important and meaningful in their experiences through childhood, early schooling, and their careers in education.

This study adds to what is known about the socialization of women, particularly in the American South. It adds to Curry's (2000) premise by illustrating how growing up in the southern U.S. influenced the women's perspectives and behaviors. The women's own accounts of self-actualization are compelling. Jane, for example, speaks eloquently of her first encounter with overt racism in the adult world when she was a junior in high school.

The study also adds to what is known about how women come to hold positions of leadership despite male hegemony. The women in my study reveal insights into how they entered leadership positions in a predominantly male leadership culture and how they formed their own leadership styles drawing on their individual strengths and what they had learned from others. Chapter Four of this study reveals findings related to women in educational leadership that parallel Slavitt's (2001) findings about women in business. This is important because it adds to the body of knowledge about women who lead in various fields.

The women in my study speak to issues related to mentoring and coaching: they describe their mentors and tell how significant others influenced their lives and careers.

This study adds as well to the literature on diversity. The women in my study are diverse (White, Black, and American Indian), so their experiences inform issues related to the socialization and leadership of diverse women.

Finally, this study was conducted from a vantage point within a State Education Agency, setting it apart from other studies of women in educational administration.

## Summary

The literature reviewed for this study ranged from studies of feminist methodologies in conducting qualitative research to studies of gender in organizational management. I also reviewed many works that dealt with women's psychological development and their formulation of self-identities. I explored recent findings related to women and leadership. Within the three broad and at times, overlapping categories, 1) Gaining meaning from experience: Women's Knowing; 2) Gender and Organization, and 3) Gender Identity and Leadership, I included the feminist discourse that related to the development of self and socialization for girls and women. I also included the literature that focused on women within organizations, especially educational organizations; and literature related to women who aspire to and gain leadership roles, particularly in education. This review of the literature that encompassed research on women's psychological development; on gaining meaning from experiences, and on how women emerged as leaders offered strong justification for additional research on women in educational leadership. In closing, I indicated how this study, *Women Who Lead at a State Education Agency: Five Lives*, supplemented the literature on how women gain knowledge, women in organizations, and women in leadership.

I presented many of the main ideas from feminist literature on the study of women in educational leadership (focusing mostly on women in the superintendency) in Chapter One of this study, where it supported my argument for this study. I reserved the literature on life history methodology for Chapter Three, where I included it in a discussion of my methodology. In Chapter Three I also presented the theoretical framework for this study, taken from the feminist discourse presented by Donna Haraway (1991).

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

I chose a qualitative research design employing in-depth interviews to construct life histories of five women leaders at a State Education Agency. John Dollard of Yale University published *Criteria for the Life History* in 1949, the year I was born. Dollard set forth his ideas of how the life history could become a scientific tool of research, presenting seven criteria that he termed indispensable for judging technique in compiling a life history and urging scientists of human life to address the importance of the culture the subject:

Before any individual appears his society has had a specific social life organized and systematized, and the existence of this life will exercise a tyrannical compulsion on him. Seen from this point of view the problem of the life history is a statement of how the new organism becomes the victim or the resultant of this firm structure of the culture. . . . The individual does not generate himself in a colorless environment; rather he “gets generated” by the surrogates of a potent cultural order. (pp. 16-17)

Dollard’s patriarchal views and Freudian framework were somewhat anachronistic, but the work was valuable because it laid the foundation of the life history approach in social scientific inquiry. Dollard's classic prose described life history as a scientific data collection method. He emphasized the importance of studying the family into which one was born:

In the case of the “family,” the patriarchal family form can be traced through twenty-five hundred years of European history, and it is certainly much older than that. It has been modified in recent days, to be sure, but it is a very solid institution even yet. (p. 21)

Denzin and Lincoln (2001) included essays in a volume more than a half century later that continued the debate over proper life history. In their work, an essay by Europeans Bertaux and Kohli (2001) offered a “continental” view of the subject. They contended that their definition of life history was more restricted than the American version composed of letters, diaries, personal notes, and autobiography. They argued that if “one takes the dimension of personal history seriously, it is appropriate to insist on a more specific characterization: the life story approach should be based on narratives about one’s life or relevant parts thereof” (p.143). They point out that lives are totalities that develop simultaneously at several levels: the historical, the societal, the ethno-social, and the personal. Bertaux and Kohli (2001) concluded with a caution that it is unlikely that a new theoretical framework of life history will emerge because the inherent value of the life story was that it allowed a fresh look at old questions.

My study is just that, a fresh look at leadership and questions about leadership, from the perspective of life history. According to Bertaux and Kohli (2001),

it constrains researchers to pay attention to the various levels of social life, to become sensitive to the weight of history, and to conceive of the present as history in the making. In short, it is highly challenging. Herein lies its fragility; herein lies its strength. (p. 148)

#### *Conducting Life History Research*

Etter-Lewis and Foster (1996) edited a collection of life histories that focused on women of color. Their discussion and analysis centered on these various women, arguing that “no single group can represent adequately the whole of women, nor can one voice speak for all” (p. 1). Their work, *Unrelated Kin*, provided detailed descriptions of methodology

that proved useful to this study, though their volume presented too much mosaic and not enough glue. The essays they included were individually provocative but were not held together by a common theme or meaning other than that the storytellers were marginalized women of color. The accounts ranged from one by the granddaughter of a Virginia slave to a life history of a Shoshone Indian woman. In one essay, the author described her research as beginning in friendship and ending with more than “five hundred pages of taped transcriptions” (p. 73). By the end of this research, I understood the researcher’s dilemma:

The task of transforming the dialogue into a comprehensible written form became the focus of our work together (1989 to 1994). How, we asked, do we begin to translate this into a form that will be of interest to and understood by general readers? As we discussed the dilemma, we could not help but wonder why other “edited” or “as-told-to” life histories (with few exceptions) had never mentioned this difficulty. . . . Many nuances were certainly lost in the process, as we translated the way we talk into the way that we write. There were times when Essie would edit out what I thought were important examples of her style of speech. And there were times when we pulled out the thesaurus to search for a word that had exactly the meaning that both of us believed was important to getting the story right. Essie had a sense of how she wanted her story to sound. We worked together, and I assisted her in shortening lengthy or redundant phrases, but all final decisions were made by Essie. (p. 74)

This was extremely helpful to me as I began to plan for my own study. I gave considerable thought to my own research, asking myself who would make the final decisions in the study.



*Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective* (1994), edited by Maynard and Purvis, offered guidelines that were useful in conducting a study like mine. It addressed many of the issues of more traditional qualitative work, but within a feminist framework. Mixing methods, the impact of involvement, validity and epistemology were explained as debates and controversies. There was a useful description of critical issues that explained why it is important for the researcher to be involved in interpretation:

To repeat and describe what women might have to say, while important, can lead to individuation and fragmentation, instead of analysis. Feminism has an obligation to go beyond citing experience in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone. (pp. 23-24)

In my study, I have tried to make connections and provide adequate analyses.

*Studying Elites Using Qualitative Methods*, edited by Hertz and Imber (1995) explored research issues related to power. The essays in this compilation focused on problems encountered by researchers who studied those more powerful than they; in my research, I focused on women in a State Education Agency who were more powerful than I.

One of the essays in this volume exposed the problems presented for a female researcher in a largely male law office who referred to her position as an outlaw position – denoting that her covert fieldwork proved to be a disruptive force in the norms of office behavior. This was relevant to my study because it addressed issues related to the unknown baggage that researchers may carry to their study. Sometimes, Pierce (1995) pointed out, researchers are blinded to their own cultural embeddedness:

White women as well as women and men of color—even researchers—are embedded within raced and gendered matrices of domination and privilege

that have consequences for the responses their multiple subject positions – researcher, female, and/or person of color–provoke. (p. 107)

Deborah Rich-Eacker's (1990) work on women in academia revealed an instance where she as researcher became more acutely aware of her cultural embeddedness. A Black woman participant forced Eacker to recognize the Whiteness of her culture, which caused Eacker to “repeatedly reflect upon my analysis from the standpoint of what was emotionally present” (p. 64).

I agree with researchers, like Wolf (1996), who claimed that life histories are more empowering than other forms of research because through the use of the women’s own words, the participants are given voice. Gilligan (1993) described the impact of life history:

From Erik Erikson, I learned that you cannot take a life out of history, that life-history and history, psychology and politics, are deeply entwined.

Listening to women, I heard a difference and discovered that bringing in women's lives changes both psychology and history. It literally changes the voice: how the human story is told, and also who tells it. (p. xi)

Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested that researchers who studied life histories believed that in order to understand human actions they must understand the meaning that participants attributed to those actions, which were revealed through “their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptions” (p. 57). This method assumed that people live “storied lives” and that telling and retelling one's story helps one understand and create a sense of self. (p. 120.)

In my research, the life history design provided the logic and method for

- a) investigating the diversity of the lives of the women who serve as organizational leaders by allowing them to tell their own stories,

- b) exploring the issues related to power and influence in childhood and adolescence, and
- c) using the concept of “career ” to describe the benchmarks, stages, life phases and thought processes the subjects pass through in their lives.

(Biklen and Bogden, 1998, p. 57)

This study explored several aspects of growing up female in America in the last half of the twentieth century from the perspectives of women who are leaders in a State Education Agency. This study examined both the broad socialization of these women into American society and their socialization into the norms of the world of education.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) spoke to the strengths of this approach, claiming that it allowed the reader to enter into the experiences of the women under study; providing a fertile source of hypotheses; depicting actions and perspectives for comparative analysis, and emphasizing the value of a person's own story. They also contended that this approach removed androcentric bias in understanding women's lives. “One understands a culture through the history of one person's development or life within it, told in ways that capture the person's own feelings, views, and perspectives” (p. 121).

I am also aware of some of the weaknesses of the life history approach. Marshall and Rossman (1999) contended, for example, that it may not be possible to make generalizations. Further, there may be limited principles for selecting participants, and fewer accepted concepts for guiding analysis.

By using the life history approach, I wanted the women leaders who participated in this study to reconstruct the reality of their lives and also to reveal their attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives towards leadership. I believed that their stories would describe their

socialization and the cultural nuances of their time and place. I also hoped that their histories would provide rich data on the patterns and myths of girlhood.

### Determining My Sample

In this study, I widened the scope to incorporate more than one life history in order to study aspects of women in leadership at a State Education Agency. Before selecting my sample, I developed criteria to define women leaders. It was important to select women who had been defined as leaders by virtue of their position in the hierarchy of the State Education Agency. My rationale was that an identifiable label, based on job title or rank, would remove the subjectivity of assessing leadership on a more nebulous basis. As I constructed my argument for selecting women who were in the higher positions within the agency, it was necessary to reflect on whether agency job titles (assistant, specialist, consultant, chief, and director) mattered in making leadership designations, and on whether consultants, like me, who had no official managerial responsibilities or budgetary powers within the agency could be considered leaders. I concluded that while consultants like me may exhibit leadership in many areas, they wielded less power (in the masculine hierarchical sense) because they had no managerial authority nor power of the purse (they managed no budgets). Further, they may not be widely perceived by others as leaders within or outside the agency. Thus I narrowed my criteria for defining leader by using organizational position titles associated with the notion of management within the hierarchy of the organization. Management positions in the agency ranged from chief consultant (middle manager), to division director, to associate superintendent, to superintendent (see Table 1).

Table 1

Management and Gender at State Education Agency, February 2003

Position	Men	Women
Superintendent (Elected)	1	0
Deputy Superintendent <sup>1</sup>	1	0
Associate Superintendents	1	2
Directors	8	7
Chief Consultants	22	24

<sup>1</sup>*The Deputy Superintendent resigned just before the completion of this study and a woman was appointed to replace him.*

It was important to gain input from other colleagues within the organization, so I asked six colleagues to compose a list of the top women leaders in the agency. I composed a list as well, and then I combined colleagues' lists with my own. I listed the names with their position titles: Some of the leaders on the lists were chief consultants (middle managers), but overwhelmingly, most were division directors or higher. Typically, the lists began with the women who were highest in the hierarchy and who were the most visible examples of top leadership. These women were associate superintendents and division directors. Several lists also included women who served as liaisons with the State Board of Education or the state legislature.

I selected the criteria of women who held positions of division director or higher in a State Education Agency to define my sampling. The rationale was that division directors and associate superintendents had high visibility and accountability within the organization and the entire state. They were supported by sizeable staffs composed of clerical program

assistants, consultants, chiefs, and in some cases, assistant directors. They had budgets which provided the power of the purse over programs that impacted classrooms. They served on an interagency coordinating committee that met regularly with the Chief State School Officer to discuss policy issues, and respond to the State Board of Education in their monthly meetings. Furthermore, they were likely to be perceived by educators in local school systems across the state as leaders in education.

I followed the Goldilocks principle in selecting how many women to include in this study, wanting to get it just right: not too many; not too few. I was aware that some life histories (Etter-Lewis and Foster, 1996) delved into only one life. Eacker's (1990) study of women in academia focused on twelve lives. Summer's (1997) study focused on six women's lives. I did not want to be overwhelmed by data, but I wanted to study more than one woman, and hopefully, to collect data from diverse women. I decided that from three to five life histories would be an appropriate number, and hoped that at least five would consent to participate.

In determining who to ask to participate in this research, I considered diversity, my own list of leaders and my colleagues' lists of leaders, and took into account my personal knowledge of the women leaders in the agency. I composed a list of five first choices and three second choices. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) maintained that the feasibility of a life-history case study is mostly determined by the nature of the subject.

Is the person articulate and does he or she have a good memory? Has the person lived through the kinds of experiences and participated in types of organizations or events you want to explore? Does he or she have the time to give? (p. 57).

The five women who were my first choices for this study were articulate. My work with them as this study progressed revealed that they also had good memories, they had lived through many very interesting experiences, and had participated in events that added richness to the research (see Table 2). Fortunately, they all agreed to participate and were willing to devote time out of their very hectic schedules to this research. There were many times that interviews were scheduled, cancelled, rescheduled, cancelled again and rescheduled. They all approached the research study with eagerness and openness.

Table 2

*Sampling profiles.*

Prospective Participant	Director or Higher?	Program Area	Ethnicity
Brenda	Yes	Communications	White
Karen	Yes	Superintendent	Black
Jane	Yes	Human Resources	Am. Indian
Barbara	Yes	Curriculum	White
Rebecca	Yes	Exceptional Children	White

Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 78) presented a table illustrating sampling strategies in qualitative research. My sampling strategies for this study were:

1. Based on criteria of a) women, b) directors or higher, c) diverse ethnicity and d) representative of different program areas;
2. Opportunistic, because certain women were included as a result of recent restructuring that put them in certain positions, and
3. Convenience-based, because I chose to conduct the study at the site where I work.

## Theoretical Framework: A View from Somewhere

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), the researcher's presence is fundamental to the qualitative study paradigm. I was both researcher and an education consultant in a State Education Agency that was the setting for this study. I knew each of the women who were participants in the study, some for longer periods of time than others. I had worked with two of these women for over a decade. One of them was a director of the division where I previously worked, so I had been a subordinate for five months. I considered each of these women to be a professional colleague of mine, but none was a close personal friend.

It is important to note that I am a woman studying women. There are feminists (Acker, 1994) who would argue that I am better suited to conduct this study because I am female. In an introduction to her collection of essays on dilemmas that feminists face in fieldwork, Wolf (1996) discusses people who study the group to which they belong and how they often claim to have a more privileged and balanced view.

Feminist standpoint theory argued that only the oppressed can understand the oppressed, but Wolf (1996) pointed out that such an argument taken to its natural conclusion argued ultimately that the greater the oppression, the greater the researcher's potential knowledge. Some believed different perspectives should be taken into account, and that one need not be of a class, gender, or race to study a class, gender or race.

I considered my gender an asset in this study. I shared situation, location, and work history similar to the five women of my study which informed and enriched this study. Each of us, researcher and researched, shared pieces of a common culture and history as part of a State Education Agency.



In her 1991 work, Donna Haraway sought to reconcile feminist standpoint theories with other views regarding the stance of the researcher and objectivity/subjectivity. Wolf (1996) called Haraway's theory the "politics and epistemology of location" (p. 14). Haraway's (1991) discourse struck a chord with me; I conducted the research for this study under the constructs of her theoretical framework. According to Haraway (1991) knowledge claims were based on what she called the partiality of situation, location and position. As Skeggs (1994) explained, "the best we can ever do is produce partial knowledge: The awareness of access to different discursive positioning, normalization and objectification" make this so (pp. 78-79).

Haraway (1991) argued that we can use these partial knowledges as an alternative to relativism. She claimed that "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" could sustain the "possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (p. 191). Such situated knowledge was a mark in time, producing a map that reflected gender, class, race and nationality (Wolf, 1996). Haraway (1991) called these situated knowledges "re-markings, reorientations, of the great maps that globalized the heterogeneous body of the world in the history of masculinist capitalism and colonialism" (p. 111). She described her map as an analytical engine for illustrating the dichotomies of feminist theory. I adapted her map for my purposes and re-drew it to apply to this research (see Figure 2).

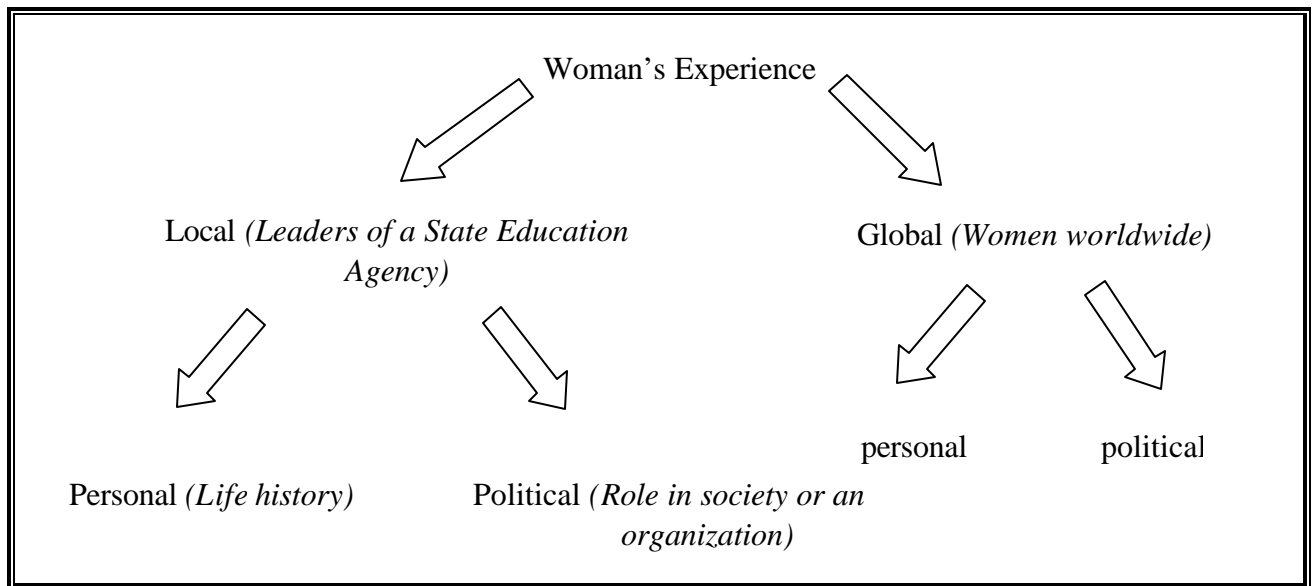


Figure 2. Donna Haraway's (1991) "map of women's consciousness and/or experience" (p.112).

Haraway (1991) maintained that "women's experience does not pre-exist, but is structured within multiple agendas" (p. 113). One can concentrate on a global dimension (e.g., the education of girls) of a political aspect, (e.g., government funding for girls to study science) of a particular local experience (girls' participation in a physics class). I examined women's experiences as women leaders through life histories, defined on the map as local, personal, and political.

This means that the dynamics of my situation as researcher provided partialities that guided me toward the whole. Using Haraway's (1991) conceptual framework, I acknowledged and built on my partial perspective as a woman who had a decade of experience as an education consultant working at a State Education Agency, while introducing the realities constructed by the five respondents in the study. Their multiple subjectivities directed me towards objectivity. According to Haraway (1991), feminists

don't need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence...but we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different and power-differentiated-communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future. (p.187)

She argued that we do not seek “partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (p. 196). In this study, I was at a particular place, i.e., a State Education Agency, and I was accountable and responsible for translating, or interpreting the stories of five women's lives and leadership. Haraway (1991) maintained that “translation is always interpretative, critical, and partial” (p. 195). Thus I used my partial sight and partial voice, from my constructed knowledge, to make sense of the women leaders' knowledges.

According to this theory, by focusing on limited location and situated knowledges, I became answerable for what I learned how to see. Haraway (1991) cautioned that knowledge or reality based on the dichotomy of oppressor/oppressed must be critically re-examined, deconstructed and interpreted. She stated that what was important was building affinities instead of oppositions and she argued for a “doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems” (p. 191). Haraway's (1991) theory bridged the gulf between the standpoint theorists and other feminists. As she explained:

There is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our visions. But the feminist standpoint theorists' goal of an epistemology and politics of engaged, accountable positioning remains eminently potent. The goal is better accounts of the world, that is, 'science'. . . . Science becomes the myth not of what escapes human agency and responsibility in a realm above the fray, but rather of accountability and responsibility for translations and solidarities linking the cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterize the knowledges of the subjugated. (p. 196)

In this study of five women's lives, and leadership, I critically decoded what Haraway (1991) called "the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions, i.e., of views from somewhere" (p.196).

