THE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WORKING AS TEACHERS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL WHO HOLD ADMINISTRATIVE LICENSES BUT WHO DO NOT WORK AS ADMINISTRATORS

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Abstract

Although the barriers that women face in the field of secondary education administration have been examined in detail, less research exists on the experiences of women holding administrative licenses but who do not work in the field. This qualitative study examined the experiences and choices of six women working in public schools that possess administrative licenses but do not work as administrators. This study required these women to participate in two semi-structured interviews in order to reconstruct their experiences. The data collected resulted in the emergence of four key themes: (1) Specificity of Interests, (2) Personal and Vocational Self-concept, (3) Professional Influences, and (4) Role Balance. The findings from this study shed light on the experiences and perceptions of this unique population, and may assist public school systems in implementing change at the district level.

Key words: women, career pattern, secondary education, administration
In memory of my grandmother Virginia Clifford.
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“The brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out; the brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. The brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They are there to stop the other people!”

-Randy Pausch, *The Last Lecture*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem of Practice

The position of women in society has changed dramatically in recent decades, and this change has positively affected women’s roles as teachers and leaders in schools (Coleman, 2005). Despite this change, “…women still do not fill administrative positions in proportion to their numbers in teaching, or in proportion to those who are now trained and certified to become administrators” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 28). Hoff and Mitchell (2008) found that men still currently hold the majority of administrative positions in public schools, and the bulk of these positions are held at the secondary level. Although there has been a large increase in the number of women holding secondary administrative positions since the 1980s, the number of male and female administrators is still not comparable (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), at the current rate of growth the number of women working in superintendent positions in public schools will not be equal to the number of men working in the same position for another seventy-seven years. Moreover, Brunner and Kim (2010) found that the pool of candidates for administrative positions is made up of seventy-five percent women, while women only occupy eighteen to twenty percent of superintendent positions. Also, the number of women working in secondary and central office administrative positions is currently not well documented (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). These statistics highlight the discrepancy between the number of male and female secondary administrators in public schools. Without further investigation, the current discrepancy between the number of male and female administrators at the secondary level will not be understood and this poses a barrier for change (Cook, 2007).

Much of the research conducted up to this point has focused on the barriers that women face in educational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). For example, Myung, Loeb, and
Horng (2011) found that male teachers are twice as likely as female teachers to be encouraged by principals to pursue administrative positions. Pirouznia (2013) posited that there is a preference for masculine leadership styles within the field of secondary administration and that this preference creates a barrier for women seeking to obtain administrative positions. All of these points support the notion that there are barriers that make obtaining administrative positions at the secondary level difficult for women. However, it is important to note that within this research, there has been very little written about the choices women make when constructing their careers.

Although previous research discusses the barriers that women face entering the field of secondary administration (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), the impact of the choices that these women make and how their choices influence the construction of their careers has not been explored in detail. In some instances, women make choices while working that affect their career progression. For example, some women choose to cut back hours or leave the workforce entirely for periods of time in order to dedicate more time to their families and other domestic responsibilities (Brykman, 2006). However, other women decide to reduce their hours or leave their jobs because they are not satisfied with the opportunities available in their current places of employment (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). These types of choices have often been viewed as signs of decreased commitment to one’s career, and this perception has limited the upward mobility available to women in their careers (Valcour & Ladge, 2008). On the other hand, many women do not view career success in a traditional manner, and this unique view of success may shape the way in which women construct their careers (Valcour & Ladge, 2008). It is for these reasons that the concept of personal choice needs to be investigated and taken into consideration when exploring the career construction of women who hold secondary administrative licenses.
but do not work as administrators. This qualitative study detailing the experiences and choices of female secondary administrative aspirants aids in giving women in the field a voice and adds to the current body of literature on the topic.

**Significance**

Shakeshaft, Irby, Grogan and Ballenger (2007) found that if educational administration does not change, women will not have the same representation as males in the superintendency until the 22nd century. They found this information to be of heightened concern largely because there are more women than men in administrative preparation and doctoral programs. This study acknowledges that women have the skills and the state-mandated credentials necessary to be administrators, but they do not always pursue the positions for which they have prepared. Additionally, researchers have suggested that more work should be done to incorporate the voices of women and minorities into the research on secondary administration so as to promote greater equality in the field and the perspectives currently being offered (Coleman, 2005).

Studying the experiences of women working at the secondary level who possess an administrative license but who do not work as administrators is a very important topic of study. The neglect of this topic in past research has resulted in a gap in the literature surrounding secondary level administration. It is crucial to allow this group of women to have a voice and tell their stories in order to better understand why some women choose to pursue jobs in administration while others do not. Not only is this topic of study important for future researchers, but also for the women whose stories are being told.

Only women were recruited as study participants because, despite the fact that more women have moved into administrative positions in recent years, the percentage of female teachers compared to the number of female administrators remains uneven (Shakeshaft et al.,
Sanchez and Thornton (2010) found that women who had moved into administrative positions generally held the lowest ranked positions in their districts. It has also been stated that female leaders in the field of education have not been well studied (Grogan, 2010). Due to the findings of these and other researchers, this study focused on the experiences of females working at the secondary level of varying ages.

**Positionality Statement**

For the past nine years I have worked as a Spanish teacher in a public school system north of Boston. During these nine years, I have held various leadership roles within my department. Working in this capacity led me to obtain licensure as a principal/vice principal, as well as supervisor/director of my subject. Although I now possess these licenses, I have not yet pursued a position as an administrator. I am also not planning on pursuing one in the near future. In my personal experience, I have found the idea of pursuing a position in administration very daunting. Men hold the majority of administrative positions in my district. From what I have seen, these men often take other men under their wing and groom them for new positions, giving them more opportunities to rise above the management level of administration.

When I initially began to consider topics of study for my doctoral thesis I perceived the field of secondary administration as a field in which barriers still existed for women looking to pursue careers in this area of education. This assumption was based on my personal experiences in my school district. In this particular district there has never been a female middle school principal, high school principal, or superintendent. Consequently, I felt that it was important for more women to work as secondary administrators in order to level the playing field. These perceptions led me to begin my study examining the challenges women face when trying to enter administration. However, as time went on and my study evolved I realized it would be more
valuable to investigate the experiences of women holding administrative licenses but who do not work in the field. Studying this topic allowed me to discover whether or not barriers were truly keeping women from entering administration or if they were making other choices that led to this decision.

During this research process, six participants were interviewed from both inside and outside the researcher’s school district and data was collected related to their career progression. Creswell (2012) noted that if the researcher is well acquainted or has shared experiences with research participants, caution must be taken to ensure that the researcher presents an accurate picture of how the data collected relates to the research questions being posed. Due to the fact that I fit the criteria for participation in this study, I already had some preconceived notions as to how participants might respond to the interview questions being asked. In order to put my own ideas and experiences aside, I used a bracketing process to minimize personal bias that could have arisen from my connection to the topic being studied. Bracketing is when the researcher recognizes and suspends his or her own thoughts and assumptions in order to understand a phenomenon without prejudice (Gearing, 2008). I also kept a journal that I wrote in after each interview session as well as at various other times throughout the study in order to reflect upon my thoughts and ensure that I was in fact staying faithful to the participants’ voices.

Additionally, I have tried to acknowledge that other women working in my district or outside my district may not have had the same experiences that I have. The goal of this study was to uncover the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of women meeting the criteria for the research study. In order to do this, I had to be open to the responses of all study participants, while acknowledging my own personal stake in this research and remaining cognizant that I had to take caution in order to avoid bias and conduct an authentic study of the phenomenon at hand.
Research Question

The purpose of this study was to examine the way that women working in secondary education who hold administrative licenses but do not work as administrators make sense of their personal concept of self, their roles, and the impact that this has on their career patterns. Thus, the research focused on the individual perceptions of participants working in secondary education in order to gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and perceptions.

The following research question guided this study: How do women who hold administrative licenses in secondary education make sense of their career pattern?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that was used to guide this study is the theory of career construction (Savickas, 1997). Career construction theory builds from Super's (1957) theory of vocational development and provides insight into the reasoning behind the choices that individuals make during the span of their careers (Brown & Lent, 2005). It is based on sixteen propositions about career construction, which can be viewed in Appendix F.

A critical component of career construction theory is the need for an individual to be adaptable in the workplace in order to find the best balance between one’s personal concept of self and the role that is played in the career setting (Savickas, 1997). The importance of the adaptability characteristic as it pertains to the workplace and career development was echoed by Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2008) who stated, “Adaptability has become an essential characteristic of workers in the modern world” (p. 64). The capacity to adapt to new roles and situations is important, because as Inkson (2004) posited, “Internal career development also has a number of craft-like characteristics. It is an ongoing process of construction involving constantly looking inside oneself, outside oneself, and ahead in time” (p. 101). Adaptability makes it
possible to remain content in the workplace and to open oneself up to possible new paths in a career trajectory.

Similarly, Super (1980) discussed the many roles that individuals play throughout their lives, and stated that people play several roles at the same time, which causes things like family, friends, and work responsibilities to all have an effect on each other. He also describes the settings and backdrops of a person’s life and career space as a ‘theatre’. Super (1980) stated:

The simultaneous combination of life roles constitutes the life-style; their sequential combination structures the life space and constitutes the life cycle. The total structure is the career pattern. Roles wax and wane in importance and in the quality of performance, theaters are entered and deserted. (p. 288)

This statement illustrates that things that are important at one point in a person’s life may not be as important at a later time, and this can affect the ebb and flow of a career pattern. Rehfuss, Cosio, and Del Corso (2011) support this notion as well as the importance of a certain degree of adaptability within a career, by asserting that the self-identity a person possesses must be maintained throughout the evolution of their career. They note that people are less likely to be successful in the workplace or have a solid grasp on their sense of self if they are not content with the identity that they have created throughout the progression of their careers.

Career construction theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it promotes a focus on the choices that individuals make throughout their careers and the impact of these choices on a person’s private and work lives. Since this study asked women who hold administrative licenses but who have never worked in administrative positions to tell their stories, the researcher posited that career construction theory might shed some light on the ways in which the consistency and importance of life roles combined with an individual’s self-concept
to mold the career patterns of these women. Through the use of qualitative inquiry and career construction theory as a guiding framework, this study sought to illuminate the ways in which women have viewed their roles, their sense of self, and the consequences of their perceptions on their resulting career patterns.

**Important terminology.** To better understand the study conducted, it is important to be familiar with a series of terms that are used throughout this analysis. All of these terms are derived from Savickas’ (2005) work on career construction theory. ‘Career construction’ is when an individual imposes meaning on their work experiences. Careers are constructed through the choices that individuals make that allow them to express their self-concepts and to reach their goals. ‘Self-concept’ is the way in which an individual expresses him or herself and finds meaning in their work. ‘Career adaptability’ is an individual’s preparation for dealing with the various tasks, changes, and traumas of a particular career. A ‘career pattern’ is the series of themes that reoccur throughout the period of one’s career. ‘Social roles’ are the roles that place a person at various points within a society and impose social expectations on an individual.

**Research Design**

The research study presented is a basic qualitative study. As described by Merriam (2009), “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because the research question sought to explore the lived experiences of women working at the secondary level in education who possess administrative licenses but do not work in administrative positions. More specifically, this study is composed of oral histories. Creswell (2012) defined oral history research as, consisting “of gathering personal reflections of events and their causes and effects
from one individual or several individuals” (p. 73). In this study, six women who met selection criteria shared their experiences. These experiences were then collected, described, and analyzed both individually and through a composite analysis.

This study was conceptualized using a constructivist research paradigm. Pontorotto (2005) described the constructivist research paradigm as the idea that many realities can exist, and he posited that each research subject creates his or her own reality. This personal reality is constructed based on individual experiences and perceptions. A constructivist paradigm was appropriate for this study because it assumes that each participant creates her own reality.

**Data Collection**

This study incorporated several types of data collection. These data sources included semi-structured interviews, based on a consolidation of Seidman’s (2006) interview protocols, a life history grid that is located in Appendix D, which offered opportunities for reflecting on the sequencing of events, documents and journals. Participants were first asked to complete a life history grid (Elliot, 2005), which served as a prompt for conversation during interviews and provided additional data about the participants. The researcher also asked participants to provide a résumé if they had one available. Next, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Each of these data collection tactics is presented below.

**Semi-structured interviews.** A modified version of Seidman’s (2006) three-interview protocol was utilized. Seidman (2006) designed a protocol in which the first interview is dedicated to gaining insight into the context of the participant’s experience, the second is an opportunity for the interviewee to reconstruct their experience, and the third is a session in which the participant reflects on these experiences. During the first interview, Seidman’s (2006) protocol emphasizes asking the participant to discuss as much as they can about themselves.
within the context of the topic being studied. In the second interview, Seidman (2006) noted the importance of focusing on the concrete details of participants’ experiences as they are related to the topic of study. In the third interview, an emphasis is put on the participant reflecting on their thoughts in order to reconstruct their experiences.

With the hope that more women would be encouraged to participate in this particular study, the first and second interview sessions were combined. Accordingly, two semi-structured interviews were conducted. Combining the three interviews into two made the time commitment to the study more manageable. Seidman (2006) stated that it was acceptable to alter the structure of the three-interview structure as long as participants were still allowed to reconstruct and reflect upon their thoughts and experiences and the structure of the protocol was not changed significantly. The interview questions and prompts used in this study are included as Appendix C. The researcher also kept a reflective journal to record observations made during and after the interviews. This journal added to the data and provided an additional perspective to the study.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to guide the respondents while still allowing them enough freedom to elaborate on their experiences (Riessman, 1993). This type of interview was appropriate for this study because it allowed the free flow of conversation and ideas between the interviewer and interviewee. The purpose of these interviews was to elicit as much detail as possible regarding the experiences and choices of the participants in order to better understand the ways in which they constructed their careers. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) stated, “Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s lived experiences, are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them” (p. 11). In this way, the researcher and respondents worked together to re-construct the stories
collected during the interviews.

**Document collection and analysis.** A timeline template, called a life history grid, is included in Appendix D. This life history grid was used to assist participants with recalling various details about their past experiences, utilizing a script, included as Appendix E. The grid asks for simple background information before going on to solicit more details about the various occupational, educational, and life experiences of each participant. This grid was filled out by the participants before the interviews. It was a valuable tool during the interviews to help prompt conversation, and it was collected at the end of the first interview to assist the researcher in the data analysis process. The researcher also kept a journal in order to reflect on the information collected during the interviews. This journal was also used to help recall the researcher’s thoughts and impressions on the data collected during the analysis process.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected during these interviews and through the life history grid was analyzed using the six phases of qualitative data analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) found that in order to extract themes and reconstruct a story from the data gathered, the researcher has to complete the following six phases:

1.) Familiarizing yourself with the data

2.) Generating initial codes

3.) Searching for themes

4.) Reviewing themes

5.) Defining and naming themes

6.) Producing the report
These steps are critical because they allow the researcher a good deal of flexibility in their data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Study participants reviewed the final interview transcripts for this study, and the data was also checked at various points along the way to assure accuracy and faithfulness to the participant’s voice. Following these six phases allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the connections that exist between the stories of the study participants.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study presents a basic qualitative analysis of interview data collected from six women working in secondary schools that possessed administrative licenses but did not work as administrators. Consequently, the results of this study may not be relevant to other populations working in the same or other disciplines. This study has three primary limitations. First, although the researcher attempted to eliminate bias by using a bracketing process, keeping detailed memos and notes during the interviews, and allowing study members to check transcripts after the fact to help guarantee accuracy, it is not always entirely possible to eliminate bias. Second, data was only collected from six women, which limits the amount and variety of data collected. Third, the six female participants included in this study come from the northeastern United States and the data collected is purely representative of their experiences.

This study included two delimitations. First, the data collected in this study was centered on the experience of each individual. Second, the accuracy of the analysis of the data collected relied heavily on the truthfulness of the participants.

It is important to note, as Maxwell (2005) stated “…explicit comparisons are usually not very productive in a small-scale qualitative study, because the small number of cases in any group limits your ability to draw firm conclusions about the differences between the groups” (p.
Although the goal for this study was not to obtain a comparative set of data to later be contrasted with other data set, Maxwell’s consideration is important to keep in mind for future researchers examining this study.

**Content and Organization of the Thesis**

This doctoral thesis consists of five chapters. This first chapter outlines the problem of practice and its significance. It states the research question, and describes the theoretical framework used to analyze the data collected. Chapter One also includes a brief overview of the research design and a discussion of the limitations of the study. Chapter Two reviews the literature and contains an overview of the research already collected and the major points of view that currently exist within the field of education, as well information pertinent to the study of women administrative positions. Chapter Three is dedicated to the methodology of the research study. This chapter includes a detailed explanation of the methods of data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations pertaining to the study. Chapter Four presents the findings from this research by outlining themes that became apparent through the course of the interviews. Chapter Five is a final discussion of the research findings and addresses the implications for educational practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of the literature surrounding the choices women make in their career trajectories, building from the historical norms and transitioning to current attitudes and research surrounding the barriers they face. In the mid- to late-1800s, principal positions were held by strong teachers who supervised staff and taught a full course load (Leroux, 2009). During this time, women held the majority of principal jobs (Leroux, 2009). However, by 1897 the role of the principal shifted and became a position that carried little or no teaching load and offered better pay; a transition occurred and men began to occupy the bulk of these jobs (Leroux, 2009). At this point, women were often excluded from these positions, as well as from the possibility of earning any sort of pension for their work as lifelong educators. The evolving role of the principal made it difficult for women to move into administrative positions.

The bulk of the extant literature regarding women in education and women in education administration is centered on the barriers that women have faced, and continue to face, in the field. For example, the work of Shakeshaft and colleagues, (2007), Enomoto (2000), and Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer (2006) described the difficulties that women experience while working in education. Though many researchers focused on these barriers, there has been less focus on the impact of the choices women make throughout their careers on their career progression and advancement in the field of secondary administration. Researchers like Savickas (2005) and Bateson (1989) have discussed the effects that personal choices and an individual’s sense of identity can have on the progression of a career. This literature review begins by outlining some of the past research that has been conducted on the barriers that exist for women in education. This chapter also contains information on further research that has been
conducted on the choices that women make and the impact this has on the ways that they construct their careers.

**General Overview of Career Progression and Women**

As the roles of women change in society and they gain more opportunities in their employment, it is important to understand the history of females in the work force. A combination of barriers has led to underrepresentation, and the personal choices that women make in their careers have impacted the level of progress women have made in the labor force. Traditionally, women have been told that their domain was within their home, and that they would make a career of caring for their husband and children, while their husband went out and acted as the family ‘breadwinner’ (George, Helson, & John, 2011). This philosophy continued to hold true through the 1960s and into the 1970s as the women’s movement began to take shape (George, Helson, & John, 2011). As a matter of fact, Bird (1968) stated that in the 1960s, there were quotas as to how many women were permitted to enter doctoral programs, and when women did work outside of the home, they were paid less than men because they did not have to support a spouse and children. Bird (1968) also posited that women with advanced Harvard business degrees were told that they were not welcome to work for many companies because the only women the companies wanted working in their organization were secretaries. However, this situation has changed considerably in recent decades.

When the women’s movement began in the 1960s, females were encouraged to leave behind the traditional domestic roles that were once assigned to them (Ferree & Martin, 1995). The after-effects of the fight for changes in the laws surrounding women’s issues and working conditions for women that began in the 1960s and 1970s can still be felt today (Ferree & Martin, 1995). In the 1980s, more women than ever were present in the work force, and they showed a
commitment to full-time employment that mirrored that of men (Gerson, 1985). Despite this increase in the number of women in the labor force, however, there still exists a gender gap in earnings and as of 2011 women in the United States continue to earn two-thirds the salary of men (Lips, 2013).

Hierarchical structures. Although historically it has been difficult for many women to reach the highest levels of power and authority within their organizations, the number of women in leadership roles has increased dramatically (O’Neill, Hopkins, & Bilmoria, 2008). However, women have been more likely to deviate from the traditional hierarchical career path than men, so the analysis in the majority of studies of career progression based on a male model are not very useful for women looking to move up the workplace ladder (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). Moreover, Bradley, Brown, and Dower (2009) stated that since such a prescribed hierarchical structure exists, in order to be able to progress in that environment, women must be properly trained and given the authority to make decisions over important projects. They found that, in general, men are given more responsibilities at work, as well as more perks like bonuses and stock options, which makes it easier for them to progress through the hierarchical system.

Non-traditional paths. Often, to progress in their careers, women find ways to move forward that are not always traditional, and one of these ways is to start their own business (D’Agostino, 2011). D’Agostino (2011) found that when a woman starts her own business, she can control not only her ability to move forward, but also day-to-day matters like her schedule and pay. “Due to a generally inhospitable organizational climate, some women are creating new more flexible career forms that provide them the opportunity to engage meaningfully in their professional and personal lives” (O’Neill, Hopkins, & Bilmoria, 2008, p. 732). As Shakeshaft et
al., (2007) observed, a good deal of the research that exists on career progression and career and life balance is based on both masculine and heterosexual models. This limits the usefulness of this research in the case of women looking to find ways to improve their mobility in the workplace.

