From the Voices of California Female High School Principals: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform Through the Lens of Activity Theory

Janice M. Jones
jjones12@mail.brandman.edu

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From the Voices of California Female High School Principals: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform Through the Lens of Activity Theory

A Dissertation by

Janice Jones

Brandman University
Irvine, California
School of Education

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Committee in charge:

Philip O. Pendley, Ed.D., Committee Chair
Jeffery Lee, Ed.D.
LaFaye Platter, Ed.D.
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY

Chapman University System

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Janice Jones is approved.

Philip O. Pendley, Ed.D.

Jeffery Lee, Ed.D.

LaFaye Platter, Ed.D.

Patricia Clark-White, Associate Dean

November 2016
From the Voices of California Female High School Principals: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform Through the Lens of Activity Theory

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ABSTRACT

From the Voices of California Female High School Principals: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform Through the Lens of Activity Theory

by Janice Jones

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female high school principals experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in a specific geographical region.

Methodology: Semistructured interviews were conducted with current female high school principals to gather data on the barriers and support systems they experienced. The theoretical framework of activity theory was used to analyze the subjects’ interaction with their environment as they sought the outcome of becoming and serving as high school principals.

Findings: Women who serve in the position of high school principal face a unique and complex set of tensions as defined by activity theory.

Conclusions: Hiring of more male principals than female principals results in a perceived barrier for aspiring female high school principals. Community provides the greatest support system for aspiring and serving female high school principals. The interaction of female high school principals, whether during the time of attaining their position or while serving in their position, with their environment as defined by activity theory creates both barriers and supports that result in a complex web of tensions that are unique to the female experience. Most women felt the most support while attaining their positions.
Finally, gender role theory continues to play a part in the perception of the high school principalship as a masculine endeavor.

**Recommendations:** Future research should be conducted on formal female-to-female support groups throughout California, the success of women principals who engage in the support structures available through structured leadership styles, the lived experiences and perceived barriers and support systems of male high school principals, perceived barriers and support systems of female elementary and/or middle school principals, behaviors that combat the perceived gender role discrepancy between female and male high school principals, the role of athletic coaching experience in the hiring of high school principals, the motivations that lead women to the high school principal position, the “unspoken” rules pertaining to the high school principal position, and the perception of personal power in regard to the high school principal position.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In 1635, the first public school in the United States opened in Boston, Massachusetts (Boston Latin School, n.d.). At that time, the curriculum was centered largely on the humanities and religion (Boston Latin School, n.d.; Hiatt, 1994; Lewis, 2009; Weiler, 2009). By the turn of the 18th century, most boys attended “Dame schools,” which were the early incarnations of a home school environment led by women in individuals’ homes, preparing these boys to attend the town schools (Madigan, 2009). While girls also attended Dame schools, they were taught skills such as sewing and knitting, and for the most part, they were not given the option of continuing their education (Madigan, 2009). This was where the story the impact of gender on the lived experiences of women in education began.

In the decades that followed, women found that education was a field in which they could experience a stimulating intellectual environment as well as financial and social autonomy not accorded to many of their female counterparts (Lewis, 2009; Weiler, 2009). Standout educators in the 1800s included Catherine Beecher, Harriet Ward, Mary Dutton, and Anne Tappan, who defined their role in education as champions of moral development and academic enlightenment, and challengers of social boundaries (Lewis, 2009). Jane Addams became a vocal advocate of education for immigrants and children, and she founded Hull House, where children of working mothers received early childhood education and where immigrant non-English speakers were provided with English and citizenship classes as well as enrichment programs that featured theater, music, and art (Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, n.d.). These women sought to extend women’s education and the education of their communities beyond the traditional
emphasis on social skills. They truly sought to expand women’s intellectual consciousness and public influence (Lewis, 2009). As such, women began to become more vocal in their role as educators with mentors and role models such as Beecher, Addams, and their counterparts.

Since that time, women have historically dominated the faculties of elementary schools across the country, perhaps because the role of teacher aligns with society’s expectations of a woman’s role as caretaker, nurturer, and collaborative problem solver (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Hammer & Rohr, 1994; Weiler, 2009). This trend has continued to the present day. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), 76% of U.S. public school teachers in the 2012-2013 school year were female, and a study conducted in 1994 reported that women represented 83.2% of elementary school teachers and 53.2% of high school teachers in the United States—percentages that would indicate gender overrepresentation by women in the elementary ranks and an equitable showing at the secondary level (Hammer & Rohr, 1994). Since these early beginnings, women have also thrived as leaders of elementary schools and middle schools. Bitterman, Goldring, and Gray (2013) reported that over 50% of all elementary and middle school principals are, in fact, women.

The numbers change, however, when one examines the percentage of women who lead high schools. Although 53% of all secondary teachers were female in 1991, only 11% of secondary principals were women during that same time period (Hammer & Rohr, 1994), and more recently, in 2012, only 30% of high school principals were women (Bitterman et al., 2013). Litmanovitz (2011) proposed several reasons for this phenomenon, among them the lack of role models, leadership stereotypes, work-life
balance issues, and the lack of mentorship for women. In a 2013 study of female high school principals in Georgia, T. H. Walker (2013) found that women perceived their professional journeys to be marked by challenges associated with cultural and societal definitions of leadership. Taken as a whole, women continue to experience barriers when striving to become high school leaders despite the fact that they represent the predominant gender in the education field.