### Researcher Biography

I include this brief personal and work history to present how I am situated in relation to this study. My role in this research, according to Marshall and Rossman (1999), should address my personal biography and how it may shape events and meanings related to research. Often, this account tells a story of socialization, "of meeting the normative expectations for those of similar gender, class, or age" (p. 164). According to Bloom (1998), a central goal of feminist methodology is that "the researcher learns to openly locate her history, values, and assumptions in the text so that she, like those researched, are open to critical scrutiny by her readers" (p. 148).

I was born in 1949 to parents who were hardworking peasant stock of the piedmont South. I grew up in a rural area whose inhabitants were largely descendants of German

Protestants who settled there in the late 1700's. The town nearby grew into a manufacturing center for furniture and textiles, so most residents lived by farming, trade, or factory work. I was aware of class differences very early in my life, as I perceived the differences in my mother's family, who worked in the cotton mill, and my father's, who were rural artisans.

Both my parents had a strong work ethic which they imparted to me. My father was a bricklayer and carpenter, and my mother worked in the mill in her younger days and later in a local supermarket as cashier. Neither of them finished high school. My only first-hand experience of college was visiting a cousin who attended for one semester. It was their expectation that I would go to college.

I was aware of only two races, Black and White. My father sometimes hired Black men from those who gathered daily on the courthouse steps to work for him as day laborers, where they would mix mortar or carry brick. Our town was very segregated. Race governed access to restaurants, bathrooms, water fountains, the municipal swimming pool and local movie theatre.

I was acutely aware of gender differences growing up. My Mom often called me "the son my father never had" because I was a tomboy who loved the outdoors and animals. I enjoyed doing things with my Dad, like checking the rabbit traps, riding ponies and roaming the woods with hunting dogs. I was very upset as I neared adolescence when my Dad decided I could no longer go rabbit hunting with him.

My love of animals contributed to a desire expressed very early in my life to become a veterinarian. This was an idea that my father discouraged at every opportunity. He would, however, talk of my becoming a judge or a forest ranger, especially if it were Friday, end of the work week, when he enjoyed a wet beverage in our dry county. Most often, however, he

encouraged me to become a teacher, which he considered an appropriate job for a woman, and one that I could always “fall back on.”

My mother, on the other hand, always urged me to follow my dreams. When I was twelve or so, she arranged for me to meet with our local veterinarian to discuss my career goals. “So,” he boomed, sitting across from me behind an imposing desk. “You want to be a veterinarian?” I answered “Yes.” “Well, look at that picture on the wall,” he directed, pointing to a large framed photograph of faces. He explained that this was his graduating class from vet school. “Do you see any women there?” he implored. Of course, there were none.

A teenage romance tempered my zeal for six years of veterinary school and influenced my choice of colleges. I attended a small church-supported liberal arts college an hour from my home, where scholarships and work-study programs made the costs affordable. My boyfriend attended as well, but the relationship lasted only through the first semester of our first year.

I did well in my classes, and as a freshman, I loved math and history. A charismatic and demanding history professor, who challenged me to earn Harvard “A's,” inspired me to major in history. He assured me that I would have a wide choice of careers with a degree in history. Always keeping my Dad’s admonition about becoming a teacher in mind, I also took the requisite education courses to earn a teaching certificate. Those courses, often taught by elderly and out-of-touch professors, were the bane of my college studies.

I went to college year-round in order to finish in three years. As I neared completion, I had an offer to go on to graduate school in history, but I turned it down because I was tired of going to school. By this time I had a new romantic interest and was married just

before my summer graduation. My husband joined the National Guard to avoid the draft and left for basic training while I returned to my hometown to teach high school history and math. From then until now, I considered education to be my career by default.

I intended to return to graduate school after my husband completed undergraduate school, but I became pregnant and as a young mother, I remained at home with my daughter for her first year. On her first birthday, the two of us moved in with my parents so that I could enroll in a nearby university where I attended graduate school to study American History.

While there, I began my first work in women's studies. I was a graduate assistant in the history department, and was assigned to assist a professor in women's studies. I helped coordinate one of the first women's studies symposiums in the state, and for my thesis, I conducted a study in oral history that documented the 1973 defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in the state legislature.

My life in graduate school was very disciplined. I biked my daughter to day care, then to campus for classes and work; home for supper and our play time together; then intensive reading and study from my daughter's bedtime until my bedtime. Once again, I attended school year-round to complete my Master's degree in one year.

I then began work in the education division of a historic restoration, where I published my first article in women's history (Riggsbee, 1976). Using primary sources, I wrote the story of Rosina Biefel, the first woman in the Moravian congregation to say "No" to church elders in the selection of her mate.

My husband, who had rejoined my daughter and I, was transferred to work on the Atlantic coast, so we moved there and I taught at a local university. I was proud of designing

and teaching the first course ever offered in women's history at this university. I planned to return to graduate school to pursue a Ph.D. in history but instead my failing marriage ended in divorce and I became self-sufficient with a young daughter. I moved back to my hometown once again, and once again, became a history teacher.

Years later I remarried and had a second family of two more children. When my youngest daughter was four, I began to feel trapped in the teaching profession where I had been for well over a decade. I looked for opportunities outside the classroom and in 1990, I began work as an educational consultant at the State Education Agency.

In 1999, I began graduate studies at North Carolina State University. An opportunity to travel and work abroad interrupted my studies but provided me with much-needed insight for the current study. In Europe, I worked as a liaison for school improvement for thirteen American schools. I was a part of a rigid hierarchical structure within the education division of the Department of Defense. I was struck immediately by the differences between that agency and the State Education Agency where I had previously worked.

While in Europe, I witnessed highly impersonal managers and several instances of outright bullying by the educational leaders. The personnel director in the district office resigned under pressure from the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent. On the morning of his departure, he sent an open letter (R. Nelson, personal communication, May 18, 2001) to his supervisors, which he forwarded to the district and school staff:

Good Morning R and L!

As I depart for my new assignment, and reflect on the last few months of our association, I have concluded that the two of you were placed here solely for the purpose of serving as bad examples.



My observations and experiences within this educational structure led me to focus on educational leadership in my studies.

In the fall of 2002, upon my return to the educational leadership program, I conducted a pilot study in educational leadership by shadowing an educational leader at a State Education Agency. Midway through the semester, the leader whom I shadowed was promoted. This was serendipitous for me, as I was now able to observe her transition to a new role. I kept a journal of my activities and observations during the course of the semester and noted reflections on her leadership style and skills. At the end of the study, I formulated simple questions based on three areas of interest:

- 1) Superficialities of leadership, like appearance and dress;
- 2) Influences of birth family and upbringing on leadership values, childhood environment and circumstance, and role models, and
- 3) Impact of former experience as a teacher and school administrator on current leadership style and role.

The leader I shadowed agreed to an informal interview and we discussed these questions. This was the germination of the idea for this study. I wanted to pursue a life history approach to a study in educational leadership. I began, much as researchers Biklen and Bogdan (1998) describe, by falling into it. I did not decide on the type of subject I wanted to interview and search for an example. Rather, I met a person whom I considered a good subject and decided to pursue this approach.

Schram (2003) argued that it is inevitable that a researcher's presence in a setting has implications for what takes place and how events are given meaning. This meant that in my case, being in a familiar setting and interacting with people I knew would not necessarily

lead to a credible account. But my years in education and experience as a woman did lend authority to my research. My fifteen years as a classroom teacher and a decade at a State Education Agency provided a vantage point or, to use Haraway's (1991) phrase, a view from somewhere, that enabled and fueled my research. My own life history, encompassing experiences as the eldest girl child of a strong father; as a young woman with a strong determination to achieve; as a twice-married and twice-divorced mother of three children, provides a well from which to draw considerable insight into feminist issues that frame this study.

#### *Research Setting*

The staff of the State Education Agency that is the setting for this study carries out the mandates and policies of the State Board of Education, whose mission is supervising and administering public schools and funds supporting them. The State Agency staff writes curriculum, sets academic standards, classifies pupils, monitors nutrition, warehouses textbooks, oversees school business affairs, implements school reform, licenses teachers and holds every public school in the state accountable for student performance and achievement.

The State Education Agency is an influential force operating within the broad political context of public education in the state, and is led by a Chief State School Officer. This Officer, elected by the voters in the state, is a member of the Governor's advisory committee and serves as the chief state school officer. He appoints a deputy to serve as a second in command at the agency. The agency had 425 staff members serving in positions ranging from clerical assistants to associate superintendents at the outset of this study.

## Ethics

There are power issues to consider when framing a research study in feminist theory.

Wolf (1996) describes three such issues that may impact a study like this one:

- 1) Inequalities inherent in the positionality of the research;
- 2) Possible exploitation of the researched by the researcher; and
- 3) The power of writing and representing.

The most central dilemma for contemporary feminists in fieldwork, from which other contradictions are derived, is power and the unequal hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated, created, and re-created during and after field research (p. 2).

Inequalities may be created by positionality, typically when a researcher is “studying down” (Wolf, 1996, p. ix). In my case, I studied women who were in positions of greater power than I, so I was studying up. I interviewed women who held positions higher (having managerial authority) than my own at a State Education Agency. It is possible, therefore, that my study of these women may be construed to be deferential. As researcher, I was careful to treat no participant with undue deference.

I have been at the agency for over a decade, and I am either nearly the same age or older than the participants. My age and tenure at the agency mitigated the power imbalance. I chose a career path at a State Education Agency that deliberately avoided management positions, which reflected my passion for independence and aversion to hierarchical power. I do not believe that my study was considered sycophantic because I was in a position of relative powerlessness. I was an insider working from within, and I had established

credibility. In this study I worked with participants who were superiors in rank but who nevertheless respected my purpose in conducting this study.

The power exerted during the research process, between the researcher and the researched, relates to exploitation, which may occur when the fieldworker uses her advantage to gain her goals at a real cost to the women she is studying (Wolf, 1996). I am unaware of any degree of exploitation that occurred in this study. I maintained confidentiality and anonymity in my individual contacts with the women in this study; I corresponded by email, in person, and through telephone calls. I did not create a group list in my electronic address book, so that each correspondent was notified independently of the others. I am unaware that any participant knows others who participated. I have disclosed no one's identity; pseudonyms were used throughout the field notes and interview transcriptions.

I disclosed my desire for extensive and candid interviews to each of the five potential participants (see Appendix A). When each agreed, I sent a subsequent follow-up, where I indicated a need to know their ages so that I could understand the historical context of their lives. I also posed another question: "Are you sure you want to do this?" The five participants agreed to disclose their ages and to fully participate in the study.

The five were willing and eager to tell their stories. By telling them they agreed to share their histories using masked identities. Even though their names were not used, it is possible that a reader could guess their true identity. I presented the participants with this possibility and they remained willing to share their histories.

I intended for this study to be conducted with and for the women who are its subject, a concept applauded by feminists, though Wolf (1996) maintained it is difficult. She argued that this is not often done without "challenging the structure of academia: how products are

judged acceptable and by whom, how progress is viewed, how 'theory' is understood, how Ph.D.s are awarded, how tenure is granted, and how women's studies is regarded" (p. 3). To this end, however, I offered participants locations of their own choosing for the interviews. I extended my home, my deck to be specific, as an informal, relaxed setting for the interviews. Other suggestions included their offices or a nearby restaurant or coffee shop (see Appendix B). The interviews were conducted on my back deck, participants' offices, and in a quiet restaurant.

Phoenix (1994) discussed the emotional dynamics of the relationship between the researcher and researched:

Firstly, the establishing of friendly relations and the willingness of the researcher to give of herself by answering any questions the respondent poses can create a situation of easy intimacy which feels (and perhaps is) less exploitative and more equally balanced in power terms. Secondly, and more instrumentally, rapport established in the interview situation may well have a direct impact on how forthcoming respondents are and hence the quantity (if not the quality) of the data collected. (p. 50)

I expressed my gratitude to each participant in this study through a written thank-you note and a small gift. In one instance I did not provide a gift because I treated the participant to dinner at the restaurant where we conducted the interview.

I was a full participant in this study. Marshall and Rossman (1999) explained participant-ness as a spectrum: "at one extreme is the full participant, who goes about ordinary life in a role or set of roles constructed in the setting. At the other is the complete observer, who engages not at all in social interaction and may even shun involvement." (p. 79).

If I were to place myself as researcher on a spectrum of participant-ness in this study of life histories, it would be toward immersion (see Figure 3.).



*Figure 3.* Participant-ness of researcher.

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Wolf (1996) described the third power issue as that of writing and representing. Glesne (1999) reminded the researcher that the “life as told is a re-presentation; the life and the telling are not the same thing” (p. 178). My background in history helped in this research. I was aware throughout this study that I might misrepresent or misinterpret the voice of a participant; however, it was my intent to adhere as closely as possible to the stories presented in the participants’ telling. I sent the interview guide to participants early in the study; I sent them a reminder with the guide attached several days prior to the interviews. Through the course of the interviews and the decoding of the transcripts, I never lost sight of the possibility that participants told me what they wanted me to know.

Bloom (1998) stated:

We must recall that people are invested in maintaining particular identities and forms of cohesion of ‘the self,’ . . . we may approach participants with an empathetic heart and open mind, we must also approach the analysis of narratives with a somewhat skeptical or at least, un-idealistic eye,

remembering that narratives never are able to represent either an absolute truth or a lived experience (p. 146).

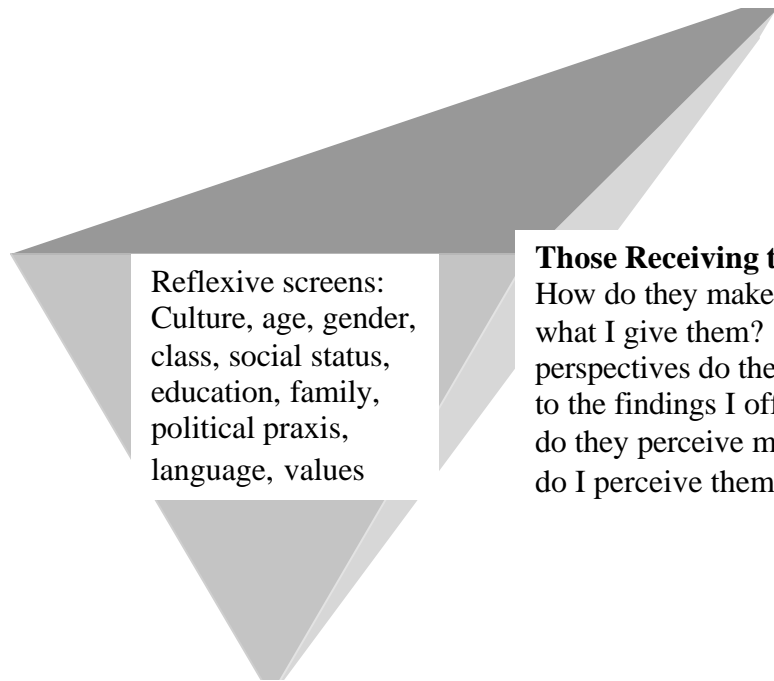
In order to conduct proper research and analyses I maintained a pragmatic ear to the voices of these five women. I was keenly aware of the interpretive implications that Maynard and Purvis (1994) described:

Feminists have to accept that there is no technique of analysis or methodological logic that can neutralize the social nature of interpretation. Rather as Holland and Ramazanoglu suggest, feminist researchers can only try to explain the grounds on which selective interpretations have been made by making explicit the process of decision-making which produces the interpretation, and the logic of the method on which these decisions are based. This entails acknowledging complexity and contradiction which may be beyond the interpreter's experience, and recognizing the possibility of silences and absences in their data. (p. 7).

### Validity

Merriam (1998) wrote that in order to have an effect, research studies “need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, educators, and other researchers” (p. 199). Merriam's question, “Do the findings ring true?” served as a mantra in conducting this research. This question reached to the heart of validity. In addition, I used Patton's (2002) concept of triangulated reflexivity to determine the degree to which the findings rang true. Patton (2002) described the reflexive process as a strategy whereby data are triangulated through the screens of culture, age, gender, class, social status, education, family, political praxis, language, and values. His diagram illustrating reflexive inquiry is shown in Figure 4.

**Those Studied:**  
How do they know what they know? What shapes and has shaped their worldview? How do they perceive me? Why? How do I know? How do I perceive them?



**Those Receiving the study:**  
How do they make sense of what I give them? What perspectives do they bring to the findings I offer? How do they perceive me? How do I perceive them?

**Myself:**  
What do I know?  
How do I know what I know?  
What shapes and has shaped my perspective?  
What do I do with what I have found?

*Figure 4.* Patton's (2002) reflexive questions and triangulated inquiry.

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I practiced reflexivity throughout this study; seldom were the participants and their stories far from my mind. I often asked myself yet one more question from Patton's (2002) schema. I was aware too, of differences between my reflexive screen and those of the women in the study. This process was akin to what Wolf (1996) called "knowledge creation" (p. 3), and she cautioned feminist researchers against maintaining too much control over this process. In this study, participants exerted control over creation of their own knowledge. When I listened to transcriptions of the early interviews, and heard my own voice interjecting questions, comments or affirmations that interrupted the flow of their stories, I learned to be silent and listen.

Merriam (1998) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed validity in terms of human beings constructing their reality defined. Merriam (1998) concluded that because humans, not instruments, collect and analyze the data in qualitative research, they actually get closer to reality. It was my goal throughout this study to try to get as close to the reality depicted by the women leaders as possible.

#### *Generalizability*

Donmoyer (1990) pointed out that the empirical research community clearly defined the procedures for formulating generalizability, and he and others agreed that the traditional procedures for assuring generalizability were not appropriate to research such as that conducted in this study.

Merriam (1998) asked: "How can you generalize from a small, nonrandom sample?" (p. 202) In her discussion, she offers a reconceptualization of generalizability, using a naturalistic theory of "drawing on tacit knowledge, intuition, and personal experience" to look for patterns that explain experience as well as events (p. 211).

Donmoyer's (1990) schema theory is a similar reconceptualization. Using it, one could explain how a reader of this study would construct knowledge of the vicarious experiences presented by the women leaders. The reader would either assimilate these into her cognitive structure, or if the experiences were new or different, she would accommodate them. After assimilation and accommodation, the reader would have cognition of these women's experiences that is both integrated and differentiated. Further, because my research is framed within feminism, the reader may be able to see these five diverse experiences through the lens of feminist theory. Donmoyer (1990) contended that such studies added "depth and dimension to theoretical understanding," and "nuance and subtlety to the ideal-typical perspective of theory" (p. 195). This meshes well with Haraway's (1991) view from some place, which rests on the particulars of positionality and location to arrive at partial truth. As stated earlier in the chapter, this theoretical approach forms the backdrop for this study.

Merriam (1998) made clear that regardless of the concept used to reform generalizability, the researcher could employ certain strategies to safeguard her passage through the treacherous waters of external validation. Among those were rich, thick description, typicality and the use of several cases and situations that maximize diversity. I incorporated these strategies into each step of the research process.

#### Data Collection

Informally, data collection of theories and observations of leadership began in the spring of 2000 while I was still in Europe, observing leader behaviors in the Brussels district office. While there, I conducted an independent study that reviewed leadership literature and asked pertinent questions about leaders' handling of critical situations. Upon my return to

the United States, I enrolled in an internship study where I shadowed and observed a leader at the State Education Agency.

Formal data collection for this study began in the spring of 2002. I contacted each prospective participant initially through email and relied on this communication tool as my primary method for contact throughout the course of the study. I printed and archived each email communication to and from the participants. Data collection included:

1. Five formal extended interviews;
2. Multiple informal follow-ups (conversations, questions, probes, interactions);
3. Observations (staff meetings; State Board of Education Meetings; Board review meetings), and
4. Field journal notes.

At the outset of this study I shared my research goals, my approach and my feminist leanings with each of the participants in a cover story, using comments like “I am very interested in how women break the glass ceiling” (see Appendix A). I disclosed a hunch about how childhood or adolescent challenges may prepare one for later roles as leaders, and asked each of the participants if she were willing to participate in an extensive interview about her life history and her leadership. I asked that each be candid. In a follow-up communication I presented my preliminary categories for the life histories as chunks of data on childhood, schooling, relationships, career, and pivotal events (see Appendix B). I invited each participant to choose her preference of interview settings.

I asked them for time to conduct an initial lengthy interview with shorter follow-ups as necessary. I also observed the participants in their organizational settings, collected any

written responses to the interview guide that they wished to provide; and I collected and analyzed their self-reports from a leadership attributes inventory.

I kept a daily journal of field notes where I recorded notes from observations of the participants in various settings within the agency, ranging from informal staff meetings to State Board of Education meetings. I took notes during participants' presentations and I also noted memos to myself. These memos noted research angles I thought about pursuing, or pertinent notes from literature I was reading at the time. At other times, I jotted down ideas for preliminary interview questions, or examples of reflexive thoughts.

I kept in mind the advice of Marshall and Rossman (1999), and from the outset I was mindful that "the abundance of data collected in a life history should be managed and reduced in some preliminary way before analytic headway can be made" (p. 122). Typically, in the initial interview, which varied in length from two to four hours, the participants told their life stories, guided by the interview probes (see Appendix C) I had shared with them prior to the interview. Some of the participants told their stories irrespective of the order of questions on the guide, but similar data were collected from all the participants. Sometimes the story they shared addressed a question on the interview guide that they may have overlooked. Some addressed current goals, opportunities and obstacles they had encountered, and their early career when they responded to the first question related to their journey.

I taped all interviews, transcribed the tapes verbatim, and gave the participants copies for their review and feedback. They returned the transcripts to me with minor corrections or comments added for clarity. After completing the interviews, and making minor corrections to the transcripts, I compiled a data notebook.