Alternatively, there are also situations where women make decisions that are not considered traditional, which allow them to move forward in their career, but sometimes other parts of their lives suffer because of these choices. In many instances, women are forced to choose between having children and a family and dedicating themselves to their careers (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilmoria, 2008). Women who do manage to ‘have it all’ often feel that they are not adequately devoting themselves to either work or family responsibilities (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilmoria, 2008). Similarly, D’Agostino (2011) found in her analysis that the majority of women working in government agencies who had reached the top levels of management were unmarried or did not have children. This is also a trend in higher education, where most of the women who earn full professorship tend to be single and childless (Sanders, Willemsen, & Millar, 2009). These potential barriers to women’s career progression may explain why “most of the studies on career paths report women’s recollections of the obstacles the women face and their career decision-making process they employed” (Shakeshaft et al., 2007, p. 114).

**Mentoring.** Another important topic of study that sheds light on women’s career progression is the topic of mentoring. Women often had fewer chances to receive training, to work on important tasks, and had less access to opportunities overall, which impacts the quality of their lives in the workplace (Bradley, Brown, & Dower, 2009). Results of a study conducted by Bradley et al. (2009) confirmed that men and women are often treated differently in the workplace, and that this treatment has an effect on how they are able to progress in their careers.
Their study determined that while men receive more chances to train and take charge of important projects, women receive more encouragement and mentoring. However, due to the fact that this mentoring consists only of positive messages and not actual opportunities to take on more responsibility at work, it does not result in any significant advancement for women (Bradley et al., 2009). Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) posited that further study on effective mentor relationships for women currently working as administrators will assist administrative aspirants to enhance their own mentoring experiences.

Masculine leadership models. Likewise, as a result of the small number of women who possess high-level management positions in work organizations, women do not have many role models to emulate (Vanderbroeck, 2010). Men and women possess different leadership styles, and the majority of work organizations use a masculine leadership model as the preferred style of leadership (Vanderbroeck, 2010). According to Adams and Funk (2012), male leaders place more importance on individual power and accomplishment, while female leaders place more importance on what is best for the group as a whole. Furthermore, women who do receive mentoring often have to fight with their mentor for the right to progress in their job or at least to be perceived as capable of moving forward (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010). The emphasis placed on male leadership models and qualities may lead some women to believe that if they take on the masculine qualities that have allowed men to be successful, they will, in turn, also be successful (Vanderbroeck, 2010). However, Vanderbroeck (2010) noted that it is often more beneficial for women to avoid adopting these male behaviors, and to actually approach the leaders within her organization to be provided with the tools that she needs to be successful.

Perception. One theory as to why there may be fewer women than men who generally pursue high-level management positions is based on the concept of perception. Yeagley, Subich,
and Tokar (2010) postulated that many women may view the balancing of career and family life as too challenging, and this affects their willingness to apply for elite positions. Women have typically addressed this unwillingness by adopting protean career advancement strategies, which have generally increased contentment in their careers and decreased the amount of insecurity that they feel in the workplace (Colakoglu, 2011). A protean career is one that does not follow a traditional path, but rather, success is defined by the individual (Kleynhans, Markham, Meyer, Van Aswegen, & Pilbeam, 2006). Despite the effort by women to move forward in their careers, and despite the fact that in Western countries the number of women at the undergraduate level exceeds the number of men, women still have a hard time obtaining high-level management positions (Sanders, Willemsen, & Millar, 2009). This difficulty can be attributed to both the personal choices that women make when constructing a career, as well as to various obstacles that women face in their places of employment.

**How Women are Viewed In and Out of the Workplace**

Some research suggests that men and women are not born acting differently, but it is the way that they are treated later in life, and the way that society expects them to behave that make them see and move through society differently (Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry, 1991). Enomoto (2000) described how being a woman is not automatically disempowering, but rather the role that women have traditionally played in a particular society dictates how much power they have. If they live in a society in which women have a low status, this status will continue to affect all aspects of a woman’s life. These differences in treatment and action have an effect on how women are viewed both in and outside of the workplace.

**Leadership stereotypes, assertiveness and gender.** Some stereotypes currently exist regarding the leadership styles of men and women. Davis, Capobianco, and Kraus (2010) found
that groups of employees rated women more constructive and communal than men as leaders in the workplace, and this finding was on par with stereotypes that currently exist describing women as more collaborative than men. However, they also found that when men and women held managerial positions in an organization and their role in this position was already determined, they actually differed very little in leadership style.

On a similar note, when analyzing how women are viewed in the workplace and in society, women with an authoritarian personality are viewed as gender-role deviant and are often looked at negatively (Peterson and Zurbriggen, 2010). Shakeshaft, Nowell, and Perry (1991) stated that male teachers have a more difficult time dealing with female administrators and were often seen as hostile when in a subordinate role to a female. On the other hand, if a woman acted less firm, she was labeled as weak, and had a difficult time being an effective leader (Enomoto, 2000). These attitudes are a part of patriarchal societies in which women who believe in feminist ideologies and act accordingly are viewed as working against the established system. (Peterson & Zurbriggen, 2010).

Moreover, when it comes to negotiating in the workplace, especially for benefits and pay, women tend to fare more poorly than men (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). Women are not expected to negotiate assertively, because this is viewed as a masculine action. However, when it comes to bargaining for a group, or on someone else’s behalf, women are permitted to be more aggressive without abandoning their gender role (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). This is often allowed because women are seen as responsible for caring for others (Enomoto, 2000). Peterson and Zurbriggen (2010) stated, “Previous research has shown that authoritarianism is correlated negatively with feminism and positively with sexist attitudes” (p. 1803). Amanatullah and Morris (2010) indicated that women are not actually less effective negotiators than men, but
rather they are just very good at staying within the boundaries of their prescribed gender role, which impacts their negotiations negatively.

**School settings.** Studies suggest that in the case of school systems, white males have defined what is normal in terms of values, beliefs, and leadership styles (Enomoto, 2000). This masculine structure often makes it difficult for women to network within an organization (Wang, 2009). Brass (as cited in Bevelander & Page, 2011) stated that women often had to sacrifice their own relationships in order to get ahead in an organization. Bevelander and Page (2001) posited that women tend to have stronger networking relationships with other females, and that women are often still at a disadvantage in the workplace due to the continued importance of the ‘old boy’ network in some organizations. This finding correlates with the results of Granrose (2010) who determined that when comparing men and women in the workplace, women have less education and experience than men, they receive fewer in-work trainings, and they often have to leave their careers to deal with domestic responsibilities. All of these differences resulted in women receiving less pay and fewer promotions than men.

Furthermore, even when applying for administrative positions, male superintendents said that they would hire an attractive female for a principal position, but most likely at the elementary level (Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry, 1991). Male administrators were found to be uncomfortable with female sexuality, and as a result, women have been asked to act in ways that suppress their femininity (Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry, 1991). Gender differences have an impact on the way both male and female leaders are viewed by peers and managers (Davis, Capobianco, & Kraus, 2010). Also, Bevelander, and Page (2011) found that many employers feel that women are not able to focus on their work as well as men because they are distracted by domestic responsibilities.
Societal expectations. Although these issues seem to only exist in the workplace, they are actually a part of a more complex puzzle in which men and women are conditioned to view their gender roles in society as fixed and pre-determined. For example, Collins (2011) found that although almost half of the overall workforce is comprised of women, the media continues to downplay the importance of women, and portrays them in a very stereotypical light. Collins (2011) asked,

If young girls do not see themselves reflected in media, will this diminish their sense of importance and self-esteem? Will boys conclude that women and girls are unimportant, as well? Will girls lack role models? Will adult women feel disenfranchised? (p. 292)

She compared the media in 2011 to that of the 1950s, in which women were shown as subordinates and often sexualized in order to sell a product. The way women are portrayed in the media is a direct reflection of the way that they are viewed in society; continuing to put them down in print and on television has a direct impact on upholding existing gender roles (Collins, 2011).

Likewise, a study conducted by England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek (2011) on the gender roles portrayed by the princesses in Disney movies found that these movies reinforce gender stereotypes. They also note “consistently portrayed gender role images may be interpreted as ‘normal’ by children and become connected with their concepts of socially acceptable behavior and morality” (p. 557). That is, when women act as they are supposed to, in their subordinate roles in which they are responsible for taking care of men and family, they will be rewarded, and things will work out positively in the end (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011). Peterson and Zurbrigg (2010) found that gendered attitudes do, in fact, affect the worlds of education, politics, and the workplace.
Additionally, Baker (2010) found that women with high levels of education tended to remain unmarried and did a better job at climbing the career ladder than their married counterparts. Mason (as cited in Baker, 2010) suggested that married women with doctorates made career decisions that were based on supporting their partner’s career rather than their own. Even in situations where both partners were working full-time, women were also expected to take responsibility for the domestic chores. Granrose (2010) noted that in these situations, many women decided to pursue part-time employment, but when women decided to stay employed full-time, this had a positive effect on their potential income earned, their job status, as well as their self-esteem. In the end, women have primarily been faced with having to balance both full-time work and domestic responsibilities, with limited upward advancement, or to stay single and maintain better career mobility (Baker, 2010).

**Domestic responsibilities.** Equally important as the issue of women deciding whether or not to maintain full-time employment is women’s decision to take leave from work for family responsibilities. Coleman and Franiuk (2011) stated that the reason women are viewed as caregivers while men are viewed as providers is because they continue to be cast in those roles. This could be reversed if more effort was put into allowing men to stay at home with the children and women to go out into the workforce. When programs and benefits that allow parents to stay home and take care of family responsibilities exist in an organization, women tend to be the ones to use them, and they often feel that they are penalized for having to do so (Baker, 2010).

Coleman and Franiuk (2011) similarly stated that whether or not a woman was a parent or not had an effect on being hired and promoted, vs. men who did not have to endure the same consequence. They posited that although more policies have been put into place to allow both men and women the possibility of sharing domestic responsibilities, not very many people take
advantage of them for fear of either not fitting into their prescribed gender role, or possibly suffering a negative consequence for taking time away from paid work.

**Experiences of Women in Education**

The struggles for women in the field of education, especially those of women trying to break into administration despite the prevalence of masculine leadership models, continue to be a concern for researchers (Christman & McClellan, 2008). Sanchez and Thornton (2010) posited that although women hold the majority of positions in the field of education in general, they still have not broken through into the higher administrative positions, and continue to occupy the lowest positions in the various systems. They also reported that it is not very shocking that women have difficulty obtaining high-level positions, because the males who dominate the administrative positions also make hiring decisions. Some researchers believe that although some gains have been made, they have not been substantial, and they will not likely be maintained over time (Young, 2005).

In Christman and McClellan’s (2008) study of current female administrators, a group of participants was asked to rank the various personality characteristics that they believed most helped them maintain resiliency in their field. The most popular response was a ‘type A personality,’ which is most often considered a masculine personality characteristic (Christman & McClellan, 2008). Young (2005) described school boards looking to hire candidates who had ‘desirable’ characteristics, and most often men were the candidates who possessed what they were looking for. Christman and McClellan (2008) stated, “Women, for the sake of their leadership resiliency, begin to resist their own gender” (p. 7). In order to be successful in a field that does not adhere to gender-blind norms, women make the best of the situation and work to adapt to the field.
Work/Life Balance. Another interesting aspect of the study of the experiences of women in education is the notion that women experience conflict when balancing their home lives and their professional lives (Eckman & Kelber, 2009). Sanchez and Thornton (2010) noted that although many women struggle with finding a balance between home and work responsibilities, many women have actually dealt with the conflict in creative ways that allowed them to maintain both aspects of their lives. In research conducted by Eckman and Kelber (2009), one of their study participants stated that she was aware of the kinds of role conflicts that female principals faced and that she was not willing to serve everyone within her school and community while denying her own children at home. Some women actively choose to delay moving into administrative careers in order to focus more on their own families.

Areas needing further study. Grogan (2010) suggests that young female leaders have not been adequately studied. She also declares that by studying this group, we can learn the most about the experiences of women in administration, and learn how to fix past mistakes. Young (2005) notes that men are not to blame for the position that women currently occupy in this field and that women are just as guilty as creating backlash against members of their own gender group. In the end, however, Sanchez and Thornton (2010) describe the state of K-12 education as a field that still poses barriers, but also as a field that is changing with time.

Current State of Women in Secondary Education Administration

Recent literature in the field of education administration has noted that no federal or national organization collects data about the gender of school administrators, and that data tends to be gathered by analyzing membership statistics in professional organizations (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). This suggests that there has not been enough data collected regarding the gender of educational administrators in the United States and its impact on the field. According to the
statistical research that has been conducted, although the number of women in higher-level administrative positions has increased, there is still a discrepancy between the number of female teachers and the number of female administrators (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). The data collected and analyzed revolves around trends in educational administration over the past three decades and notes that there has only been a small increase in the presence of women administrators during that time.

Charol Shakeshaft and colleagues (2007) researched the progression of women working in education and women in the general workplace over the past few decades. One of their key findings was that a significant number of women working at the central office level do, in fact, aspire to pursue the position of superintendent (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). They noted that in 1985, several studies found that sex discrimination on the part of school boards and current school administrators was a key factor in women not being able to obtain school administration positions. This finding was supported by research conducted by Bradley, Brown, and Dower (2009), which stated that there was sufficient evidence that women do, in fact, have very similar goals in terms of career aspiration to men. These researchers also posited that lack of career aspiration was not a factor in limiting the career progression of a woman, but rather, the lack of access to training and opportunities within the workplace had a dramatic impact on the ability to climb the career ladder. Despite being encouraged to shatter the proverbial glass ceiling, many women still found it difficult to obtain top-level positions in their place of employment (D’Agostino, 2011). All of these factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in secondary administrative positions.

The ‘typical’ administrator. Feminist literature has outlined the many ways in which education administration is still viewed in masculine terms. Since men have historically
dominated the field of administration, they dictate the norms and personality characteristics that define a “typical” administrator, and this can put women at a disadvantage when applying for and working in an administrative position (Enomoto, 2000). This potential disadvantage may become further magnified due to the lack of women making decisions about educational policy, and due to the small number of women who hold decision-making positions, further impacting the K-12 education system for students and teachers, the majority of whom are women (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Not only are women sometimes discouraged from applying for administrative positions because they do not possess masculine personality characteristics, but also because the structure of the administrative system in K-12 education shows a preference for candidates who are not constrained by the demands of childcare (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Feminist literature outlines the many ways that educational administration has been and continues to be a male-dominated field.

**Male hegemony.** Likewise, literature written about gender inequality demonstrates that a number of potential barriers still exist for women who aspire to become educational administrators, and those who already hold positions as administrators. Some research suggests that advertisements and job descriptions for positions such as superintendent could be the starting point for the unequal representation of males and females in these types of positions, because job advertisements tend to highlight the desire for candidates with ‘masculine’ qualities (Newton, 2006). Also, since many women are aware of the preference for administrators who possess more ‘masculine’ qualities, they tend to adopt these when they obtain positions as administrators, and this often means leaving many of their own personality characteristics at the door when they come to work in the morning (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2009). Existing research shows that the role of women in educational administration is very complex.
Research in the field of gender inequality also reveals that many people, including women currently working in the field, fail to recognize that women may still be at a disadvantage when working in school administration (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). This literature continues to reiterate that there is a male hegemony in the field of educational administration, and that women often have to work harder than men to demonstrate that they are qualified for administrative positions (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). An important part of continuing research in the area of gender inequality will be the analysis of the inconsistent standards that exist for women and men in school administration.

**Gender empowerment.** Along with research regarding discrimination against women in educational administration published in feminist literature and gender inequality literature, there is a considerable amount of inquiry in literature involving gender empowerment. Gender empowerment literature discusses many of the roadblocks women experience and suggests various ways that these roadblocks can be eliminated. Research in this literature points out one way for women to gain the confidence necessary to pursue administrative roles in schools is to have more female administrative role models, and that this could be achieved by creating a network of female school leaders (Sherman, 2005). Additionally, Sherman (2005) noted that creating this kind of network is not a panacea for discrimination against women in school administration, but that it will take a series of smaller steps to incite a great change. Research in gender inequality states that another step in helping to diminish the imbalance between men and women in school administration positions is to simply try to make the distribution of each gender in these positions more equal (Deutsch, 2007).
Identity

Many scholars studying identity during the second half of the 20th century focused on the idea of a group identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). However, recently there has been more of an emphasis on the study of individual identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Castells (2010) described identity as “...people’s source of meaning and experience” (p. 6). He noted that for any one individual, there might be a number of identities that exist, but that at times, these multiple identities may cause stress or conflict. Lawler (2008) reiterated this idea and stated that regardless of whether or not an individual is aware of them, everyone identifies with several identities. Castells (2010) also asserted that the construction of identity within a social context is always influenced by power relationships. Kraus, Chen, and Keltner (2011) suggested that for an individual to feel liberated from the constraints of a social identity, they must become empowered enough to express their true identity and not work to meet the criteria other people hold them to.

Individual identity. Writing about the construction of identity for professionals working in education, Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) stated, “The development of teachers’ professional identity occurs through interpretation and reinterpretations of their experiences” (p. 121). She went on to discuss the notion that new opinions and experiences will always be analyzed and considered in terms of their relation to past experiences. Lawler (2008) confirmed this when she said “...identities impact on each other” (p. 3). She also repeated the idea that identities are highly social, and that they are constantly reinvented or looked at from new perspectives depending on the experiences that one has. Hetherington (1998) maintained a similar opinion, but also noted that people may possess more than one identity, and that although individuals do have a small degree of control over the construction of these identities, they are largely dictated by society.
All of these factors have an impact on the construction of identity both in and out of the workplace for educators.

**Collective identity.** On the other hand, despite the recent emphasis on individual identity, some researchers still note the importance of the influence of collective identity. Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined social identification as “…the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate” (p. 21). Schopflin (2010) stated that with every group activity that a person participates in, a new identity emerges, though sometimes this identity is not long lasting. For a social identity to be adopted, an individual has to decide to internalize this identity and construct their own meaning of what this identity really signifies to them (Castells, 2010). These social identities are particularly important in the workplace. Ibarra (2003) posited that, “Few working lives are untouched by organizational changes, internal management shuffles, office politics, and the stress, burnout, or disaffection that goes with the territory” (p. 17). She further noted that activities and relationships associated with work are critical in employees’ lives, and these factors often have an impact on an individual’s life outside of work. Identity is constructed on a daily basis through a variety of conversations and activities that people experience (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). This is a critical concept because both collective and individual identities have an impact on each other (Schopflin, 2010).

**The Concept of Composing a Life**

The notion of composing a life was first introduced by Mary Catherine Bateson in her book *Composing a Life* (1989). In this book, Bateson referred to life as an art that is composed through the improvisation of daily living. Bateson focused specifically on the experiences of women as they compose their lives. She stated that as the needs of an individual change, so does the way in which this person lives their life, and the kinds of choices that they make. Bateson
(1989) indicated that the ‘landscape’ of life is not constant or fixed, but rather something that shifts and can be molded to accommodate life’s ongoing challenges. This improvisation is not something that is only applied to daily life, but also to one’s chosen career path.

Bateson (1989) noted that, “For Americans today, composing a life means integrating one’s own commitments with the differences created by change and the differences that exist between the peoples of the world with whom we increasingly come into contact” (p. 59). She believed that, in some instances, people try so desperately to maintain a path that is considered part of the ‘norm’ that they never realize they are limiting their own progression by not allowing themselves to reach their full potential. Bateson (1989) considered the discontinuity and unpredictability of life the norm, and encouraged women to construct new paths in their lives and careers.

She also stated, in many cases, when someone is composing a life they feel very apprehensive about straying from the prescribed path of what having a career should look like, even if this fear were to put aside, the benefits would outweigh the risks. In her book, Bateson (1989) discussed how life events, such as pregnancy, giving birth, and menopause, all have an impact on the way a woman will make choices in her life. She believed that because of these major life events, women have always had to find a way to improvise to achieve balance in their lives.

Another important aspect of composing a life is recognizing where the past, present, and future fit into the puzzle. Bateson (1989) asserted,

Composing a life involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present, remembering best those events that prefigured
what followed, forgetting those that proved to have no meaning within the narrative. (p. 30)

To understand the mosaic that is a life, one must be able to see that it takes a variety of decisions to reach a given point, and that it is, in fact, possible to reach the top of the pyramid without necessarily following the most direct path.