High schools differ from elementary and middle schools in a number of areas—age of students, curricular design, and developmental needs of students, most specifically (Sizer, 2013). The expectations of a high school principal are also unique to the position (Gregory et al., 2010; Macias, 2014; Sink, 2010; Tirozzi, 2001). Additionally, in the current era of educational reforms, some specific to the high school setting, the role of the high school principal continues to evolve in response to the emerging needs of a new generation (Macias, 2014; Rice, 2010; Sam, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Both men and women meet these emerging needs as high school principals; however, while women have been strongly represented as elementary and middle school principals, a gender gap continues to exist at the high school level. Even though women leaders have been shown to have a collaborative and inclusive team-building skill set, something that is valued in current leadership mindsets, they continue to lag behind males in terms of the number of top educational positions held (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Litmanovitz, 2011; T. H. Walker, 2013).

A 2004 study indicated that while both men and women high school principals express equitable job satisfaction and role commitment, women experience significantly greater role conflict in terms of their role in the workplace and their role at home.
(Eckman, 2004). Women who have broken the “glass ceiling,” therefore, can be considered unique and insightful in that they have the experience of leading in a venue historically reserved for men. Interestingly, the Boston Latin School, which in 1635 broke new ground as the first public school in the United States, had a number of headmasters in its rich history—all male—until 1998, when Cornelia A. Kelley was appointed as its first woman leader, 363 years after its opening (Boston Latin School, n.d.), an anecdotal piece of history that speaks to the barriers women face when entering the realm of educational leadership, especially at the high school level. The barriers that women face as they aspire to and actually become high school principals continue to exist and continue to be studied. In addition, support systems, such as mentors the likes of Beecher or Addams, have assisted women high school principals in their unique journey. As history has shown, it is a journey marked by social and professional challenges that are unique to women, and a discussion of how women have overcome these challenges is pertinent as more and more women are entering leadership ranks.

**Background**

The historical perspectives that touch on women in education accentuate the long tradition of women as educational forces who help shape society’s concept of “school” (G. J. Clifford, 2014). The emergence of women as leaders in secondary education has also been studied as women began to enter the realms of school administration and district leadership. Studies pertaining to the history of women in education, the underrepresentation of women as high school principals in particular, current reforms that affect the high school principalship, and the barriers and support systems women have encountered in their journey to be leaders on high school campuses accentuate the unique
perspective of the woman high school principal. In the current era of increased accountability for high schools to produce college- and career-ready individuals, much is expected of high school principals of both genders. While female high school principals bring a diverse set of skills to their positions, many have struggled to attain those positions and have relied on specific support systems to assist them as they become and serve as high school principals (Buckner, 2011; Snedden, 2013). In order to fully understand these barriers and support systems, one must first examine the role of women in education and educational leadership.

Women in Education and Educational Leadership

Historically, women have been assigned roles of caretaker and nurturer, and in line with those societal roles, they have been underrepresented in the highest organizational levels, which have been stereotypically defined by masculine-driven leadership styles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Hyde, 2014). In the educational realm, women’s societal role, as described by Eagly’s social role theory, aligns more congruently with that of teacher rather than leader (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Wood, 2011, 2013). Early involvement of women in teaching took the form of teachers in Dame’s schools. The Dame’s school objective was to prepare young boys for entrance into towns’ schools; to this end, the Dame’s schools were most often organized in the teachers’ homes (G. J. Clifford, 2014; Madigan, 2009) and were temporary placements whose curriculum focused on reading, writing, and religion (G. J. Clifford, 2014; Hiatt, 1994). Early educational pioneers such as Beecher worked extensively to educate 18th-century women as teachers through enrollment in institutes, seminaries, and colleges, which were a departure from women’s roles as the Dame’s school teachers of the 17th
century (G. J. Clifford, 2014; Lewis, 2009). Beecher’s efforts opened up not only
teaching opportunities for women but also opportunities in educational administration
when she established the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823 and the Western Female
Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, approximately a decade later (Lewis, 2009).

Despite the efforts of early female educational pioneers, women continue to be
outnumbered by their male counterparts at certain levels of educational administration
even though women still hold the majority of teaching positions throughout the country
(Bitterman et al., 2013; Hammer & Rohr, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics,
2013). Data show that while the majority of principals at the elementary level are
women, the number decreases dramatically at the secondary level with only 30% of high
schools being led by women (Bitterman et al., 2013).