To learn more about their self perceptions of their own leadership, I asked the women to self-rate their leadership attributes on the Leadership Attributes Inventory developed by Johansen, Moss, and Preskill, in 1989 (see Appendix D). This inventory is composed of 37 attributes that are highly correlated to effective leadership (Johansen and Moss, 1991). The creators of this inventory maintained that leadership attributes were much more stable across situations and over time than specific leadership behaviors were. They believed that these attributes acted as “predispositions, facilitators, and constraints which predispose and shape behaviors in consistent ways” (Johansen and Moss, 1991, p. 8). They further contended that certain attributes, if possessed in adequate amounts, would increase the likelihood that desirable leadership behaviors would occur in a wide variety of situations. At the outset, I thought that using the instrument would be illuminating and that the results may inform the study. As it turned out, I chose not to pursue statistical analyses of the results because the sample of five was so small. The results from the self-rating instrument and what I chose to do with it are explained in greater detail in Chapter Four.

### Data Analysis

Life history analysis is similar to narrative analysis, in that the participants are revealing their life stories through words. As researcher, woman in her fifties, fellow educator, and co-worker, I analyzed the life histories of the five women leaders presented in this study. I analyzed their stories from an ideological perspective embodied in feminist theory using Haraway’s (1991) positionality. I looked for similarities and differences in the life histories; I tried to find patterns that pointed to a finding, and generally, I searched the data for clues to reveal information about how these women came to be leaders in education.

At the outset of this study I reflected on possible categories of data that I would collect. In my interview guide, the probes could be arranged into certain categories. The tentative general categories of data that I anticipated were 1) Childhood, 2) Schooling, 3) Relationships, 4) Career, and 5) Pivotal events.

Beaty, Funk, Pankake, and Schroth's (2003) proposal for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (2003) described a study of women leaders' resiliency that used categories similar to the ones I had chosen. Their study surveyed women specifically about "vital experiences in their development, about turning points in their lives, and about what role failure or adversity had played in their lives" (p. 3). Three major ages and stages of life periods were identified: pre-school through high school, early career choice and work experiences, and early leadership experiences. These closely paralleled the categories that I tentatively created. This same proposal identified "common elements of influence: family, teachers, and mentors and spiritual or religious beliefs" (p. 3). Again, these elements aligned nicely with the primary areas of interest that I had indicated in my cover story to the participants, where I explained that I would be gathering data on the experiences and values from their early life, i.e., childhood, and their formative years (see Appendix A).

I considered these categories to be what Constat (1992) would call temporal in the early stages of the research, but as the study progressed, these categories did not diminish in relevance. During the data collection, iterative categories, such as "Segregated Schools," emerged as well. Much as Guba and Lincoln (1981) described, frequency, or the number of times something is mentioned in the data, became an important guideline in developing

categories. Credibility with audience, uniqueness and “areas of inquiry not otherwise recognized” were also criteria used in developing categories (p. 95).

I assigned data to categories as soon as the collection process began. As Merriam (1998) described, “category construction begins with reading the first interview transcript, the first set of field notes, the first document collected in the study” (p. 181).

The analysis began as soon as data were collected. I compiled a data notebook, and divided it into six chapters, one devoted to each participant and one for the leadership self-report. I coded the contents of field notes from observations and interview transcriptions. Certain themes were apparent in the first interview, and I noted these in memos to myself. Even though I knew the general categories that I was looking for at the outset of the research, I was, as Merriam (1998) described, one who “does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like”(p.162). I followed her guidelines for analyzing data as I proceeded through the collection process in order to avoid unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming data, and aiming for data that were “parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 162). I analyzed data using the guidelines that Merriam (1998) presented (examples of how I used them are provided in parentheses):

1. Make decisions that narrow the study. (I started with the broad topic of educational leadership, then narrowed it to women in educational leadership, then to women who were leaders at a State Educational Agency.)
2. Clarify the type of study I want to conduct. (I chose a qualitative study, using a life history approach.)

3. Develop analytic questions to guide my work (How was it that these diverse women came to be where they are? How did gender, class and race affect their journeys?)
4. Pursue specific leads based on previously collected data. (My pilot study prompted my desire to know more about the influence of families on young girls.)
5. Think critically about what I see. (There are only men pictured on the wall of honor in the Chief State School Officer's office. There has never been a female state superintendent. Why?)
6. Write memos to myself to reflect on emerging issues. (Memo to myself on March 05, 2003: Women know women--women know how other women can shape and mold educational programs in a feminine model. This could apply to teacher education, curriculum and instruction, special programs, school reform. This can be a reason why such a study is important: we can learn from these examples! We can listen to and heed women's voices!)
7. Elicit feedback and input on themes and issues from respondents.  
(Question posed to respondents for reflection: Do you believe there is a feminine leadership style?)
8. Explore the literature while analyzing the data (Reading Simon Baron-Cohen, The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain, 2003, while analyzing data).



9. Play with metaphors, analogies and concepts (Am I interested in a study of women's travel from one place to another, as in a journey, or the path they take? Am I interested in a study that records women's voices or am I interested in their vision; in seeing the world through their eyes?)
10. Develop graphic organizers. (Illustrating where I am in relation to the participants on a scale)

I became better at the analytical process as the study progressed. I looked for emergent themes as I analyzed data; writing memos to myself and listing themes as I proceeded from interview to interview. I saved several electronic versions of each transcription so that I could save a version coded with themes. I looked for negative instances to disprove my hunches or dispel hypotheses regarding tentative explanations (Merriam, 1998). In a few instances, I found them. I speculated, for example, that I might find women who reported strong fathers who influenced them to lead. In two cases, however, fathers were described as weak or diseased, and it was another relative, perhaps an aunt, or grandmother, who exerted influence.

Throughout this study, I continuously compared these women's life incidents and their remarks concerning them. I constantly compared incidents noted from interviews and observations with my own experience as a woman and as an educator. I compared each life history with each of the others. Gradually, striking themes began to emerge.

#### Summary

In this work, I chose a sample of five diverse women leaders, White, Black, and American Indian, who held positions of division director or higher in a State Education Agency. I explored the narratives of these women leaders' lives, using transcribed life

histories of women who work at a State Education Agency. I conducted a thorough literature review of life history research methodology prior to data collection and based my work on the principles of this methodology. I drew heavily from the works of Merriam (1998), Marshall and Rossman (1999), and Patton (2002) to guide data collection and analysis. I listened carefully and took notes while I tape recorded these women's stories. In analysis, I filtered the more than 180 pages of data from their transcribed stories through a feminist lens based on the theories of Donna Haraway (1991). Using what she calls positionality and partialities, I built a network of connections among these five lives. Merriam's (1998) assertion that valid findings are those that ring true to the reader guided my analysis, as did Patton's (2002) model of triangulated inquiry. I made every effort towards ensuring validity in this study. Wolf's (1996) discussion of power issues in feminist research provided the ethical considerations that were central to my method. I attempted to capture the similarities and differences in five leaders' life histories, categorizing my areas of inquiry into childhood; schooling; significant relationships; goals; pivotal life events, and leadership. My ultimate goal was to discover what was meaningful to them from their lives and how that may have contributed to their educational leadership.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This study is based upon extensive in-depth interviews with the participants. The interviews were loosely structured around an interview guide composed of eleven probes, or questions (see Appendix C). Each participant was allowed the flexibility to begin her story as she chose. Most of the participants began with the first question (age, comments on her present role, and perceptions of herself as leader). The second probe set the stage for the narrative of her life history, asking the participant to tell about her journey to where she was at the time of the interview. Remaining questions focused on childhood, schooling, perceptions of gender, class, and race, significant relationships, goals, careers, opportunities and obstacles, pivotal life events, and leadership.

The major findings are presented in this chapter, grouped under headings that capture the gist of the women's stories. In most instances, data from each participant are included under each heading. Subheadings were used as appropriate for better organization.

### The Women

This study focused on the personal histories of five women whose ages ranged from 45 to 60. Brenda and Jane, the youngest of the five, were the same age, and Karen was the oldest. Descriptive details are presented in Table 3.

All were born, raised, and educated in the American South, within the boundaries of three bordering states along the Atlantic seaboard. Their lives encompassed the decades of the fifties through the nineties in the United States. The era during which these women came of age was aptly described by Rebecca, when she commented on the changes she had witnessed during her college years:

When I went my freshman year, everybody dressed really preppy, with those little Villager dresses and colored shoes, and by the sophomore and junior years, everybody looked like total hippies. We danced to Beach music my freshman year and listened to the heavy metal my junior year. There were curfews my freshman year of 9:30 and 10:00 in a state university, and no boys in a dorm; and my junior year, there were no rules. Boys were in and out, and it was a revolutionary time to be in college.

Each woman was married. Brenda married for the first time only a few years ago. Karen and Barbara were married and divorced early in their careers; both later remarried, Barbara during the course of this study.

Karen was the mother of two adult daughters; Jane was the mother of two young adolescents; Rebecca was the mother of adult son and daughter, and Brenda had an adult stepson.

Karen was Black, and Jane was an American Indian. Brenda, Barbara, and Rebecca were White.

Table 3

*Participant Profiles*

Participant	Age	Race	Marital Status	Children
Brenda	45	White	Married	None
Karen	60	Black	Married, Divorced, Remarried	Two
Jane	45	Am. Indian	Married	Two
Barbara	55	White	Married, Divorced, Remarried	None
Rebecca	54	White	Married	Two

## Their Roles

I have worked at the State Education Agency for nearly 12 years, and I recognized all of the participants in this study as leaders in education at the state level. Each day, these women helped shape educational practice and policy in the southeastern State they called home. As leaders in a State Education Agency, what they did and how they did it affected teachers, students, and parents statewide.

In this study, I focused on their life stories in an effort to discover what was unique and similar in their journeys to leadership. I collected data that would point to findings about how these women were reared, what values and attitudes they acquired in childhood, and how factors like gender, class, and race affected them along the way.

In an effort to preserve the anonymity of the participants, each woman will not be identified by her role in the State Education Agency. However, this brief description will provide a summary of the individuals and their experience: one woman had worked at the State Agency for 18 years; she began her career as a manager in a school district office at the age of 24. Another began as a classroom teacher, moved reluctantly into local school administration, then to school district administration, and finally to prominent leadership in the State Education Agency. One was a former academician and a relative newcomer to the State Agency staff. Another participant had worked at the State Agency for 27 years, having come there directly from the classroom. And another was a classroom teacher and instructional specialist before joining the Agency staff more than a decade ago.

## Their Stories

Brenda told her story very matter-of-factly in her office early one morning before work began. She spoke to me in soft, hushed tones, barely above a whisper. She was well-

prepared, having read the interview guide thoroughly. She had prepared written responses to each item, lest we run short on time during the interview. We sat at a conference table; her demeanor was frank, open and honest.

Karen came to my house, sat on my deck during an early spring evening after work and told her story. Birds singing and humming lawn mowers created background noise on the tape of her interview. She told her story jubilantly, and punctuated it with her laughter. She became emotional during certain parts of her tale, her eyes welling with tears. She proclaimed her story, as though she were preaching from the mountaintop, from her first line: “It all began when I was six years old.”

Jane was a bit late and breathless when she arrived in her office for an extended midday lunch hour interview. We sat at a polished round conference table that was stacked high with print materials that reflected the various projects she had underway. Once she focused her attention on the interview, she was an eager story-teller, expressing a lot of emotion. Her story flowed so naturally, that I wondered if she had rehearsed telling it. Jane was very emotional when she recalled memories of her sister and brother. Her eyes became teary and her voice cracked.

Barbara met me in a quiet upscale restaurant after work. I arranged for a private room for the two of us, where we shared appetizers and dinner during the evening. She referred to a paper copy of the interview guide during her story. Barbara spoke in a sweet Southern drawl characteristic of inhabitants of the eastern Appalachians; she was a mirthful storyteller.

Rebecca’s interview was the most difficult for me to schedule, due to time and work constraints, and her busy schedule. When we finally settled on a convenient time, we met in

her office at midday. She sat behind an impressive walnut desk with the skyline of the state's capital city as a backdrop. She had read the interview guide and referred to it throughout the interview, addressing each item precisely and providing answers that were clear and to the point. Perhaps because she had allotted a certain amount of time for the interview, Rebecca made few extraneous remarks. Her interview was the easiest to transcribe, partially because by this time I had learned not to interject my own comments.

### *Childhood*

Each woman grew up in the South, either in a small town or rural hamlet. Each participant spoke of her childhood with nostalgia, recalling mostly positive, pleasant memories of seemingly simpler times. Two of the women talked about traumatic events that are described in a subsequent passage. No one in the study disclosed an unhappy childhood. For the most part, their early years sounded idyllic in the retelling.

Of the five, two were firstborns of both parents, and one was the firstborn of her father, but middle child of her mother. One was the youngest, and two were middle children. Family size ranged from two to eight children, so each had siblings, although one had a sibling 14 years younger than she. One participant's mother was a young widow with four children when she married the participant's father, so there were half-siblings. In every case, the participants' parents remained married to each other; one woman's mother died early in her childhood, and her father never remarried. In her case, an aunt moved in to care for the children, so there were two adult parent figures in the home.

Parent occupations included textile mill worker, foreman at a brickyard, brick mason, retired businessman, wholesale trucker, home day-care provider, gutter-hanger, and teacher. Three of the women had mothers who worked.

### *Idyllic Memories.*

All the women in this study, including Karen and Barbara, remembered childhoods that were carefree and idyllic in their reconstructions. Barbara described herself as a young tomboy roaming the rolling hills of her Appalachian hamlet. Brenda described a small town life of fish fries and lazy summer evenings on cool front porches. Jane remembered routine Sunday outings to visit cousins in the country, and berry-picking by the roadside. They depicted scenes of simple, uncomplicated lives, not unlike Hollywood versions of growing up in the late fifties and early sixties. Barbara made up stories as she spent carefree summer days playing on her grandparents' farm: She took the cushions from an old davenport and pretended she was sailing a ship.

### *Early Trauma.*

Two of the women dealt with significant trauma in childhood: the loss of a parent and growing up with an alcoholic parent. Each told the story of how these factors influenced their lives. In each case, the women gained something positive through the experience. Each woman believed she came through the trauma with a greater determination to succeed.

Karen's loss came early in her life when she was seven years old. She awoke one morning to find a cousin at her house, sitting with her and her three younger siblings. He explained that he was there because her mother had gone to the hospital to have a baby. Karen remarked that she was so naïve at seven, she didn't even know that her mother was expecting a baby. Her Dad returned home later that day to announce the birth of a sister. Karen spoke of the bittersweet days after her sister's birth:

I remember my Daddy going every day to visit my mother, and he would take us, but we were too young to go into the hospital. So he parked his car where



he could see us from the hospital window; when he would get up there, he would wave at us. I think about him trusting us in the car, he knew we weren't going to bother anything; we didn't fight with each other, we just talked and played till he came out.

And then I remember that Friday night. My Daddy came home, and it was about two or three o'clock in the morning, and [he] woke me up. "Karen," he said, "Your mother is dead." I didn't know what to say, I didn't know what that meant for me. I was just stunned, I don't know if I went back to sleep, I was just stunned. I was the oldest child. I don't think he told the others until the next morning. Then my father just sat down, and I've never seen him look so distraught; he was in his 30s and he was left with five children. And that's the only time I remember seeing my Daddy actually just cry, off and on those days. My aunt who lived next door had a large house, and so they brought my mother, my mother's body, to that house, and I remember she had on this pink suit. I remember just looking and I still couldn't comprehend what all this meant for me.

What it meant for Karen was being raised by her father and her father's sister who gave up a promising career in New York to come South and raise her brother's five children. The young widower, his sister, and other relatives maintained a strong family bond and extensive support for the five motherless children. Karen's aunt remained with her family for 21 years, until Karen's youngest sister was a sophomore in college.

Karen confessed that she often wonders how her life would have been different had her mother lived:

My Daddy built a beautiful home for us, but he didn't maintain it. He didn't have the drive, I guess. He didn't have a lady behind him saying "You need to be doing this [or] that." So he didn't keep it up like I thought he should. And little things, I didn't think he paid attention to it, he just worked and came home, and wanted us to be good in school and was always there for us, though [he was] kind of strict, because he had all these girls.

Education was absolutely the most important thing we could do, and he supported that, he sent us to school, he got whatever we needed. And if a teacher said we needed to do a particular thing, he was always behind that particular thing.

Karen explained that her father constantly told his children, from the time they could remember, "When you go to college . . . ." The idea of college was so instilled in Karen that she would never have thought of just getting a job when she finished high school. For Karen, the early loss of her mother meant that her father would exert a strong influence on her life: Education was foremost among her aspirations.

Barbara experienced a different trauma. She was the daughter of an alcoholic father. Barbara, although she recalled many happy memories from her childhood, spoke of the inevitable pain and disappointment created by her father's illness.

The only unpleasant thing in my childhood that I remember is when my Daddy would get drunk on weekends. My Daddy was very loving and I felt as if my Daddy loved me so much and that he just thought I was the most wonderful person in this world. It was very disappointing to me that he would get drunk and I just couldn't understand that.

My Daddy was a hard worker and I felt very loved as a child. But I had to become an adult before I could forgive my Daddy for what I considered wasting his life. I thought my Daddy was very smart, and I saw him wasting his life, and I just could not understand why he could not quit drinking. I just could not understand.

It took a long time to forgive him for his disease. Emotionally, now, I still consider it a weakness. Intellectually I know it's a disease, but even today it's emotional.

Barbara also dealt with the unsettling confusion she experienced over her mother's role:

I guess I also had some anger towards my mother because I looked at her to do something about it, and she did nothing. Now I realize that there's not a lot she could have done.

My mother was an enabler to my Daddy's alcoholism. [She] is a follower, not a leader. She loved Daddy so much that she would never balk at him.

At an early age, middle school, I guess, it was almost as if I felt like the parent, it was not as though I could verbalize this [at the time], but I became the parent. I can remember giving Mama advice.

Barbara internalized a desire to rise beyond what she saw and not to repeat mistakes she felt her mother had made. Her early trauma led to a determination to succeed as an independent woman:

I could see my mother taking care of my Dad. I saw how emotionally dependent she was on him, and I thought, not for me. That had a major

influence on my wanting to be independent and on my having initiative. It also had an influence on my wanting to work hard.

*Literacy.*

One of the first commonalities among these women that I noted was their love of literacy. Books, reading, and recitation were important in their young lives. Brenda credited the Bookmobile with saving her young life. The Bookmobile, a rural institution, was a library on wheels: a bus filled with a fresh supply of books from the main library in town that made routine stops at schools and communities throughout the countryside . Brenda said,

That was the most important day when the Bookmobile came. You know, stacks and stacks of books every week. I used to do my friends' book reports because I LOVED to read and I was a decent writer and they didn't like to do that. I read all the time and my mother read.

I hear people say "Do what you want your children to do." My mother was a voracious reader. My grandmother was.

Jane had no bookmobile, but her resourceful mother made special arrangements for Jane to have access to books. Jane loved reading and wanted to have access to a library during the summer. Jane remembered:

I read all the time. Still do. I read everything and anything. I would ride my bike to the library. My mother talked to the principal at the elementary school and this was before we had summer reading programs and what they would let me do is go and check out books. So I would ride my bike across town to that school library with my Dad's fishing-net bag; sling it over my shoulder, and put books in there. That helped me.

Karen spoke of how she learned hymns, and Bible verses, particularly Psalms, in school. She also recalled participating in an early performance of a skit that was broadcast on the local radio station:

I remember my whole family getting into a car, because the radio in the house was broken, and we sat in a car, and listened to that little performance, and I was just so excited to hear my voice on the radio. And they were too, so it was real exciting. It was a dramatic kind of thing.

### *Schooling*

The women in the study were not ambivalent toward school. They fell into two groups: they either loved school or hated it. Three of the participants, Karen, Jane and Barbara, loved school and thrived in the school environment. They were very successful there, and two of them, Karen and Jane, skipped a grade because they were such high achievers. This is in keeping with a finding by Rimm (1999) who studied a sample of 1,000 girls who became successful women. She found that a quarter of the women in her study skipped subjects and that 15% skipped grades during elementary and high school.

When Karen began her life story, she started by saying that her journey began when she was six years old. Attending school was central to her life, and her first days there were spent in a segregated two-room schoolhouse deep in the rural South.

I began school at the age of six, I did not attend kindergarten. I went to a two-room school that had first, second, and third grade in one room; fourth, fifth, and sixth in another room. I remember very well, the lady who taught me

lived not too far from me and was in my family by marriage. But because she was my teacher, I always called her “Mrs. Smith.”

I remember very vividly that I could finish my lesson very quickly. She always gave me somebody to tutor. She made sure I did my lessons, then she would say, “I want you to help so and so.” So I did that often. At the end of the first grade, she told my father, “I’m going to put Karen in the third grade because she has already mastered second grade and she helps other children.”

Jane’s memories of school were closely allied to her pride in being an American Indian. She had a strong loyalty to her father, who encouraged her to do well in whatever she attempted:

I don’t know how much of it was personality, or how much I just soaked in from him [her father]. I soaked in every lesson like that that he wanted to teach. I never made less than an “A” in school. I never missed a day of school my entire life. If I were sick, I went until 12:00 [p.m.]. I graduated from high school after eleventh grade, skipped the whole last year. I never missed a day. Wouldn’t have dreamed of missing a day of school; wouldn’t have dreamed of making less than an “A”.

Barbara was very independent and self-motivated from an early age. A goal-setter for life, she set her own educational goals each year, and one year, her goal was not to miss a day of school:

I would get myself up in the morning because my Mama and Daddy would leave [for work] before I did. I would get myself up, dress myself and get to

the bus. I didn't even have an alarm clock. That was the year that I did not want to miss a single day of school. I went to school sick. My third grade goal was not to miss a single spelling word the entire year. If I did not, Mama and Daddy would buy me a bike. It seems as if I had a goal every year.