Ultimately, composing a life is an art form that requires continuous improvisation and a dedication to achieving one’s goals, rather than allowing society or the workplace to dictate how life should be lived. In the case of women, they sometimes feel that it is difficult to move forward in their lives and careers due to societal expectations or domestic responsibilities, but these can be combated by being flexible and committed to a goal (Bateson, 1989). Women, in particular, seem to have always followed non-traditional paths, and they have managed to turn these sometimes-difficult journeys into positive experiences (Bateson, 1989).

**Women Composing Lives**

Similar to the work conducted by Bateson, researchers like Hertneky (2012) also believed that women’s career progression is nonlinear, and that they often take breaks from the traditional career path to dedicate themselves to other personal endeavors. In many instances, a woman’s career choices are influenced by what is going on in her family life, and these choices shift depending on what she feels she needs to accommodate the challenges of her personal life (Brykman, 2006). Hall (2004) also stated, “… as we go through our life stages, we may not be aware that what was once a good fit between identity and life/career choices is no longer that, as our identities and lives evolve in different directions” (p. 6). This echoes Bateman’s (1989) assertion that one’s life choices have to constantly be reimagined to remain relevant.
Eagly and Carli (2007) described this nonlinear progression, or improvisation as a ‘labyrinth.’ The pair discovered that as personal and family obligations conflicted with their career obligations, women would take action and make choices to find a balance. In some instances, these choices had a negative effect on a woman’s career progression or income potential (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Valcour and Ladge (2008) posited this is due to the fact that women who decide to take time off for having children or participating in other personal activities rather than dedicating themselves completely to their career are often viewed as less serious and committed than their peers. Bateson (1989) believed that women should not have to focus on only one aspect of their life, but that it is, in fact, possible to successfully commit to more than one goal without compromising the seriousness of commitment to any one goal.

**Protean careers.** This concept of composing a life goes hand in hand with research conducted on protean careers. A protean career is defined as a career path that has no boundaries and is not restricted by the traditional workplace hierarchy (Arthur, 1994). Baruch (2006) also described the importance of recognizing the challenges and multiple identities that people are faced with today. She found that the ability to conform to the traditional hierarchical structure that exists in many places of employment dictates how successful one will be in their career. Hall (2004) described the protean career as one in which the individual has control over their career path, rather than allowing the organization to force them in a given direction. He also emphasized the idea that success is in the eye of the beholder. If individuals are happy with their career choices, this can be more valuable than money or prestige. Research on protean careers coincides with Bateson’s theory in that there is acknowledgement of the necessity of being flexible and focusing on the individual employee’s life, rather than on the rigid career trajectory that exists in many places of employment in the United States.
Also, since a protean career is one that follows a path determined by the employee rather than following a traditional path imposed by the organization itself (Arthur, 1994), it is important to recognize that researchers such as Hall (2004) noted that individuals choosing a protean career path find personal success when they devise their own journey to the top. Hall (2002) also stated that the study of protean careers is critical because, for the majority of people, work is used to determine their quality of life. He also found that people pursuing protean careers must have a high level of self-awareness and adaptability to successfully navigate that type of career because it is self-directed.

In their study, Arthur and Rousseau (1996) discuss the benefits of following a protean career pattern. They found that when an employee has a protean career, this allows for new ways to think about work over a lifetime. It enlarges what is currently known as ‘career space’ and includes aspects of people’s non-work lives, and allows for more flexibility in the perception of the lifespan of a career. They stated that these benefits will have an effect on the way that people view and plan their careers in the future, and that this type of career will create more overlap between one’s career and self-identity.

Moreover, Kleynhans, Markham, Meyer, Van Aswegen, and Pilbeam (2006) noted that the concept of a protean career is more modern than the traditional linear career path. They stated that an important characteristic of the protean career is that the individual decides when a change in path is necessary, and that they also work very independently to manage their work environment and experiences. They found that the way in which protean careerists define success is more often tied to personal psychological success than bound by traditional units of success measurements like high salaries and management positions. They also noted that employees following a protean career path value their freedom and mobility.
Similarly, Greenhaus, Callanan and DiRenzo (2008) posited that because maintaining a protean career path is driven by personal goals and values, the concept of being ‘protean’ is more of an attitude than an actual ‘path’. Harrington and Hall (2007) linked the study of protean careers to gender by stating, “Although in recent years distinctions by gender have diminished, gender continues to have a large influence on how people view their careers and work-life issues” (p. 13). They said that although many people do not have protean careers, there has been a huge shift in society due to recent technology, and this will be beneficial for people who have to deal with specific family responsibilities while also working. Littleton, Arthur, and Rousseau (2000) reiterated this idea by stating that a protean career path values the inclusion of personal and family commitments in the definition of psychological success. They noted the concept of a career path has actually been replaced by the concept of a ‘career fingerprint,’ which is a highly individual mark that is left, rather than a simple path that is followed (Littleton et al., 2000).

Bateson’s (1989) conception of ‘composing a life’ stems from the study of protean careers. She described this phenomenon as the art of improvisation that women utilize on a daily basis, and that determines the various paths that they take in their careers. Bateson (1989) noted, “Today, the materials and skills from which a life is composed are no longer clear. It is no longer possible to follow the paths of previous generations” (p. 2).

**Non-linear paths.** Hertneky (2012) suggested that in many instances, in the case of women leaders, the leadership positions they obtain do not come from being successful at following the traditional career path. However, despite the successes that have been witnessed in terms of obtaining leadership positions in an unorthodox fashion, the normative linear career path still seems to be the dominant model in place in the United States. Similarly, Bateson (1989) compared the nonlinear path of career progression to the making of a patchwork quilt.
She described the sewing together of the various pieces, and that although they may not seem very different at first, does in fact create a final product that is interesting and ‘evocative.’ It is through this nonlinear path that Eagly and Carli (2007) referred to as the labyrinth that some women manage to find success in maneuvering their way to the top of the traditional hierarchical power structure.

Further research on the concept of women following non-traditional career paths conducted by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) suggested that despite the fact that the study of boundary-less careers has been of increasing interest, women have actually been following this career model for many years to find balance between their work and personal lives. Similarly, Cabrera (2009) stated that the traditional work schedule composed of long hours and travel make following a hierarchical career path almost impossible for women. She noted, in many cases, women are forced to adopt non-traditional paths to be able to juggle the work and personal responsibilities that they must complete. Cabrera (2009) also stated, “While half of the workforce is now made up of women, societal norms still expect women to shoulder the brunt of household and care giving responsibilities” (p. 188). She suggested that these domestic responsibilities contribute to the difficulties that women may face when trying to move up the ladder in the workplace. Briscoe, Hoobler, and Byle (2010) found that in society, many organizations view people who choose to follow a protean career path as less dedicated to their career, and this might sometimes inhibit them from being able to work their way up the ladder.

Moreover, Cabrera (2009) describes the role of work organizations in the lives of women. She found that typically, people expect the work organization to guide their career and point them in an upward direction. However, just the opposite is happening when women decide to pursue a protean career path. In this way, women can control their own schedules and still make
time to take care of personal responsibilities. Similarly, Baruch (2006) noted the complexity of life today makes the possibility of pursuing a protean career path a necessity. She described one’s career as another piece of the ‘life journey.’

**What is important.** Finally, it is important to recognize what is important to women when they move forward in their careers. It has been documented that women tend to put more of an emphasis on their personal happiness and psychological accomplishment than on traditional indicators of success like money and titles (Cabrera, 2009). Women also tend to take into consideration a wide variety of factors, such as the well-being of family members and friends, when making career decisions (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). They felt this is in contrast to men, who typically do a better job of separating their personal lives from their work lives, especially when making decisions regarding their careers. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) suggested that men’s ability to separate their personal lives from their work lives is possible because they are either unmarried, or they have a woman in their life who takes charge of the majority of the domestic responsibilities.

**Career Construction Theory**

Savickas (2005) developed his career construction theory as an extension of another career theory. He stated that the difference from the traditional definition of a career (in which an individual holds a series of jobs throughout their life), in his model, the individual constructs a career through the meaning that they put on their work experiences (Savickas, 2005). He noted the focus of his theory is not on the end result or total of all of these work experiences, but rather on the patterns that emerge and develop into a story. This theory is an update and an extension of Super’s (1957) theory of vocational development, and is more relevant for study of 21st-century careers (Savickas, 2005). Unlike the conventional view of career development phases,
Savickas (2005) believed that, “Careers do not unfold; they are constructed as individuals make choices that express their self-concepts and substantiate their goals in the social reality of work roles” (p. 43). This is a critical belief because career construction theory is based on a constructivist point of view in which individuals construct personal realities through their own interpretations of events (Savickas, 2005).

Career construction theory has three major focuses: vocational personality type, career adaptability, and life themes (Savickas, 2005). It is based on sixteen propositions about career construction, which are listed in Appendix F. Savickas (2005) described ‘vocational personality’ as the individual traits that match people to a chosen vocation. He focused on the ‘vocational self-concept’ and how this personal self is actualized in the workplace. He defined career adaptability as “…the attitudes, competencies, and behaviors that individuals use in fitting themselves to work that suits them” (p. 45). Savickas (2005) considered an individual to be adaptive if they possess the following qualities:

1. Becoming concerned about their future as a worker.
2. Increasing personal control over their vocational future.
3. Displaying curiosity by exploring possible selves and future scenarios.
4. Strengthening the confidence to pursue their aspirations (p. 52).

Savickas (2005) noted that the end goal of career adaptability is when an individual reaches a point at which they can validate their own concept of self. The third focus of career construction theory is life theme. This area developed from Super’s (1951) original theory and emphasized the point in one’s career in which they have stabilized, can reach their potential, and ‘preserve self-esteem’ (Savickas, 2005). This final area of focus is considered the narrative portion of the theory because, “In telling career stories about their work experiences, individuals
selectively highlight particular experiences to produce a narrative truth by which they live” (Savickas, 2005, p. 43).

**Super’s influence.** Prior to the development of his theory that served as the basis of career construction theory, Super (1980) also discussed the limitations of the various career development theories that were in place during his time. The goal of his work was to create a theory of career development that was more comprehensive and took into account the numerous variables that exist when studying career trajectory (Super, 1980). One of the key differences between Super’s work and the work of previous researchers is that Super placed focus on an individual’s entire career span, rather than simply the choices that led to an initial career decision (Super, 1980). Super (1980) discussed the many roles that individuals play throughout their lives, and stated that people play several roles at the same time, which causes things like family, friends, and work responsibilities to have an effect on each other. He also described the settings and backdrops of a person’s life and career space as a ‘theatre.’ Super (1980) wrote,

> The simultaneous combination of life roles constitutes the life-style; their sequential combination structures the life space and constitutes the life cycle. The total structure is the career pattern. Roles wax and wane in importance and in the quality of performance, theaters are entered and deserted. (p. 288)

This statement illustrates the things that are important at one point in a person’s life may not be as important at a later time, and this can affect the ebb and flow of a career pattern.

Additionally, other researchers like Rehfuss, Cosio, and Del Corso (2011) supported this notion, as well as highlighting the importance of a certain degree of adaptability within a career. They stated the self-identity a person possesses must be maintained throughout the evolution of their career. They noted that people are less likely to be successful in the workplace, or have a
solid grasp on their sense of self if they are not content with the identity they have created throughout the progression of their careers. Similar to Super’s goal, Savickas (2005) stated that his work’s primary aim was to create a career development theory that enhanced the theories currently in existence. Consequently, his work can be viewed as an advancement of Super’s (1957), and the main difference between the two theories is that Savickas (2005) added to this existing theory to provide more depth for 21st-century career development analysis.

**Unique points.** As a result, the most unique aspect of Savickas’ (2001) career construction theory is that it was the first career development theory of the 21st century, and that it focuses on a constructivist point of view (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Other authors have reiterated the importance of a more contemporary view of career construction. Inkson (2004) stated that career development is “…an ongoing process of construction involving constantly looking inside oneself, outside oneself and ahead in time” (p. 101). Likewise, Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2008) posited that it is imperative that all workers maintain a high degree of adaptability to compete in the modern workplace. Savickas et al. (2009) discussed the issue of existing 20th century career theories being inadequate, and stated that due to this inadequacy, they may no longer be useful in the analysis of career development. These researchers went on to note, “Managing interactions between different life domains has become a paramount concern for the many peripheral workers whose employment is contingent, free-lance, temporary, external, part-time, and casual” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 241). These new concerns and career models did not exist in the past, and Savickas’ (2001) career construction theory is currently the only theoretical proposal that supports these emerging concerns.

It is for these reasons that career construction theory lends itself so well to the qualitative study of careers. As Savickas (2005) noted, “In chronicling the recursive interplay between self
and society, career stories explain why individuals make the choices they do and the private meaning that guides these choices” (p. 58). It is through these stories that individuals construct a career path and compose the stories of their lives.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the way in which women who work in secondary education and hold administrative licenses but do not work in administration make sense of their personal concept of self, their roles, and how this vision impacts their career pattern. The following research question guided this study: How do women who hold administrative licenses in secondary education make sense of their career patterns?

Research Design

A qualitative approach was used to address the research question. Stake (2010) posited, “Research is inquiry, deliberate study, a seeking to understand” (p. 13). He also noted that using qualitative research implies that the research being conducted depends on the perceptions of the research participants and the way in which they understand the events in their lives (Stake, 2010). Silverman (2010) agreed that when investigating and analyzing people’s experiences and their daily lives, a qualitative research design is the most suitable choice. For these reasons, a qualitative research design was used to study the experiences of women who work at the secondary level and hold administrative licenses but do not currently work as administrators.

As Barbour (2008) described, “Qualitative methods can allow us to access these ‘embedded’ processes by focusing on the context of people’s everyday lives, where such decisions are made and enacted, rather than simply looking at patient characteristics or the content of consultations” (p. 13). Consequently, a qualitative research design was the most fitting research design for studying the experiences of women in this study.

Constructivist paradigm. A constructivist research paradigm guided the development of this study. Pontorotto (2005) wrote that the essence of the constructivist school of thought is
that each individual perceives experiences in their own way. Consequently, when research participants recall past events, their perceptions affect the way in which they construct the reality of what happened. This paradigm was appropriate for this study because it places an emphasis on the perceptions of the lived experiences of study participants. Using this model allowed women at the secondary level who hold administrative licenses but who do not work as administrators to illuminate their individual experiences.

Pontorotto (2005) noted the importance of the interaction between the researcher and the subject in a study utilizing a constructivist paradigm. Pontorotto posited that in order for their individual concept of reality to be constructed, there must be deep reflection by the research participant. He also noted, in this type of study, the researcher must assist the research participant to construct their own perceived reality by co-analyzing the experiences of the research subject. In this way, the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee was critical to the success of this study.

A Basic, Qualitative Approach

This study employed a basic qualitative approach. Rather than aligning with more prescriptive methodology, a basic qualitative approach allowed the researcher flexibility to modify protocols to gain the biggest insights into the participants’ experiences. More specifically, this study’s data set was composed of multiple interviews that allowed participants to share the stories of their lives and career patterns.

Conducting a qualitative study is an excellent way to study a person’s life or everyday behavior (Silverman, 2010). Savickas (2005) wrote, “In chronicling the recursive interplay between self and society, career stories explain why individuals make the choices that they do and provide meanings that guide these choices” (p. 58). The co-construction of the participant’s
stories illuminates the career paths that led various women to remain in the teaching profession instead of entering public school administration. In order to answer the research question, this study used a qualitative approach to best understand the perceptions and experiences of the women interviewed.

**Participants and Recruitment**

**Participants.** The participants in this study were six women who work as secondary teachers, possess administrative licenses, and have never worked as administrators. Limiting the study to six participants allowed for thoughtful analysis of the experiences of a handful of women. Catterall and Maclaran (2006) posited that the number of research participants is determined by the depth that the researcher wants to attain from the interviews being conducted. It is easier to gain a greater depth of understanding when fewer participants are interviewed, when contrasted with a larger sample size. It is for these reasons that six research participants were included in this study.

**Recruitment.** Recruitment for this study took place in person and over the Internet. Initially, several high school principals, department heads, and other educators in leadership positions in Massachusetts were contacted to inquire about conducting the study with some of the teachers in their schools. These educational leaders were considered ‘gatekeepers’. Jensen (2008) defined “gatekeepers” as “individuals who can be used as an entry point to a specific community” (p. 2). Gatekeepers were contacted with the hope that they would be able to identify women who would meet the selection criteria to participate in this study. Initially, very little information was obtained from department heads and schools principals.

Individual teachers were also recruited via e-mail. A copy of the letter sent to these teachers is provided in Appendix A. This was the more successful tactic, confirming Hatch’s
(2002) assertion that said, “Participants are the ultimate gatekeepers” (p. 51). Participants are considered to be the most important gatekeepers because they ultimately determine the amount of information that a researcher will be able to access.

**Sampling strategy.** The initial sampling strategy utilized for this study was criterion sampling. The purpose of criterion sampling “…is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance…” (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 238). This sampling method maintained quality assurance throughout the collected data (Creswell, 2012). In this case, participants needed to meet four criteria. First, all of the women in the study must have worked or currently work at the secondary level in public schools. Second, they must possess an administrative license. Third, they were not working as administrators. Fourth, they must be working in the eastern part of the state of Massachusetts.

Along with criterion sampling, a snowball sampling technique was used in this study. A snowball sampling technique relies on the researcher contacting people who may qualify for a given research study and asking them to refer other people who may also fit the needs of the study (Babbie, 2013). Hugh-Jones (2010) argued that this method is beneficial because these participants may be more willing and open to sharing information about their experiences and perceptions. For this study, the researcher contacted acquaintances from her workplace that she believed might fit the study criteria. This action resulted in the recruitment of two participants.

Finally, it is important to note that recruitment of participants often happens in casual ways. It is not uncommon for a researcher to discuss their research with someone and to realize that they or someone they know may be a good candidate to participate in the study (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman, 2004). The researcher employed varied sampling techniques in order to widen the search for study participants. The use of both of these sampling strategies was
necessary in order to recruit a sufficient number of participants meeting the required study criteria.

Because data was analyzed using career construction theory as a theoretical lens, and this theory places an emphasis on the many phases of career development, effort was made to recruit participants who were in various stages of their careers. The practice of recruiting participants at various stages of their careers in order to understand the experiences of the population as a whole is known as maximum variation (Creswell, 2012). Savickas (2005) stated, “Career denotes a subjective construction that imposes personal meaning on past memories, present experiences, and future aspirations by weaving them into a life theme that patterns the individual’s work life” (p. 43). For this reason, enlisting participants from many stages of their ‘work life’ was important in order to obtain a well-rounded picture of the experiences of women who possess administrative licenses but do not work in administrative positions.

Prior to recruiting participants, institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained through Northeastern University’s IRB board. This approval was obtained in order to protect all study participants and to ensure their anonymity. Participants also signed an informed consent form stating that they understood the purpose of the study and the risks involved in participation. A copy of the informed consent form is located in Appendix B. Participants could withdraw at any point during the study.

Data Collection

As a result of the constructivist research paradigm utilized, the researcher served as an interviewer and co-constructor of experiences and perceptions. Study participants were interviewed and asked probing questions in order to solicit sufficient depth. This dialogue between the researcher and participant was critical because “The human interaction in the
interview affects the interviewees, and the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 62). This study sought to gather rich data pertaining to the experiences of women who hold these licenses but who do not work in an administrative capacity. According to Damianakis and Woolford (2012), “Typically, the qualitative researchers’ data collection involves face-to-face interaction with participants” (p. 709). During face-to-face interaction, the researcher gains access to the world of the participant, allowing a greater chance to understand the participant’s thoughts, experiences, and decision-making processes (Damianakis & Woolford, 2012). Also, Merriam (2009) asserted that using interviews as a data collection procedure is necessary if the researcher seeks insight into past events that cannot be replicated.

**Interviews.** Within this study, each participant took part in two semi-structured in-depth interviews. These interviews were based on a modified version of Seidman’s (2006) three-interview protocol. Seidman (2006) suggested that all interviews must be conducted one-on-one and each interview should last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour in order to gain an understanding of the context of the participants’ experience. Before the first interview, each participant constructed a timeline that detailed her basic life, education, and work trajectories. Elliot (2005) posited that it is sometimes difficult for interview participants to recall the details of past events without some time to think. She recommended a blank grid be prepared with columns titled: year, age, education, work history, housing history, and family history so that participants could better recall these details from their past. A sample, blank template of this timeline is included in Appendix D. The data from this grid was included in the analysis and was used to initiate conversation with participants during their interviews.
Including the time that it took to discuss a timeline of the research participant’s life and work history, each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) recommend using no more than six general questions during an interview. They noted that if more than six questions are used then participants will be exhausted, while using fewer than six questions will result in not enough data being collected. Although only six questions were asked, the interviewer also prepared a series of prompts that were used to gather more information. The interview questions served to spark conversation with the participant without limiting the types of stories that were told. The questions provided some guidance, but the interviewee directed the conversation. Merriam (2009) suggested,

Having fewer broader questions unhooks you from the interview guide and enables you to really listen to what your participant has to share, which in turn enables you to better follow avenues of inquiry that will yield potentially rich contributions. (p. 104)

In order to recruit the maximum number of participants possible the first and second interviews of the three-interview protocol were combined. Seidman (2006) stated that combining these two interviews was acceptable as long as the general format of the interviews was maintained, and the participants had an opportunity to reflect on what they discussed.