The Changing Role of High School and High School Principals

High schools, by definition, differ from elementary and middle schools, and as
such, high schools require principals to meet a unique set of expectations (Sizer, 2013).
The traditional, comprehensive high school in the United States services students from
Grades 9-12 and encompasses the adolescent years of 14-18. It is during this time that
students are expected to be prepared to enter either a university or the workforce
(Rothman, 2012; Sizer, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In response to
concerns expressed by university professors and workforce executives in regard to the
quality of applicants’ skills, school reforms have been put into place to address these at
the public school level (Balduf, 2009; Moore et al., 2010). As a result, high schools are
facing an educational landscape that is more global in scope, where more rigorous
curriculum is expected to be presented to students daily and where performance is
assessed by multiple and varied measures (Robinson, 2015; The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Principals at all levels have historically been seen as imperative to a school’s success and the effectiveness of its programs. Studies have shown that principals not only impact teacher attitudes and their perspective about where they work but also those of parents and community members (Rice, 2010). The principal’s job is multifaceted and complex and includes instructional, managerial, and organizational leadership skills (Robinson, 2015; Valentine & Prater, 2011). While all principals share the above-mentioned skill sets, the high school principal has a unique set of leadership expectations as evidenced by recent studies. A study conducted in 2014 analyzed the qualities that 21st-century superintendents look for when interviewing potential candidates for the job of high school principal, and findings from that study indicated that a strong secondary curricular background is necessary in this age of common core standards and the expectation that students leave high school either having completed all university requirements or having established a career technical pathway (Macias, 2014). Additionally, high school principals must have the interpersonal skills to navigate politically as they work with school boards, community groups, parents, and near-adult students in a pivotal time in their lives (Macias, 2014; Tirozzi, 2001). Studies have also shown that principals’ time management effectiveness correlates with their effectiveness as school leaders, and yet one of the hallmarks of the high school principalship is the long hours associated with the position (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Khan, Khan, Ahmad, & Naseer-ud-Din, 2015). The current era of educational reform has also contributed to new measures of school effectiveness to which
high school principals must aspire (Macias, 2014; Rice, 2010; Tirozzi, 2001; The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

In addition to the academic and instructional leadership expected of high school principals, these principals are a face for the community in what the modern high school has often become: a center where the community congregates to participate in a variety of events, from academic to athletic (Sizer, 2013). The American public high school is more complex than classrooms and lockers but represents a facility where communities come together to enjoy evening and weekend events and where students are prepared for the next step in their newly minted adult lives as they stand on the threshold of who they will become (Sink, 2010; Sizer, 2013). Often, the American high school is used as a community facility where a variety of forums converge—athletic clubs, charities, and churches, to name a few. The high school principal, therefore, serves as community liaison and instructional leader. In the midst of significant changes in education, the role of the principal has also changed, and this requires a new skill set that affects both male and female aspiring high school principals. However, since women are far underrepresented as high school principals, the current educational reforms and the new skills needed to facilitate these warrant examination as additional variables to consider when discussing the barriers and support systems that women experience in the high school principalship.

**Current Educational Reforms Impacting the High School Principalship**

Five current educational initiatives affect the high school principal’s role (Warren, 2014). The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Common Core State Standards, college and career readiness initiatives, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local
Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), and reforms in discipline procedures currently impact the manner in which high school principals lead their schools (Jackson, 2014; Warren, 2014).

In December 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This act replaced the previous education act known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This new educational initiative changes the manner in which school performance is measured by introducing new measures of accountability (Hiler & Hatalsky, 2015). Due to the recent passage of this initiative, research has yet to be completed as to the expected or actual impact this act will have on high school principals and their effectiveness. However, the act itself does define new foci for high schools in terms of college and career readiness, university requirements, and career pathway completion, as well as more equitable advanced course offerings at the high school level. As a result of the new accountability measures, principals will need to navigate their school communities through the organizational and paradigm shifts that will occur (Macias, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Since 2010, California has made the transition from state standards to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; California Department of Education, 2016b). Studies have shown that the principal’s role has changed as a result of the adoption of the CCSS, and thus the requirements to become a high school principal have changed as well (Jackson, 2014; Macias, 2014). With the adoption of the CCSS, high school principals must be well-versed in secondary curriculum and instructional methods in addition to leading the cultural shift that is taking place in U.S. public high schools as new initiatives such as the CCSS revise expectations regarding student mastery of content and student

College and career readiness is another active initiative that affects how high school principals focus their efforts. California has adopted college and career readiness standards that outline the competencies that students must master in order to be ready for post-public-school life (California Department of Education, 2014). This initiative redefines the goal of high school so that the focus shifts away from high school graduation and toward preparing students for university and workplace skills, namely in the fields of communication, technology, critical thinking, and community involvement (California Department of Education, 2014; Mishkind, 2014). The current era of educational reform will also redefine the goals of high school principals as they lead their schools with more global and far-reaching objectives (Snyder & Bristol, 2015).

New funding initiatives have changed the way high school principals are able to fund the various programs on their campuses. Resource allocation has changed in that the amount of resources allocated to California schools is based on the demographics of the district and district needs that result from these demographics (Ragusa, 2013). Recent research has indicated that high school principals who are working within this new funding environment have had to face increased scrutiny and accountability measures to ensure that funds are being allocated to programs that are producing positive results (Batsell, 2013; Ragusa, 2013).

In the past, high schools have responded to unruly and defiant behavior with punitive action, such as suspension or expulsion. However, recent studies have examined
current educational reforms in the arena of school discipline, including the restorative justice movement, where students are encouraged to resolve conflicts through open communication and mediation techniques led by trained adults, and positive behavior intervention systems that affect student behavior by reinforcing positive behaviors and redirecting negative behaviors (Bebee, 2015; Brown-Kersey, 2011; K. Y. Cole, 2013; Eacho, 2013; Koumas, 2015; Priester, 2015; Zulfa, 2015). High school principals are affected by this change in philosophy surrounding student discipline. The literature shows that there has been a shift in what is expected from high school leaders in terms of changing school culture and climate and how the new expectations impact the manner in which high school principals balance supporting staff discipline concerns and supporting student behavior modifications (Brown-Kersey, 2011; M. Clifford, Menon, Gangi, Condon, & Hornung, 2012; K. Y. Cole, 2013; Gregory et al., 2010; Priester, 2015).