When I was in the fourth grade, I decided I would learn all the capitals of the States. When I was in the fifth grade, I decided I was going to read the most books in my class. In the seventh grade I decided I was going to memorize the first three or four paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence. I didn't have any rhyme or reason for why I would have a necessary goal; it was just something that interested me.

It is interesting to note how this goal-setting behavior characterized her early years in school and continued throughout her career.

Like Karen and Jane, Barbara excelled at school. She fondly remembered the teacher in elementary school that made such a difference for her:

She wrote on my report card that I had great potential and I was an excellent student and that if I would continue to grow, I would have a bright future. I still have that report card. Actually, I have all my report cards. That was meaningful. As a child, I didn't know that I had potential. I made good grades, but I didn't consciously know that I could make good grades. "Mrs. A" and her husband took the male and female in her class who made the highest grades to the Oasis restaurant for dinner. I still remember that night. That had a great impression on me.

The other two participants, Brenda and Rebecca, confessed a strong dislike of school, despite the fact that they were successful there. Brenda and Rebecca held teachers in low esteem. Brenda's story of school could be summed up in one word: Boring.

It was so boring, from the beginning. I hated school. My teachers had to come get my brothers because I was crying, I didn't like school. Sit in one seat all day; plus, when I was at home, [I could] watch TV a while, go outside and play, do other stuff. That structure, I don't like that. Terrible teachers; [I had] a very poor English teacher.

Rebecca echoed many of the same sentiments about school. Her dislike, too, stemmed from her perception that the teachers weren't very good. Even though she grew up with a father who was a member of the local Board of Education and a mother who had been a teacher, Rebecca did not attend school enthusiastically.

I hated school, from beginning to end. I hated it, until I got to college. I used to cry every day; I used to throw up in primary school. And that's one reason I wanted to be a teacher. I thought, "Man, I can make it better for kids than this." It did not seem child-friendly to me. I was a good student; I was a teacher-pleaser, I did well. In high school, I really didn't get the point. I thought my teachers would be so excited when I came back after my first year of college to hear from me, because I was going to tell them how un-meaningful it [high school] was. Needless to say, their eyes just dropped.

Even though she hated school, Rebecca said that she was born to supervise teachers.

I was in teacher education from birth. I used to play school. We were always riding around looking at new schools. I have a brother and sister who did not



go into education so I don't know why it was just my thing. I taught Bible school, I taught church Sunday School, I was always teaching people. I went to college and I told my advisor that I wanted to be a supervisor to help teachers. Even at that age, I thought I had a vision of what teachers ought to be doing.

Because she felt so strongly about her vision of what teachers should be like and how they should teach, Rebecca's early career in education was focused on the goal of gaining a principalship. She spent time teaching in the classroom, however, and she insisted that:

Through it all, I had this vision of how it could be different, of how it could be better for children and all of those experiences have shaped the type of administrator that I am today, and the type of person I am when I interact with teachers.

#### *Segregated Schools.*

A report by The Commission on Closing the Achievement Gap (2001) in North Carolina suggested that modern schools may be able to learn something from taking a closer look at minority students' experiences in segregated schools. Each of the women in this study attended segregated schools, at least during the early years of their schooling. Karen attended Black schools; Jane attended an Indian school, and Barbara, Brenda and Rebecca attended White schools.

Karen enjoyed everything about her schooling from the age of six, when she began, to the age of sixteen, when she graduated. She told a particularly heartwarming "ugly duckling" tale of herself as a chubby, self-conscious middle-schooler who became the high school Queen:

I attended that school from seventh through twelfth grade, had a wonderful experience there. [There were] teachers who demanded a lot in behavior and in performance. I remember my seventh-grade math teacher made us learn the times tables up through 15, and we had to stand up and recite them.

I represent[ed] our school in the spelling bee, I was second to the last to be left standing, and I missed the word “cucumber.” I’ll always remember it; I wanted it to be “c-u-c-o-m.”

[The school’s population numbered] about a thousand, and it was all Black, the teachers were all Black, and principals, administrators, so I saw the Black band director, choral director, all of the teachers, advisers, all of those were Black. I had a good experience, and I joined the chorus, enjoyed that, and when I was a senior, I ran for Miss CJS. And I won! Sure did! [laughter]. They had a wonderful coronation for me, and a wonderful art student made this beautiful crown for me and I have pictures of that to this day.

I thought I was a little bit chubby, and had gotten teased about that, but as I went through high school, I grew taller, slimmed down, and it was so funny. This girl, I called her Little Hoodlum, because she was “just loud and wrong,” she liked me for some reason, and she went around, almost appointed herself to be my campaign manager. And kids were scared to say “No” to her, so that’s probably how I won.

Jane spoke of her memories of segregation from an American Indian perspective:

I grew up only knowing the world of American Indian and whatever that meant. And the schools were segregated. There were three different school

systems; [they] ran three different school buses. It was just something again that you were accustomed to. I can clearly remember waiting for the school bus, and I would know which one to get on, because I saw a bus coming, and I would know that was the White Bus, and I'd see another bus coming and I'd know that was the bus for the Black kids.

Jane's mother took her children to school and chose their teachers. She recalled:

My mother would go to the school, the first day of school, and we would all be behind her, and she would take us one by one to the door of the teacher she wanted us to have that year. We all had Ms. L. in first grade; most of us had Ms. B., in fifth grade, it was literally that way. Teachers would stay, for the most part in the school. I only had Indian teachers; I only had Indian principals. The races just were not mixed in the workforce or in the schools. So Mama would take us that first day and you know I had on the little dress, and the little socks and stuff. She would stand there until the teacher wrote the name down and then she would take the next child and go on.

Jane made a striking observation about the solidarity of race in her elementary school:

I can remember sitting in class [in elementary school] and taking the California Achievement Test and the teacher leading the class in filling out the identifying information. When it would say, "Race," everybody would put an "I" for Indian. I didn't think about that until many years later – that a teacher was able to stand in front of an entire class and say, "And everybody put an 'I.'" It wasn't any big deal because there was no comparison, really, outside of that community.

Jane was an eighth grader when the schools in her county were integrated. In some communities, she said, the Indians were “just as upset over integration as any other race.” In those areas, the Indians were saying “We have community schools here and it’s working really well.”

Barbara, like Jane, remembered seeing the segregated school buses: “The only time I saw Black people was on the school bus that passed our school on the way to a segregated school and I would be thinking as a child, ‘why aren’t they in our school?’”

Rebecca’s story about segregated schools was unique. Her father was on the local school board when racial integration of schools was proposed. She spoke compassionately about his plight:

Actually there were more people of color who came to our house begging him not to make them lose their schools. So I saw a very different side of this whole process. They would sit and cry, saying, ‘Please, don’t make us give up our schools.’ They did not want to come to the White schools in our community, and they felt like it was a real loss to their race, and that tore his heart out.

Brenda, one of the youngest participants, recalled wondering what all the fuss was about when the first Black student was enrolled in her school:

In third grade, we had our first Black student, and you know, I didn’t understand why she felt uncomfortable and why the other kids with me felt uncomfortable, because you know, I was around Black people all the time, I didn’t think there was anything strange about that.

### *Gender, Class and Race*

The women said that gender, race, and class were non-issues to them as children. Each woman in this study claimed that she came to a realization later than her childhood, either in adolescence or early adulthood, of the significance of gender, class, and race in her life.

It is important to recall that each participant grew up in a small town or rural area in the South, in the late fifties or early sixties. The popular media often portrays the South of this era as a place of political conservatism and racial strife. The women in this study, however, painted a childhood portrait free of strife associated with the uglier aspects of gender, class, or racial discrimination. They acknowledged, however, a growing awareness of differential treatment based on gender, class, and race as they grew older. In Jane's words, "As a child, I knew there was separation of stuff; it didn't weigh on my head or my heart until I became much older."

#### *Gender.*

Though no woman in the study expressed strongly feminist views, each addressed what it meant to be a girl growing up in the fifties and sixties.

The participants were aware of a double standard regarding how they were treated and what was expected of them. Karen mentioned that her father was very strict, because "he had all these girls." Rebecca, when she described her father, spoke of chivalry, which has historically been associated with Southern gentleman. Southern historians pointed out that certain Southern men and women emulated the ideals of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (Simkins, 1968). Rebecca grew up on a farm where her antebellum ancestors once lived, and described her father as chivalrous: "We were country people, but my father was a very chivalrous

person. When you came in, he always stood up, he took your coat, he poured your beverages, and he treated my mother royally.”

Brenda, in a somewhat similar vein, spoke of learning from her mother how to spoil men. “Spoiled my brothers, my mother and I did, [and] I always spoiled the bosses I’ve worked for; they may not look at it that way, but I always went out of my way, did their work, in a lot of cases, but that’s okay.” Brenda, in reflecting on where she learned the instinct and judgment necessary to be an incisive leader, said that her Dad was the “nicest person, but a dishrag, not a leader.” Brenda stressed that she liked men, but she was able to “recognize a lot of their weaknesses.” She claimed that most men with whom she had worked were “not as organized as women” and she believed that their “work ethic is not nearly as strong.” She had no doubt, however, that men “still are in power” and so “we have to get along with that.”

Jane’s father, on the other hand, taught her that in the future, her gender would make no difference. Jane recalls him saying, “You have to get an education, Jane, because it does not matter if you are female. Now, the day and time you’re living in, it will not matter if you’re female. It will not matter if you’re Indian. It will not matter if you’re poor. If you have an education, nobody ever will be able to take that from you.” Jane’s father, like Karen’s, stressed that success was tied to education. For Jane, the equation seemed fairly simple: “I was just going to do well. Partly out of a sense for me; partly out of a sense of knowing I had this situation that I was going to have to climb out of because if I didn’t, I couldn’t see what the future would hold.” Although Jane felt that for her, racial issues overshadowed gender issues, she wondered if it were not different for her older sister, Pat, born in 1947. This sister, the firstborn, took responsibility for the brood of eight children and

often served as a surrogate mother. Jane believed that she understood her sister's sacrifice and worried that her sister had never had the chance to make decisions in her own self-interest.

Barbara grew up in an extended family where a ritual of segregated seating for meals, based on gender, was still the norm. It is interesting to note that Barbara was able to bridge the gender segregation and eat at both tables; first with the men, and then with the women:

There were six seats at the men's table, and there were only five men. As a child, I always ate with the men, so I had the benefit of the conversation the men had, and then I would sit there with the women, so I was always at both tables.

Barbara claimed that she never thought about what girls could do or boys could do, and she had tremendous self-confidence that she credited to her father's doting and to being an only child for fourteen years. She said that she was "being brought up to think I could do just anything in the world was that my Daddy and my whole family treated me as if I were special. I don't know why. I was the only child. I was always around adults." Barbara had an "I'll show you" attitude, which she called "doing the dare thing." That was how she became a circus tightrope walker:

My grandmother had this big apple tree that had a fork in one of the branches, and I put this pole in that branch and I would pretend that I was in the circus as a tightrope walker, so I would practice hours and hours about how to walk that pole. So I would walk up the pole, then I'd walk down the pole; up the pole, and down the pole. So this distant cousin, M., came to Grandma's, and

he said, ‘I’ll bet you can’t walk that pole,’ so I walked the pole, and I said ‘I bet you can’t.’ And he couldn’t!

It was clear that Barbara had a keen determination to succeed at whatever she set out to accomplish. She grew up playing football with the boys in her neighborhood, and she admitted to being very competitive in sports, especially as she grew older, and especially when playing against men:

Competition for most of my life has been important. My competition has been against men and males, and not women. When I was in my early 20s and I learned how to play tennis, I always wanted to play with men because I saw them as a challenge to beat. It’s almost as if when playing with women I had to nurture the woman and say nice things like “That was a nice shot.” I didn’t have any of those emotions when I played with men. My attitude when I played with men, and in a sense this symbolizes the way I feel about men, is “Ha, ha, ha! I got you.”

*Class.*

The women in this study were, for the most part, unaware of different social classes as children. Each woman came from a family of hard-working rural or small town folk who lived simple lifestyles. Rebecca’s words captured well the sentiment that each woman expressed about their early perceptions of class: “As rural people and educator people, we didn’t have money, but I didn’t know that, I thought we were very, very wealthy.” Brenda wrote: “Class—nobody in [my hometown] had a whole lot.”

Another characteristic that may be associated with class consciousness and is perhaps a holdover from an older, more deferential, Southern society was an



emphasis on cleanliness and making a good presentation, particularly when you go into town. Rebecca recalled:

When you go to town, you clean up. You don't walk around with rollers in your hair. That was part of having pride in yourself. When my father died, the first thing I thought of that I could do for him was to take a shower and dress up. "When you show up, show up looking good." He would always say, "You only have one chance to make a first impression, and that is often the impression that people keep."

Jane remembered how happy she was, despite what she now knows was extreme poverty:

Resources were just too tight. We were extremely poor. I mean, looking back now, we lived in a house that was four rooms. My brother slept on the couch, and the girls all slept together. There was an extra bed in my parent's room. I was so happy. I don't remember ever going to bed hungry, [we ate] a lot of chicken and rice and stuff like that, but I don't remember ever being hungry. I know that I didn't have new clothes, and we didn't have a new car, and we didn't have a nice house, but we had a lot of respect in the community.

Brenda grew up in a small Southern town and as she tells it, "Class, that wasn't a big deal, nobody had much of anything. And yet, I played with people who lived in the trailer park, I played with people who later went to [a private girls' college]."

Barbara described the rural hamlet where she grew up as homogeneous. "People were like me. They didn't have more money, they didn't have less money, we were just in the same boat." She related, however, a revelation she had as a child when she visited the

home of a Black family. She realized they had less than she. “I remember being struck with how poor they were. In reality, our house looked better, but we were poor too.”

No participant expressed a sense of inferiority or even an awareness that they were, by recognized standards, poor. Barbara said, “I didn’t feel poor.” Jane echoed those sentiments when she talked about growing up with seven siblings in a four-room house. Her description of her young life reverberates with the strong emotion she felt of being loved and cared for, despite her family’s poverty. She said, “You shared everything, all the love.”

Karen walked over two miles to and from school each day in elementary school. Barbara said that students didn’t have cars at her high school. Karen did not own a car until she completed college and had her first teaching job. As she told it, her father stressed to her, “It is your job to go to school and earn good grades, it is my job to work and take care of you.”

Stereotyping existed, of course, and by the time most of these women had reached adolescence, they became aware of its effects. Barbara told her story of going to college with girls who stereotyped her as a hillbilly. But she discovered that she, too had stereotypes about girls living near Washington, D.C.:

They asked, “Do you have running water in your house?” They were very surprised, [by me, and] I was surprised when people from D.C. didn’t even know who the Secretary of the Interior, or Secretary of State was. I was shocked, so I did have a stereotype about people in that area. I recognized that they felt that because I had grown up where I did that I had had an inferior education. I talked differently. I used correct grammar, I had different pronunciations.

*Race.*

With race, as with gender, these women expressed few instances as children when they were aware of prejudice or discrimination. But by late adolescence, things had changed. These women came of age during the Civil Rights movement in the American South and even if they did not experience overt racial discrimination themselves, they had become aware of its existence by the time they finished college or started their careers.

Jane felt a keen pride, instilled in her from birth, at being an American Indian. She described her hometown, where American Indians were in the majority, as having two other, smaller, neighborhoods that were clearly identifiable as “White and Colored.” It was not until the semester before she graduated from high school that she felt the sting of racism. She was attending a high school that was not her own, but in another town, to take credits for summer school in order to graduate early. The principal of the school assumed she was attending summer school because she had failed, because she was Indian. She tells the story:

I was in class one day, in English class, and he called me to the door, and stood there in front of the room, and he said, “I understand from your teacher that you are actually a top-notch student.” I said, “Yes sir, I like school.”

And he said, “And you’re an Indian?” in front of the whole class. I thought to myself, “Okay, I’ve now gotten into another world.” I said, “Yes I am.”

Jane spoke at length about perceptions of American Indians and racial stereotyping. When she was a college student, professors remarked that she didn’t sound like she was from her hometown. She replied kindly that her father had traveled. All the while, she knew what they were really saying to her: “What they meant was that my grammar wasn’t horrible.”

She knew, too, that she had advantages because, as she put it, “I didn’t look particularly Indian. They knew I was Indian, but because I seemed a little bit different, quite frankly, faculty were willing to work with me.” This comment bears out Cox’s (1994) assertion that within phenotype groups there is an inverse relationship between the amount of physical distinctiveness from the majority group and career outcomes, i.e., non-Whites of lighter skin color fare better. Jane summed up her experience and what the experiences during this time were like for most of these women:

As a child, I knew there was separation of stuff; it didn’t weigh on my head or my heart until I became much older. I suppose even without really thinking that was part of the desire to achieve an education. By then, I was beginning to see, this is how you deal with stuff. You don’t go burn a building down, some people do. You don’t fight in the streets. What you do is, you become educated, and fight for women’s rights, for class equity, for racial equity.

Jane stressed the strong sense of racial identity that she had as an Indian. When she graduated from college, an uncle remarked to her that she was going to “leave her people.” She said that as an Indian, it is very hard to leave your community. It is ingrained in youth, she said, “From the time you are born, you know who your people are, and you know [that] you share everything. Meals, clothes, space. Everything.”

Rebecca, who was White, grew up in a rural county with a large Black population. She knew a local Black family as Aunt E. and Uncle B. and she “thought until I was an adult that she was my aunt and he was my uncle. I had no idea that that was just what we called them. They were equal to my other aunts and uncles.”

Barbara, also White, said that she was raised to “respect everybody regardless of race, creed or color.” Her father was a foreman at a brickyard and many Black men worked with him. She recalled no memories of him stereotyping them as a racial group.

Karen, who is Black, described her early childhood experiences with children and adults of different races:

My father had a fishing lake, and he would let people come and fish. All kinds of people came and I remember running and playing with the little Black children, [and] White children. My Aunt got to be real friends with one lady who would come and bring her grandchildren, a White lady, and they would sit on her porch and drink lemonade, and laugh and talk, and we would play with the children.

Karen’s father modeled acceptance of all people. She saw no overt racism and said that nothing negative toward other races was ever said in her home. When Karen went to college, “minorities were almost expected to be nurses or teachers” and Karen was unsure of what she should do. Her aunt had taught her a lot about sewing and needlework, so she pursued a degree in Home Economics, with a minor in science. As it turned out, Karen spent much of her life and career transcending racial barriers.

When she completed her Masters degree at a university in a large Southern city, she was recruited to teach in New York, for a salary twice as high as the one she earned back home. It was not until Karen arrived on the job that she understood why she had been so heavily recruited. The school was under a mandate to diversify staff or lose federal funding. Thus she found herself among a few minority recruits at a high school of 2,200 students. She confessed that she was “afraid a little bit” but said that she was “treated cordially, and didn’t

have any problems,” even though there were episodes when racial tensions flared during her first year there.

Brenda, who was a member of one of the few Catholic families in her small Southern town, attended Church with Blacks and couldn't understand what the big deal was:

I think it's the strangest thing. I went to church with Blacks, my brothers played basketball with Blacks, there were always Black kids around. I went to school and there was this thing called segregation and integration. And I thought, “This is totally bizarre.” I didn't realize that the Methodist Church we lived beside, that Blacks couldn't go there, that only Whites went there. It was very strange.

One note of interest is that although each woman in the study declared her family prejudice-free, two mentioned racial epithets used in their home. These labels would be considered inappropriate by today's standards. In each case, however, the participant was quick to add that no harm was meant in the use of these labels, and that in the context used, there were not intended to be derogatory.

#### *Significant Relationships: Families and Mentors*

Grandmothers, mothers, fathers, aunts and husbands were among those with whom the women in this study had significant relationships. Each woman named one or more family member(s) who had served as an inspiration, role model(s), or motivator(s) in her life. Each woman named someone in her family who had exerted considerable influence in her youth, either to do well in school and/or pursue higher education. The person was usually an older relative whose own promise went unrealized and whose education or career was thwarted by having to assume responsibility for other family members. In every case, more

than one significant relationship was described. Three of the five women's stories indicated that their father was primarily the person who had pushed, cajoled or inspired them to pursue excellence. Two of the women spoke of their mothers and/or grandmothers and/or aunts in this context. Two of the women also indicated that their relationships with husbands were significant.

Each woman in this study talked about being raised in a family where there was a strong awareness of values. Parents or close relatives instilled a belief in hard work. Nearly all mentioned going to Church as a child, and one spoke specifically of her father's spiritual values.

Brenda described her mother as her best friend, and she guessed that she had inherited some of her will to achieve from her grandmother and great-grandmother. Both her mother and grandmother were described as "unusual" because they were transplanted Westerners in the small Southern town where she grew up. She spoke of the influence her mother and grandmother had on her love of reading and books, and she guessed that she may have inherited the strength and resolve from her grandmother and great-grandmother. Her great-grandmother, a young frontier widow, took over her deceased husband's business, which happened to be a bar. The great-grandmother was very successful, and when she was asked, later in life, why she never married, she remarked: "I never found a man I wanted to give up my good life for."

Brenda herself was a workaholic who married later in life. She had been married only two years at the time this study was conducted. Importantly, she described her husband as providing balance in her life. Earlier in her career, she confessed, she was never really

very interested in getting married. She was, she said, “Always work-oriented and career-oriented.” She was similar to her great-grandmother in that regard.

Karen’s father obviously exerted a major influence on her life, since her mother died when she was seven years old. She described her father as a hard-working man who never ceased to stress the importance of education for his children. It was clear that he was a strong, involved parent. As an adult Karen faced the tough decision of leaving home to teach in the North. She turned to her father and recalled his advice with fondness: “Go ahead, it’s a new experience, and if you don’t like it, home will always be here.” That message served Karen well throughout her multi-faceted career in education in four states along the east coast. She also described her father as a man who held deep spiritual values, saying that she and her siblings were always at Church. There were tears in Karen’s eyes when she told of her father’s death. He had never remarried, and when he died, Karen explained, he was laid to rest where he always wanted to be, beside his beloved wife, Karen’s mother.