The first interview. In the first interview, after the study was explained to the participant and their consent was obtained, the researcher asked the participant to discuss the events written on their life history grid. This grid supplemented the interview data collected and was used to assist participants in recalling past details of their life and work. The use of this grid was integrated into Seidman’s (2006) three-interview protocol in which the goal of the first interview is to allow the participant to recall as many details as possible about him or herself related to the topic being studied. The questions asked during this stage of the interview process elicited
details regarding demographic information and prompted the participant to reconstruct their experiences from the past and describe the impact of these experiences on the present.

**The second interview.** During the second interview of this study, the researcher asked the study participant the questions necessary to fill in the gaps of the story. Seidman’s (2006) protocol included a second interview as a chance to explain experiences in detail and reconstruct events. This was also the point at which the participant had the opportunity to reflect on their previous responses and to think about the impact of past experiences on the present.

**Interview setting and process.** All interviews were held at an isolated site chosen by the study participant to eliminate the possibility of distractions. The majority of interviews took place in the participants’ offices and school buildings. One interview took place at an isolated spot in a restaurant. King and Horrocks (2010) stated that participants should be asked where they would like the interview to take place noting that most of the time, it will occur somewhere they are comfortable. During the interviews, the researcher used a MacBook Air and an iPhone to record data digitally, preserving the exact words of each participant. This method provided a backup copy of the interview and made digital transfer easier. Each digital recording was labeled using the participant’s pseudonym in order to protect the identity of the participant.

**Field notes/journal.** Throughout the course of each recorded interview, a journal was kept with notes taken by the interviewer. Krefting (1991) noted that a field journal is often used to record the thoughts of the researcher regarding both their own behavior and that of the interviewee as it relates to the research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommended integrating data from field notes and observations from journals written by the researcher about the field experience into the analysis in order to provide a ‘reflective balance’ between the participant’s point of view and that of the researcher. During and at the end of each interview,
the researcher took notes on any interesting details that emerged throughout the process. This journal also contained information about the researcher’s biases and decision-making process, which assisted in later auditing. Taylor (2005) stated,

By keeping a reflexive research journal, the researchers can be systematic in their examination of the experience of being a qualitative interviewer, which should facilitate the emergence of new insights and deeper understanding of both the research topic and the research process. (p. 44)

All of the information recorded in this field journal was included in the final data analysis.

**Document analysis.** Additionally, all participants were asked to provide a résumé if they had one readily available. Human resources webpages of the school districts where the participants worked were also read and analyzed. This information provided a more detailed picture of the jobs offered within their school districts and the qualifications required to apply for each job. The researcher also investigated the licensure programs that were mentioned by the study participants. These artifacts were reviewed along with the interview data collected in order to accurately re-construct the story of each participant.

All formal protocols were followed in this study. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and completed informed consent forms. Consent forms which are located in Appendix B included detailed information on the goals of the study, the amount of time that participants would dedicate to the study, the safety precautions in place to protect the participants’ anonymity, and the risks and benefits of study participation. This information served to protect both the researcher and research participants by beginning the study with full awareness of the intent and goals of the study. Copies of these protocols are included in the appendices.
Data Storage

Data was recorded digitally using a MacBook Air and an iPhone. These digital files were labeled using pseudonyms. The files collected were saved on both electronic devices in password-protected folders. They were also saved on an external hard drive, which was locked in a file cabinet that no one except the researcher could access. Written and printed documents included transcripts of interviews labeled with pseudonyms and a journal of notes kept by the researcher. All written and printed files were stored in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher could access.

Once the audio data was securely saved in several places, the recordings were professionally transcribed. The audio data was sent to a company that transcribes interview data and was sent back as word documents. These documents were stored securely in a password protected electronic folder on the researcher’s computer. All study participants were given pseudonyms, and therefore it is not possible for anyone aside from the researcher to identify these individuals. Best practices suggest that “Tapes and transcripts should not be labeled in ways which could compromise anonymity, and identifying information (such as sampling documents) must be stored separately from data” (Lewis, 2003, p. 68). Also, Mann and Stewart (2000) stated that “…the use of pseudonyms, the changing of any identifiable personal details, including names of places, institutions and times, the assigning of code numbers, the secure storage of data and the destruction of data…” is a way of maintaining confidentiality (p. 57). The practices of using pseudonyms, altering personal details, employing secure data storage, and destroying data were adhered to in order to maintain confidentiality in this study. At the end of the study, all of the digital recordings were destroyed. All other records will be maintained for a period of three years.
Data Analysis

Data analysis software was used in this study. The data was saved as encrypted files in password-protected folders within the data analysis program. HyperRESEARCH was used for coding and storage. This program maintains a high standard of security, and only the researcher was permitted to access data once it was uploaded to the analysis program.

In this investigation a basic qualitative study was conducted. Since this study contained a variety of interviews with participants from different backgrounds and career stages, the final analysis of the data obtained provided important insight into the individual and collective experiences of the women being studied. To emphasize the individual nature of these experiences, each story was first analyzed on its own. To construct broader meaning, all of the stories were analyzed together in a second analysis in order to view a pattern within the stories of various women. Analysis began informally at the start of each interview through the use of a field journal, and continued until all of the interviews were completed and transcribed. Since the interviews in this study explored individual life stories and experiences, establishing a temporal range was an important piece of the reconstruction process. This range began with the earliest age that each participant recalled and ended with their present experiences.

**Thematic coding.** Once the data pertaining to each individual was analyzed, the cross case coding process took place. A thematic coding process was used in this study. This process was used in order to better understand the connections between the stories of all of the study participants. Thematic coding occurs when a list of common ‘themes’ or patterns are detected within the data collected (Boyatzis, 1998). This was done by reviewing the transcripts of the interviews and locating points in which study participants expressed the same or similar ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).
As stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), “Analysis involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analyzing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing” (p. 15). The method discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used in this study and involved six data analysis phases. The first phase is to familiarizing yourself with the data. The researcher actively read the data several times in order to look for meaning and repeated patterns. The second phase is known as generating initial codes. In this stage, the researcher decides which codes that could be assigned to the data were the most salient. In this study, thirteen codes were identified. The third phase is searching for themes. In this stage, instead of focusing solely on smaller codes, the researcher analyzes the data and searches for more extensive themes, or the ways in which codes can be combined to create broader themes. In this study, six themes were identified. In the fourth phase, reviewing themes, the researcher deletes themes that are unnecessary or creates new themes if needed, before mapping them to begin to construct a story from the data. In the case of this study, the thirteen initial codes had to be condensed in order to establish the final six overarching themes. The fifth phase, defining and naming themes, involves analyzing the data using the themes that were found. Lastly, in the sixth phase, producing the report, the final story is constructed.

HyperRESEARCH, a specialized software program, was used to navigate the data and to support the thematic coding procedure.

Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that there is no one agreed upon method of thematic data analysis. They also note that thematic analysis allows the researcher a degree of flexibility in their analysis. However, as a result of this lack of uniformity in the process and the high level of flexibility within this method of data analysis, it is important to follow a guideline in order to maintain consistency and ensure validity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and
Clarke (2006), “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 10). Thematic coding was used in this study to clearly establish the common patterns observed throughout the data analysis process.

Inductive analysis methods were used in order to identify themes in this study. Savickas (2005) stated that as people reveal the stories of their career trajectories, themes emerge that illustrate why individuals made the career choices that they did. For this reason, inductive analysis was used to identify codes as they emerged throughout the course of the research. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive data analysis is “data-driven”. This method of analysis was a critical component of this study, as the research question aimed to explore the experiences of women in secondary education as they occurred organically, rather than to view them within the context of a theoretical framework.

**Ethical Considerations**

All information collected in this study was done according to the procedures and guidelines outlined by the application approved by Institutional Review Board at Northeastern University. All research participants were provided with an informed consent form that outlined the goals of the study, included as Appendix B. They were informed that if they felt uncomfortable at any time, then they could withdraw from the study. This form was signed before the research began in order to confirm that the participant understood what to expect while participating in this study. The researcher also explained the study procedures and process to each participant before beginning the interview process. Participants were informed of the various ways in which their identities and the information that they provided were protected.
Study participants were informed that they had little to no risk of incurring any harm due to their willingness to participate in this study.

In order to protect the subjects and create trust between the researcher and the participants, the confidentiality of subjects had to be assured. The identity of each participant was protected through the use of pseudonyms. Only the researcher had access to the actual names of each participant. All of this information was stored in a password-protected folder on the researcher’s computer and on paper in a locked file cabinet. Once the study was completed, all of the digital recordings were destroyed. Additional notes and records will be kept for a period of three years.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined four main criteria used to establish trustworthiness in research studies. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. However, Seale (2003) noted that in their original work in 1985, Lincoln and Guba did not account for the constructivist focus on the possibility of the existence of various realities. They therefore added a fifth criterion in later years that is called authenticity. They describe authenticity as “being consistent with the relativist view that research accounts do no more than represent a sophisticated but temporary consensus of views about what is considered to be true” (Seale, 2003, p. 173). Also, study participants were given the opportunity to review and react to their interview transcripts and the individual stories that were written by the researcher as a result of the interviews. This step allowed the participants to be an active part of the reconstruction process. This research study utilized these criteria to ensure trustworthiness.

Member checking. One of the most important and reliable methods of establishing trustworthiness is through “member checks,” which Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe as “the
most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). They go on to indicate that in order for a reconstructed reality to truly be valid and represent the experience of the research participants, participants must be given the opportunity to reflect and react to what has been found by the researcher. Member checks were conducted formally and informally throughout the course of the study in several ways. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) suggested “furnishing entire copies of the study to a review panel of respondents and other persons in the setting being studied” before submitting a final report (p. 142). Participants were also given the opportunity to respond to the information presented in this study once individual stories were constructed. This technique allowed for the highest degree of accuracy when reconstructing the past experiences of research participants.

**Rich descriptions.** Since the results of qualitative studies can be contextual and case specific, every effort was made to report findings in a detailed manner (Quinn Patton, 1999). This was done through the use of rich data descriptions and in-depth interviews. Obtaining rich data is a collaborative process, achieved through conversational exchanges that take place during these research interviews to provide the data needed to collect the most comprehensive data possible (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001). Creating thick descriptions was not only useful in this particular study, but also for later researchers that may want to conduct similar investigations. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) affirm that “Thick description involves making detailed descriptions of the context and other aspects of the research setting so that other researchers can make comparisons with other contexts in which they are working” (p. 296).

**Reflexive journal writing.** Journal writing provided another manner in which trustworthiness was established in this study. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), “A reflexive journal is a diary (daily or as needed) of information about the investigator, such as the
investigator’s possible biases and the methodological decisions that the researcher makes” (p. 297). They also asserted that keeping a journal during the course of the study could be useful later for writing descriptive reports and conducting later audits regarding the methods used during the study.

**Trustworthiness conclusions.** In summary, three major processes were conducted in order to ensure trustworthiness in this study. The first and most important process was the member checking method, in which research participants were given the opportunity to verify the work and data collection of the researcher in order to validate the data that was obtained. The second process was the provision of thick and rich data description. This was an important collaborative process because it allowed the maximum amount of data to be collected in order to create a comprehensive analysis of the subject being studied and to provide detailed information to future researchers. The last measure that was taken to ensure trustworthiness was to maintain a journal throughout the course of the study. This journal allowed the researcher to engage in deeper reflection, to record thoughts as the study progressed, and to use this data later to paint a comprehensive picture of the research process.

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed in this study. Chapter Four outlines the research findings obtained during the interviews, from the resumes and life history grids collected, and during the analysis stages of the research process. It includes participant profiles as well as the individual story of each participant. It also contains a list of the themes that emerged during the data analysis process with supporting data from participant interviews.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings from this qualitative study. The purpose of the study was to examine the ways that women working in secondary education who hold administrative licenses but do not work as administrators make sense of their personal concept of self, their roles, and the impact that this has on their career patterns. Six women at various stages of their careers were interviewed. All of these women hold administrative licenses but have never worked as administrators. A basic qualitative study was conducted to focus on the perspectives of the individual women being interviewed, as well as to develop a composite description of the experiences of these women in relation to the themes that emerged.

The objective of this study was to answer the following research question: How do women who hold administrative licenses in secondary education make sense of their career pattern? This chapter first introduces the participants. Then, the themes that emerged from the data related to each individual are presented in the initial findings. Following this, a composite description including four main themes that emerged from all of the data is presented. These themes include: (1) specificity of interests; (2) personal and vocational self-concept; (3) professional influences, and (4) role balance.

Analysis Overview

As the previous chapter reported, a thematic coding method was used to analyze the data collected. A detailed, step-by-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), includes six phases: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The researcher read all the transcripts before starting the coding process in order to familiarize herself with the data. During the first phase of data analysis, initial codes were identified. More specifically, a
A descriptive coding method was used to analyze the basic topics in the data (Saldana, 2009). These descriptive codes were then further examined using a second cycle coding method known as pattern coding. This approach pulls together large amounts of data in order to sort it into smaller, meaningful units of analysis (Saldana, 2009). During the second cycle coding process, concrete themes emerged, and these themes were then used to construct a complete story. The qualitative data analysis program HyperRESEARCH was used to facilitate data analysis.

**Participant Profiles**

Six women participated in this study. Each met the inclusion criteria for the study which were that they work at the secondary level, hold an administrative license, but have never worked as an administrator. Five of these women currently work at the secondary level and possess administrative licenses but do not work as administrators. One of the participants retired from her job as a secondary teacher one month prior to data collection. She also had an administrative license, but had not worked in an administrative capacity. This section contains a basic profile of each participant and this information is summarized in Table 1.

**Blake.** Blake, age 59, was a high school math teacher at a public high school. She began teaching in 1975, and in this same year she completed her Bachelor’s degree in Math education. She decided to study math in college and pursued teaching at the secondary level because she considered it her most challenging subject. In 1982, she received her administrator certification through a Master’s degree program. In the same year, she obtained a part-time position as a math instructor at the college level. Blake is married to a high school principal and has two grown children. Blake holds administrative licenses for supervisor/director of mathematics and principal/vice principal for grades seven through twelve. She recently retired from her teaching position in 2013 after working for 39 years in the same school system.
Caroline. Caroline, age 42, is a high school special education teacher in a public school. She has been a teacher for 18 years. She is married and lives in the suburbs with her husband. In 1995, she obtained her bachelor’s in English. In 2012, she completed a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in which she earned an administrator license. Before teaching in the public schools, Caroline taught in two alternative schools. While working in these alternative schools, she held a variety of leadership positions, though she has never worked as an administrator. She is very passionate about advocating for special education students. Caroline holds principal/vice principal administrative licensure for grades five through twelve.

Felicia. Felicia, age 31, is a middle school literacy teacher in a public school. For the past six years she has worked in two different middle schools. She is married and has five children. She is also pursuing a doctoral degree. She began her post-secondary studies at a local community college. After completing her associate’s degree in education she went on to study at a four-year school where she obtained her bachelor’s degree in elementary education in 2006. In order to obtain her administrative license, she enrolled in a master’s degree program that she finished in 2009. She is very proud of her education and emphasized the importance of pursuing education within her family. Felicia holds a principal/vice principal administrative license for grades five through eight.

Jennifer. Jennifer, age 48, is a middle school guidance counselor in a public school. She has worked in the public schools for twenty years. In 1989, she obtained a bachelor’s degree in psychology and she then went on to complete a master’s degree in school counseling in 1993. In 2006, she participated in an administrative licensure program through which she earned a principal license. She also finished her doctoral degree in education in 2013. Jennifer holds a principal/vice principal administrative license for grades five through eight.
Maria. Maria, age 58, is a high school world language teacher and department head in a public school. She has been a teacher in the public schools for 37 years. In 1976, she completed a bachelor’s degree in French. She then went on to earn two master’s degrees, one in French in 1981 and the other in Spanish in 2002. She earned her administrative license through a practicum she completed within her school. In addition to her full-time job as a teacher, she also works as an adjunct instructor at a local college. She is a member of a professional organization for language teachers that has played an important role in her professional and personal life. She is married with two grown children. Maria holds an administrative license for supervisor/director of world language for grades five through twelve.

Sarah. Sarah, age 40, is a middle school English language arts teacher at a charter school. She has worked in education for 11 years. In 2002, she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English and education. She went on to complete a master’s degree in education in 2007. Sarah is also working on a doctoral degree in education. She obtained her administrative license through a practicum experience at her work and additional coursework completed at a local university. She is divorced and lives with her two children. During her interviews, she expressed interest in transitioning from working in a charter school to working in a public school. Sarah holds a principal/vice principal administrative license for grades five through eight.
Table 1

Summary of Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family Status</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Admin License</th>
<th>School Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Married, 2 children</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Supervisor/Director &amp; Principal/VP</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Principal/VP</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicia</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Married, 5 children</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Principal/VP</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Married, 2 children</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>World Language</td>
<td>Supervisor/Director</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Married, 2 children</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>World Language</td>
<td>Supervisor/Director</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Divorced, 2 children</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>Principal/VP</td>
<td>Charter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Individual Stories**

The following narratives were compiled to present the essence of the experiences of the participants, drawing largely from their own words and perspectives.

**Blake.** Blake always wanted to be a teacher. She can remember being as young as five years old and playing school with her neighborhood friends where she played the role of the teacher. This game would turn out to be indicative of the way she viewed herself throughout her career. In Blake’s case, being a teacher was an innate desire: “It was just inside. I never changed my mind how kids changed their mind. Every month they want to do something different. I always just wanted to be a teacher.”

At the start of her life, Blake lived with her family in a large city. She attended elementary school in a parochial system where she recalls the nuns promoting academic rigor. However, a few years into her elementary school career Blake’s family moved to a nearby suburb. Once she began school in this new public school district, she realized that although she was ahead in many academic subjects, she was a bit behind in math. This realization prompted Blake to work hard to catch up in this subject. She even had to skip recess to improve her skills: “…I actually had to stay in to do math to catch up.” The extra work that Blake did in math ended up being part of her motivation to study math later in life.

The desire to teach and the desire to work with math never left Blake throughout her high school years. Once she graduated from high school and enrolled in college, she decided to pursue a career in math education. This degree was a way for Blake to combine her two passions. In order to pursue this path, she declared a major in middle school math education. Over her four years at a local college, she indicated that she worked hard to complete her degree and to earn her first teaching license. She graduated with her Bachelor’s degree in 1975. This
degree allowed her to return to work as a math teacher at the middle school in her hometown. After several years working at the middle school level, Blake moved up to the high school in the same town. She worked at this school for the remainder of her career.

When she first began working at the high school, Blake also started to work part-time on her master’s degree in secondary administration. This degree led to an administrative license. She completed this degree in 1982, which was the same year in which she obtained a part-time position as a math instructor at a local university.

During the early stages of her career, the decision to obtain a license in administration was influenced by several people. One woman who encouraged Blake to go down this path was the head of the math department at the high school where she worked when she was first hired. Blake felt that this woman had a lot of confidence in her and was always pushing her in the direction of a job in administration. This woman served as a mentor to Blake. Her training motivated Blake to pay close attention to detail in her work and to always follow through. These principles were something that she valued and impacted her work in education throughout her career. Another math teacher, a male colleague of hers, also acted as an important professional influence. She knew him from when she was in high school, and he was very supportive: “He just, he would always try to give me little hands-on things to do. He was great.” Both of these mentors encouraged her to consider working as an administrator.

Even though I was thinking of it, they just thought I would be successful at it. They had put a little light bulb in the back of my head that was always there kind of pushing me and mentoring me.

These colleagues encouraged Blake to consider working as an administrator but she never left her job as a math teacher because she said, “I was happy with what I was doing”. Blake always
viewed herself as a teacher, and leaving the classroom for administration would not allow her to work with students and her colleagues in the same capacity.

During the early years of her career, Blake was very busy and balancing many roles. Although Blake felt that the role of teacher was the most prominent role that she played in her early adult years, once she got married this changed. She married another educator in 1983 and had her first child in 1985. At that time Blake realized that, “School isn’t as big of an issue when you have your family”. After the birth of her first child, she took a year-long maternity leave. At the end of this leave, she returned to work as a math teacher at the high school. However, in 1988, her second child was born, and she ended up taking a longer leave than she had anticipated. After the birth of her children, the most important role in her life was that of wife and mother. Although Blake had planned to be a stay-at-home mom for two years, she ended up staying out of work for four years. Her rationale for this long leave was that her school district was undergoing major budget cuts and she felt that if she stayed out on maternity leave she would have a better chance of returning to her position as a teacher in the same school in the future rather than being laid off.