When discussing the role of principal, external pressures from educational policies greatly impact the daily functioning of a high school and its leader. Women high school principals, while underrepresented, work with their male counterparts to traverse new legislation and expectations and yet continue to encounter barriers that necessitate support systems that their male counterparts do not. Given the added layer of gender inequity of high school principals, the current era of educational reform creates a more complex professional landscape for women high school principals.

Women High School Principals

Historically, women have been underrepresented as high school principals (Bitterman et al., 2013; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gupton, 2009; Hammer & Rohr, 1994; Riverside County Office of Education, 2015). A 2012 staffing survey indicated
that only 30% of all high school principals in the United States were women even though women were more equitably represented at the elementary and middle school levels where they represented 64% and 42% of principals, respectively (Bitterman et al., 2013).

The data, therefore, show that the disproportionality of men as high school principals continues to exist. However, some studies have suggested that there is no significant difference in the leadership styles of women and men as high school principals (Eckman, 2003, 2004; Martin, 2011). Conversely, other studies have shown that women use more collaborative and collective leadership strategies than their male counterparts to transform their organizations, including educational institutions (Buckner, 2011; Eckman, 2004; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Snedden, 2013). Whether women’s approach to leadership is more collaborative or inclusive than that of male high school principals or not, it is noteworthy that the perception of women as leaders continues to be a point of interest and research.

Regardless of gender, high school principals need to meet the managerial and instructional needs of their schools, especially when working with the current educational initiatives described above. Yet, studies that have examined the experiences of women high school principals have reported that women still feel impacted by the “glass ceiling” that exists between men and women at higher leadership positions in education (Eckman, 2003, 2004; Hansen, 2014; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Pecora, 2006). Studies continue to show that men outnumber women as high school principals throughout the country, and the state of California is no exception (Bitterman et al., 2013). Barriers continue to exist that prevent women from attaining these high-level positions, and yet there are women who do attain these positions. Women who attain high school principalships are in the
minority; however, their stories are rich in information pertaining to the barriers they experienced as well as the support systems that helped them succeed in their professional goal of attaining the position of high school principal. The experiences of women who have penetrated that glass ceiling have been well-documented and offer insight into their career paths, which are marked by persistence, a strong support system, tenacity, and a focused approach to their career (Gupton, 2009; James, 2009; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Pecora, 2006; T. H. Walker, 2013). In this current era of educational reform, it has been noted that strong, collaborative leadership is needed to change school culture in a way that meets the goals and utilizes the allocated resources in a manner that is beneficial to the entire school community (Allen, 2015; Bolton, 2011; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Lazzaro, 2009; Robinson, 2015; Valentine & Prater, 2011; Ziegler & Ramage, 2012). Therefore, although research has shown that women high school principals experience barriers and support systems, the research lacks a deeper examination of the barriers and support systems they experience as they tackle the educational reforms currently impacting their role.

**Barriers and Support Systems Affecting Women High School Principals**

In order to fully understand how some female educational leaders broke through the glass ceiling, a review of the barriers and support systems that women have experienced is necessary and appropriate. Recent studies have shown that while women are as qualified to lead organizations, such as high schools, as their male counterparts, they continue to be underrepresented as high school principals (Eckman, 2003, 2004; Grogan & Shakeshaf, 2011; Pecora, 2006). In Eckman’s 2004 study of female high school principals in three Midwestern states, it was noted that women “experienced
greater work-family conflict than did men,” as they often had families at home that needed their oversight as well (p. 192). Some barriers that have been cited by women high school principals in past studies include a concern for a work-life balance that includes caring for family, the perceived glass ceiling that prevents women from attaining leadership positions beyond the elementary school principalship, and societal expectations that women are more suited to the classroom than to the position of high school principal or superintendent (Eckman, 2004; Gupton, 2009; Hilliard, 2000; Kruse, 2012; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; T. H. Walker, 2013). A 2013 mixed-method study revealed that women who felt that they encountered barriers as high school principals cited a “good ol’ boys” network and a lack of mentors for women who act as high school principals (T. H. Walker, 2013).

Support systems are important to the success of women high school principals, and a review of the literature emphasized the need for systems that allow women high school principals to pursue the position and act as engaged, visible leaders for their school communities (Eckman, 2004; Hansen, 2014; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; T. H. Walker, 2013). Women have cited a number of support systems that include mentorships, networking groups, and district-level support (Eckman, 2003; Gupton, 2009; Hansen, 2014; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Most recent studies cited personal, family support as an invaluable support system in women’s ascent to the position of and performance as high school principals (Hansen, 2014; James, 2009; Litmanovitz, 2011; Pecora, 2006; T. H. Walker, 2013). The barriers and support systems that current women high school principals experience warrant an examination as high schools enter a new era
of accountability measures that call for leadership that is marked by the ability to transform institutions rather than simply manage them.

**Statement of Research Problem**

The underrepresentation of women as high school principals has been well-documented through data sources at the national and state level (Bitterman et al., 2013). Although women represent well over half of all elementary principals and about half of all middle school principals, they only represent about a third of all high school principals in California (Bitterman et al., 2013). Despite well-documented studies of the unique set of leadership skills that women bring to organizations, including educational institutions (Buckner, 2011; Eckman, 2004; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Snedden, 2013), males are still disproportionately hired as high school principals.