Jane’s father was an inspiration to her. He was 56 years old when Jane was born. He had experienced a lot as a young man, traveling across the country and into Mexico as an itinerant musician. When he returned to his hometown late in his life and married her mother, Jane said he was ready to settle down. Her father taught Jane the value of having a good name. She explained:

If you had a good name, you could walk into the furniture store and get a piece of furniture if that’s what you needed. Or you could say, “I need to have a little bit of credit for this period of time.” That’s the same kind of thing I that I would try to instill in my children. That’s what I would hope, especially



if you talked to people from down around home, if you mentioned my name right now, that people would say, “Yes, she has a good name.”

Jane’s admiration of her father was very evident in her description of him. She stressed the values that he had imparted to her:

He had just lived through lots of difficult years in this country, when there were so many barriers. And he wasn’t resentful, he never said anything ugly against whatever the establishment was at that time, whatever the government was, he didn’t raise me with a sense of hate or regret or anger. He raised me with a sense of: “You have opportunities, and you have to seize those.”

My mother had eight children. Four children from her first husband, who passed away. So then my Dad entered the scene, and I was this middle child as far as the rest of the children, they looked at me as the middle kid. But I really function very much as a first-born child, because I was my father’s first. He would say to me in elementary school, “You have to set the examples for your little sister. You have to do these things.” Not in a real forceful kind of way, but, “Jane, your mother and I have these expectations, because you have these little sisters.”

For Barbara, it was a grandmother and two aunts who helped shape her into a young girl intent on success. Barbara’s grandmother, valedictorian of her class, had obstacles in her path:

She had a love for learning; she would love to read Shakespeare. I remember stories of how she scored so high on a test that her test was sent to the state university. She had to travel by horse and buggy to go to school. She was the

only one who wanted to go to high school and graduate. She was so frightened of horses, but she coped with her fear of horses in order to be able to go to school. I have her diploma on my wall. She had a lot of influence in my aspiring for greater things. She always said she had a scholarship to go to college, but she did not take advantage of it. There were several reasons why she didn't go. She was older, and her family was dirt poor, and she really did not have the means, even though she had a scholarship, she really did not have the means of going to college. My conversations with her made me aspire to go to college.

Barbara's aunts were also positive influences. Her older aunt was the "pusher in my family." She was the one who peppered Barbara with questions about grades, and how she was doing at school. A younger aunt, a senior in high school when Barbara entered first grade, taught Barbara the alphabet, how to spell, how to count, and "looked after her."

For Rebecca, her father was very significant in her life, having instilled in her the value of taking pride in whatever one undertakes. She explained:

Our family was always really big on values, and character. My father always taught us to be proud of what you do, and in turn, do something you can be proud of. From my father and my mother, [I learned] "If you're a ditch digger, be proud of digging ditches, and stand by your ditch."

Rebecca also spoke of her husband's very positive influence on her life. Her husband was the principal of the school where Rebecca completed her student teaching. Rebecca was quick to add that he didn't ask her out until she had finished her course.

She described their relationship:

He's taught me a lot. He and I are complete opposites. My neighbor said, "Being with the two of you is like being with one whole person."

He was a very successful high school principal. After he retired, he worked for a couple of years running an alternative school and because that opportunity was at night, we were like ships passing, and we felt like that was not good for our retired relationship, after our children were gone. So he does contract work now, but still really enjoys being around high school students.

When he came here [to the State Agency] to visit, he said, "I don't know how you do this, it just sucks the life out of you." He needed to be out where there were children and teachers.

Current literature on women's mentoring experiences suggests that having a mentor is an important aspect of their lives at work and research indicates that such relationships are critical to women's success (Blake-Beard, 2003). The women in this study spoke of significant individuals who were mentors or coaches. Typically, the person was in a superior position and a white male. These mentors encouraged, advised, and tutored the women in a school or work setting. Cross-gender mentoring relationships can present particular problems, according to Cox (1994), but these women did not disclose any. In the cases reported here, the women were mentored by men who related to them "as they would their wives and daughters" (Cox, 1994, p. 200). Cox (1994) offered several interpretations related to findings on women and mentoring: one is that women work harder to overcome barriers to mentoring; another is that women are more likely to acknowledge the importance of mentors; and lastly, that mentoring is more essential for women to make it into higher management positions.

Brenda's former supervisor, a White male, taught her the ropes. After he left the State Education Agency, Brenda was hired as his replacement. She said, "I just learned a lot from him, looking at life, and looking at educators, and the politics of things, some really horrible, nasty, gross, but fascinating things." She described her rise to assume his position as a natural progression: "He gave me free rein to do a lot of the management of personnel which I think is the hardest of any job." When her mentor retired, Brenda was left with a choice: "I could keep my job and work for somebody else, and I didn't want to do that. I knew how this office ran, knew what needed to be done, so I applied for the job." She took the opportunity very seriously, she said, so she "wrote up a plan. There was no way they could not give me the job unless they [senior management] just totally went in another direction."

Karen spoke very fondly of her mentor, a fellow Southerner, and a White male, who encouraged her to leave the classroom for positions of greater leadership. Karen also credited him with pushing her to obtain her doctorate.

When he left her school district to become a district superintendent in another state, he sent for Karen, who responded as she often had: "Oh, goodness, No." She explained that "I was always saying No." This time, however, her mentor was asking her to move to another state. When he asked if there was anything to keep her where she was, Karen mentioned her sisters. He asked about her husband, and that was the first time that Karen divulged the private trials she had been facing at home. She and her husband were separated. She had told no one at work about their ups and downs; she had kept everything to herself. Despite her closeness to this mentor, she had said nothing about her personal life. He was

shocked to learn that she was living as a single Mom with two young daughters, and was somewhat chagrined that she had not shared this information. Karen explained:

I'm a real private person, so I didn't talk about it, I came to work like everything was okay and sometimes I just cried myself to sleep at night. But at work, and for the kids, I was just okay. All that time, internally, I was feeling a failure because nobody in my family got divorced. I was feeling like this absolute failure.

Her boss/mentor gave her this advice, which Karen holds dear: He said, "Don't you know that's how you get your support, people care about you." Karen followed her mentor to another state, looking upon the opportunity as "a good change for me and my children."

In the years that followed, Karen's mentor encouraged her to pursue an advanced degree. He was so persistent, she said, that she hated to get out of the car in the mornings, because she knew he would be there, asking her if she had registered for classes yet. Under his guidance, Karen obtained a doctorate and credits her mentor with having given her sound advice regarding her choice of programs.

Rimm (1999) pointed out that in the highest percentage of cases, the mentors of successful women were professors. Jane told a moving story of how a professor from her days as a freshman in college mentored her through undergraduate and graduate school, and postponed his own retirement until she was ready to assume the position that had been his. When Jane began her college studies, this professor was advising in a new program of study that was being offered for the first time and heard that Jane was interested. She tells the story:

He allowed me to have conversations with him, kind of like I'm having with you, [I was saying] "Dr. L., I want to achieve more," and he was the first person, (and it would have taken a person outside the [local town] community, and a non-Indian, at that time), to look at me and say, "Jane, you not only have the ability to finish college, but you're going to go to graduate school." I didn't know what graduate school was. I didn't know anyone who had gone to graduate school, so JL is the one who said that. I finished college, I taught one year and then went back to work on a Masters. He was the one who picked up the phone and called [the University] and said, "I'm sending a student to you who has finished her program here, and she needs to be admitted to your masters program and you need to look at her credentials."

Jane shared a photograph of her class, the first to graduate from the school with degrees in Special Education. She talked about this cohort of students, competitive at times, but very close. They were a group of "very bright women," and Jane was the only American Indian in the group. There was only one other minority, a Black woman.

Jane and Karen both mentioned that they felt welcomed in their mentor's homes. Jane said, "Dr. L. would have us over to his house to a social once a semester." Karen described her visit to her mentor's new location, to check out the prospects of moving there herself. She took her sister along, and when they arrived, he was sitting on his front porch, "in Bermuda shorts, drinking beer." She described her welcome:

[His wife] came out and she had on her shorts, and they hugged me and they hugged [my sister] and we sat there and talked and had the best time. He called the real estate man and he came and got me and took us to look at

several places. [There was] one we really, really, liked and then he we had a fish dinner and came back to Dr. C.'s house. He sat there and he talked, and he was so comfortable. On the ride home, my sister said, "You know what? I really didn't particularly want you to move up here by yourself with those girls. But, I just can't believe Dr. C is a superintendent. Karen, he is one of the most comfortable people to be around." And she said, "It is obvious that he wanted you to be okay when you got here." She said, "Now, think of another superintendent who would have done all this."

Barbara was candid in her discussion of significant men and women in her life. Her high school English teacher stressed the importance of focus. He told Barbara: "You need to set priorities, and decide what's most important to you. You won't be able to dab[ble] in everything your entire life." A fellow teacher who taught in the classroom next door told Barbara, "When you make a decision, regardless of whether its right or wrong at that time, you make that be the best decision." Another woman that Barbara considered a mentor was a former President of the National Business Education Association. She encouraged Barbara to run for the Board for the National Association, and predicted that Barbara would become the Association President one day. Barbara explained how this woman had planted the seed by her simple statement, "Five years from now, I expect you to be President." And Barbara was.

Rebecca's experiences offer an example of how followers' perceptions of leaders enable leadership (Center for Gender Organization, 2002c). She credited many of the former and current leaders at the State Education Agency with teaching her valuable leadership skills. She learned a lot from the former Director, whose position she now holds. Her goal,

she said, was “to do the very best job I could at the level I was and learn what I could from the people that were around me.” She believed that she had the “opportunity to work with some great leaders, who have done some nice nurturing for state leadership.” Her very practical common sense led her to understand that “It doesn’t mean that you have to do everything like they do but there certainly is an opportunity to learn from people who are doing good things.”

### *Career Experiences: Opportunities and Obstacles*

Each woman’s journey to her current leadership role followed a circuitous path. As Rimm (1999) notes, men more frequently follow a linear route and more often define themselves by their careers while women follow a variety of pathways. There were more differences than similarities in how the women came to their leadership roles.

Rebecca, for example, didn’t want to pursue her career in administration seriously until her children were older. She said she felt like her first commitment was to ensure the success of her own two children. Karen, on the other hand, was a divorced single parent, so she followed a steadier course towards her career goals while mothering two young girls. Jane’s career was shaped by her dependency on her older sister who cared for her children. Brenda and Barbara, who had no children or husbands during the years when they were most intent on pursuing advancement, spoke openly of their drive and ambition to reach positions of leadership. Their courses were more linear.

Barbara acknowledged that she jokingly told teachers in her school, very early in her career, that she would someday be the leader of their program area at the State level. Barbara set the goal and achieved it.



Brenda worked hard and followed a plan. Jane's career was shaped by her lifelong dream to teach at the University in her hometown. Rebecca's route was the most circuitous, but no less driven by a lifelong vision of what education should be like.

Karen stressed that her career was marked by opportunities coming to her, whether she was looking for them or not. From the outset of her career, she was presented with opportunities that she could not refuse. When she told her story, it was as though these career advancements appeared out of nowhere; she would refuse at first, but later she would agree to assume the position she was offered.

*Hardworking and Dedicated Professionals.*

A striking similarity in each woman's story, however, was how seriously each woman took her work. The women in this study were dedicated professionals with a solid work ethic. In no case was a participant equivocal about her hard work and contribution(s) to her work organization(s). Brenda described her early career, when she worked as a public information officer for a school district, as something that she had to "escape" from, because she nearly burned herself out by volunteering and giving so much to the community. After she left that job and began working at the State Education Agency, she worked all the time. In her words, "I remember a Thanksgiving I took my computer home and worked half a day. Every weekend, I was in the building working. At night, I used to say maybe I should bring a cot here."

Barbara's story of landing a teaching job in a large urban district when odds were against her demonstrated her creativity, her determination, and willingness to go many extra miles to get what she wanted. Her story was filled with references to ideas that she had and the hard work that it took to bring them to fruition. She explained what she learned about

herself when she wrote a textbook: “I realized that I could not go home after working all day and write. I didn’t know that about myself. I wrote on Saturday and Sunday and I had a book in two months.”

*Balancing Work and Family.*

Studies of working women show that although roles and expectations have changed in recent decades, women still perform most of the domestic chores in the home. The demands of outside work often create a sense of guilt in women (Cox, 1994). Jane was very frank about the toll that work took on her home life. After teaching at the University for ten years, she decided to go to work in a school district as an assistant superintendent. There, Jane found she had to rely on her sister as backup caregiver to her children. Jane called her sister “the closest thing I had to a wife.” Jane found herself the lone female assistant superintendent in a district office surrounded by other assistant superintendents who were men.

I was new in the job, and even though I came with a good reputation, it was still a new job and I had to prove myself in some senses of the word. If the Superintendent wanted to meet at 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, that was okay with everyone else. For me that meant a lot of juggling at home. For them [the men] it meant walking out the door and leaving it to their wives. They had children, too. But they didn’t ever stop to process what Jane was going to have to do to get to these meetings.

There were meetings, too, where she would be required to stay late. “If we had to stay at a meeting till past midnight, it didn’t cross anybody else’s mind.” Jane pointed out the issues of what she called culture and gender:

My husband also worked. Even though I have a great husband, somewhat progressive, but again, because of acculturation, and my desire to want to be their mother, the children, for caretaking stuff, absolutely looked to me first and still do. So, yes, it very much became a struggle.

Rebecca did not try to work at a demanding administrative job when her children were young. She was frank about how difficult she perceived it to be: “I don’t know how people do things like this with little children. I can’t figure that out. I always knew there was life after 45 or 50. My plan was to move into a role of a heavier career when my children were on their own.”

Karen met the dual demands of parenthood and her career path with the support of her sisters, her faith, and her work family. When she was asked to move yet again to follow her mentor, she had much to consider. By this time, Karen had remarried; her husband was willing to make the move. Karen’s youngest daughter, a junior in high school, wasn’t so sure. She was heavily involved in extracurricular activities. She told Karen that if she decided to go to this new district, she would not go. This same child had suffered separation anxiety earlier in her life, after her father left the family. Karen says that she “always wanted to know where I was.” Karen explained:

When their Daddy left, she was so small, she just knew he disappeared. When I would go to my father’s house, [if] I went to another room, not very long, she was going to turn up. One day, I told my sister, “My youngest just seems to follow me.” She said, “Think about it. If one of your parents were here today, and then just gone, she might think that you’re going to disappear too. So she has to check to be sure you’re there.” I would notice, if she were out in

the yard playing, every half hour or so, she would just walk into the house, and say, “Mom, what are you doing?” Once she found out I was there, she would go back out.

Her youngest daughter’s announcement troubled Karen, but she was willing to consider letting her daughter remain behind with the church pastor’s family. Her daughter went away to cheerleading camp, and when she returned, Karen was in her daughter’s bedroom, when, as Karen tells it, “she came over, sat on the bed beside me, and said, ‘Mama, I’m going with you, I’m not going to let you leave me here.’” Karen’s relief was heartfelt and overwhelming. She said, “Oh, I was so glad.”

The new position would have other challenges: County and city systems, though recently merged, remained segregated within one building. A partition in the office building kept the former city staff separate from the former county staff.

### *Pivotal Life Events*

As might be expected, the women described births, deaths, marriages, and divorces as the pivotal, life-altering events they experienced. Two described coming to the capital city to take a job with the State Education Agency as a pivotal event. Two other stories; one of death, and one of divorce, were particularly poignant and are reconstructed here. The final story is of marriage. Each story is representative of the types of events that these women said shaped and reshaped their lives and careers.

#### *Death.*

Patricia, Jane’s oldest sister, was ten years old when Jane was born. She was like a mother to Jane and her younger sisters, particularly when Jane’s mother was so busy that she did not have time to do things like braid the girls’ hair. Patricia assumed much of the

responsibility of caring for the younger children, and although Jane never heard her complain, she observed that her sister didn't have the chance to be as young and carefree as other girls during their adolescence.

When Jane married and finished graduate school, she and her husband built a house next door to Patricia and her family. Jane said, "I couldn't imagine anything better than living next door to my sister." Jane had worked as a professor for ten years and was recruited as an assistant superintendent for the local school district. She considered taking the job because she had the support of this sister who "probably came into my house to check on my children eight to ten times a day." Patricia got Jane's children up and ready for school when Jane had to leave for early morning meetings; Patricia checked on them at midday as she worked in their school cafeteria, and she covered for Jane in the evenings if she had a late meeting.

Early one morning Jane called Patricia to tell her that she was taking her son to soccer camp, 10 miles away, and asked to have Patricia's daughter check in on her own daughter, who she left sleeping. Jane left for the twenty minute drive to soccer camp and while she was gone, her sister, Patricia, suffered an aneurysm. She fell into a coma later that day and was removed from life support later that week.

Though Jane described her sister as "the most humble person in the world," over 2,000 people came to her wake. Jane was unsure of how to function for awhile, and she said she felt like she had lost a guide post. She was not quite sure of what to do. She left her job as assistant superintendent at the end of the year. Her children were suffering, Jane said, because their world had been destroyed. She tried talking to the Superintendent to explain her loss and predicament, and while he was empathetic, Jane believed that this particular

person could not process those things. Jane said she looked at “all the hours I would be away from these little school-age children” and she knew there “was no way I’d make those sacrifices.” Jane said she couldn’t live with herself if she continued and that there was “no job on the face of the earth worth it.”

Jane met with the Superintendent to explain why she was leaving: “I have to be a mother first. I can’t do that right now, I can’t balance both, and you can’t help me balance both.” Jane told the Superintendent that she was unable to give Patricia’s children and her own children what they needed, and he could not help her do that. Jane returned to the University, to a more accommodating work schedule, where she became the Dean of Education.

The lessons she learned from her loss helped shape Jane into the leader she was at the time of this study. She said, “If you work with me, you’ll never have any issues if you need to leave to take care of something with your family.” She said she would never have considered taking a job at the State Agency if she hadn’t known that her boss, the Chief State School Officer, was a very family oriented person.

#### *Divorce.*

Barbara had gone through college in three years so that she could marry Tom when he returned from the Navy. She admits that she didn’t really “feel good about” marrying him, but she had set that goal, and their families, according to Barbara, were “intertwined.”

Barbara soon discovered that Tom did not understand her ambition. He could not understand why she wanted to do more than just “teach for thirty years and then retire.” She explained that Tom had “grown up in a family where men were very domineering. His stepmother would be half-way in the air when his father said jump.”

In her fourth year of teaching, Tom told Barbara that he wanted a divorce. When asked what was wrong with their marriage, Tom's answer summed it up, according to Barbara. Tom answered: "You don't bake cookies."

Barbara left teaching and moved to the capital city, to work at the State Education Agency. Two friends and professional counseling helped Barbara through the divorce, which she described as devastating. She believes that the event helped her learn valuable life lessons about what one can control and when one must move on. She became more accepting of life after her divorce, and she grew to be "very comfortable in her own skin." Barbara said that in a few years, it "did not bother me one bit to be alone."

### *Marriage*

For Brenda, meeting her husband was a pivotal life event. As described earlier, Brenda was a woman of high energy who spent long hours at the office and many weekends there as well. Meeting Jim changed everything. "He pretty much forced me to take time [off]. I stopped working so much. I used to work all the time." Brenda said that her marriage "broadened" her, and helped her to see that "I don't live and die with this place." A woman of amazing energy and diverse interests, Brenda described her husband as a "neat person who has lots of interest and keeps things hopping." Brenda attended concerts with her husband, who plays trombone in a jazz group and big bands. She has learned "how to take really good naps and make good lists and enjoy the music." She added that after sitting through so many State Board of Education meetings for so many years, she could do lots of things at one time.

In the first interview probe, the women were asked, "What do you do?" In every case except Brenda's, the women described their work. Brenda's response was indicative of the

new direction her life had taken: “I take the dog for a walk. I’m a big dog person. That’s how I unwind at the end of the day. I walk very, very fast. I get frustrations out that way, and that way, I don’t slit tires, or shoot my husband or any of those kinds of things.”

### Leadership

This final section is organized by participant. Each woman told me whether or not she considered herself a leader and why. They spoke with thoughtful insight and anecdotal evidence of their leadership in either their current role or a former one at the State Education Agency. In addition, each woman talked about her current goal(s). The women spoke of their perceptions of what leaders do and of good and bad examples of leadership. They also offered their ideas on whether there may be a feminine leadership style.

In addition, during this study, the women assessed their leadership using the self-report from the Leadership Attributes Inventory developed by Johansen, Moss, and Preskill, in 1989. The Inventory is a checklist of 37 attributes of leadership (see Appendix D). In the self-rating, an attributes like Integrity is rated by indicating the extent (ranging from 40% to 100%) to which the women believed the attribute accurately described them (see Appendix E). I asked each woman to complete the inventory anonymously.

I examined each inventory, noting highs and lows; and computed the means for the five women. I created a table for comparison of their means to those from an earlier study of mostly white male community college presidents. At the outset of the study, I believed this would provide some insight into the differences in men’s and women’s leadership. However, as I studied the results, I realized the sample of five was too small for comparison with a sample of 30 so any interpretation must be made cautiously. Furthermore I am not certain that the mean was the most informative way to report these data. However, I included the



results from the inventory and the comparison table in Appendix F. There I noted the attributes that women believed they currently possessed 90% or more of the time.