Since she decided to stay out of work longer, she was able to help out another colleague who was newer to the district and would have been laid off if she had returned. Although Blake was home on leave, she decided that she wanted to remain productive and did not want to put her career on hold entirely. This was a way for her to balance her roles as teacher and mother. She had the option of keeping her evening job as a university-level math instructor. “I was still working at night and still teaching college level material. It just made me happy to be with my family.” Due to this part-time job, Blake felt that her leave of absence did not have a significant
impact on her career progression. Blake was able to maintain her identity as an educator through her position as a college math instructor.

Once Blake returned to work, the option of leaving the classroom and moving into an administrative position became a possibility. At various points, her husband encouraged her to look into this option. Despite his encouragement, Blake did not feel that this move was right for her stating “As much as he wanted me to be an administrator, the timing for me just never seemed right.”

When Blake described her ideal administrative positions, she talked about her interest in being a curriculum leader or department chair for math. “I never really did use my administration license. I probably would have as a supervisor or as a math technology person. Being an assistant principal or principal, that wasn’t enticing to me.” Working as a math department supervisor was a position that she felt could help her to assist other teachers to move forward. She also noted that it was a position in which she could help bring out the best in students.

Blake indicated that another reason she did not move into an administrative position was because there were not many openings for these leadership roles in the math department within her school. “The openings only opened up twice for math. Other than moving around at the time, most of us didn’t move around like people do today.” Teachers tended to stay in their positions for the duration of their careers when Blake was considering her switch to administration. She believes that it is more common today for teachers to have several jobs throughout the span of their careers. Although Blake noted that she could have left her school district in order to pursue an administrative position that she found desirable, she said that she was always happy in her job as a math teacher in her home district.
Another factor that influenced Blake’s decision not to pursue a job in administration was that she did not want to deal with some of the challenges that came along with the position. Since Blake was married to a principal, she was able to experience many of these challenges first-hand. She described these challenges as the “headaches” that come along with being a principal. At Blake’s house they would receive phone calls at all hours for her husband who was a high school principal to address issues at his school. This was very difficult when her children were still young:

I know a lot from my husband about people coming at you asking for favors and they call our house at all times of the day. This is before caller ID and things like that and having no qualms whether it was 11:00 at night or you know, 6:00 in the morning, especially when I had a young family.

The importance of the wellbeing of family was an important factor in Blake’s decision not to work as an administrator. She did not want her job to interfere with the time that she had at home with her children. Blake also knew that administrators often leave very early in the morning for work and, in many instances, come home extremely late. For Blake, she felt that while her children were still in school she did not want to make the switch to working as an administrator and not be able to dedicate her time to her family. Teaching provided her with a schedule that made spending time with her children more manageable.

Although Blake’s children are now adults, she spends a lot of time caring for her grandson. When she described her typical day, she noted that she wakes up fairly early for work, and even once the school day is finished, she often stays longer in order to organize things for the next day or week. Though she no longer has to care for her own children, she often watches her grandson on the weekends. Blake continues to emphasize the importance of taking care of
her family over a job in administration. The time that she spends with her grandson would limit her time outside of school to do additional work or activities, and this would make working as an administrator impossible.

Blake retired a month prior to her interviews. She is currently enjoying retirement and spending extra time with her family. Although she may consider coming back into the schools to work as an administrator if something great comes along, she has no plans to return to work in the foreseeable future.

Caroline. During high school, Caroline wanted to drop out of school. She considered herself to be a part of a group of students who were not very serious about academics. Her friends were into drugs and skipping class, but she did not take it that far. Both of her parents were educators so dropping out of school was not a possibility:

I was that student that could do well if I only applied myself. I was bored most of the time and I have a very short attention span, but both of my parents are educators so dropping out was not really an option.

Despite wanting to leave school, Caroline said that she always knew she wanted to work in education: “Yeah, even when I was hating school and hating my teachers, I still kind of always knew.” It was clear that Caroline felt a strong connection to education even though her own experiences in school were not always positive because she still knew she wanted to become an educator.

After graduating high school, Caroline first went to a community college. Once she completed her associate’s degree, she moved on to a four-year university where she completed her bachelor’s degree in 1995. During her undergraduate studies she majored in English and psychology. Although she notes that she worked harder in college than in high school, Caroline
still feels that she did not work to her full potential. Caroline also worked a part-time job at a music store while she was completing her bachelor’s degree. Another girl who worked with her at the music store had a second job at alternative school, and this coworker managed to get Caroline a job at the same facility. Caroline felt comfortable pursuing a position at an alternative school because she could identify with the struggle of the population that it assisted.

This job was Caroline’s first position as an educator and it was working at a male residential facility with incarcerated youths. Caroline started as a house counselor and then moved on to become a teacher. Since this facility housed a program for an extremely at-risk population, Caroline expressed some apprehension about working there alone as a female. She described it as a two-room schoolhouse for incarcerated males. While working at this facility, she worked on a licensure waiver. Caroline credits this job with inspiring her to continue working with at-risk students. As she noted in her earlier description of her own high school experiences, assisting at-risk youths in an educational setting was something that she was passionate about and always knew she wanted to do. Although she herself was not an at-risk student in high school, she had many friends who were and this type of position allowed her to work with these types of students. In 1999, she left this position to pursue a job at a different alternative school.

At this new school, Caroline was required to work under a state teaching license and she had recently obtained a license in special education in order to comply with this mandate. While working at this school, Caroline was also completing a master’s degree in special education. Her job at this alternative school gave her the chance to work in a leadership capacity. She also had the chance to run extra programs at the school to help at-risk student be successful in school. This served as a point of inspiration. She was visibly excited when she described the impact that
these programs had on her students. She still tries to incorporate what she learned at this school into her current job: “I really developed an interest in that and try to incorporate a lot of that into my class or I did when I had more leeway.” Caroline has found it difficult to provide her students with these same types of experiences because of a lack of funding and because her current school setting was more rigid than her last. Despite the fact that creating these kinds of opportunities for her current students has been difficult, Caroline still looks for ways to pursue funding and support her students through more therapeutic programming.

After working in this second school for six years, Caroline began to consider moving from private school into the public school setting. “I just decided that I was putting in the same amount of work or even more than I would be at a public setting but there were benefits that the public setting had for me that I would never get here.” A huge factor in her move from the private to the public setting was the issue of pay and benefits. Once she transitioned from the private school to the public setting in 2005, she also had to adjust to a role that offered fewer opportunities for leadership. This change had an impact on her self-concept in that it was no longer as easy to work in a position where major decisions were being made within in the school. While working in the private school Caroline was a leader: “Like I said for the last four years that I was there, it was all leadership from being an immediate supervisor to all the teaching staff to being a member of the administrative team.” Caroline went on to discuss the difference between her private school jobs and her public school job: “Then once I came here, again I just had to learn that public school was a huge transition so I did not really have anything at that point.” In this position, she adjusted to being a classroom teacher but still had the desire to work in leadership roles in the back of her mind. Caroline views herself as not only an educator, but
also as a leader that has the capacity to work at the upper levels of school management in order to improve the experiences of at-risk students in the traditional education setting.

The first role that Caroline was hired for in her current job at a public high school was working as a teacher in the resource room and also as a co-teacher. She was eventually moved to an alternative program within the school. She said that although she has always worked in alternative programs, that she would like to spend at least part of her time as a teacher in a general education classroom. She noted that she has tried to make this transition, but it has been difficult because she is paid from a different budget than general education teachers, and she is working in a position that is often difficult to fill. Consequently, she believed becoming an administrator would allow her to further assist the population that she currently works with, and she views this opportunity as one of the desirable aspects of a job in administration. This is because she could continue to work with at-risk students but possibly in a more influential capacity. She discussed her motive for wanting to become an administrator:

Traditional discipline models do not work for mentally ill students. They do not work for students who may not have a mental illness per se but who are troubled in other capacities, it does not work. If it did work, alternate programs would not exist so I would love to at some point in my perfect nirvana world run a school, an alternative school under a public umbrella.

Working as an administrator would help her to exert more influence over the at-risk population that she works with while giving her the chance to work with mainstream students. She views a position in administration as an opportunity to make positive changes in the education system. For Caroline, the way in which public schools are currently run does not meet the needs of the
students that she works with because they are not run in a way that assists students who are mentally ill. She feels this puts them at a disadvantage.

Caroline feels that she has had several colleagues who have played a supportive role in her career. In addition to the first male colleague she had who helped her to get her first official teaching job, she notes that there was a woman at in her second school who is currently working as a college professor. Caroline described this woman as a “companion on the journey.” They would often discuss how they believed a school should be run. They would bounce ideas off of each other and imagine what their ideal school would look like. Caroline described this woman as very supportive and she admires that this woman is also very knowledgeable about the field of special education. Caroline still speaks to this former colleague on occasion and considers her to be someone that she can go to for advice about professional matters.

For Caroline, the most important part of working in education is being able to help students. She does not want to work in a position that would completely remove her from assisting students. Caroline completed a program in 2012 that allowed her to obtain an administrative license. She acknowledges that she has not been actively pursuing a job in administration and says that she currently feels content with her job and school. Caroline is married, and she does not have any children. She also has not had any breaks in her career. In the future, Caroline plans on pursuing an administrative position, but she does not know when she will do so. She feels that she will know when the right opportunity arises and will apply for it.

Felicia. As a child, Felicia remembers dreaming of becoming a teacher. Her earliest memory of wanting to become a teacher is from kindergarten: “I’ve always loved being around children. I mean even when I was in kindergarten I used to play school. It was just like I was
born to be an educator, I think.” It was clear that these were very positive memories for Felicia. She credits her sixth grade teacher with later encouraging her to follow this dream. “I actually decided in sixth grade that I wanted to be a teacher. I had a wonderful teacher at that point. She did everything in her power to sort of foster that in me.” She described a project they completed that year that she still keeps to this day, “We had to do biographies in sixth grade and I still have it. There was no other option for me, I was going to be a teacher.” Felicia recalls being given a plan book and grade book to play with by this teacher. These memories were the beginning of what she remembers as her desire to work in education. Felicia never considered any other career field and did everything in her power to see her dream become a reality.

In 1998, Felicia had her first child. She was seventeen years old. She managed to stay in school and graduate with a high school diploma. However, she recalls feeling overwhelmed with the idea of going to college. “At one point I would say that I probably felt that was out of reach when I got pregnant with my first child.” Her friends and family encouraged her to stick with her education.” This support was an important part of Felicia’s motivation to move forward with her career plans.

Immediately following high school she went on to a community college to work on an associate’s degree. Once she completed her associate’s degree, she took a small break from school so that she could have her second child in 2001. Once again, after her child was born she went back to school to obtain a bachelor’s degree that she worked on from 2003 to 2006. This degree was in elementary education. In the middle of pursuing her bachelor’s degree, she was a surrogate and carried twins for another woman. This experience did not interrupt Felicia’s schedule or plans. “In 2004, I did a surrogacy where I carried twins for someone else, but it really wasn’t a bump with my education at all. I just kept chugging through.”
Once she graduated from her undergraduate program, Felicia got her first job in education in 2006 when she accepted a position as a building substitute in a middle school. During this time she continued to take courses in education at a local college. While she was taking these courses, she met a professor who inspired her to continue on and pursue a doctoral degree:

This woman is sort of where all my doctorate stuff came from. I saw that she was a mom of three; she was working as an administrator. She had obtained her doctorate. She was very savvy, very cool, and very quick witted and so I wanted to be her.

This professor was a role model for Felicia and showed her that it was possible to have a solid career while still taking care of a family. Shortly after this experience in 2007, Felicia decided to have a third child. Once she had her child, she immediately moved on to a master’s degree program in educational leadership. Through this program she obtained her administrator license. In 2009, she had her fourth child and in 2011 her fifth child followed. After the birth of her fifth child in 2011, she enrolled in a doctoral program where she is still currently a student. It is important to Felicia to balance her roles as a mother, teacher, and student.

Since 2007, Felicia has worked in the same middle school as a literacy instructor. When discussing her motivation to obtain an administrative license, she felt that there was a lot of change that could be made in schools while working in this capacity. However, she also noted that this position holds many challenges: “For me, the biggest challenge would probably be I would say sustaining change because all too often what I’ve seen so far is that we’ve had a huge turnover rate.” Felicia felt that she could really make a difference while working as an administrator. She described seeing both positive and negative school administrators during her career. Felicia said that she would always strive to be one of the positive administrators, and that these people have set examples of
both what to do and what not to do while working in that position. Although sustaining change can be one of the most difficult parts of working as an administrator, Felicia stated that she is up for the challenge.

One factor that has pushed Felicia to work hard and continue to pursue career opportunities is the fact that she views herself as a role model to her children. Her children also motivated her to obtain an administrative license:

I feel like my boys have always been watching me very closely to see how I’m going to react to certain things. They see that I’m under this stress or this pressure of wanting to accomplish things, but can’t. I’m trying to teach them that that’s not really an excuse. You just have to go the extra step in order to accomplish these things that you will be successful and you’ll be able to make that change. Even why I’m in school now is really just to show my kids that it’s possible, that you can do it even if you have five kids, even if you have all these life events going on outside the school. If you really want it you can actually achieve it.

It is important to Felicia to instill a positive work ethic in her children. She considers herself to be a positive example for them and this has served as a motivating factor in her journey to one day become an administrator. Felicia does not only want to talk about what can be done in life, she also wants to be able to show her children that, despite domestic responsibilities and life’s challenges, it is possible to accomplish great things.

While discussing her daily schedule, Felicia said that she starts her day off by getting herself and her children ready for school. Once she leaves school at 3:15 in the afternoon, she goes to pick up her daughter and then she runs errands or takes her children to participate in sports. Felicia works hard to complete most of her work tasks during the school day so that she
can dedicate time to her family and to her doctoral program in the evening. At night she makes sure that her children complete their homework before dinner. Later in the evening once she helps her children get ready for bed, she spends time working on her own academic work for her doctoral program. Her husband helps out with the children at night so that she can study. “I start my doctorate work, my studying, my reading, whatever. I usually do that until about one in the morning and then I sleep until five.” Although her husband helps out at night, Felicia completes the bulk of the domestic chores in her family. Felicia describes her routine as a cycle that repeats itself daily. In order to accomplish everything that she needs to in a day, she has learned to create a balance: “I have created these roles so I can fit into them like wear the hat at that moment and give it my all. Then when it’s done I put it away and open up the next thing.” Juggling all of her daily domestic responsibilities is difficult, but Felicia has found a way to make it all work and to continue to move in the professional direction that she wants to pursue.

Felicia was motivated to pursue a job in administration because of her roles as a teacher and a mother. She is proud of having continued on with her education despite some of the challenges that she has faced in her life. It is important for her to serve as a strong role model for her children. Felicia had several experiences during her childhood that encouraged her to become a teacher and she feels that her desire to work with children is innate. In the future, Felicia plans to pursue a job in administration so that she can be a positive force for change in public schools.

Unlike the other participants in this study, Felicia balances the roles of mother, teacher, and student. She discussed applying for administrative positions in the future. She also mentioned the importance of being a role model for her children. Through her job as a teacher she has taught her children about achieving their goals. Since Felicia balances all of her roles
and does not allow one to be more prominent than another, she views a position in administration as a good fit for her. However, similar to other study participants she would like to work in a position where she can directly work with students and faculty.

**Jennifer.** Jennifer began her career in education as an elementary school adjustment counselor. Prior to working as a counselor in the public school system, she was working in a residential center where she was required to do restraints. This requirement was chaotic for Jennifer, “I wanted to work with kids that were more normal and not the craziness of residential”. She noted that she wanted to work with the general population, and that she wanted to maintain a traditional school schedule because of her desire to have children. This prompted her to earn a master’s degree in school counseling in 1993. In the same year her first child was born. In 1999, her first position was cut, and she collected unemployment until 2001. Jennifer talked about not minding as much at that point that she was out of a job because it gave her time to stay at home with her daughter. In 2002, she went back to work as an adjustment counselor, but this position was also cut at the end of the year. While she was in this position, a female assistant principal who was going to become the school principal encouraged Jennifer to become her assistant principal. Although she did apply for this position, she had not yet completed a program for administrative licensure, and she did not get the job.

Jennifer discussed one of the reasons that she pursued an administrative license was because “They said that it would be a good idea in that I kept getting cut. So I saw it as a way for more job security.” In order to have a backup career plan, Jennifer made the decision to work on her administrator’s license. The following year she was moved to a middle school counselor position. She was not sure that she would like this job, so she officially enrolled in a principal licensure program. Jennifer did end up liking her new middle school position. Once again she
received encouragement from her new male principal who wanted her to apply for a position as an assistant principal.

This principal told her that she was already doing the job of an assistant principal, and she may as well be recognized for it. Consequently, Jennifer applied for a few administrative positions, but she did not get them. “So I applied for a couple of jobs. I ended up not getting them. I was thankful I didn’t get them because I don’t think I really wanted them.” Jennifer’s passion was not administration, and she always saw herself continuing to work as a counselor. She remained working as a guidance counselor until 2011 when she took a job as the chairperson of a high school guidance department in an urban school district. Jennifer did not enjoy this job, and she felt that the school was very dangerous. This job was difficult because although she was supposed to supervise other counselors, she did not have any authority to enforce their compliance. Jennifer reported not having any support from the principal of this school. This lack of support was a contributing factor to her looking for a new job. After one year she left this position and moved to a small suburban school district closer to her home where she currently works and is very happy.

Initially, Jennifer was not interested in pursuing an administrative license, but because other administrators kept encouraging her and her positions were cut frequently, she viewed obtaining this license as a job security measure. Jennifer discussed what she believed to be a factor in her failure to obtain any of the administrative positions for which she applied. At more than one of her interviews, it was mentioned that although she had worked in the schools for a solid amount of time, she did not have any classroom experience. Jennifer felt that this aspect of her career was viewed as a negative point in her job history and limited her opportunities to work as an administrator.
In Jennifer’s opinion, the biggest reward of working as an administrator was the increase in pay: “I can’t think of any rewards besides the salary.” Years ago she would have said that creating change in schools was a big reward, but now she feels like this is a very difficult task and that based on her experiences throughout her career, she no longer views this outcome as a reward. The schedule that she maintains in her current school is similar to that of a teacher, and she enjoys this aspect of her job. She finds that having so much contact with kids in her current position is helpful when it comes to parenting her own children. Jennifer feels that the most important part of her job is working with kids. She enjoys helping students feel like they can be successful in school, “I like that I’m there for the kids. I like that through my course I can engage kids that are not typically engaged in school.” If she were to pursue an administrative position, Jennifer would prefer to be an assistant principal rather than a principal. It is important to her to have someone working above her to defer to on complicated issues. A former supervisor told her it was best to always be in the position of assistant for this reason. “His advice to me was always be an assistant. Be an assistant principal. Be a principal for a year and then go to assistant superintendent to get over that jump, that principal job as quickly as possible.” Jennifer views certain high-level administrative positions such as principal and superintendent as having added stresses that she does not want to handle. Working as an assistant principal or superintendent would allow her to work more closely with students and still have someone to defer to on school issues.

Although Jennifer is happy in her current job, she said that she would consider pursuing an administrative position a couple of years before she retires. This is a move that she would make in order to increase her pay and maximize her retirement benefits. Jennifer feels that although she does not really desire to become an administrator, if an administrator in her district
told her that they wanted her to pursue a position working in that capacity, then she would do so. This past year she earned her doctorate and wants to use the knowledge and experience that she gained from the degree to work within the professional organizations in her field.

Jennifer mentioned several times that she did not really want to become an administrator. She views her role as an educator as an important one and the most important aspect of this role is working with children. If she were to pursue a job in administration, she would prefer to be in an assistant position where she could maintain direct contact with students.

Jennifer saw her major role in education as that of a counselor. Jennifer pursued an administrative license for job security but she never really saw herself fitting comfortably in this role. For Jennifer the roles of educator and teacher are congruent while the role of the administrator does not match up with her perceived self-concept. It is for these reasons that Jennifer is happy in her current position and does not anticipate working as an administrator in the future.

Maria. While discussing her past, Maria stated that as a child she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. She said that she would play school with her friends and family members. She had a chalkboard in her basement where she would play the role of the teacher. “I would always be dragging them into the basement with a big chalkboard. I would be the one up on the little platform that my dad had put together and be correcting the papers and this kind of thing.”

Maria identified a memory of a language teacher that she had in middle school as a significant motivation in her decision to become an educator. This teacher was young and made learning the language fun through various kinds of activities that they would do in class. She also noted that she had a great high school French teacher. These teachers helped Maria to find
her niche in the field of teaching. They encouraged her to continue to study languages and showed her that it was possible for learning to be fun.

For a short time in high school Maria considered becoming a journalist, but at the time journalism was not a traditional option for women who were pursuing a college education. The only options she indicated were available to her at the time were in nursing and education. Although she was required to choose between the fields of nursing and education, Maria was happy with her choice to pursue her childhood dream of a career in education.