Historically, women in education have been considered collaborative instructional and curricular experts to the extent that teaching as a profession was referred to as women’s “true” profession in early American educational history (Hoffman, 2003; Lewis, 2009). Studies have shown that more women than men are in educational leadership and doctoral programs to prepare them to act as leaders in high-level positions (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gupton, 2009). Additionally, current educational reforms have redefined the accountability measures for which high school principals are responsible to include new funding formulas to address demographic needs of the district, college and career readiness programs, and a new emphasis on alternative responses to student discipline (Batsell, 2013; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Jackson, 2014; Ragusa, 2013; Rice, 2010; The Wallace Foundation, 2013; Warren, 2014). Despite new expectations on the part of high school principals requiring collaborative and collective approaches to
leadership, the extensive history of women in education, and the current strong representation of women in administrative preparation programs, the underrepresentation of women as high school principals persists.

Numerous studies have revealed that women experience barriers and support systems unique to their gender that both challenge and encourage them to perform as high school leaders despite data that indicate that they are in the minority (Cook, 2007; Gosmire, Morrison, & Van Osdel, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gupton, 2009; Hansen, 2014; Hicks, 1996; Hilliard, 2000; Kruse, 2012; T. H. Walker, 2013). It is known that women are underrepresented and that their support systems are vital to their success as visible and viable high school principals (Cook, 2007; Hicks, 1996). It is also well-documented that barriers persist that challenge women as they pursue high school principal positions (Hansen, 2014; Harry, 2013; Hilliard, 2000; Kruse, 2012). Despite the need for support systems and the barriers that women high school principals encounter, there are still 30% of women who do serve as high school principals, and their experiences continue to provide women who are interested in such a position with rich context and descriptions of their journeys. Inherent in their journeys were barriers that challenged them and support systems that assisted them, and a study that explores both will lead to a deeper understanding of female high school principals in a career dominated by men.

A study of the barriers and support systems women experience while in their current positions as high school principals is timely and relevant. In the current era of educational reform and in light of the many educational initiatives that affect high schools specifically, research is needed to describe the lived experiences of current
women high school principals. Not only is this an issue of equity in hiring practices but also an insightful exploration of women who have broken that glass ceiling, the difficulties they encounter even today, and the systems that allow them to beat the odds as women high school principals.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female high school principals experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California.

**Research Questions**

**Central Question**

How do female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California describe the barriers and supports they experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining their current position and during the newest era of educational reform?

**Research Subquestions**

1. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?

2. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?
3. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?

4. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?

Significance of the Problem

Although women are strongly represented as teachers at all levels of public education—elementary, middle, and high school—they are underrepresented as high school principals (Bitterman et al., 2013). Data show that women represent approximately 30% of all high school principals, although they represent approximately 60% of all elementary school principals nationally (Bitterman et al., 2013). Despite the disproportionality of male high school principals as compared to females, women continue to enroll in and graduate from administrative and doctoral programs at a greater number than their male counterparts (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), making them well-qualified to enter the workforce as administrators even though they are not hired at the same rate as males at certain levels. While some studies on organizational leadership have shown that women and men do not differ in leadership styles, other studies have indicated that women lead in a more collaborative, collective manner than men (Buckner, 2011; Eckman, 2004; Snedden, 2013). Therefore, despite the gender inequity of the high school principalship, the research has shown that while women are preparing to advance
in the administrative field, they continue to be concentrated at the elementary level. In addition, as evidenced by the research, women either lead no differently than men or lead in ways that would foster transformational change by collaborating and empowering others.

A study of current women high school principals and the barriers and support systems that they experience would provide aspiring women high school principals with insight pertaining to how they attained and currently serve in their position despite data that show them to be in the minority. While various studies have been conducted that describe women in educational leadership and their lived experiences, studies that examine the barriers and support systems that women experience in the current era of educational reform are few (Hansen, 2014; James, 2009; Kruse, 2012; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Pecora, 2006; T. H. Walker, 2013). These studies have revealed that women encounter barriers such as the balance of personal and professional responsibilities, especially when women are mothers; power struggles in the workplace that involve attitudes that center on masculine-driven leadership styles; a lack of support from other women in leadership; and networking opportunities that women are not privy to (also known as a “good ol’ boys” club). The barriers discussed in these studies highlighted the unique set of circumstances in which women find themselves when aspiring to be and serving as high school principals. Support systems included strong family ties, professional organizations, and networking that resulted in friendships and mentorships.

For all the information discussing the barriers and support systems that women encounter, there is a lack of information on current female high school principals experiencing the educational reforms facing them today through the lens of a theoretical
framework. Activity theory, which originated in the 1920s with the works of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria, has been used to analyze a variety of social settings and to describe the process by which subjects achieve outcomes (Bourke, Mentis, & O’Neill, 2013; Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki-Gitai, 1999). Activity theory is useful in analyzing barriers that hinder progress toward an outcome and thus was appropriate for a study on women high school principals and the barriers they encountered as they attained positions in a male-dominated career. No research has previously examined the experience of the female high school principal through the theoretical framework of activity theory. This points to a need to theoretically examine current women high school principals’ experiences as they lead in this time of intense change.