Because the sample of five is so small, and because this study is a qualitative one, further quantitative analyses were not conducted on these data to determine statistical or practical significance. The comparisons with the larger sample of community college presidents (N = 30) should be interpreted with caution, as noted above.

Of particular note, the women each indicated a “7,” or perfect score, (meaning that they possessed this attribute 100% of the time), for the attribute: Willing to Accept Responsibility. Those attributes that the women, on average, believed they possessed 90% of the time included: Energetic with stamina; Accountable; Achievement-oriented; Enthusiastic, optimistic; Dependable, reliable; Assertive, initiating; Committed to the common good; Personal integrity; Intelligent with practical judgment; Ethical; Motivating others; Decision-making; Problem-solving, and Information gathering and managing.

Differences greater than one in the men’s and women’s means were noted in the following attributes: Visionary; Tolerant of ambiguity and complexity; Courageous, risk-taker; Networking; Delegating; Stress Management, and Ideological beliefs are appropriate to the group.

### *Brenda*

Brenda was a manager in a local school system’s district office by the time she was 24 years old. Two older people were reporting to her:

I did my own thing, and started programs, and when I got bored with something, I’d give that to one of the people working with me. That’s pretty much the way I’ve operated. Then [I] started something new. I had five

bosses in five years. Which was fine, because I just did what I thought was right.

Brenda responded to the prompt asking whether or not she considered herself a leader without hesitation: “Absolutely.” This was especially true, she added, in contrast to others in leadership positions that she saw around her. Brenda believed that her ability to provide a reasoned opinion when someone asked a question was one of her leadership strengths. “It just kills me to sit around at leadership team meetings, and people sit there quietly. Surely they have an opinion, even if they don’t have a *real* informed opinion, they must have some *thought* or something.” She stressed that she spoke up in these meetings, “Whether they want to hear it or not.”

Brenda was forthright about leadership. She believed that as a leader, “You just have to stand up and say what you think.” The key was having good instinct and using proper judgment. She felt that she had exercised both during the years that she had served the Agency in advocating for the right things. According to Brenda, leadership had a lot to do with “sticking your neck out.” She thought that a lot of people were not willing to do that, and cited an example of a man who held a very high position in the agency many years earlier who was unwilling to take a stand. Brenda called him a “dishrag,” a term she also used for her father. In the case of this former leader, she said that “He didn’t care. I think part of [leadership] is caring, too. He didn’t give a damn.” Brenda referred to the missing quality as “that backbone thing, being willing to say what you think.”

To Brenda, a feminine leadership style was one that was more inclusive. She believed that women were more willing to make a decision and more willing to discuss

issues openly rather than conducting business behind closed doors. And women, according to Brenda, “were not as concerned with getting credit for their actions.”

*Karen*

Karen reflected for a moment when I asked her if she considered herself a leader. She equivocated a bit in her answer: “In some situations, I do.” She quickly added that she often considered herself one of an interested group, a collaborator. She said that she liked to “sit at the table and be one of the group that’s working on a particular goal, or accomplish a particular aim.” She believed that in those situations, “leadership [could] just change hands around the table, based on your expertise.” Karen was very clear about what she did at the Agency and her goal:

My primary focus is always to try to do what is best for children and I get extremely frustrated when politics and other issues enter into the picture and I don’t hear one person mention “Is this good for the children? Is it going to make things better for the children?” I actually had a meeting today where I was real frustrated because that wasn’t happening. My efforts, energy, my thoughts, are continually on how can I do and what can I do that can make it better for all the children in our state with a particular emphasis on those children who may not have been served as they should have, as they deserve, through the previous years.

Gilligan (1993) wrote about the need to hear the voices of women and the theories of development that their experiences inform. She said that we have come to notice the silence of women and “the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak” (p. 173). Karen related an experience in a leadership team setting that illustrates what Gilligan was saying. At a leadership team meeting of the superintendent, associates, and directors of the various

divisions, Karen proffered a response to an issue that was under discussion, based on something she knew from her experience as a principal. She had not been asked to contribute to the discussion, and when she did, the men around the table continued to discuss the issue, as though she had said nothing. Then, when a male director spoke up and suggested a possibility that was nearly identical to Karen's response, everyone around the table responded positively and affirmed that the male director was correct. Karen said that she guessed "they just weren't used to having a Black woman at the table."

Karen was described by one of her colleagues as an "inspirational leader." An educator who had just heard Karen speak to a group said, "I always feel better after being in her presence." (Researcher's Daily Journal, September 20, 2002) Karen said "You learn to lead rather than boss." She was well-known for insisting that "You must lead with the head and the heart." I noted her advice: "Be humble and always engage your heart."

When I asked her about her leadership, Karen said that she accepted "personal accountability" for what she did and when she set out to do something, she intended to do it "right." She had assumed leadership of a division at the State Agency that had been without a leader for several months. The staff lacked cohesion, they didn't meet regularly, and in Karen's words, "they had a real low feeling about how they were perceived as professionals." She immediately set out to improve the situation. Her attitude was "people are going to know [this division] is up here before I finish." She established regular staff meetings, and expected all staff to be in the agency on Mondays, so that if she needed to connect with them, they were available. Karen's recipe for mending this ailing section was to reorganize the division, to shift the way they did the work, and to set up a lot of protocols. It made a tremendous difference and Karen began to see people "start blooming." While Karen spotted

potential leaders among the staff, she also spotted weaknesses. She learned what to assign people to do and what not to assign them. She provided several success stories and one story of what she termed “un-success.”

Her un-success story concerned a former manager on Karen’s staff. She was the only person that Karen thought she had failed to influence positively in her career. Karen, as the division director, intervened in a personnel matter to avoid having grievances filed, and despite regular meetings with this manager and her staff, Karen could never get this supervisor to acknowledge her role in the difficulties. Karen said that “she would sit there, cold, as if she were an ice cube.” Karen said that throughout the ordeal, this manager maintained that “I don’t know what they’re [her staff] whining about. I haven’t done anything wrong. I don’t see anything I have to change.” Eventually this woman left the agency, believing that there had been a conspiracy to get rid of her. Karen laughed at the idea of the former Associate Superintendent conspiring to do such a thing, because “[He] was mush. Which is why I love him to death. Just mush. He wouldn’t have gone after anybody.” Karen called for an exit conference with the woman and told her,

I regret very much I could not convince you that treating people right would have reaped wonderful benefits, in terms of the work you all did, and how you would feel about yourself, and how they felt about you. I hate [that] you think I was out to get you because what I really wanted to do was keep you and make you a better supervisor than you were.

Karen was in one of the highest positions in the Agency when this study was conducted. She had served in that capacity for less than a year after receiving a promotion into the position. This promotion, like so many of the other opportunities that came Karen’s

way, was not something that she had intentionally sought. She was asked to apply and then she was given the position. She described her frustrations in her new role, but also her determination to succeed:

I'm still adjusting because I'm accustomed to more guidance toward a vision. I don't feel that. Our meetings are just agenda items that somebody ticks off and we don't plan and talk about where the agency is going, and that frustrates me a little bit. I don't know how to get it on track. ... I'm still caught in my little niche, haven't landed where I'm comfortable yet. I'm still searching for where I'll be comfortable. I think it's a difference in [the] style of men who don't give very much direction. But [they] might walk on you a little bit if you don't do what they expect. And you're trying to figure out, well what is it they want? So, I'm still struggling with that, but I'll get there.

*Jane*

Jane, who is in a position at the Agency equal to Karen's, had been there for less than a year when she spoke to me about her leadership role. She had risen through the ranks as a University professor. She was five months pregnant with her second child and in her second year of teaching at the University when the provost asked her to consider taking a half-time administrative position as Director of Student Teaching. She recalled:

I remember in my heart of hearts, wanting to say, "No, I don't want to do this, let me just teach. But when you're an Assistant Professor, and you're on tenure track, and the provost is saying we'd like you to consider this, I said, 'Of course.'"

She wondered aloud if perhaps she "looked like an administrator" because she always seemed to end up in administrative positions. She guessed it was because she appeared

organized, worked hard, and “didn’t go to meetings and say really stupid things.” Jane also said that she “wasn’t strange and unusual.” Eventually, after a number of years, she felt she had enough “power and rank” that she could say that she no longer wanted to be an administrator. Still, she says the results of the Myers-Brigg Personality-type Indicator showed her to be an “organized, administrative-type, leader-type” of person. When she accepted her current position at the State Education Agency, a former acquaintance called Jane and told her that she had always known that Jane would advance in her field. Jane, however, is somewhat bemused by others’ perceptions. Candidly, she confessed:

I’m terrified, you know, a lot of the times, underneath, of making the wrong decisions, that I’m not doing a particularly good job. I question myself. I get tickled, especially at home, I can walk into a [convenience store] to get a [soda] and I leave [my husband] in the car, and 10 minutes later, I’m coming out, and he’ll say, “They needed to ask you something, right? ...I won’t even know who the person is, and they’ll say, Dr. Jane, do you have a minute?” And [my husband] will say, “There’s something about your face. You just look like you have an answer.”

Jane attributed much of her desire to work hard to advance the cause of American Indian males to the loss of her brother when he was 35 years old. Jane and her brother had been very close. When he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, Jane slept in his hospital room every night. Jane said that he had once told her, “Jane, you’re going to make straight A’s and you’re going to go to school.” He had no desire to go to college, but Jane believes that he “lived his personality a lot” through her. Jane was completing her dissertation when he died, and she dedicated it to him. She believes that as a young man in the sixties, her

brother and his friends did not have a chance to become anything because of “who they were and the time they were living.” She explains that now she becomes frustrated with Indian kids because they do not have the barriers that her brother and his friends had.

Jane summed up her comments on leadership by saying that she leads from a collaborative, familial viewpoint. She says she stays in close contact with people who are not educators and that “keeps her grounded.” She does not consider herself “a boss,” but rather she considers herself “a colleague.” She can’t imagine ever struggling with the decision to allow a staff member to leave for a family emergency because “When it came down to [my brother] needing somebody to sleep on the floor beside his bed, I was there.”

### *Barbara*

Barbara was the long-timer among study participants at the Agency: At the time of this study, she had worked there for 27 years. Her reasons for considering herself a leader were summed up in a single notion: she had seen her ideas become common practice across the State. Barbara had long advocated the implementation of a focused, structured course of study, which was now the basis of the State’s curriculum. She said she had spent “at least 10 to 12 years of my life influencing local people, state staff, business people, superintendents, and others about the importance of students having a focused course of study.” In the process, she had formed alliances with people who “made a difference.”

When she started work in the Agency in 1976, Barbara happened upon a Radio Shack store in the local mall. She went in and engaged the sales representatives in a conversation about the possible uses of microcomputers in business education classrooms. It was a preposterous notion at the time: She visited classrooms across the state and told teachers that someday computers would replace all their typewriters. “They all laughed at me. They were



kind but they thought I was crazy.” Now, Barbara says, “You can’t find a place where computers aren’t an integral part of business education.”

Barbara laughed when she described herself as an enthusiastic 26 year old teacher who came to the capital city. One of the keys to her success, she said, was that “I did not know that which I did not know. I took lots of chances and was very bold.” Looking back, she feels fortunate to have made good decisions. She was an inclusive leader who asked for advice and included older staff members who had vied for the position she was given in decision-making. As she put it, she was “savvy enough to recognize that I needed their help to be successful.”

Barbara, who had spent much of her young life setting goals, continued this practice as a professional. She says, “I set professional goals I wanted to accomplish. For example, there were only 90 business education teachers who came to the summer conference when she began as a consultant. My goal was to have at least 500 business teachers.” Barbara achieved the goal.

As a goal setter, Barbara confessed to becoming restless after she accomplished her goals. Fortunately, she was able to move on to greater challenges. Her supervisor recommended her for his position when he announced his retirement. Barbara expressed her gratitude:

He was nice enough to give me opportunities to learn things outside my field.

He gave me opportunities to be before the State Board of Education. He gave me opportunities to learn about finance. I had a background in accounting, I understood management. Anyway, those opportunities made me feel confident to become the director.

When she was being considered for the supervisor's position, the Chief State School Officer, head of the State Agency, interviewed Barbara. Then he sent his Director of Public Relations to lunch with her to "size her up." Finally, the head Officer asked how she thought she would be accepted in a male-dominated field. Barbara considered this "an interesting question." She explained:

I had tried very diligently to make sure that I was very responsive to people in the field, that I exerted myself as a leader, but not necessarily as a pushy person. I also tried to position myself as someone who listened to the viewpoints of other people. The local directors met ...and said they would like to see me in the position. That was nice.

Barbara got the job, and moved into higher and higher positions within the Agency as time went on. She did not always win the position she sought. Twice she had vied for a position and lost, once fairly recently. It was worth noting that Barbara expressed no bitterness over the jobs she applied for and didn't get. In one case, when she applied for a Director's position and did not get it, she accepted an Assistant's position. Later, when the Director retired, Barbara applied again, and this time, she was selected. She had recently applied for one of the highest positions in the Agency but it was given to someone else. There were no sour grapes. Barbara credited her loss to her lack of experience in being a principal. In each instance cited here, Barbara remained open to learning more about herself and the Agency.

A leader that Barbara had seen early in her career had inspired Barbara to want to be like her. She was attending a conference for business education teachers when the woman entered the roomful of educators. Barbara was so impressed with the woman's carriage and demeanor, she asked her older friends, "Who is that woman?" When they told her that she

was the state supervisor, Barbara retorted, “I’m going to have her position one day.” Barbara described her reaction to seeing this woman:

She made such an impression on me about how professional she looked, and how she exuded confidence as she walked to the podium of that auditorium with I don’t know how many people, it seemed like hundreds and hundreds of business teachers, and I was so impressed with the way she carried herself, with what she said.

Barbara had several ideas about what set men and women apart as leaders. She contended that “women are more collaborative,” more likely “to pitch in and do the work.” Men delegate, according to Barbara. She cited an example of a recent male supervisor: “Do this, do that. He expected the product.” His successor, a woman, according to Barbara, was “more involved in the work.” Another difference in working for both men and women was that she found “men to be more competitive and women to be more team oriented, consistently.” In summing up her thoughts about feminine leadership, Barbara said the best women leaders are those “who can develop a bullet-proof vest.” Barbara’s philosophy of leadership, which more than adequately described Barbara herself, was revealed in one of her final comments: “You have to believe in yourself or you’ll be eaten alive.”

### *Rebecca*

Rebecca was a very practical woman who knew that she was a leader. Her duties included oversight of a staff of more than 40 persons and administration of the largest federally funded project in the State. She often interacted with the Attorney’s General office and the Office of Civil Rights. As she put it, “My name and the Chief State School Officer’s

name goes on the line.” Rebecca was happiest, she said, “when I’m in a position to make a difference, to have an input at leadership level.”

Rebecca was a natural leader, the person that people would often turn to, to make a decision, or lead the class, even in elementary school. She won a state leadership award when she was 16 years old, and served in the Student Government Association in college. “It’s always been part of who I am.” If she was involved in something, she said, she usually ended up being President, “not because I have this power thing, but I just have a vision of how things ought to be and that’s one thing I do very well.” To Rebecca, organizing and leading “feels comfortable.”

At the State Agency, Rebecca used her leadership to pursue a vision of education reform, particularly for special children:

Most people wish our children would just go away; “Don’t show them to us.”

Its like avoidance.... That population is not going away. Because of our infant mortality rates, because we are saving children who have horrible accidents like we never have before, the population of students with disabilities is growing, and they are going to be an accountable part of our education system. And that’s good for our communities,...to let them contribute.

When she discussed women as leaders, Rebecca said that “Sometimes I think that women are more compassionate and have a broader picture of leadership.” She recalled mentoring a woman who “was really falling apart” with the responsibilities and requirements of teaching. Rebecca encouraged the woman by reminding her that she had run a household and raised three children, and compared to that, teaching was a “piece of cake.” She continued:

I think women have more skills at or have had more exposure to running homes and keeping lots of things on their mind, like picking up so and so from carpool and at the same time you've got to get groceries and you've got to get this ready and where men are very helpful in that role often they don't have the practice of keeping all those things on their mind and not going crazy.

That skill that women bring to leadership, I do think it's different. It's the ability to look at the big picture and be supportive of people in doing their job.

Rebecca described her own leadership style as one of "trying to hire as talented a staff as you can find" and then she tried to "create a world of convenience and wonder for them." She said that she worked hard for her staff to be successful.

Many of them come in and say, "In this agency, it's supposed to be the director who gets the recognition." My philosophy [is] "If you do the work, you need to get the recognition. I need to stand behind you, to pick up the pieces and make sure you have a sound platform to stand on." That may be different, I know a lot of people really like to be front and center, I just like to make sure things work well. I've always had the philosophy that I wanted the person that I worked for to look good.

Rebecca also explained that she felt an important part of her leadership was to keep the higher ups informed. She thought it was vital, "letting people know where you are, and no surprises." She also mentioned something as mundane as proof reading could make a big difference. Rebecca said that if a letter is written for a higher up's name, it should be "the best it can be."

Rebecca said that she led “for the good of the whole, not for the good of me. My focus is on staff success. If you’re a great leader, your staff won’t be falling apart. They are going to be successful.” Like Karen, Rebecca thought that it was her duty to ensure her staff’s well-being. Rebecca remained on an emotional even keel, wanting her staff to enjoy coming to work. It was her goal to create an environment for them that they could enjoy but also where she could be honest with them if they messed up. Rebecca was the only woman of the five to mention that work should be fun. “It’s very important for everyone to figure out how to have fun every day.”

Rebecca summarized:

You [have to] have fun every day and you can’t let the job wear you out. And that’s from a person who left here Friday night at 7:30 trying to get everything done. But it’s a choice. Sometimes you have to stay long hours, but if it ever becomes not fun, then I’ll find something else, because that’s something that my staff has come to trust.

### Summary

The women leaders in this study were from traditional two-parent (or two-adult) homes of the fifties and sixties in the American South. Their economic standing ranged from poverty level to middle class, and their racial make-up included White, Black, and American Indian. Their birth orders varied. There were more similarities than differences in their histories and in their leadership experiences. Table 4 summarizes the participants’ families, schooling, pivotal life events and comments on leadership.

They were inspired to succeed by someone in the home environment: a father, mother, grandmother, or aunt. They were mentored by someone else who was successful,

either in college or in the workplace. Literacy was important to them. They accepted the world as it was, and even when they realized that some things were not as they should be, there was no anger or resentment expressed. The women shared a willingness and drive to make things better for others, especially children. Each woman had a strong work ethic and a strong sense of values.

They were not ambivalent about their early schooling: they either loved it or hated it. In each case, the women’s attitudes toward school had been shaped by teachers: either very good ones, or very poor ones.

*Table 4*

Summary of leaders’ life histories and their comments on leadership.

Leader	Family	Pivotal Events	Leadership
Brenda	Small town Catholic family; father was truck farmer; mother taught her to spoil men	Leaving school system for job at State Education Agency, Marriage	Have the courage to stick your neck out
Karen	Lost her mother at age 7;, six siblings; caretaker aunt	Mother’s death; Following her mentor	Be humble and engage the heart
Jane	Seven siblings; very poor older father	Sister’s and brother’s death	Stay grounded; family comes first
Barbara	Alcoholic father; strong grandmother and aunts	Divorce; Moving to the capital city for job at State Education Agency	Believe in yourself or you’ll be eaten alive
Rebecca	Chivalrous father on school board, mother was teacher	Coming to the Agency; job change during reorganization	Create a world of convenience and wonder for staff

The women were not strident feminists, but in every case, they recognized the inherent power imbalances in being female. They each worked within the existing system and did not challenge the order. They believed there was a feminine leadership style that was collaborative, caring, inclusive, and courageous.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

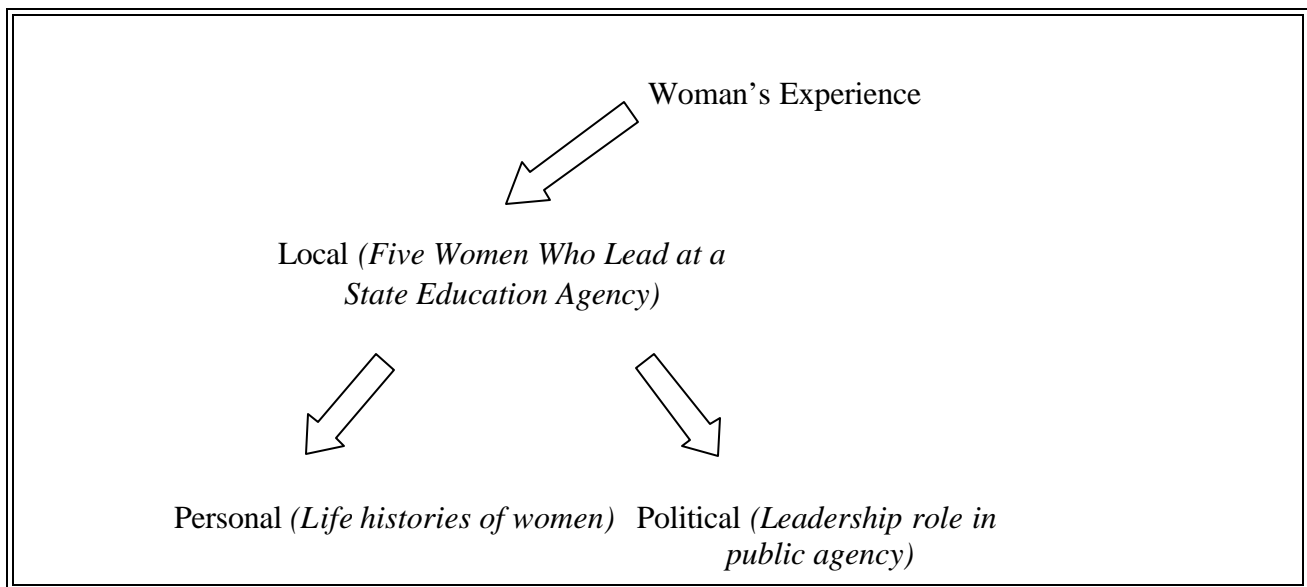
### Introduction

The findings in this study are not astounding, but they are significant. These women, who range in age from 45 to 60, came of age in post-World War II America during the struggle for racial and gender equality. Maynard (1994) pointed out that people's stories of their lives are embedded in their culture. They describe and interpret events at the same time. The women in this study work within an organization whose bureaucratic structure was in place for nearly a century before the women were born. Men have ruled this State Education Agency during its first hundred years, and they remain in certain positions that mark them as powerful.