In 1976, Maria earned her bachelor’s degree in secondary education and French with a minor in Spanish. After she received her degree, she immediately began working as a high school language teacher and, in 1979, switched schools in order to work in a district closer to where she currently resides. She continues to work in this second school district. In 1978, while at her first job, she started working on a master’s degree in French, and she completed this degree in 1981.

In the early 1980s she had two children. Maria did not take a maternity leave and stayed out of work for the minimum amount of time necessary using her sick days. At the time when she had her children, the teacher’s contract in her school did not outline rules for women regarding maternity leave. “That was the first time that they had to write maternity language into the contract. I’m talking 1985. Prior to that there was no language at all in the teacher’s contract.” Although she did not take a leave, looking back Maria felt that it would have been beneficial for her to take some time to be at home with her children. However, she reflected on the fact that she was very fortunate to have the help of her parents in caring for her children that enabled her to continue working and moving forward in her career. Much later in her career, Maria decided to pursue a second master’s degree in Spanish and completed it in 2002. In
addition to her work as a high school teacher, Maria also works as an adjunct professor at a local college.

In order to earn an administrator license, Maria completed a practicum within her school district. Her initial decision to obtain an administrative license was motivated by some of her issues with the teacher’s contract. Maria felt that there was conflict of interests for the teachers working as department heads because of their dual role as teachers and evaluators. Working as a department head within her school drove her to earn this credential and to prove to herself and the school district that she could lift herself up to the professional level necessary to be qualified for the job. There was a push in her district for department heads to obtain this license in case they were required to leave the teacher’s union and move into administration. Maria noted that the schedule of an administrator is more intense than the schedule of a teacher. Although she stated that teachers also work very hard and commit a lot of time to the job, the way the time is distributed is different. “I think administrators, their schedule is different. Their contact with teachers is different. Their contact with students is different.” She considers being an administrator to be a twenty-four hour job. When she discussed her typical day, Maria said that her children are now adults and she does not have to care for them any longer. However, she did say that she still helps her elderly mother out after school. Maria feels that family is important and is happy to help her mother, especially given the time that she spent taking care of her children during their younger years.

In addition to the teachers that influenced her in her life during her education, Maria also had colleagues who mentored her during her career. Maria works for a state language organization, and through this work she has met many people who have encouraged her to pursue an administrative license. Working for this organization made Maria feel recognized for
her professional work. Within her own school, she does not feel that her work is always appreciated by the administration. She described one female mentor in particular who encouraged her to work toward an administrator license: “She’s knowledgeable. She just can give you that, what’s the word I’m looking for? She can just give you that push. She would instill the confidence that I needed to do this.” Maria placed a lot of value on the encouragement of her colleagues that helped her to move forward professionally.

Maria described the best part about working as an educator as working with the students. She discussed this aspect of her work and said, “It’s the students themselves. It’s the kids. It’s that interaction.” She also enjoys working with the other teachers in her department. Maria does not currently have any plans to work in administration. She feels that she is set in the position that she currently has. According to Maria she is at the end of her career in the public schools. However, she did note that if she were to take a job as an administrator, she would ideally work as a professional development coordinator or as a director of curriculum and instruction for a district. Maria views these jobs as directly connected to the teaching staff. “Where I would have seen myself as an administrator would have been as a professional development coordinator, things like that. Really the one to be able to bring back to the district the professional development that teachers would need.” She said that she definitely does not have any interest in working as a principal at this point in her career. Maria is in the final phase of her career, and she is planning to create change within her department and to continue working with professional organizations in her field.

Sarah. Similar to other study participants, Sarah recalled playing school with her friends during her childhood. She reminisced about posting pieces of paper on her closet doors and pretending that they were blackboards. The memories she has of her youth always include
working with children. “I’ve always worked with kids whether it was through babysitting or being a camp counselor or something like that.” Her father worked part-time as an athletic coach, which also had an impact on her decision to pursue education as a career. Although she had several experiences as a child that prompted her to want to become a teacher, she also said that there was one point in time when she considered becoming a journalist. “Then I remember in high school, I would think about being a teacher and then I kind of convinced myself that I was going to be this great writer.” Journalism was the first path that she followed when she went off to college.

When she began her undergraduate studies, Sarah switched her major seven times before deciding that she wanted to pursue a career in education: “When I was at UMass I had seven majors literally, seven majors before I finally decided that teaching was what I wanted to do.” Sarah discussed the pivotal experience that she had while she was in college that made her realize that she wanted to teach. A friend of hers was working in a local urban elementary school and asked her if she wanted to spend some time volunteering as a reading buddy to fourth and fifth grade students. Once she became involved in this program, she knew that she wanted to pursue teaching. When discussing this event she said, “I went and I loved it. I was like this is what I want to do. I want to make a difference this way.” Sarah said that there was always an emphasis on the importance of education when she was growing up and that her family had high expectations. Working as an educator was a way to pass on this belief system. She also felt that working with children in the schools was a way for her to make a difference in the larger community. This was an opportunity that she did not have while working in fields other than education:
So I think that it’s very giving of yourself and I think that’s important to me as a person to be able to give back to the community where I felt, as when I did work in the business world for those few years, I felt I wasn’t doing anything for the greater good other than telemarketing or whatever it might be. So I think that it’s important to me, the idea of giving back and helping others.

Once Sarah had this experience, she returned to her college and switched her major to education. Although she had considered entering several fields, she ended up coming back to her first career choice of teacher.

After so many changes in her major, Sarah said her parents wanted her to take some time to work and decide which field she truly wanted to pursue before finishing her degree. She took a break of about three years before returning to school. During this break, she worked in several positions in the corporate setting. Working in these jobs helped her to confirm her initial desire to work in education. Since she went back to school to finish her undergraduate degree, Sarah feels like she’s been in school constantly. Sarah ended up finishing her bachelor’s degree at another institution in 2002. This was followed by her pursuit of a master’s degree in education that she completed in 2007. Once she finished her master’s, Sarah went on to complete some extra coursework in education before enrolling in a doctoral program in education. Sarah is still enrolled in this program and embraces the roles of both teacher and student.

In 2002, Sarah obtained her first teaching job at a private school. In 2007, she transitioned to the charter school where she currently works. Sarah noted that although she has two children, once she began working as a teacher she did not have any breaks in her career. At the start of her career she never thought that she would pursue a job in administration. She always wanted to stay in the classroom full-time. However, once she came to work in her
current school, she began serving in several capacities that allowed her to observe the perspective of teachers and the perspective of administrators when it came to running a school. Sarah enjoyed the responsibilities that came with these leadership positions. She felt that a change was needed in her school, and that in order for this change to occur someone who had a good deal of classroom experience needed to be a part of the process.

Then when I came to my current school, which is the charter school, I was starting to be a part of a faculty input team and again getting some of those jobs or duties on top of my teaching. I started seeing or feeling that I have a better view of the teacher perspective and that the administrators that I was working with had lost touch with their teacher side. Sarah felt that she would be a good candidate for this kind of administrative position as she is dedicated to ensuring that education is both teacher and student centered.

Part of Sarah’s interview revolved around the discussion of the mentors that she has had throughout her career. She said that the greatest mentor that she had was a female head of school at her first permanent teaching job. This mentor was described as someone who empowered her staff: “She was very much about empowering her staff and she practiced distributed leadership and then she wanted to give staff as many opportunities as possible.” This woman felt it was important to provide her staff with opportunities to improve and to allow them to be a part of the decision-making process. Another important quality that this mentor had was her ability to balance her work and home lives:

   She’s really just been champing me the whole time and we’re also friendly too. So I think that’s really helpful as well. It’s made me feel that this can be done. She has two children herself. She balanced all of this and had an incredibly successful career. So that’s been a really great mentor for me this whole time.
The values that this woman has made an impact on Sarah, and her encouragement provided Sarah with the motivation to continue to move her career forward. She also served as a role model of a woman who has a family and still has a successful career. Sarah still keeps in touch with this mentor and discusses work and personal issues with her.

Sarah feels that part of her decision to pursue work in administration, especially in a public school system, is that there would be a significant increase in pay. Currently, she is not being compensated as well as a public school teacher that holds the same credentials and has the same amount of experience. Sarah feels that she is coming to the end of her career as a teacher, and that in order to move forward she has to work as an administrator. Sarah is looking for new opportunities within public schools. Working as an administrator would allow her to maximize the use of her education and experience.

Ideally, Sarah would like to work as director of curriculum and instruction or possibly as assistant superintendent. However, she knows that she will have to have some administrative experience in order to move into these types of positions. She said that she would look for a job as an assistant principal and work in that position for a few years before moving into one of her ideal administrative positions. Sarah does not want to work as a principal because she finds the type of tasks associated with that position to be undesirable. However, she stated “If a principal position were to open itself up, I would do that but I definitely see myself on the curriculum path versus the finances and those types of things.” Sarah feels that assistant principals get to work more directly with teachers, students, and curriculum, which is where she sees herself working. She also noted that she is not interested in working as a superintendent because they do not typically work directly with curriculum.
A large part of Sarah’s day outside of work is dedicated to taking care of her two teenage children. She also spends time outside of work completing homework for her doctoral program. Being a teacher is a large part of Sarah’s identity. She feels that the best part of her job is working with students. In the future she would like to continue to have a lot of contact with students:

I would see in the role that I would like to take is to be involved as much with students as possible whether that means with extra-curricular activities in a middle school, being a presence is there.

Although Sarah is currently looking for a position in administration, she does not feel that she is in a rush. Sarah is happy with her current position as a teacher and will stay in that position until the right administrative job comes along.

Sarah is very interested in working as an administrator. She views a career in administration as an extension of her work in the classroom. Sarah believes that she will have more opportunities to assist both teachers and students in this role. Sarah feels that she can better the position of her family and improve the education system if she takes a job as an administrator.

In Sarah’s case her view of what an educator is includes the roles of teacher and administrator. Sarah views being an administrator as a way to gain more power and consequently have better control and more influence over what is going on in education. Since Sarah’s children are older and no longer need as much care as they once did, she feels that she is now in a better position to move into a job in administration.

Key Themes

Once the data for each individual was analyzed and constructed into individual stories,
the data was revisited to inductively identify themes using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach, previously described. It is important to note that out of the six women interviewed in this study, only two participants actively applied for administrative positions. As a result of this composite analysis, four significant themes emerged from the data: (1) specificity of interests; (2) personal and vocational self-concept; (3) professional influences, and (4) role balance. In this section, each of these themes will be described and illustrated with supporting details from the collected data.

**Specificity of Interests**

One of the most salient themes that emerged from this study was the participants’ feeling that their dedication to working with students was one of the most important aspects of their careers in education. All six study participants discussed their dedication to students. For example, when asked about her motivation for pursuing a license in administration, Blake asserted that she was committed to “bringing out the best in kids.” When discussing the rewards of being an administrator, Caroline noted that she believed while working in this capacity “You can work with kids when I think they need it most.”

**Students are the most important part.** The importance of focusing on working with students also became a prominent theme in the discussion of their career choices, their work as teachers, and all aspects of their work as educators. Felicia stated, “I would say the most important part would be to get all my students to really understand the purpose behind why they’re learning what they need to learn. I work hard to do that every day.” Maria emphasized her feeling that the students were the best benefit of working as a secondary teacher: “It’s the students themselves. It’s the kids.” Maria talked about the trips she takes with her students as a language teacher, and the pride she has watching her students go on to study language in upper-
level courses. The importance of dedicating themselves to students and watching them grow was a common sentiment among the participants in this study.

**At-risk students.** Not only were participants interested in helping the general student population but also the idea of positively affecting at-risk students through education reemerged several times. Jennifer described working with students through a course she teaches: “I like that I’m there for the kids. I like that through my course I can engage kids that are not typically engaged in school. I can make kids feel success that are not successful in any of their other classes.” Caroline had a similar response when she talked about working with students that are considered at-risk. She noted, “The kids that I work with are some of the most undervalued, misunderstood and underappreciated kids you will ever want to meet. They are capable of amazing things and people cannot get past their behavior.” She went on to discuss the importance of recognizing all of the potential at-risk students do have, rather than focusing on what they cannot do.

Felicia reiterated this idea when she talked about her work with at-risk students, stating, “When I do that I find that a lot of them have either already given up or are on the verge of giving up.” Despite the challenges of working with at-risk students, Felicia views it as a positive aspect of her work: “Not all students learn the same way as I have mentioned and I feel like I’m blessed to be able to have the high-risk students because, I think it gives me more flexibility on what I do.” The participants indicated that working with students, whether they are at-risk or not can often be a challenge, but these teachers feel strongly committed to assisting all students in order to help them to be successful in school and in life.

**Rewards of being a teacher.** Sarah mentioned the many benefits and rewards of working with students, but she also noted that this work could be challenging at times. She replied, “I
love their humor. I love that they’re trying to figure out who they are. Yeah, I think they’re absolutely exasperating sometimes but I understand that.” Felicia emphasized the importance of making real-world connections evident to students: “I think it’s really important for a teacher to be able to understand and to be able to show the students how it becomes applicable to them in the real world beyond high school.” Helping students to grow and develop both in school and in the world beyond the classroom is one of the rewards that study participants identified of working as an educator.

**Role of the administrator.** Sarah discussed the importance of working hard to increase the contact that one may have with students while working as an administrator. She noted that, although there may not be as many opportunities for administrators to work with students as there are while working as a teacher, these opportunities could be created. She stated, “What I would see in my position of the role that I would like to take is to be involved as much with students as possible….” Furthermore, she recalled an assistant principal in one of her schools that made a point to step in and teach a class from time to time. She said, “I would love to do that. I would love to be in the classroom for two purposes. One, get to know the students; see what their strengths are. Get to know them on a more personal level and then also for staff.”

**Other supervisory positions.** Several participants also discussed the fact that it might be easier to have more direct contact with students and families while working in curriculum and other supervisory administrative positions, rather than while working as a principal. Sarah stated that she felt that “working quite a bit with students, teachers and families is the most important.” She believed that her background and studies were most aligned with positions in curriculum development, and that these types of positions would give her more access to work with these groups.
Blake responded similarly. She felt that working as a curriculum supervisor would help her “to be able to get kids to be successful and to help other people.” She also compared the curriculum supervisor position with the position of assistant principal. She stated that assistant principals tend to deal with discipline more than being able to work with students in other capacities. Caroline also discussed the types of administrative positions that she would be interested in and emphasized her work with students. She stated, “I don’t ever want to be in a position where I’m completely removed from kids.” Each participant in this study discussed the importance of working to support students while working as both as a teacher and as an administrator.

**Interest in specific positions.** The data collected during the interviews from this study illustrates the importance of working directly with students to these participants. All of the women who participated in this study indicated that the strongest thing they would consider, and that may prevent them, from pursuing specific types of positions is their desire to work directly with students which they perceived many administrative jobs not to offer. In order to maintain a high level of satisfaction in their jobs the study participants feel that they must work in a position that allows them to focus on student success. This will affect the types of jobs that they choose to pursue in the future. For example, the majority of participants talked about working in positions like that of department head or coordinator of curriculum and instruction. The participants view these administrative positions as the most likely to allow them a high degree of contact with students and therefore as positions they would be willing to pursue after leaving the classroom.

All participants in this study found different aspects of administrative positions appealing. There were a range of preferences, but in the majority of cases the participants felt
that curriculum coordinator positions were the most desirable because they allowed for more student and faculty interaction. When Blake was asked about the administrative positions that would be appealing to her, she said that she would rather be “a supervisor/director over a principal or assistant principal.” Seeing her husband who is a high school principal deal with difficult situations influenced her preference. She also discussed her desire to maintain more contact with students and to work within her chosen academic discipline. Blake was interested in pursuing an administrative position as a supervisor/director of a math department, but she found certain aspects of the principal and assistant principal positions like the demanding schedule undesirable.

Maria felt similar to the majority of study participants. She stated that she would be most interested in assistant superintendent or director of curriculum and instruction positions. She stated, “…where I really would have seen myself as an administrator would’ve been as more of a professional development coordinator, things like that. Really the one to be able to bring back to the district the professional development that teachers would need.” Maria discussed wanting to continue to work with teachers and also wanting to stay involved in her chosen academic discipline. Maria felt that working as a principal she would have to deal with angry parents and other conflicts, and she did not want to do that. “I don’t think my strong point would’ve been with parents and with those kinds of conflict issues at all.” The most desirable administrative positions to Maria were ones in which she could continue to work in an academic setting and continue to work with teachers. She felt that being the director of curriculum and instruction for a district was the best fit for her.
Similarly, Sarah is most interested in working in a curriculum director positions, but she also notes that she would need prior administrative experience in order to be qualified for that job. She said:

Ideally my dream job is to work in a curriculum support type of position. Assistant curriculum superintendent I think is really ideal because of the K-12 and seeing the whole scope is really my ideal. But I also realized and I have talked to a good friend who is a superintendent at a large school system and I spoke with him and I said, “What do you think?” He said, “You need to get some of the administration experience under your belt.” He said, “I would recommend doing the assistant principalship for a year or two. Get that on your resume. Get that under your belt and then start looking to move into the assistant superintendent type position.” He said, “You’re more than qualified for it. It’s just you need the little resume builders.” I said, “Okay.” So that’s been my plan.

Sarah also described the school principal as working less with students and focusing on other building level issues like finances. She felt that as an assistant principal she would be able to work more with teachers, students and curriculum. When asked if she was interested in pursuing a position to be superintendent, she said that she was not interested and would rather stick to working with curriculum. She has been keeping an eye on administrative positions and stated, “From the positions that I have looked at, I’ve been looking at curriculum director, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning and design and professional development, book choices, coaching staff and mentoring staff. So those are the things that I feel that I excel at and that’s what I’m interested in pursuing.” Sarah said she would consider applying for a principal position, but she views this job as a stop on the way to becoming a curriculum director.
Like other participants, Felicia views working as a principal as a necessary stepping-stone toward the position of director of curriculum and instruction for a school district, which she feels suits her best. She discussed how a teacher who worked with her recently went directly from classroom teacher to director of curriculum and instruction without ever working as a principal or assistant principal. She felt that due to this leap, this director was not as effective as she could have been because she was not familiar with the dynamics of a school at the building level. She also mentioned that experience working as a principal is not always necessary in order to be able to move up the administrative ladder; other positions like assistant principal would also provide enough experience to do so. She stated:

Well, like I said, I hope that within the next two to three years I’ll be in an assistant principal position where I’ll probably be for about three years or so and then I’ll start looking for a principal position somewhere. After a term there, then I’ll probably start looking at curriculum and instruction director.

Felicia views the principal position as a short-term option that may be necessary in order to pursue other higher-level administrative positions, but the principalship is not the job that she is working to obtain.

On the other hand, Caroline discussed how she would prefer to work as an assistant principal, dean of students, or headmaster. She attributed the possibility of creating new programs and initiatives to help at-risk students to these positions:

I touched on this before because I feel that in a public school setting, especially, because we serve everybody, there’s so much of a one-size-fits-all approach, and although I know in certain areas that’s necessary, I don’t feel it’s always appropriate, and I feel it’s the best way to maybe work on implementing strategies and programs that can help keep
struggling students in school and enable those that are struggling or slipping through the cracks to have a more successful school experience.

She said that she would only consider a job as a principal if it were in the right setting. She does not want to be a principal of a traditional public school like the one that she currently works in. She also mentioned not wanting to work in other central office positions like superintendent or assistant superintendent. “I don’t ever want to be in a position where I’m completely removed from kids. I would never want to be superintendent. I would never want to be a director of pupil personnel.” Her rationale for not wanting to work in those capacities is that “It’s not enough hands-on. I need the challenge, the challenge of being in the classroom as opposed to other types of challenges.” Caroline would like to continue her work with at-risk students and will only consider a move to administration if she can maintain an adequate level of contact with students and if her idea of a desirable position opens up.

Personal and Vocational Self-concept

Some of the participants felt that being a teacher was innate, while others had more concrete experiences early in their lives that led them to pursue this career path. Five out of the six participants in this study voiced their desire to become an educator from a young age. The experiences that these participants discussed had an impact on their decision to become teachers as well as their decision to pursue an administrative license.

Early roots. Several participants discussed imagining being a teacher as a child. When asked to discuss when she considered entering education, Blake replied:

Well, when I was very young I can remember that I always wanted to be a teacher. I used to play house and play teacher as a kid as the earliest, five years old, I always knew I wanted to be a teacher.
Blake felt that there was not one key experience that led her to enter education, but rather that it was an innate desire:

It was just inside. I never changed my mind how kids changed their mind. Every month they want to do something different. I always just wanted to be a teacher. As much as leading kids, I can remember being that little and making kids sit on stairs and giving them work to do. We’re talking almost twenty years there. I just did that and I never wavered from it.