Not only would a study of this sort enlighten and educate current aspiring women high school principals, but it would provide timely information to human resource professionals who are seeking to bridge the gender inequity in the high school level principalship. Information pertaining to the barriers and support systems that women high school principals experience could not only influence hiring practices that are often affected by perception but could also be a catalyst for further development and discussion of identified support systems that have helped current women high school principals in their attainment of their position. By examining and describing the barriers and support systems that current women high school principals experience, the study itself may be instrumental in affecting human resource practices that could preempt these barriers and establishing more support systems that would provide information to help achieve a deeper understanding of the gender gap that continues to exist in high school leadership.
Definitions

**Activity theory.** A descriptive, theoretical approach that analyzes factors impacting a person (subject) in achieving a particular outcome in a societal structure by categorizing such factors into one of the following four categories: instruments (also known as tools or artifacts), rules, community, and division of labor (see Figure 1); most appropriate for fields of inquiry, such as education (Engeström et al., 1999).

![Figure 1. Visual representation of Engeström’s activity theory framework. Adapted from Perspectives on Activity Theory, by Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, and R.-L. Punamäki-Gitai, 1999, p. 31 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press).](image)

**Instruments.** Also known as artifacts or tools in activity theory, instruments are tangible factors that allow a subject to communicate and interact with his or her external environment. Instruments can include, but are not limited to, strategic plans, books, Internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics.

**Rules.** In activity theory, rules act as a mediating component between subject and community. These rules determine how the subject is to work within his or her community and rely on cultural and societal expectations and roles in order to work within the activity theory framework.
Community. In activity theory, community refers to the social context and systems in which the subject functions as a part of a whole. The community is governed by rules that define the subject’s role within the communal context.

Division of labor. In activity theory, division of labor refers to the hierarchical structure of activity in an environment; it also refers to the roles individuals execute within an organization.

Barrier. A circumstance that presents an obstacle for women’s attainment of the position and service as high school principals (or superintendents).

Support system. A practice or network of people who provide an individual with practical or emotional support.

Era of educational reform. Major revisions to NCLB, which imposed federal regulations on public education in the United States, that took place in 2015 resulting in greater funding control by state and local school districts. The ESSA of 2015 replaced NCLB. Other reforms that have impacted public educational entities in California include adoption of CCSS, LCFF, LCAP, college and career readiness initiatives, and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) and restorative justice practices that address student behaviors.

High school. A facility that is a public expenditure that constitutes a system of free and public comprehensive education for students in Grades 9-12 in preparation for postgraduation endeavors such as university/college or career. High school as used in this study does not refer to continuation, community day, or charter schools.
**Principal.** A position approved by the local school board entrusting ultimate authority on a school campus. Elementary, middle school, and high school principals hold fundamental responsibility for their site outcomes.

**Delimitations**

The delimitations for this study were gender, geographical location, and career criteria of the participants. Female high school principals participated in this qualitative study. Gender delimitations focused specifically on females. Geographical location for this study was limited to Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. Collected demographic information included position, length of service as a principal and in education, age, and ethnicity. All interviews for this qualitative phenomenological study were conducted in person or via telephone and relied on the honest communication of all participants in response to interview questions. Due to the small sample size, generalizability is limited.

**Organization of the Study**

This study was organized as a qualitative phenomenological study based on the voluntary participation of female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The study comprised a central research question and four research subquestions that provided the basis for a more detailed series of interview questions that were posed to participants at a location of their choosing. The interview questions pertained to their experiences prior to becoming high school principals as well as their experiences while serving as high school principals. These interviews took place during the month of September 2016 and were recorded for transcription accuracy. Results of the interviews were coded by the researcher in an
effort to identify emerging themes that provided a basis for the researcher’s findings and conclusions.

Chapter I of this study provided an introduction to the social and historical context of the study and presented the significance of the study, the problem statement, and the research questions. Chapter II delves into a review of literature that pertains to female leadership at the high school level. Additionally, Chapter II further defines and describes the educational reforms affecting the high school principalship today. Chapter III describes the methodology of the study as well as instrumentation. Chapter IV includes an analysis of the data collected, and Chapter V concludes this study with a discussion of the researcher’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of women in the workforce and in leadership roles has been well-researched, as has been the history of women in education. In order to situate the current study within the existing literature that pertains to women high school principals, this chapter provides a historical perspective on the entrance of women in the workforce and leadership roles in addition to exploring the seminal works that pertain to women in education and educational leadership. Because the study focused on leadership at the public high school level, literature pertaining to public high schools in the United States and current educational initiatives affecting the high school principalship is also reviewed. These initiatives include the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), college and career readiness initiatives, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), and reforms in discipline procedures currently impacting high school principals. The experiences of female high school principals prior to this era of educational reform are also examined through recent studies pertaining to barriers and support structures. Additionally, a review of literature that focused on activity theory provided the theoretical basis by which the current study was executed and exposed the gap in the literature from which the research questions in this study were generated.