Some women are gaining power as well; two of the women in this study serve in positions of close proximity to the Chief State School Officer of the Agency. Before this study was finalized, a woman was appointed as the Deputy, or second in command, at the State Education Agency upon the resignation of the man who held the post at the study's outset. Incrementally, these women and others like them are making their mark on leadership within this State Agency.

The focus of this chapter is: What has been learned in answer to the basic research questions in this study, and how can these answers inform educational leadership for others? This study was conducted using Donna Haraway's (1991) map of women's experience as its theoretical framework. Haraway (1991) argued that all of women's experience can be analyzed through the binary pairs of local/global and personal/political. Figure 5 illustrates the portions of Haraway's (1991) map that were most pertinent to this study.





*Figure 5.* Portions of Haraway's (1991) map that were most pertinent to this study.

The analysis of these women's lives and leadership addressed the basic research questions in this study:

- ☞ What are the values, perspectives, goals and behaviors of women in educational leadership positions at a State Education Agency?
- ☞ What role does gender play in educational leadership at a State Education Agency?
- ☞ What roles do diversity and gender equity play in educational leadership at a State Education Agency?

The remaining sections of this chapter present conclusions from this study. The Hero Is Dead: Bring On The Women!; Feminizing a Public Organization, and A Leadership Primer for Girls and Boys and Their Parents offer my responses to the findings presented in Chapter Four. These sections are based on careful analyses of women's experiences using Haraway's (1991) model. This study focused on the local, personal, and political articulations of women's experience.

*The Hero Is Dead: Bring On The Women!*

One writer on leadership recently asserted that “the dominant construct of ‘leadership’ in the English speaking world is bound by a masculinist construct associated with aggressiveness, forcefulness, competitiveness and independence” (Scrivens, 2002, p. 1). However, recent research suggests that this dominant mode of leadership is no longer working. Fletcher (2002) pointed out that workplace effectiveness depends less on individual action and more on collaboration. She concurred with others who had written about new leadership styles that what organizations need at this time in history is not “another hero” but shared leadership (Fletcher, 2002, p. 1). She also argued convincingly that although there is much talk about the new post-heroic leadership, the paradigm has not really shifted. The notions of masculinity and femininity that are embedded in our subconscious, Fletcher argues, make heroic images of leadership and individual success resilient (Fletcher, 2002). The reason these ideas hold fast, according to Fletcher (2002), is that the new models “violate some basic principles and beliefs—about gender, power, individual achievement, and even work and family—that we as a society hold dear” (Fletcher, 2002, p. 2). One such notion that the society holds dear is that there are two separate spheres: the public, where people work and produce, and the private, where people nurture and care for family.

In this study, I saw evidence that this notion of split spheres was still alive and apparent, but I don’t think it is thriving. Based on my findings from the women’s life histories and their leadership experience, women like the ones in this study are making inroads to developing a new leadership culture. They are helping to make “private cares” into “public worries” (Center for Gender in Organizations, 2001b, p .2). Heroic leadership models of the past implied that a single individual, a hero, would come forth and solve the

problem or slay the dragon. Post-heroic leadership refers to leadership that is multifaceted; it does not have to be exerted by a single individual; it is collaborative. A single warrior can no longer slay the dragon to restore order. Karen named two dragons that would be exceedingly difficult for any single warrior to slay: “Our society has fostered greed, and we do not nurture our children.” She called for “bringing children back into the fold.” She did not see herself as a hero; rather, she saw herself as a collaborator and advocate for leadership with heart.

Each woman in this study affirmed a belief in feminine leadership that looked different from what they knew as masculine, or heroic, leadership. They spoke of having the courage to stick one’s neck out, of being a family-oriented leader, of not ignoring the needs of their staff, of being collegial and collaborative. These women, rather than slaying dragons, were charged with a mission to make the public world a better place. As Jane said, “I think that men still function in that historical world and orientation. That’s what’s really nice about having women, more women, in leadership roles.”

Each woman in the study mentioned male mentors. It is not difficult to understand why males served as mentors to these women. Males, particularly white males, were privileged in the world of paid work since the onset of industrialization (Padavic and Reskin, 1994). Until fairly recently, studies found that most women respondents reported that their informal mentors were male, and primarily White (Blake-Beard, 2003). This finding upholds the conceptual framework of heroic leadership: women looked to men as their “heroes.” Recent research indicates that women are increasingly serving as mentors, and that women are more often involved in cross-gender mentoring (Blake-Beard, 2003). These are promising findings that indicate women are gaining positions where they may act as mentors.

The women in this study did not address whether or not they served as mentors to others within the organization, but from observation, I found that they did.

In December 2001, a few months after the terrorist attack in New York City, the Simmons Graduate School of Management in Boston sponsored a seminar on new ways of thinking about leadership. The seminar resonated with the awareness that leaders were facing a new and different world (Center for Gender in Organization, 2001b). In the shadow of the heroism displayed on September 11, and President Bush's strong rhetoric of good versus evil, the seminar called for an end to the polarizing language and expressed a need for another model of political leadership. The new leadership that was needed would be post-heroic, and based on citizen-participation. The new leaders would need to be open to multiple solutions and a bigger picture that reflects the complexity of the modern world (Center for Gender in Organization, 2001b). The new leadership would focus on mission rather than self, and new leaders would embrace complexity and mess (Center for Gender in Organization, 2001b). Rebecca's comments about her leadership style illustrated the focus on mission: "I need to stand behind you, to pick up the pieces and make sure you have a sound platform to stand on. That may be different, I know a lot of people really like to be front and center, [but] I just like to make sure things work well."

One of the effective leadership training models for post-heroic leaders was based on an educational model: there was curriculum development, evaluation, group work, and co-teaching (Center for Gender in Organization, 2001b). The women in this study were very familiar with the components of such a model, which may account for what I perceived as women perched on the cusp of the post-heroic leadership model. Women have had to acknowledge and deal with the complexity of organizations, i.e., family and social structures.

They reached maturity with what Gilligan (1993) described as the dissociative split between their experience and reality, and they embrace the complexity of multiple tasks and multiple roles. At the above-mentioned seminar, it was noted that doing leadership differently meant “having leaders come up through the organization,” and learning as a “whole group, so people take turns” (Center for Gender in Organization, 2001b, p. 4). How strikingly similar these ideas are to what the women in this study were already doing. Four of the five had “come up through the organization.” Karen’s response to whether or not she was a leader was nearly synonymous with the description of the changes deemed necessary: “I consider myself one of the interested group,” and “I like to see leadership just change hands around the table.”

Kolb and Merrill-Sands (2001) pointed out that women need to challenge and interrupt gender assumptions in constructive ways. This is exactly what this study demonstrated that these women were doing. They exhibited the needed attitudinal change that “values the feminine: attentiveness, listening, acceptance of flaws and mess” (Center for Gender in Organizations, 2001b, p. 2). Even though none of these women claimed to be feminists they were chinking away at the old masculine model of leadership—of heroes slaying dragons. They were doing this by participating in this study, analyzing their own leadership, and theorizing about feminine leadership.

One note of caution: I do not want to imply that all women are post-heroic leaders. Some women have assumed leadership in largely masculine ways and conform to what is considered the masculine model of leadership. Indeed Brunner and Costello’s (2003) study of bullying in organizations indicates that in some instances, women as supervisors and managers actually keep competent women from being noticed and promoted. They

contended that a woman bully's "sole strength may be her ability to puppet upper management's traditional agenda" (p. 4). This may happen when feminine traits are undervalued in a masculine system, and women who do become managers want to protect their power base. Whatever the cause, this study does not intend to forward the notion that all women are good leaders. That is not the intent in describing the new leadership: both men and women can openly embrace post-heroic leadership. As Jane indicated, the current Chief State School Officer at the State Agency, a man who "put his family first," would be an example of the new leader.

### *Feminizing a Public Organization*

In this section, I want to explore the possibility that a public organization can be feminized and in so doing, it can be made more empathetic. Some organizational theorists (Kelleher, Rao, and Stuart, 1999; Williams, 1995) have argued that organizations' norms and values are gendered. They caution that the underlying structures and processes that reinforce and reproduce gender inequity may be invisible and may appear to be routine and gender-neutral (Kelleher, Rao, and Stuart, 1999). If this is the case, one could argue that an organization that is masculine in gender will be markedly different from one that is feminine in some of the same ways that men are different from women. Kelleher, Rao, and Stuart (1999) contended that what is generally accepted as appropriate behavior and norms of the workplace are reflections of male characteristics, like individuality, independence, and rationality.

Furthermore, experts in organizational and psychodynamic theory contend that schools of management have masculinist assumptions about achievement (Center for Gender in Organization, 2002c). These masculine assumptions do not acknowledge the undue

pressure on women who have the primary responsibility for family in addition to their work outside the home, and thus women's responsibilities outside the workplace are not legitimized (Center for Gender in Organization, 2002c). Cox (1994) contended that despite all the talk about men sharing responsibilities of child-rearing and housework, women in America do as much as twice as much as men in the home. It would follow, then, that an organization that valued achievement and success in the workplace, but devalued family responsibilities may be considered masculine in nature, while an organization that recognized the importance of relationships, i.e., families, may be considered feminine.

Baron-Cohen (2003) poses a new theory of sexual differences that is based on brain research. His thesis, stated simply is: "The female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy. The male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems" (p.1). An empathizer can easily pick up on other people's feelings and is affected by their feelings. A systemizer controls systems by identifying rules that govern them, through careful analysis, observation, and prediction (Baron-Cohen, 2003). It should be mentioned here that Edward Wilson (2000) reminded readers of the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of his seminal work in social biology that while neuroscientists' replications of human mental activity may be incomplete, they go far beyond the "philosophical speculations of the past"(vii). Wilson (2000) further added that:

To grasp human nature objectively, to explore it to the depths scientifically, and to comprehend its ramifications by cause-and-effect explanations leading from biology into culture, would be to approach if not attain the grail of scholarship, and to fulfill the dreams of the Enlightenment. (vii)

How do such theories fit within the framework of this study? The stories that the five women shared in this study support the concept that a public organization that is more empathetic and less systemizing would be of greater benefit to women in leadership roles. Jane indicated that her willingness to come to the State Education Agency to work was in large part due to the Chief State School Officer—whom she saw as putting family first. She did not indicate that she saw the State Education Agency itself as a family-first kind of organization, but rather, she saw one individual, albeit the leader of the organization, whom she knew to be a person who was very cognizant of family priorities.

Brenda, on the other hand, spoke at length about how there had been no time for relationships early in her career at the organization, and how she should have moved a cot into her office because she spent such long hours there. Karen described the frustrations of her current role because she had not found her place yet: She felt the need for more “guidance toward a vision.” She complained that in leadership team meetings, “We don’t plan and talk about where the Agency is going;” the meetings were more an occasion to “tick off agenda items.” I would argue that the frustrations of Karen’s new role were created by too much systemizing (monitoring information and tracking variance). Karen’s call for guidance towards a vision expressed a need for better communication, which would require more empathizing (connecting or resonating emotionally) (Baron-Cohen, 2003).

If an organization (and here, I am speaking only of a public organization) were feminized, or borrowing from Baron-Cohen’s (2003) theory, made more empathetic, it would recognize that relationships matter and it would become more family-friendly. It would not demand long hours away from home and families. It would move beyond systemizing to



become more empathizing. I argue that an organization—like a State Education Agency, may benefit from becoming more feminized.

There is research that indicates that an ability to handle multiple roles leads to higher performance (Center for Gender in Organization, 2001a). Rebecca reminded the frustrated teacher she was mentoring that if she could perform the various roles required in running a home and raising her family, teaching was a “piece of cake.” It is important for organizations to recognize that women are accustomed to handling many roles. Rebecca described it well:

I think women have more skills at or have had more exposure to running homes and keeping lots of things on their mind, like picking up so and so from carpool and at the same time you’ve got to get groceries and you’ve got to get this ready and where men are very helpful in that role often they don’t have the practice of keeping all those things on their mind and not going crazy.

Some writers contend that organizations are “losing their highest performers when they lose women who want to integrate work and personal life and are pressured to make work their only priority” (Center for Gender in Organization, 2001 a, p.5). Research in the late eighties on how couples in which both partners work divide the housework indicated that women spent a lot more time doing housework than men. Further, the men’s tasks tended to be weekly or monthly tasks while the women’s tasks were daily chores.

(Padavic and Reskin, 1994).

I am not arguing here that men never assume roles of responsibility for their families or that all women are more responsible for their families’ needs. Rather, I am arguing for the workplace to become more equitable in expectations, norms, and values regarding feminine

characteristics. Relationships should be valued equally with reasoning. For women and men to be truly equal at work, the organizational arrangements that privilege men must be changed and the psychological incentives that make men strive to be different from women must also change (Williams, 1995, p. 185).

I contend that the women and the men within a public organization will benefit if the organization is more empathetic and less systemizing. There would be a greater regard for familial responsibilities and perhaps even provisions for child-care within the organization. I have often wondered why all schools do not provide on-site daycare; it seems a natural fit, yet few public schools and few public organizations have such facilities. Increasingly, as women participate in paid jobs outside the home, there are fewer relatives available to provide daycare, so parents must rely on organized care providers (Padavic and Reskin, 1994). Organized childcare is expensive and it is inconvenient, leading to increased pressure on working women. In this study, Jane spoke to her need to have a “wife” at home. She characterized her husband as

somewhat progressive; he did different things than his father, he was there when the children were born, he changed diapers, he did stuff his Dad would never do, so progressive in those kinds of things, but again, because of acculturation, because of whatever, because of my desire to want to be their mother, the children, for caretaking stuff absolutely look to me first, and still do.

If it is true that workers, bosses, coworkers, and customers all have a hand in creating a gendered workplace, and if employers’ decisions help shape the gendered work environment (Padavic and Reskin, 1994), then it would be possible to feminize, or

empathize, the organization or workplace. Women and men would have to assert their needs and employers would have to become responsive to those needs. A shift from having male mentors to having female mentors may serve as one way to feminize the organization.

A State Education Agency is a public policy-making organization, and if it were to become more empathetic, and less systemizing, it is likely that this trend would be reflected in the policies produced. Blackmore (1995) wrote about the feminist policy-makers in the Australian State Department of Education, maintaining that “one cannot talk of policy abstractly,” rather it must be seen as the “product of a particular context at a particular time” (p. 10). In a bureaucracy like a State Education Agency, it is the administrator, and in this study, the women, who are the experts in policy-making and who must represent citizens’ best interests. Karen perceived this when she spoke of her current goals: “I don’t hear one person mention ‘Is this good for the children?’; ‘Is it going to make things better for the children?’” Perhaps a more feminized organization, would take social relationships into account, rather than adhering to a more “rational-technicist/managerialist” approach (Blackmore, 1995, p. 2). Some politicians have called for training centers to recruit women to become policy-makers, claiming that “Politics has long been a man’s world, and this will give us fresh voices, different points of view and new ideas” (Thigpen, 2003, p. 5B). Women as policy-makers are likely to produce more feminized policy, which will reflect the fresh voices and different points of view from the traditional policy-makers.

In this section, I posited a reconceptualization of a public organization, suggesting that if such an organization were to become more feminized, it could become a more child-friendly, relationship-oriented, collaborative entity. I have used Baron Cohen’s (2003) theory based on the brain research of men and women to identify the distinctive nature of

men and women. I do not mean to imply that all men are systemizers, and that all women are empathizers. Nor do I want to imply that an organization can become feminized by simply adding more women and taking away more men. Rather, I am juxtaposing the ideal public organization that would address the needs of families, women and men, with what is usually seen as a bureaucratic, policy-making entity that conforms to traditional culture and norms.

*A Leadership Primer for Girls and Boys and Their Parents*

Although I have tried to avoid making generalizations based on only five women who are leaders within one organization, I do believe there are valuable lessons that can be gleaned from the stories presented here. While one purpose in conducting this research was to find out how gender equity affected educational leadership, another was to inform other younger girls, parents, men, and women who seek more information about careers in educational leadership by sharing these women's stories. To this end, I noted those behaviors that were common to the women's childhood, young adult life, or leadership. These behaviors contributed to the women's success, and are worthy of emulation. These principles may be the gold nuggets of this research, although they are not shocking revelations. Some of them echo findings from Rimm's (1999) report on how girls become successful. These behaviors were pertinent to the successful women in this study who came of age during the last half of the twentieth century. I include these in a primer because they provide excellent advice for parents of both girls and boys, and for aspiring leaders. The women's voices in this study are bulleted to offer testimony to each leadership behavior.

1. Have an open-mind. Each woman in the study indicated that her openness to differences, to new experiences and to novel ideas was important in her early life and in her current role. The parents or caretakers of these women modeled acceptance of

others, regardless of their race or gender. These women believed they could learn from others. As Roos (1985) pointed out, sex differences in socialization are elusive and difficult to measure in empirical tests. People learn others' expectations from the socialization that they receive as children as to what constitutes appropriate adult behavior. The women in this study learned to be open-minded, accepting, and inquisitive. The women said:

- ? I had tried very diligently to make sure that I was very responsive to people in the field, that I exerted myself as a leader, but not necessarily as a pushy person. I also tried to position myself as someone who listened to the viewpoints of other people.
- ? I had wonderful experiences and I think it was because I was open to people.
- ? We were all friends, race was NOT a big deal.
- ? I can understand why people have other views, but I have very liberal views.
- ? I grew up with the value that you respect everybody regardless of race, creed or color. I think that has been the important formative component of my life because I really do believe that you can learn from anyone. And so therefore I don't dismiss people before I really get to know them.
- ? I've always had just all kinds of friends, and never identified strongly with one group.

2. Be a visionary. Having a vision and setting goals toward realization of the vision was vital to these women. They were goal-setters as children and as adults. They said:

- ? I've never thought about running away from home, or doing really wild kind of drugs or anything like that, because I always had this unspoken goal. Yes, I was going to graduate from high school and I was probably going to graduate somewhere at the top of the class, and I was going to go to college.
  - ? Through it all, I had this vision of how it could be different, of how it could be better for children.
  - ? That was the year that I did not want to miss a single day of school.
  - ? When I finish here, that's something that would kind of excite me. To go to a poor, rural, small area and be a principal of an elementary school and really make a difference. You know, go somewhere that really needs some help.
  - ? I really enjoy looking at the big picture, I'm always looking at the big picture.
  - ? I had this vision of how it could be different, of how it could be better for children and all of those experiences have shaped the type of administrator that I am today, and the type of person I am when I interact with teachers.
3. Have high expectations. Parents or other family members held high expectations of these women when they were young. These girls were pushed along the road to success from an early age. In each woman's life, there was a person within the immediate family that encouraged, cajoled, pestered, inspired, and challenged the young girl to do more and to achieve more. In addition these women had high expectations for themselves. They said:
- ? [I] wouldn't have dreamed of missing a day of school; wouldn't have dreamed of making less than an "A".

- ? You had to go to college to get out of town. That's what you had to do. Otherwise you'd end up working in the mill, and I could never see myself doing that.
- ? I had this situation that I was going to have to climb out of because if I didn't, I couldn't see what the future would hold otherwise. If I didn't go to school, if I didn't do well, I didn't know what the alternative was going to be.
- ? [My brother] had a total expectation that I was going to go to school.
- ? I had a father who was very interested in my learning, and he was interested in spiritual growth as well as education, but he had a keen desire for all his kids to be well-educated.

4. Put family first. Family members—parents, aunts, grandmothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, and children were significant in these women's lives. Relationships were very important to each of these women, both in their childhood and as adults. When parents were not present other relatives encouraged success. The women said:

- ? We're all within two hours of my parents, and they're both still alive, both very healthy, a nice family, we all liked each other, which is pretty amazing.
- ? I grew up really in a very secure environment. I clearly knew who I was in terms of my family and my extended family.
- ? The other thing that really shaped me a lot in the early days was a large extended family.
- ? I love my home and my family, that's my most important thing in life.
- ? We've lost both parents, and settled estates, and we've never had a cross word, we've always just worked things out for the good of the whole.

5. Do not mask emotion. Some girls mask their feelings because they believe the world associated with work will afford them greater success. It is important to encourage girls and boys not to mask feelings like hurt, disappointment, and heartache. Girls and boys may cry. The women said:

? I'm a real private person, so I didn't talk about it, I came to work like everything was okay and sometimes I just cried myself to sleep at night: But at work, and for the kids, I was just okay.

? That's the only time I remember seeing my Daddy actually just cry.

? It was a death sentence. [The doctor] told [my brother] the next day, what the problem was, before anybody could get there, and he sat in the room, and that's the only time I saw him cry. And he cried very quietly for a while.

6. Do the right thing. Each woman in this study was more concerned with doing the right thing as a leader in their organization than with doing the thing right. Ethical concerns were at the forefront in their decision-making. They said:

? It was a place where all the teachers worked together for the common good of the students.

? I would hope, especially if you talked to people from down around home, if you mentioned my name right now, that people would say, "She has a good name."

? My instincts usually just lead me to do the right thing.