She said that she always wanted to be a teacher, but that wanting to be a math teacher came later when she realized that it was a challenging subject for her. She left a parochial school and moved to a new town where she was behind in math. She described how she had to work hard to catch up to the other students in math, and how that experience encouraged her to become a math teacher.

Caroline felt that education was not her first career choice, but that it ended up being the one that suited her best. When asked how far back she considered entering the field of education she stated, “I have always kind of known. It was not my first career path, my first career choice, it was like my third, but it was the one that made the most sense so here’s where I am.” She also mentioned that she did not enjoy school very much when she was a student in high school. Despite this, she said, “Yeah, even when I was hating school and hating my teachers, I still always kind of knew.” For Caroline, her innate feeling led her to want to become an educator despite considering other career fields.

As Maria described her past life, she realized that she had also liked to play school as a child:
It’s interesting. I was always the teacher when my brother and my cousin we lived close together. I would always be dragging them in the basement with a big chalkboard. I would be the one up on the little platform that my dad had put together and be correcting the papers and this kind of thing.

Maria went on to say that once she reached high school, she decided she wanted to be a journalist, but, as a woman attending college at the time, she perceived that she could only choose between becoming a nurse and becoming a teacher. The lack of options for college study and her initial desire to teach brought her back to work in the field of education.

Sarah was also led to a career in education through her innate desire to be a teacher. She began by talking about her memories of pretending to be a teacher as a young child:

You know when I was a little girl, I was actually talking to my daughter about this the other day, I liked to play school with my friends and we used to post paper up on our closet doors and pretend they were blackboards at the time.

She had a change of plans in high school:

Then I remember in high school, I would think about being a teacher and then I kind of convinced myself that I was going to be this great writer. So I couldn’t be a teacher because I was going to be this great journalist, but it was always there.

Despite considering other career alternatives Sarah was drawn to a career in education because of her early experiences. Felicia also wanted to educate from a young age. She stated, “I’ve always loved being around children. I mean even when I was in kindergarten I used to play school. It was just like I was born to be an educator.” Each of the participants in this study who talked about playing school as a child felt that the inner pull to work in education was stronger than the desire to pursue work in another field, and this had an important impact on their career decisions.
Other early experiences besides innate feelings were also factors that influenced this study’s participants to choose a career in education and to later work towards an administrative license. Felicia mentioned a teacher that was influential in her decision to become a teacher:

I actually decided in sixth grade that I wanted to be a teacher. I had a wonderful teacher at that point. She did everything in her power to sort of foster that in me. She gave me my first lesson plan book, my first grade book.

She said that at that point “…there was no other option for me; I was going to be a teacher.” For Felicia, a love of working with children and encouragement from a teacher at a young age influenced her decision to become a teacher.

For Sarah, her first exposure to teaching came when a college friend of hers was student teaching at an urban school near her university and asked Sarah to volunteer as a reading buddy at an elementary school. Of the experience, Sarah said, “I went in and I loved it. I was like this is what I want to do. I want to make a difference this way.” She also mentioned that the influence of her father working as an athletic coach and her own work as a summer camp counselor were additional factors that led her to want to work as an educator. Sarah wanted to be a teacher from a young age, but explored the possibility of other fields in college until she decided to return to the field of education.

Professional Influences

Another important recurring theme in this study was the presence of various professional influences throughout the careers of these female study participants. All six participants mentioned a female mentor who either assisted them in their work or motivated them to move forward with their careers and education. Four respondents also mentioned having a male mentor in addition to a female mentor. Some of these mentors and role models were only around
for a short time, while others still play an active role as friends and consultants in the participants’ lives. Although all of the participants had a mentor that inspired them to pursue an administrative license, most were not inspired to pursue the administrative position itself. Only one participant was encouraged to apply for an actual administrative position.

Blake noted that a female department chair first hired her and that this woman also encouraged her to pursue an administrative license. She discussed her desire to pursue an administrative license:

Even though I was thinking of it, they just thought I would be successful at it. They had put a little light bulb in the back of my head that was always there kind of pushing me and mentoring me. They were very good to me at the time saying that they thought I’d do a good job at it.

She said that although this female mentor is retired, she does keep in touch, and they do see each other now and then. When asked to describe this female mentor, Blake said that she was known for being very “tough,” and that she held people to a high standard.

Jennifer talked about her female mentor who was the assistant principal of an elementary school at which she worked previously. This assistant principal encouraged her to pursue an administrative license and told her, “You’ve got what it takes. I need you as my assistant.” Throughout both of her interviews in this study, she felt that she was pushed in many ways to pursue an administrative license because she was recognized as someone who was already performing the duties of an administrator, even though she was not working as one. In the cases of both Blake and Jennifer, having a mentor that believed in their ability to become an administrator and vocalized this belief was an important part of their decision to obtain an
administrative license. However, this encouragement still did not lead the majority of participants to apply for administrative positions.

**Mentors as role models.** Several participants also had mentors who served as role models. Caroline talked about a woman who she worked with in an alternative school setting. She described her as “more of a companion on the journey.” This woman had similar goals to her own, and she was a good person with whom to discuss the future of Caroline’s career. She stated that this particular woman “could see herself on a track of something very similar that contained adventure therapy and possibly teaching others to do what she does, in fact she is now a professor.” Caroline and this mentor still maintain contact, and she noted that when they worked together they would always say, “Someday we are just going to open our own school and we are just going to rock this and make it happen, because we know what needs to be done.” When asked to describe this person, Caroline said that she is “very supportive” and that she is a great person to work with, especially on a collaborative team.

**Other inspirations.** Maria also described the female mentors that led her to pursue a career as a teacher. She talked about a middle school world language teacher who had an impact on her decision to pursue that particular path: “I had a great middle school teacher. She was a young woman. She was pretty. She was well dressed. Middle school, that really does influence you. She just made it fun. I loved it. It was easy to grasp.” Maria went on to discuss her own involvement in a professional organization for world language teachers, and the female mentors who she worked with in this organization who helped her to make the decision to pursue an administrative license. A couple of women within this organization who were already working as administrators encouraged her to join them: “I think that really was kind of the impetus that pushed me that way, belonging to that professional group that made me say, I may not be
recognized here where I do work, I am going to do it.” Maria is still in touch with these female mentors. When asked to describe the mentors from this professional board, she spoke of one in particular as intelligent and knowledgeable. She said, “She would instill the confidence that I needed to do this.”

In Sarah’s case, she described a key female mentor in her career as a woman who was the head of a school at which she had previously worked. She liked that this woman was a leader and that she worked to empower her staff to assist in the decision-making process. She stated, “She went and got her doctorate and she said, ‘You should do this too.’ And I said, ‘All right, I will do this too.’ She’s really just been championing me the whole time and we’re also friendly too.” Sarah also noted that they both had similar backgrounds and that this shared experience was a motivating factor for her: “It’s made me feel that this can be done. She has two children herself. So she’s balanced all of this and had an incredibly successful career. So that’s been a really great mentor for me this whole time.” When asked to describe this female mentor, Sarah said that she is intelligent, but she has very good listening skills. Sarah would like to have a similar administrative style.

Felicia mentioned the presence of several female mentors throughout her education and career. She stated that the first female mentor to influence her was a professor who she met while completing her undergraduate studies. She said, “This woman is sort of where all my doctorate stuff came from. I saw that she was a mom of three and she was working as an administrator. She had obtained her doctorate. She was very savvy, very cool, very quick witted and so I wanted to be her.” This woman served not only as a mentor, but also as a role model who showed Felicia that it was possible to have a family and still maintain a career. When
Felicia was asked to describe this mentor, she described her as “well-versed” and knowledgeable.

Felicia mentioned another female mentor who was a teacher that she had worked with. Felicia said that she enjoyed watching her develop from a good teacher into a great teacher:

Then as she was part of the administrative process as she was going to school she became an excellent teacher because she just had all the tools available to her and she was exploring different venues. As I watched her grow, I knew that too was the direction I wanted to go to.

Felicia stated that this teacher eventually became her practicum supervisor and provided her with the opportunities to do many kinds of work within the school, including teaching in the classroom and participating in school councils and committees.

**Male mentors.** All six respondents mentioned a female mentor that assisted them at various points throughout their careers, but four participants also discussed having a male mentor. Blake talked about a math department colleague who served as a mentor for her. He was someone that she had known when she was in high school. She said that he “had taken me under his wing.” Blake felt that he was someone who helped her at the start of her career by providing her with opportunities to improve her practice. Caroline had a supervisor at one of her former schools that she also describes as a mentor. She said, “He was still a pretty valuable person in forming who I am professionally, but I don’t have any communication with him.”

Felicia credits a male mentor that she had who was a principal at an elementary school with helping her to obtain an elementary license and for providing her with various other professional development opportunities. Finally, Jennifer also mentioned the presence of a male mentor. He was the principal of the middle school that she worked at in the past. This principal
encouraged her to move forward in her career and begin an administrative licensure program. This was one of the main reasons that she decided to pursue an administrative license.

In the case of all of the study participants the presence of mentors and other professional influences only impacted the decision to pursue an administrative license and did not impact obtaining an administrative position. Only two of the women interviewed actively applied for an administrative position. One of the women said that she was not actually interested in the job, but applied because it was a job in her district and because she was encouraged to do so by a colleague. The other participant is interested in working as an administrator so that she may eventually find a job as a director of curriculum and instruction. At this point in time possessing an administrative license is simply an added safety net for these women who may or may not choose to look for a job outside of the classroom in the future.

**Role Balance**

Several participants in this study mentioned the importance of balancing their roles of teacher, student, parent, and wife. In her interview Blake talked about the early years in her career and feeling like she and her husband were juggling a lot once they had children. She said that her husband wanted her to leave the classroom but, “As much as he wanted me to be an administrator, the timing for me just never seemed right”. She also stated that she took about six years total in maternity leave when her two children were born. Despite not working full-time in the public schools, she did maintain a part-time position in the evenings at a local university. For Blake, being able to work part-time allowed her to maintain some of her vocational self-concept, but still spend a good amount of time with her family. When asked about the impact the break she took had on her career she said, “It just made me happy to be with my family”. Blake also noted that when she is working, “School isn’t as big of an issue when you have a family”. In
Blake’s case the role of mother and wife are more important than her role as an educator, and this impacted her choice not to move into administration. She knew that if she became an administrator she would likely have to dedicate more time to her job than she currently does and that would interfere with the time she had with her family.

When Felicia described her typical day a good portion of her time outside of work was used for caring for her children and completing her studies. Her duties as a parent, wife, and student run late into the evening. Felicia discussed not bringing her work home, “That’s really because when I’m home, I’m 100% focused on my family, which is like at 10:30 every night I’m 100% focused on this doctorate program”. Felicia has to compartmentalize the roles that she plays in her life in order to feel that she is successfully meeting the demands of each one. Felicia stated that she would eventually like to move into an administrative position, but she has not yet found one that suits the needs of her goals and schedule.

Maria is now working at a stage at the end of her career. Despite the fact that her children are adults and no longer live at home, she still finds herself dedicating part of her day to domestic responsibilities. Once Maria leaves work she often stops by to check on her elderly mother. The combination of this, the time she spent raising her own children, and the years she was a student in addition to working full-time have all affected her career decisions. Maria noted in her interviews that she is not interested in becoming an administrator. She also described the time that the typical administrator dedicates to their job as being ‘24 hour time’. Maria feels that at times family matters can get in the way of work, “It’s like a bit of a down day in school because of family stuff. Your family is number one”. Balancing multiple roles has been a part of Maria’s life and career all along. In order to best be able to live up to the responsibilities of all of these roles Maria chose to stay in the classroom rather than pursue a job in administration.
For the participants in this study they have always tried to balance the roles of wife and mother with their roles as educators. This hierarchy of roles may make it difficult for these women to commit to careers in administration that often require more hours both in and out of school.

**Conclusions**

This chapter described the findings of this study. Six female participants who work as secondary educators participated in the interviews. All of these participants possess administrative licenses but have never worked as administrators. This study was conducted in order to answer the research question: *How do women who hold administrative licenses in secondary education make sense of their career pattern?* This chapter described each participant and major influences related to the construction of their career pattern. In addition, it described four major themes that emerged. These themes are: (1) specificity of interests; (2) personal and vocational self-concept; (3) professional influences, and (4) role balance. These four themes were outlined using examples from the data gathered. The following chapter includes implications for research, implications for theory and practice, and recommendations for future research based on these findings.
Chapter 5: Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine the way that women working in secondary education who hold administrative licenses but do not work as administrators make sense of their personal and vocational concept of self, their roles, and the impact that this has on their career patterns. Six women who worked at the secondary level, who possessed administrative licenses but did not work as administrators, participated in the study. Each participant took part in two interviews, bringing the total number of interviews in this study to twelve.

The findings from this study help to incorporate the voices of women into the literature that currently exists about secondary education and administration—a need highlighted by Coleman (2005). Furthermore, the findings add to the extant body of research regarding the realities of women working in the field of secondary education (McGovern-Robinett, 2002). Four key themes emerged from this work. These themes are: (1) specificity of interests (2) personal and vocational self-concept; (3) professional influences, and (4) role balance. This study expands upon these findings and discusses the implications related to theory, research and practice.

Implications for Research

The four themes that emerged over the course of this study have been discussed in previous chapter. This section discusses some of the existing literature and how it is connected to the themes from this study. It also discusses the connection between the themes and the theoretical framework.

Theme 1: Specificity of interests. One of the themes that emerged from this study was the participants’ dedication to students and the role this played in the construction of their careers. All of the participants interviewed placed an emphasis on the importance of student
interaction in their jobs. The participants in this study were only interested in administrative positions that would allow them a high degree of contact with students and other faculty members. This concept has been discussed in previous literature. In a study conducted by Smith (2011), forty female teachers took part in a series of life history interviews. Smith (2011) concluded that there was a core group of the female teaching population that can be considered “pupil-centered teachers.” She described these teachers as having personal values that put an emphasis on student well-being and achievement, as well as valuing positive relationships.

Smith (2011) wrote, “In general, the values that drove pupil-centered teachers’ career decisions were expressed in terms of the importance of pupil welfare and achievement, and the principles of equal opportunity and inclusion” (p. 17). This study’s findings aligned with Smith’s (2011): a group of pupil-centered teachers interviewed in Smith’s (2011) study held similar values to the teachers in this study, and this factor may have had an impact on their career pattern.

Smith (2011) also found that the values held by the teachers in her study conflicted with traditional school leadership practices, and that these women’s career decisions were based on the pupil-centered values that they hold. This conclusion is similar to the finding in this study. The six participants all noted that working with students and supporting teachers would be critical components of any administrative position that they accepted, if they chose to pursue an administrative position at all. Since they perceived that working closely with students and teachers does not always align with the traditional upper-level administrative positions, this factor would have an impact on whether these women would choose to apply for an administrative position besides department chair or director of curriculum, both of which they indicated allow position holders to maintain more contact with these populations. Looking at this through the lens of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005), leaving teaching to work
in administration would disrupt the balance that was achieved between the individual’s vocational and personal self-concepts. The student-centered emphasis appears to be what these women valued most, and it was difficult for them to rationalize these roles with what they viewed as the expectations of the administrative positions.

Theme 2: Personal and vocational self-concept. Of the six women that participated in this study, five responded that they had wanted to become an educator at a young age. In most instances, the participants reminisced about pretending to be a teacher when they were extremely young. Other participants described thinking about working in education while they were students at the high school level. The fact that these women have always viewed themselves as teachers is critical to understanding their self-conception of their careers. All of the participants also have at least one personal self-concept and one vocational self-concept that impacted the career decisions that they have made and how they view themselves personally and at work. Self-concept consists of an individual’s personality traits and how one views themselves within society, while vocational self-concept is the way their personal self-concept is reflected within the context of their occupation (Savickas, 2005). Some of the participants had more than one personal self-concept.

Castells (2010) posited that an individual can have multiple identities but sometimes this may cause stress or conflict. Kraus, Chen, and Keltner (2011) also found that for an individual to feel free from the constraints of identity that may be imposed upon them socially, they must remain true to themselves and their personal view of their own identity. In the case of this study, the six participants had to deal with establishing their personal and vocational self-concepts. Most of the participants felt that it was important to keep these multiple identities separate.
However, they all acknowledged that they way that they viewed themselves personally and professionally impacted their work life.

For example, the fact that many of the participants felt an innate desire to be classroom teachers added to their career satisfaction because their personal and vocational self-concepts were well aligned. This correlates with Lawler’s (2008) findings that multiple identities can have an effect on one another and that they can be reinvented according to new experiences. Although the findings from the interviews in this study demonstrated a clear connection between the participants’ personal and vocational self-concepts even from early on, some participants were contemplating making some changes in their careers due to an evolving perception of their self-concepts, which is how they view themselves outside of work.

Theme 3: Professional influences. Bradley et al., (2009) found that women tend to receive mentoring in the form of encouragement and positive messages, but that this generally does not lead to career advancement. This finding aligns with the findings from this study. All of the participants in this study mentioned having at least one mentor if not multiple mentors that influenced them professionally. Although they all spoke positively about the experiences that they had with these individuals all of the stories they told revolved around encouragement. None of the participants discussed any significant opportunities that were gained at work through their networking with these mentors.

Another finding from the literature that correlated with this study is the idea that women tend to have stronger networking relationships with other women (Bevelander & Page, 2001). A few of the participants in this study mentioned a male mentor in addition to a female mentor, but all of the participants emphasized the connections that they made with their female mentors and the influence that these women had on them professionally. Professional influences played a
major role in the study participants’ decisions to further their education and obtain their administrative license; in fact, this was the specific area in which they received encouragement. However, these mentors did not continue to provide encouragement with regard to pursuing an actual position in administration. Thus, their impact may have been limited only to the pursuit of an administrative degree.

Theme 4: Role balance. Yeagley, Subich, and Tokar (2010) noted that some women may view the balance of work and family life as very difficult and this may impact their decision to apply for top-tier positions. None of the participants in this study wanted to move into a superintendent position. Many of the participants cited the managerial nature of the position as a reason why they found the job to be undesirable. Other participants mentioned the fact that these positions often require a greater time commitment than teaching jobs or some other administrative positions and therefore they were not interested in pursuing them. It was noted by Baker (2010) that it has generally been easier for single women to achieve career mobility than married women or women with children who balance full-time work and domestic tasks. The roles that the participants in this study play outside of work play a role in the decisions that they make in their career. They may have a difficult time balancing their personal and vocational self-concepts if they were to move into a high level administrative position.

Colakoglu (2011) posited that many women decide to adopt a protean career structure in order to construct their own vision of success in the workplace. Sanchez and Thornton (2010) reiterated this concept when they said that many women come up with creative solutions to the work/life balance. In the case of the women in this study they all had individual notions of what a successful career pattern was for them, and these notions aligned with both their personal and
vocational self-concepts. In this way the participants balanced their roles in a way that worked for them without compromising their identity.

**Summary of Conclusions**

The information provided in this chapter provides an analysis of how the data gathered can be interpreted based on the research that was conducted. This section presents a summary of the conclusions for the four themes that emerged from the study’s findings.

Theme one, *specificity of interests*, suggests that the participants are looking for administrative positions that allow them to maintain a high level of contact with students and teachers. Principal and superintendent positions often do not allow the same degree of involvement in classrooms as other administrative positions do. This factor may limit the number of women pursuing these positions.

In the second theme, *personal and vocational self-concept*, almost all of the women in this study knew that they wanted to be teachers at a young age. This was a reflection of their personal self-concept. In order to feel satisfied in their careers these women had to make sure that their personal and vocational self-concepts matched. Although the women in this study also had self-concepts that aligned with mother, wife, and student, the identity that was most prominent in the professional world was that of classroom teacher. The participants in this study always viewed themselves as classroom teachers and therefore leaving that profession would detract from their vocational self-concept.

For theme three, *professional influences*, the participants in this study revealed that female mentors have played an important role in supporting and encouraging them throughout their careers. Some participants also had male mentors that supported them. Although all of the participants felt that the experiences they had with these mentors were beneficial to their careers,
the mentoring that took place really only consisted of encouragement and positive messages. None of the participants had a professional influence that pushed their career forward or that moved them into an administrative position.

The fourth theme, role balance, revealed that the women in this study discussed playing multiple roles once they left work. Most of the participants in this study are wives, mothers, and students in addition to teachers. Also, all participants noted that they do not want to work in an administrative position that they considered to be too managerial in nature. Principal and superintendent positions are not only the farthest removed from the classroom, but they are also the positions that have a schedule that would most likely conflict with the time needed to complete domestic chores after work. These factors may make principal and superintendent jobs undesirable to women, who often balance multiple roles.