Women in the Workforce and in Leadership Roles

Women have historically played a role in America’s workforce. The past 2 centuries have transformed women’s lives and roles in the workforce (Freedman, 2002). As early as 1900, women left the home to pursue jobs that served a variety of purposes dictated either by financial need, social need, or the need to grow as an individual.
(Acemoglu, Autor, & Lyle, 2004; Freedman, 2002). However, they only constituted 18% of the workforce during that time (Acemoglu et al., 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Since the 1970s, feminism has spread globally and across the United States, continuing to transform the role of women in the workforce (Freedman, 2002). Then, in the 1980s, as the United States shifted from an industrial to an informational society and joined the global economy, women increased their representation in the labor force and became leaders of small and midsize firms (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Most recently, women account for 46.5% of the labor force, but their representation at more senior corporate levels remains negligible by comparison (Khairuzzaman, Ismail, Jafar, & Al-Taee, 2012; Williams, 2012). In 2000, women represented 12.5% of Fortune 500 corporate line officers but only 5.1% of the highest ranked corporate officers, and they accounted for 11.7% of the membership of boards of directors; moreover, women hold less than 3% of the most senior management positions in major corporations in the United States (Khairuzzaman et al., 2012). The representation of women in Fortune 500 leadership positions remains primarily in the lower ranks and lower paying positions; in 2010, women held only 2.6% of CEO positions for Fortune 500 companies (Hanna, 2010). Then from 2012 to 2014, this statistic increased to a “mere 3.8% of Fortune 500 chief executive officer seats” filled by women (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014, p. 1129; Sellers, 2012; R. C. Walker & Aritz, 2015). Although the proportion of women in the workplace has increased within the past few decades, women remain “vastly underrepresented” at the highest organizational levels (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016, p. 1).
Women remained constricted in their progress through the mid-20th century, and the term “glass ceiling” was coined in the title of the 1986 seminal work on women in leadership by Carol Hymowitz, journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). In this historic article, Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) described the glass ceiling as a covert and unspoken phenomenon that prohibited women from attaining executive positions. Karau and Eagly (1999) further clarified that the glass ceiling is a “barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from higher level leadership positions” (p. 321). Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) explained this phenomenon as a combination of status-quo bias and stereotypes about gender and leadership. As women began to ascend to top executive positions more frequently, the glass ceiling was debated as an appropriate metaphor for women who have overcome the barriers that are inherent in rising up a corporate ladder despite gender inequalities. Carly Fiorina, former Hewlett-Packard CEO and 2015 presidential candidate, stated in 1999, “I hope that we are at the point that everyone has figured out that there is not a glass ceiling” (as cited in Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 6).

Even though Hymowitz’s (2004) report on women executives who have broken through the glass ceiling asserted that the glass ceiling has in fact become a thing of the past, the paths that women take to become leaders continue to be rife with challenges and barriers. While women began to enter the workforce at greater rates in the late 20th century, historical data show that there has existed a gender disparity in positions of leadership perhaps due to societal expectations of leaders that speak to the perceived masculinity of leadership positions (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Wood, 2011). Frameworks such as social constructivism and social role theory speak to the scholarly
application of gender psychology and societal expectations pertaining to leadership inequities (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; R. C. Walker & Aritz, 2015). Early corporations entrusted the functionings of their businesses to male leaders almost exclusively, and that pattern continues to highlight an inequitable situation that exists in leadership as a whole. Currently corporations, although many are led by women, perpetuate the pattern of a much higher percentage of male leaders at top levels of government, business, and finance (Gupton, 2009; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). While women have made strides in positions of leadership, Eagly and Carli (2007) asserted, “Even now, the presence of women in elite leadership positions is unusual enough that it evokes a sense of wonder” (p. 4).

Despite the data, studies have shown that women possess leadership abilities and skills that are valuable in leadership positions. The possibility that “women and men differ in their leadership style is important because a leader’s behavior is a major determinant of his or her effectiveness and chances for advancement” (Cuadrado, Navas, Molero, Ferrer, & Morales, 2012, p. 3083). A 2010 study found that women are more likely to be chosen as leaders of organizations in times of crisis and that “stereotypically female interpersonal attributes were most predictive of who participants selected as a new leader for an organization in crisis” (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010, p. 449). This study concluded that participants perceived male candidates as lacking in the interpersonal skills needed to navigate an organization that is poorly performing (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) summarized a variety of studies that characterized women’s leadership traits as relational, spiritual, and balanced with a focus on social justice and continuous learning. Women have also been
perceived as participating in organizational cultures that value participation, collaboration, and interpersonal relationships (R. C. Walker & Aritz, 2015). In a meta-analysis conducted by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) of 99 independent samples from 95 studies that addressed the debate by quantitatively summarizing gender differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness, results indicated that when all leadership contexts are considered, men and women do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness, although women were rated as significantly more effective than men from the view of subordinates. In contrast, when self-ratings were considered, men rated themselves as significantly more effective than women rated themselves (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Other studies have shown, however, that women have an advantage over men in adapting their leadership behaviors, which experts have shown is effective in most organizational contexts (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Despite research showing that men may be perceived as better suited and more effective as leaders than women (Carroll, 2006; Eagly, Makhijani, & Konsky, 1992), some popular press publications have reported the opposite: that there may be a female gender advantage in modern organizations that require a “feminine” type of leadership (Conlin, 2003; Williams, 2012). Research has indicated, therefore, that while women and men may not be substantially different in their approach to leadership, the perception of feminine leadership as opposed to masculine leadership styles does play a role in the construct of higher levels of leadership in a number of domains (Cuadrado et al., 2012; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; White & Ozkanli, 2011).