? Every decision I make every day I think about the impact on children in classrooms and teachers. We can't continue to just make it at the top and not think about how it's impacting those children.



? I lead for the good of the whole, not for the good of me.

7. Work hard. These women were raised in families with a strong work ethic. They were willing to expend the effort and the time necessary to achieve success, and they did not expect their journeys to be comfortable or easy. The women said:

? I feel young, because I have a lot of energy, all day long. I've always been that way. I'm an early riser, morning person, I like to be one of the first people [to arrive at work] I love to open the door. I like to be the one to get the lights on, get everything going.

? From the time I was 15, I worked, I had a job outside, so I could contribute to the family income.

? My Mom worked after I was six or seven months old; she worked from then until she retired at 62, in a textile factory.

? I really like working. I get a lot of stuff done. I have a great staff, we do good stuff and I like being a part of that.

? They were saying that minorities couldn't get out of there; [but] all they [the university] wanted were students who applied themselves.

And the minorities who didn't get out didn't apply themselves. I finished in three years, I had my dissertation done, and I don't know how I did that because I was a principal.

8. Believe in Yourself. The women in this study called it a strong sense of self or confidence. They simply acknowledged their belief that they would reach their goal or find comfortable footing in uncomfortable zones. These women believed in themselves, and they said:

- ? You have to believe in yourself or you'll be eaten alive.
- ? Lots of us became educators, and that again, gave me a real strong sense of self.
- ? I remember these cousins saying to me, you can't do this, or you can't do that. And I would say, "Well, just watch me."
- ? One thing I have never lacked is confidence.
- ? I've done just about everything; right now I'm doing stained glass. Last year I did welding, sand blasting, I'll probably go back to doing some of that again. I've done everything. Weaving, jewelry-making, and, you name it.

9. Maintain a healthy balance. These women balanced their private and public lives.

Several mentioned the importance of staying grounded, and of having fun. For some of the women in this study, balancing work and family did not come easy, and for at least one, her work at the Agency was postponed until her children were older. Some balanced their lives by staying in close touch with family, others through their faith or their hobbies. They said:

- ? I try to keep [parents and children in the Church tutorial program] informed, too, in terms of what's going on at the state level, and what parents need to plug into that, and how important it is to support their children and to keep up with what's going on at the school. I try to give them little tips of things they can do at home to help their children be successful.
- ? If you're going to come here every day, some days it might be a cup of mocha, at three o'clock, sometimes its just taking time to look at pictures of something

recently that we've done that's real fun, but you gotta have fun every day and you can't let the job wear you out.

? I like simple things. You know, I've never met a brownie I didn't like. That makes me feel good.

10. Be Humble. These women were approachable and realistic in their assessments of who they were. Each one knew exactly where she had come from and acknowledged those who had helped her along the way. Each one could laugh at herself. The women said:

? In every crowd you're going to find people who are not really about life: You just have to find people you can enjoy.

? I do talk to a lot of other people in the course of a day and in the course of a week, that are not in education, that are not tied up in the issues that I'm tied up in, and that keeps me grounded, and that makes me, I think a lot about, [people] like my sister, who struggle every day to pay their electricity bill and keep the family together, and keep kids fed. So some of the problems I struggle with, I try to balance that against.

? Be humble, and always engage your heart.

#### Further Research

This study was somewhat limited in its breadth, since it was based on findings from interviews with only five women in educational leadership roles. Further research of women and men in educational leadership positions at state education agencies may contribute to other solid findings regarding feminine leadership styles. It would strengthen the findings presented here if similar research were conducted with men who were in educational leadership positions. Additional studies of women who work in support positions with the

women in this study may serve to illuminate these findings. It would be interesting to contrast their stories with the stories of the women who lead.

I strongly suggest other studies like this one that would enlarge the sample provided here. Such studies of women in other regions of the country or in other parts of the world would broaden the findings on feminine leadership. More research on women from indigenous communities, like the woman in this study who was an American Indian, would provide valuable insight into the influence of community on women in leadership. More data could be collected from Black women leaders to supplement the story of the one woman in this study. No Asian or Hispanic women were included in this study, so it would greatly strengthen the body of knowledge on educational leadership to hear their stories as well.

The women in this study ranged in age from 45 to 60. An investigation of younger women in educational leadership positions would be very informative and may contribute trend data on generational changes in leadership. It is also likely that research on women who serve as leaders in other educational institutions, such as public schools, libraries, and colleges would provide additional insight into feminine leadership styles.

I urge more studies to be done using the life history approach because it provides knowledge of how women fit within their cultural group. Data from life histories are rich historical and sociological resources that shed light on gender, culture, norms and values of the participants' time and place. Studies such as this one contribute to the body of knowledge on leadership, gender, organizational management, sociology, and history.

#### Reflections on This Research

When I began this project I wasn't certain what direction it would take or what its outcomes would be. My goal was to learn more about women in educational leadership and

their histories. I had many hunches regarding women who led in education and some of these hunches were borne out, and some were not. I believed that women in educational leadership positions had not deliberately set out for that destination, but ended up there by default. This hunch was not borne out. While most of the women in the study spoke of having very limited choices in selecting their careers, they did not indicate that they considered their careers to be careers by default.

I believed that women who were in leadership positions had probably been spurred along by strong fathers. This was the case for three of these women, but the others had mothers or female relatives that pushed them to achieve. I also conjectured that there was a close tie between being a teacher and being a leader. While two of these women talked a lot about what kind of teacher they had been, one woman was never a teacher, and the other two did not talk at length about their classroom experiences.

As a woman in the same age range and in the same field of work, I shared much in common with these participants. I did not know either of these women particularly well at the outset of the study, but they and their stories enriched my life. These women opened up to me during the course of this research and gave me so much more than I expected.

I discovered many similarities between their lives and mine and differences as well. When I began this study, I believed that this would be our story, theirs and mine, since I shared their culture, their working-class upbringing, and their love of literacy. I found out very quickly, however, that this study of leadership would be comprised of their stories. Theirs were the stories I wanted to tell, because my path had diverged from theirs. I had deliberately chosen not to become a manager within the organization. Their stories forced me to reflect on my own choices and my own history, which is another story altogether.

The findings presented here are based on the rich data they graciously provided in telling their stories. The overarching theme that I discovered and reflected upon throughout this research was the vast importance of the family unit, whoever it may be composed of, in the lives of these women when they were girls. The norms, values and expectations that propelled these girls into lives as adult leaders in education were imprinted through their early experiences within their families.

### Summary

This study was conducted to investigate the influence of gender on educational leadership. It was designed as an exploration of life histories of five women who served in leadership roles in a State Education Agency. What I found was that these five women, who are racially diverse, had a common Southern heritage and somewhat common experiences during their late adolescence, or “coming of age” years. They all emerged from the tumultuous sixties with varying degrees of commitment to the cause of gender equity. All concurred that their awareness of equity issues had been sharpened by exposure to either subtle or overt racial or gender discrimination. Each woman valued her family; each woman learned leadership skills at the knee of influential relatives and alongside white male mentors. Each woman remained committed to leadership in the State Education Agency, where she sought to do right by the schools and children of the State. Additionally, each sought to live a more balanced life, valuing both her personal life and her work life.

Each woman contributed to a definition of feminine leadership: It is collegial, collaborative, caring, inclusive, compassionate and courageous. These women recognized that their gender, and for two of the women, their race, had thrust them into a peculiar place in leading others: While they did not ascribe fully to the masculinist assumptions of

leadership, they followed the post-heroic model to varying degrees. The important thing was that they were aware of the differences between the men who had traditionally held their roles and the style they had imposed on their subsequent leadership in the posts. The findings in this study are optimistic. They look forward to other findings in other studies of younger women who may have come even further towards a new style of leadership than the women studied here. The findings in this study point decisively to the future and are encouraging, because they allow what Haraway (1991) called “the construction of an account of collective experience, a potent and often mystified operation”(p. 113). Like Haraway (1991), I hope that writing such as this will help to create affinities among all human beings. For as Christiane Northrup (1998), a noted physician specializing in women’s health issues, believes:

For all of written history, the Earth and the natural world have been viewed as feminine, with “virgin resources” to be “exploited.” What happens to individual women and what happens to our planet are linked. Our personal and collective degradation of nature, women, and the feminine is drawing to a close, one person at a time. (pp. 766-767)

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: COVER STORY

I am currently writing my proposal for my dissertation at NCSU. I want to do a qualitative study of women in top leadership positions at DPI, and I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in this study. I am asking you and four others, hoping for a sample of five.

I plan on doing a "life histories" approach, telling the story through a narrative of how you came to be where you are. The theoretical framework will have feminist overtones, since women in top leadership positions are the exception, not the rule. The study will protect anonymity, and all interviews and data will be treated confidentially. I wanted to ask you first before I formally write my proposal.

I am very interested in how women break the "glass ceiling" and what experiences and values from their early life, i.e., childhood, formative years equip them for their journey. I believe that something happens to little girls at an early age that points them in a certain direction, and prepares them to face atypical challenges successfully. This is just a hunch. I do want to interview you extensively about your life history. I would ask that you be candid, and as a researcher, I would pledge to respect your privacy and mask your identity in field notes and in the final product.

The interviewing and writing would take place in late spring and early summer. In terms of time, I think it would require an initial interview of 40-60 minutes, with follow-ups of shorter duration. I would also like to observe you in meetings, which is doable since I am here at DPI. I would ask, too, that you be willing to self-assess your leadership style using an instrument that has proven validity and reliability. This is the Leadership Attributes Inventory, developed for use with Vocational Education Leaders. It is a 39-item self-assessment, where you read a characteristic and rate yourself by saying to what degree (30% of the time, for example) you exhibit that characteristic. If you are willing to participate in this study, I will certainly be telling you more about the instrument. The self-assessment would probably take about 45 minutes of your time.

I have selected you because I consider you a leader. I hope that you will be willing to participate, but I understand the demands on your time. Please help me if you can.

Thanks for taking the time to consider my request.

## APPENDIX B: FOLLOW-UP CORRESPONDENCE

- 1) Would you feel more comfortable meeting me in an informal setting, like a coffee shop or restaurant, for our initial interview? (If so, we could meet either before work, after work, or during lunch at a location of your choosing at a time of greatest convenience to you.)
- 2) I want to hear your life story, i.e., how did you get from there (birth) to here (statewide leader in education), and why. I will probably "chunk" the data into childhood, schooling, relationships, career, and pivotal events. Do you have any reservations about full participation in the study?
- 3) Are you willing to disclose your age, ethnicity, and where you consider "home," i.e., NE, SE, Midwest, NW, W, SW United States?
- 4) Would you like to provide your pseudonym for the research? I will code all field notes with the fictitious name, so that I do not disclose anyone's identity anywhere in the process.

If you could send me answers, I'd be most grateful. Thanks - Belinda

I live less than five minutes away, in the Mordecai community off Wake Forest Road. I have a pleasant deck with table, chairs, and umbrella. I make really good iced tea, and even have a couple of bottles of decent wine on hand, should you enjoy a glass. Anyway, I'd like to invite you to come to my house after work, anytime between 5:00 - 8:00, sit on my deck, and allow me to listen to your story (and tape it as well). Remember, you won't be identified by name! I will allow up to two hours for the interview, but I will only ask you for one hour if you're hurried.

I am also providing an interview guide with this request. You may want to begin to reflect on some of my questions, and even jot down some of the things you think of when you read the questions. Thanks, again for agreeing to participate in this study.

Belinda

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

This is a study of life histories of five women who have reached positions of upper management and leadership in a State Educational Agency of a progressive southern state. You are an important part of that study: I want to hear *your* voice and see the world through *your* eyes.

1. Tell me about yourself: how old are you, what do you do (omit specifics, like job titles, and identifiers). Do you consider yourself a leader? Explain.
2. Tell me about your journey to this place (leadership at the state agency). Did you think you would end up here? Why?
3. Talk about childhood and growing up: where, when, what was it like? Describe your family. What were your early impressions of gender, race, and class? How have they changed?
4. What was school like for you (include the early days, high school, college, other)?
5. What were your early goals? Later goals? Current goals?
6. Tell me about significant relationships in your life.
7. What special opportunities came your way? What obstacles blocked your path?
8. Did you ever teach school? Were you a principal? Talk to me about early career experiences and how they shaped who you are today.
9. What were the pivotal events in your life?
10. Please share anything that may reveal the essence of who you are; what have I failed to ask that you feel is important to your story?
11. Do you think there is a feminine leadership style, i.e., do women lead differently from men? How? Explain.

## APPENDIX D: LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES INVENTORY

TABLE 1  
Leader Attributes

J. Moss, H. Preskill, B. Johansen

1. *Energetic with stamina*  
I approach my work with great energy and have the stamina to work long hours when necessary.
2. *Insightful*  
I reflect on the relationships among events and grasp the meaning of complex issues quickly.
3. *Adaptable, open to change*  
I encourage and accept suggestions and constructive criticism from my co-workers, and am willing to consider modifying my plans.
4. *Visionary*  
I look to the future and create new ways in which the organization can prosper.
5. *Tolerant of ambiguity and complexity*  
I am comfortable handling vague and difficult situations where there is no simple answer or no prescribed method for proceeding.
6. *Achievement-oriented*  
I am committed to achieving my goals and strive to keep improving my performance.
7. *Accountable*  
I hold myself answerable for my work and am willing to admit my mistakes.
8. *Assertive, initiating*  
I readily express my opinion and introduce new ideas.
9. *Confident, accepting of self*  
I feel secure about my abilities and recognize my shortcomings.
10. *Willing to accept responsibility*  
I am willing to assume higher level duties and functions within the organization.
11. *Persistent*  
I continue to act on my beliefs despite unexpected difficulties and opposition.
12. *Enthusiastic, optimistic*  
I think positively, approach new tasks with excitement, and view challenges as opportunities.
13. *Tolerant of frustration*  
I am patient and remain calm even when things don't go as planned.

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14. *Dependable, reliable*  
I can be counted onto through to get the job done.
15. *Courageous, risk-taker*  
I am willing to try out new ideas in spite of possible loss or failure.
16. *Emotionally balanced*  
I have a sense of humor and an even temperament even in stressful situations.
17. *Committed to the common good*  
I work to benefit the entire organization, not just myself.
18. *Personal integrity*  
I am honest and practice the values I espouse.
19. *Intelligent with practical judgment*  
I learn quickly, and know how and when to apply my knowledge.
20. *Ethical*  
I act consistent with principles of fairness and right or good conduct that can stand the test of close public scrutiny.
21. *Communication (listening, oral, written)*  
I listen closely to people with whom I work and am able to organize and clearly present information both orally and in writing.
22. *Sensitivity, respect*  
I genuinely care about others' feelings and show concern for people as individuals.
23. *Motivating others*  
I create an environment where people want to do their best.
24. *Networking*  
I develop cooperative relationships within and outside of the organization.
25. *Planning*  
I work with others to develop tactics and strategies for achieving organizational objectives.
26. *Delegating*  
I am comfortable assigning responsibility and authority.
27. *Organizing*  
I establish effective and efficient procedures for get mg work done in an orderly manner.
28. *Team building*  
I facilitate the development of cohesiveness and cooperation among the people with whom I work.



29. *Coaching*  
I help people with whom I work develop knowledge and skills for their work assignments.
30. *Conflict management*  
I bring conflict into the open and use it to arrive at constructive solutions.
31. *Time management*  
I schedule my own work activities so that deadlines are met and work goals are accomplished in a timely manner.
32. *Stress management*  
I am able to deal with the tension of high-pressure work situations.
33. *Appropriate use of leadership styles*  
I use a variety of approaches to influence and lead others.
34. *Ideological beliefs are appropriate to the group*  
I believe in and model the basic values of the organization.
35. *Decision~making*  
I make timely decisions that are in the best interest of the organization by analyzing all available information, distilling key points, and drawing relevant conclusions.
36. *Problem~solving*  
I effectively identify, analyze, and resolve difficulties and uncertainties at work.
37. *Information gathering and managing*  
I am able to identify, collect, organize, and analyze the essential information needed by my organization.

APPENDIX E: SELF-RATING FORM FOR THE LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE INVENTORY

Please indicate the response that best represents the extent to which you currently possess each attribute.

1. *About 40% or less of the time this is an accurate description of me.*
2. *About 50 % of the time this is an accurate description of me.*
3. *About 60% of the time this is an accurate description of me.*
4. *About 70% of the time this is an accurate description of me.*
5. *About 80% of the time this is an accurate description of me.*
6. *About 90% of the time this is an accurate description of me.*
7. *About 100% of the time this is an accurate description of me.*

Your response	Attribute
	1. Energetic with stamina
	2. Insightful
	3. Adaptable, open to change
	4. Visionary
	5. Tolerant of ambiguity and complexity
	6. Achievement-oriented
	7. Accountable
	8. Assertive, initiating
	9. Confident, accepting of self
	10. Willing to accept responsibility
	11. Persistent
	12. Enthusiastic, optimistic
	13. Tolerant of frustration
	14. Dependable, reliable
	15. Courageous, risk-taker
	16. Emotionally balanced
	17. Committed to the common good
	18. Personal integrity
	19. Intelligent with practical judgment
	20. Ethical
	21. Communication (listening, oral, written)
	22. Sensitivity, respect
	23. Motivating others
	24. Networking
	25. Planning
	26. Delegating
	27. Organizing
	28. Team building
	29. Coaching
	30. Conflict management
	31. Time management
	32. Stress management
	33. Appropriate use of leadership styles
	34. Ideological beliefs are appropriate to the group
	35. Decision-making
	36. Problem-solving
	37. Information gathering and managing

APPENDIX F: WOMEN LEADERS COMPARED TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
PRESIDENTS

The five women in this study rated themselves, using numbers 1 through 7, indicating the degree to which they felt they currently possessed each of the 37 attributes. The numbers represented a range from 1 = 40% or less of the time, to 7 = 100% of the time. If a woman believed that she currently possessed a given attribute, like Motivating others, and that attribute described her leadership 60% of the time, she would indicate a response of 3. The results from each woman's self-rating instrument were combined; and a mean response was computed for each of the 37 attributes.

The womens' means were then compared to means from an earlier study of mostly white male community college presidents (Hall, Lynch, and McElevy, 1997). The following table illustrates this comparison of means. It should be interpreted with caution, however, because of the large discrepancy in the size of the two samples. There were 5 women (not an adequate sample statistically) and there were 30 community college presidents.

It should be noted that all the women rated themselves as possessing the attribute Willing to take Responsibility 100% of the time (indicated by a 7 on the scale). Other cells are shaded (dark pink) for attributes that the women, on average, said they possessed 90% of the time (indicated by a 6 on the scale). Differences greater than 1 between the women's means and the mostly male community college presidents' means are shaded (medium green).

### Comparison of Mean Responses of Self-Ratings<sup>1</sup>

Attribute	Women Leaders (N=5)	Comm. College Presidents (N=30)	Difference
1. Energetic with stamina	6.20	5.70	+0.50
2. Insightful	5.20	5.37	-0.17
3. Adaptable, open to change	5.20	5.60	-0.40
4. Visionary	4.60	6.20	-1.60
5. Tolerant of ambiguity and complexity	3.40	5.17	-1.77
6. Achievement-oriented	6.20	6.20	0.00
7. Accountable	6.60	6.63	-0.03
8. Assertive, initiating	6.00	6.07	-0.07
9. Confident, accepting of self	5.80	5.93	-0.13
10. Willing to accept responsibility	7.00	6.23	+0.77
11. Persistent	5.60	5.93	-0.33
12. Enthusiastic, optimistic	6.20	6.07	+0.13
13. Tolerant of frustration	4.60	4.80	-0.20
14. Dependable, reliable	6.20	6.37	-0.17
15. Courageous, risk-taker	4.40	5.67	-1.27
16. Emotionally balanced	6.20	5.80	+0.40
17. Committed to the common good	6.40	6.73	-0.33
18. Personal integrity	6.80	6.77	+0.03
19. Intelligent with practical judgment	6.00	5.80	-0.20
20. Ethical	6.80	6.67	+0.13
21. Communication (listening, oral, written)	5.80	5.57	+0.23
22. Sensitivity, respect	5.80	6.13	-0.33
23. Motivating others	6.20	5.77	+0.43
24. Networking	4.80	5.90	-1.10
25. Planning	5.80	5.77	+0.03
26. Delegating	4.60	6.00	-1.40
27. Organizing	5.80	5.20	+0.60
28. Team building	5.60	5.67	-0.07
29. Coaching	5.00	5.57	-0.57
30. Conflict management	5.20	5.23	-0.03
31. Time management	5.60	5.67	-0.07
32. Stress management	4.60	5.83	-1.23
33. Appropriate use of leadership styles	5.40	5.97	-0.57
34. Ideological beliefs are appropriate to the group	5.40	6.43	-1.03
35. Decision-making	6.00	6.07	-0.07
36. Problem-solving	6.00	5.67	+0.33
37. Information gathering and managing	6.20	5.57	-0.63

**Highs > 6.00**

**On average, the women felt this was an accurate description of them 90% of the time.**

**Difference > 1.00**

<sup>1</sup>Interpretations should be made with caution due to discrepancy in sample sizes.

## APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina

Office of Research and Graduate Studies

**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

Sponsored Programs and Regulatory Compliance  
Campus Box 7514  
1 Leazar Hall  
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514  
919.515.7200  
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra A. Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator  
North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board

Date: June 18, 2003

Project Title: Women Who Lead at the SEA: Five Lives

IRB#: 151-03-6

Dear Ms. Black:

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101.b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations.  
For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429; the IRB Number is: IRB00000330
2. Review de novo of this proposal is necessary if any significant alterations/additions are made.

Please provide your faculty sponsor with a copy of this letter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Debra Paxton  
NCSU IRB