Implications for Theory

Throughout the course of this study, especially during the data analysis phase, career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) was a valuable lens for viewing the data. Several important connections emerged from the data that are directly related to this theory. Savickas (2005) posited that careers do not simply unfold, but that individuals construct careers according to the meaning that they impose upon their experiences. He also noted that the focus of his theory is on the patterns that create a story over the course of a person’s career, rather than on the end result of a career trajectory. In this study, the emphasis was not on the end state of an administrative role, but rather the choices and identities that led to the consideration of that role. The women interviewed in this study shared their individual experiences, discussed what these experiences meant to them, and reconstructed a career story based on the information that they shared. The
participants chose to share the details that they consider to be most significant, and as a result, their stories are a reflection of what they consider to be meaningful.

**Connections to the sixteen propositions of Savickas’ (2002) career construction theory.** In addition to the implications noted above, this study found several similarities and differences that correspond to the Sixteen Propositions of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2002), included in Appendix F. In these propositions, Savickas described components that influence the way individuals make career decisions. He also discusses the processes that individuals undergo when they choose to make various career decisions.

In the first proposition Savickas (2002) talked about the importance of obtaining a balance between all of the roles that an individual plays. If a balance is not obtained this produces strain, which in turn can cause unhappiness and instability. In this study, the majority of participants found a balance between the multiple personal and professional roles they play in life. For example, Blake talked about the importance of her family and dedicating time to being a mother. She also noted that she understood the strain of being an administrator because her husband was a principal and therefore made the choice not to pursue an administrative position because she sought to maintain the balance she has currently achieved. She realized that if she left teaching to pursue a position in administration she would no longer be able to balance all of the roles that she considered a priority. It was for this reason that she never felt the timing was right to move into a job in administration.

Sarah also mentioned the fact that her children were getting older and more independent. She felt that since they were older her role as a mother was not the same as it once was, and if she wanted to obtain a job as an administrator she could still balance her roles of educator and mother. Therefore, she expressed that while she did not actively seek an administrative position
while her children were young, it may have been possible to obtain this balance if she secured an administrative position once her kids had grown up. Based on these findings, it was clear that a number of participants chose not to pursue an administrative position due to their desire to balance multiple roles while the one participant who was actively pursuing a position believed that her shift in roles would allow her to maintain a balance even if she were to transition to a new position.

The third proposition of Savickas’ (2002) theory discusses how an individual follows a certain career pattern based on their family’s socioeconomic level, their self-concept, and the opportunities that they are provided with in society. This is consistent with the experience that Maria shared about choosing a major in college. At the time that Maria graduated high school it was typical for women of her social standing to choose between studying to become a nurse or a teacher. She also described pretending to be a teacher as a child, which was a way for her to express her self-concept early on. Given the choices that she had at the time, it made sense for Maria to choose to become a teacher, even though in the back of her mind she considered studying journalism. The influence of societal pressure pushed her in a different direction, but she was still able to choose to work in a field that aligned with her self-concept.

Savickas’ (2002) eighth proposition described the amount of satisfaction that an individual obtains from their work. It suggests a direct correlation to their ability of implementing their vocational self-concept. Caroline spoke very passionately about her work with alternative student populations. She felt a connection to her students because she felt like she was not necessarily a mainstream student when she was a high school student. When she became a teacher her vocational self-concept was directly connected to the population that she taught. This connection provided her with a great deal of satisfaction in her career.
Maria and Felicia also described a congruency between their self-concepts and vocational self-concepts. They expressed this in their interviews when they related stories about their past and their motivation for entering the field of education. Both of these participants expressed a high degree of satisfaction in their current positions.

Another central proposition of career construction theory is proposition nine, and this relates to the way self-concepts are developed and implemented through the opportunity to play many roles, with a central focus on how the approval one gains from peers and supervisors while playing these roles impacts these conceptions. One interesting point in this proposition is the mention of role-play. In this study, five of the six participants talked about playing the role of the teacher when they were children. This innate interest expressed through games was indicative of an early need to express this aspect of their self-concept. As the participants grew older and had the chance to make education and career decisions, working as teachers was always a big part of this decision. Although their self-concepts developed and grew over time, there was always an innate desire to work in education they traced to these early feelings. This sense helped the participants to implement their self-concepts and construct their careers around a core role that they play in life.

Proposition ten (Savickas, 2002) outlines the ways that self-concepts and vocational preferences can change with time, and influences of changes people experience in their lives. Most participants in this study expressed a feeling of stability in their career. However, Jennifer did mention a period of instability when her job was cut repeatedly. This change in her life prompted her to consider working an administrative license. She talked about her motivation for pursuing the license and said it was to obtain more job security. She also mentioned the fact that although she did not really want to become an administrator, she would consider doing so in
order to increase her pay for retirement. This career does not align with her self-concept and only makes sense to her in the context of advancement at the end of her career in order to provide more financial stability for her family.

Sarah also discussed being happy as a teacher and initially never wanting to leave the classroom. As time progressed she began to see herself as more of a leader within her school. The opportunities for leadership that she had in her job and the changes in her life have altered her self-concept. She is currently looking for an administrative position. The changes that these individuals have experienced in their lives modified the way they view themselves and as a result their vocational preferences as well.

Proposition eleven (Savickas, 2002) stated that during a person’s career, they cycle through various stages that impact vocational change. These cycles include growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. At the time of the interviews, the majority of the participants were in stages of establishment or management. None of the participants seemed to be in a stage of disengagement. Felicia and Sarah were both interested in applying for administrative positions. This indicates that they are likely in a stage of growth or exploration. They have spent a good deal of time as teachers and have experienced stability, but they are looking to expand and validate their evolving self-concepts. Moving through the cycles of vocational change gives an individual the opportunity to advance in their career and find a renewed sense of balance between a career change and a new self-concept. For the majority of participants, their perceived growth did not come through a change or position but rather through the position they currently held. Career Construction Theory indicates that individuals will pursue various positions in order to obtain growth. However, this study showed that the women
found opportunities for growth within their current position and this influenced their career choices as they made the conscious choice to remain in their positions.

The concept of a mini-cycle of the previously mentioned stages can occur if an event destabilizes an individual’s career. This phenomenon is referenced in proposition twelve. The only participant to talk about a break in their career was Blake. When she left work to go on a maternity leave this caused her to move into the stages of growth and exploration. Despite not working at the secondary level full-time, she continued to work part-time at the college level. This part-time position helped her to continue to grow in her field. Blake also discussed getting offers for jobs from private sector companies. However, she still felt like she wanted to work in education and eventually went back to work full-time at her old position. Blake had to cycle through stages that she had experienced previously in order to find balance again between her career and personal self-concept.

In proposition twelve Savickas (2002) states that a minicycle of growth or exploration may occur during a career stage transition or of a person’s career is destabilized by personal events. The majority of participants in this study discussed looking ahead in time and considering taking an administrative position when they knew their career would be destabilized. For the most part this destabilization revolved around personal events. Jennifer talked about the possibility of pursuing an administrative position once she came closer to retirement in order to increase her income. Sarah and Felicia discussed their children growing older and having the possibility to move into an administrative position because they no longer had to dedicate as much time to caring for them. Caroline also described wanting to move into an administrative position in the future when she knew that the time was right and she felt that there was a natural period of transition between her current job and a job as an administrator. Although these
participants were projecting into the future, at this point in time their desire to work directly with students remains their top priority. These women understand that there may come a time when they experience a destabilization in their careers, but they are currently only considering this career move for the future and have not yet made an actual change in careers.

Another important proposition is number fourteen, which discusses career adaptability. Savickas (2002) describes this as a “psychological construct” which allows individuals to cope with vocational development and change. Since most of the participants in this study were in a constant state of stability due to the positive alignment of their vocational and self-concepts they did not have to show career adaptability. However, in the case of Maria, she did work on obtaining a license in administration later in her career in order to keep up with the demands of her position. Since she was a department chair and they were being required to observe and evaluate teachers, her administration wanted her to get this license. If Maria did not comply with this regulation she would have been faced with an imbalance between her vocational and self-concepts due to the requirements of this occupational position. Maintaining this balance was important to Maria so she obtained the necessary license and in doing so demonstrated her career adaptability. Jennifer was in a similar situation when her job was cut and she was encouraged to obtain an administrative license. She felt that if she were to get this license then she might have more career opportunities if her job was cut again in the future. Aside from these two participants, none of the other women expressed a need to adapt to any kind of vocational change. In the case of the women in this study, they constructed careers that were very stable. Their career patterns were also very similar. This similarity can be attributed to the way these women view themselves according to their self-concepts. The job stability that these women maintained made it unnecessary for them to have to be adaptable in their careers.
These implications for theory confirm that Savickas’ (2005) career construction theory is accurate and useful when analyzing an individual’s career choices to reconstruct their career story. In this particular study, the use of career construction theory allowed the researcher to view the data from an angle that placed an emphasis on the decisions and perceptions of the individual participant. This focus was important because it shed light on the value that this theory might hold for future researchers looking to utilize it. It is also important to consider the fact that the women who participated in this study all work as teachers and that this profession may be different than other professions. The values and ideals of the participants in this study primarily revolve around working directly with students and their need to balance their roles in and out of work. These factors play a huge role in the way that this theory relates to the construction of this particular type of career pattern.

**Implications for Practice**

The results of this study suggest a variety of important implications for practice. Since the findings detail many aspects of the experiences of women working at the secondary level, most of the suggestions revolve around the field of education at this level. However, these findings may also have an impact on the general hiring practices within school districts, as well as on the structure of administrative positions within schools.

The women in this study voiced their preference for working to support both students and teachers. They wanted to be able to maintain this focus within their work even if they were to move into an administrative position. In order to attract more women to these positions, along with a greater variety of applicants in general, school districts should consider promoting student-centered work for principals and superintendents. Opportunities to be more involved in the day-to-day tasks that involve student and teacher contact should be a greater aspect of these
administrative positions. It is likely that more women would be interested in administrative positions that are considered top tier if they had more extensive opportunities to interact with students and teachers, aligning their perception of these roles with their goals and self-image.

Also, superintendent positions should be modified to allow for more contact with faculty and to allow more input regarding curriculum decisions. None of the participants in this study expressed an interest in working as a superintendent. When discussing this particular position they determined it to be undesirable due to a lack of contact with faculty and students, and due to its managerial nature. More women may be encouraged to pursue superintendent positions if they are altered in a way that allows them to work directly with faculty and have an impact on students.

The participants in this study had both female and male mentors who assisted them in different ways throughout their careers. Since female mentors were found to provide the women in this study with encouragement, while the male mentors provided more opportunities for career advancement, it is important to ensure that women have access to more male mentors. It would also be beneficial to train more female mentors to encourage the pursuit of positions in which there is currently a disparity. Creating mentoring programs for women in secondary education in which they can be paired with successful male mentors who work in administration, or with women who encourage them to work as administrators may be a way to assist more women in moving into secondary administrative positions.

The administrative structure within school districts should be examined to determine if the positions that are available allow for the balancing of multiple roles and responsibilities. The majority of the women in this study discussed their domestic responsibilities once they left work. Several of the participants noted that working as an administrator would be difficult because of
their home and work demands. School districts need to make a special effort to allow for more life/work balance in administrative positions. These actions may help to even out the number of men and women who move into high-level administrative positions, creating more female role models within the administrative ranks.

Finally, all of the participants in this study expressed contentment with their career patterns. For the majority of them it was a conscious decision not to pursue a position in administration rather than a consequence of barriers in the field. As a result of this finding it is important to allow women holding administrative licenses to make the decision not to work as administrators without judgment. Rather than pushing women to enter a field they do not feel suits their needs, it is imperative that society and the public education system respect this decision and allow them to continue to happily work in the classroom. It may also be beneficial to allow these women to share their stories and experiences rather than always allowing women who have attained administrative positions to serve as the example of the successful female educator.

In summary, here are some tangible steps that may be considered to address the implications for practice stated above:

1. Re-construct administrative positions so that they include more interactions with students and ensure that these are reflected in policies such as evaluation, etc.
2. Re-construct high-level administrative positions so that they include more direct contact with faculty and more input on curriculum.
3. Develop intentional mentoring systems and encourage mentors to discuss and encourage the pursuit of administrative positions rather than only focusing on the pursuit of administrative licenses.
4. Allow for more flexibility in administrator’s schedules to promote the balance of personal and professional life.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused entirely on women who did not hold administrative positions, future research could approach this topic from a different angle, identifying women who do hold administrative positions or who are actively pursuing them. This was not the focus of this study but would provide additional insight of the career choices for women in education.

This study focused on the pursuit of administrative positions in general but did not focus on a specific position. However, much of the literature points to a need for more women in roles such as superintendents. Therefore, future research could focus on aspirants to the superintendency. Also, since these participants did not aspire to obtain superintendent positions, it would be useful to investigate the way in which women who do pursue superintendent positions make sense of their roles as educators. Moreover, this study was small and included only six participants. Conducting a similar study and including many more participants could yield more detailed results.

Finally, since this study focused on the unique experiences of women holding administrative licenses at the secondary level, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study on men that hold administrative licenses but do not work as administrators. This would allow further insight into the similarities and differences between the experiences of men and women working under similar circumstances.
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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Fellow Educator,

My name is Jessica Clifford and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am conducting a study for my doctoral thesis on women working in education at the secondary level. The title of this study is: The Perceptions and Experiences of Women Working as Teachers at the Secondary Level Who Hold Administrative Licenses but Who do not Work as Administrators. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as one of the above-mentioned women working at the secondary level.

The intent of this study is to gain insight into the experiences of women who hold an administrative license, but who do not work as administrators, as well as to contribute to the research on women working in the field of education. In order to participate, you will be required to fill out a life history grid and complete two face-to-face interviews. These interviews will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Also, after the interview data has been transcribed you will be asked to review the transcription, elaborate on it and check for accuracy. Your participation is completely voluntary and any information you share will be confidential.

Included with this letter is an Informed Consent to Participate in Research. This consent form outlines the goals of this study and contains answers to questions that you may have.

I appreciate the time that you have taken to read my letter and I hope that you will consider participating in this study. My email address is clifford.j@husky.neu.edu.

Sincerely,

Jessica L. Clifford
Doctoral Student
Northeastern University
Appendix B: Informed Consent for Research Participation

Northeastern University
Department of Education

Informed Consent Form for Research Participation

Principal Investigator:  Tova Sanders
Student Investigator:  Jessica Clifford

Title of Project:  The Perceptions and Experiences of Women Working as Teachers at the Secondary Level who Hold Administrative Licenses but Who Do Not Work as Administrators

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this study because you are a woman working at the secondary level who possesses an administrative license, but who is not working as an administrator.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to better understand the perceptions and experiences of women at the secondary level who possess administrative licenses, but who do not work as administrators.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a life history grid, participate in two interviews, and check your data for accuracy once the interviews are completed and transcribed.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

These interviews will take place in a setting of your choosing. The interviews will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. You will also have the opportunity later to read and check the transcription of your interview.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort associated with this study.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help contribute to the literature on females working in the field of education.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

Once the interview data is collected, you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of data analysis.

All data collected will be stored in a secure space. Once the data has been analyzed, and the analysis has been written, all data collected will be destroyed.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

If you decide that you do not want to participate in this study, you can inform the researchers and your participation will be terminated immediately.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions or problems regarding this study you may contact either the principal researcher Tova Sanders at Tova Sanders T.Sanders@neu.edu or you may contact the student researcher Jessica Clifford at clifford.j@husky.neu.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

___________________________________                  ____________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                  Date

___________________________________
Printed name of person above
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent: ___________________

Date: ___________________

Printed name of person above: ___________________
Appendix C: Interview Questions

First interview questions:

1. Walk me through the information that you wrote on your life history grid?
   a.) Tell me about your past life up until you chose to become an educator, going as far back as possible?
   b.) How did you come to enter education?
   c.) Describe a key experience that you believe influenced your decision to enter the field of education.
   d.) Are there additional key experiences that impacted this decision?
   e.) If you have had any breaks in your career, what were they for?

2. Tell me why you initially wanted to obtain an administrative license?
   a.) Have you had any mentors that assisted you in this decision? If so, can you describe these people?
   b.) Discuss how these people have helped you?
   c.) Describe any life events that impacted this decision.

3. Discuss some challenges of being an administrator?
   a.) Describe how the schedule of an administrator is different than that of a teacher?
   b.) Discuss some rewards of being an administrator?

4. Walk me through your typical day?
   a.) In what ways does being a teacher affect who you are outside of work?
   b.) How often do you discuss work at home?

5. Can you tell me about what you enjoy most about working as a secondary teacher?
   a.) Can you tell me about which aspects of jobs in administration are appealing?
   b.) Tell me about whether or not you will pursue a position as an administrator in the future?
6. Tell me about the qualities and characteristics that define you?
   a.) How has working in education shaped these qualities?
   b.) Describe any personality qualities that you possess that have helped you to be successful working as an educator?

Second interview questions:

1. Given what you have told me about your role as an educator and given what you have told me about your role outside of work, how do you understand your decision not to pursue a position in administration?

2. How do you feel about the career pattern that you have followed up to this point?

3. Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, where do you see yourself going in the future?

4. Are there any details that you would like to add to the information that you have provided?

5. Tell me about your experience participating in these interviews.
Appendix D: Life History Grid

Pseudonym:

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<th>Education</th>
<th>Work History</th>
<th>Housing History</th>
<th>Family History</th>
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Appendix E: Script for Life History Grid

You have agreed to take part in a study investigating the experiences of women working in education at the secondary level. As a part of the interview process you are being asked to fill out the attached life history grid in as much detail as possible. The purpose of filling out this life history grid is to assist you in recalling details from the past. The researcher will also use this life history grid for the purposes of data collection and analysis. You may print this grid, fill it out by hand and bring it to your first interview. Alternately, you may type it and send it electronically to the researcher before your first interview at clifford.j@husky.neu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration.


1. A society and its institutions structure an individual’s life course through social roles. The life structure of an individual, shaped by social processes such as gendering, consists of core and peripheral roles. Balance among core roles, such as work and family, promotes stability, whereas imbalances produce strain.

2. Occupations provide a core role and a focus for personality organization for most men and women, although for some individuals this focus is peripheral, incidental, or even non-existent. Then other life roles such as student, parent, homemaker, “leisurite,” and citizen may be at the core. Personal preferences for life roles are deeply grounded in the social practices that engage individuals and locate them in unequal social positions.

3. An individual’s career pattern—that is, the occupational level attained and the sequence, frequency, and duration of jobs—is determined by the parents’ socioeconomic level and the person’s education, abilities, personality traits, self-concepts, and career adaptability in transaction with the opportunities presented by society.

4. People differ in vocational characteristics such as ability, personality traits, and self-concepts.

5. Each occupation requires a different pattern of vocational characteristics, with tolerances wide enough to allow some variety of individuals in each occupation.

6. People are qualified for a variety of occupations because of their vocational characteristics and occupational requirements.

7. Occupational success depends on the extent to which individuals find in their work roles adequate outlets for their prominent vocational characteristics.

8. The degree of satisfaction people attain from work is proportional to the degree to which they are able to implement their vocational self-concepts. Job satisfaction depends on establishment in a type of occupation, a work situation, and a way of life in which one can play the types of roles that growth and exploratory experiences have led one to consider congenial and appropriate.

9. The process of career construction is essentially that of developing and implementing vocational self-concepts in work roles. Self-concepts develop through the interaction of inherited aptitudes, physical make-up, opportunities to observe and play various roles, and evaluations of the extent to which the results of role playing meet with the
approval of peers and supervisors. Implementation of vocational self-concepts in work roles involves a synthesis and compromise between individual and social factors. It evolves from role playing and learning from feedback, whether the role is played in fantasy, in the counseling interview, or in real-life activities such as hobbies, classes, clubs, part-time work, and entry jobs.

10. Although vocational self-concepts become increasingly stable from late adolescence forward, thus providing some continuity in choice and adjustment, self-concepts and vocational preferences do change with time and experience as the situations in which people live and work change.

11. The process of vocational change may be characterized by a maxicycle of career stages characterized as progressing through periods of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement. The five stages are subdivided into periods marked by vocational development tasks that individuals experience as social expectations.

12. A minicycle of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement occurs during transitions from one career stage to the next, as well as each time an individual’s career is destabilized by socioeconomic and personal events such as illness and injury, plant closings and company layoffs, and job redesign and automation.

13. Vocational maturity is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual’s degree of vocational development along the continuum of career stages from growth through disengagement. From a societal perspective, an individual’s vocational maturity can be operationally defined by comparing the developmental tasks being encountered to those expected, based on chronological age.

14. Career adaptability is a psychological construct that denotes an individual’s readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks of vocational development. The adaptive fitness of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies—the ABCs of career construction-increases along the developmental lines of concern, control, conception, and confidence.

15. Career construction is prompted by vocational development tasks and produced by responses to these tasks.

16. Career construction, at any given stage, can be fostered by conversation that explain vocational development tasks, exercises that strengthen adaptive fitness, and activities that clarify and validate vocational self-concepts.