In the educational realm, the data echo those related to corporate America. Currently, women are underrepresented in leadership positions of educational
institutions, even though 67% of doctoral degrees in educational leadership are earned by women (Gupton, 2009). The pinnacle of educational leadership is the role of the superintendent, and only 22% of superintendents of districts across the United States are women (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). In California, the data reflect that women lead only 16% of school districts (Association of California School Administrators [ACSA], 2015). In addition, female high school principals nationally represent only approximately 30% of all high school principalships, although they represent over 60% of all elementary principalships (ACSA, 2015; Bitterman et al., 2013). This gender gap is especially shocking given the fact that education is a field that is dominated by women, if teaching statistics are considered (Domenech, 2012; Kowalski et al., 2011; Lee Dowell & Larwin, 2013; Litmanovitz, 2011; Skrla, 1999). Studies of females who lead at the upper levels of the educational spectrum have indicated that many share the same barriers that are encountered in other fields (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Karau & Eagly, 1999). As the educational landscape continues to evolve, a study of women high school principals and the current tensions that often prevent women from progressing beyond the educational glass ceiling, or gender labyrinth, provides additional information on women who are defying the odds to become visible, high-level leaders of influence in organizations.

**Women in Education and Educational Leadership**

G. J. Clifford (2014) stated that women constitute the majority of teachers in public and private elementary schools, and they represent about half of teachers at the middle and high school levels. Historically, women have been assigned roles of caretaker and nurturer, and in line with those societal roles, they have been
underrepresented at the highest organizational levels, which have been stereotypically
defined by a masculine-driven leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Hyde, 2007,
2014). As a testament to female teachers’ influence, Indiana’s first state superintendent
of schools in 1852 stated, “Blessed be he who invented female teachers” (as cited in
Hoffman, 2003, p. 7). Horace Mann also described women as being “fitted” to the
profession in the “Temple of Education” (as cited in Hoffman, 2003, p. 7). As such, the
bridge from home to school was a natural progression in the early stages of American
education, and thus women filled the role of teacher; “the combination of their own
learning and some experience in home teaching often led a mother . . . into ‘keeping a
school’” in her own home (G. J. Clifford, 2014, p. 24; see also Hoffman, 2003).

In the educational realm, women’s societal role, as described by Eagly’s social
role theory, aligns more congruently with that of teacher rather than leader (Eagly &
Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Wood, 2013). In fact, Alice Freeman Palmer wrote in her 1908
book *The Teacher*, “Never before has a nation entrusted all the school training of the vast
majority of its future population, men as well as women, to women alone” (as cited in
education of girls and women in the United States, echoed Eagly and Wood’s (1990)
suggestion that education is closely perceived as a caretaking profession, much like
nursing, and thus promotes society’s role for women (Eagly & Wood, 2011, 2013;
Madigan, 2009). Early involvement of women in teaching took the form of teachers in
Dame’s schools. The Dame’s school objective was to prepare young boys for entrance
into towns’ schools; to this end, the Dame’s schools were most often organized in the
teachers’ homes and were temporary placements whose curriculum focused on reading,
writing, and religion (G. J. Clifford, 2014; Hiatt, 1994; Lewis, 2009; Madigan, 2009).

Hoffman (2003) described the common scenario of the mid-1800s school rooms where a number of women were led by a male principal who would deal with the discipline of the “older boys” (p. 7). In the early days of American education, women were viewed as caretakers and nurturers, which aligned with society’s expectation of the female role in the home and in the community.

While the women’s role in education began to grow, it began to evolve into leadership roles with early educational pioneers such as Catherine Beecher, who worked extensively to educate 18th-century women as teachers through enrollment in institutes, seminaries, and colleges, which were a departure from women’s roles as the Dame’s school teachers of the 17th century (G. J. Clifford, 2014; Lewis, 2009). Beecher’s efforts opened up not only teaching opportunities for women but also opportunities in educational administration when she established the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823 and the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, approximately a decade later (Lewis, 2009). Women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Charlotte Forten, and Mary Church Terrell became early high school administrators at the Washing Preparatory High School and were followed by the likes of Fanny Jackson-Coppin in Philadelphia; these were standouts in the world of women teachers in the late 1800s (Hoffman, 2003). In quoting the work of Zyack and Hansot (1982), Brunner and Grogan (2007) characterized the years of 1900-1930 as the “golden age” for women in school administration. The majority of these positions, though, were concentrated at the elementary principal level, and women were only able to “make modest gains into the ‘lower strata of the upper crust’” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 4).
Women’s influence and role in the workforce have historically been impacted by political and economic changes, and education reflects this pattern as well (Acemoglu et al., 2004; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Weiler, 2009). It has been noted that when men returned from war following the 1940s, women left administrative positions and were replaced by men who received GI Bill educational benefits (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Societal barriers such as social role expectations and political and economic factors have existed throughout history for women, and support systems such as those created by Beecher and Cooper offered women opportunities to influence education outside of the classroom (Hoffman, 2003; Lewis, 2009).

This history of women in education is rich with outliers who entered education and thrived in the profession as both teachers and leaders; however, the pattern of men’s dominance of higher leadership positions persists (Bitterman et al., 2013; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; G. J. Clifford, 2014; Lewis, 2009). Even in the earliest days of women in education, barriers existed that reflected society’s expectations for women in general (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; G. J. Clifford, 2014; Hoffman, 2003). Despite the efforts of these early female educational pioneers, women continue to be outnumbered by their male counterparts at certain levels of educational administration even though women still hold the majority of teaching positions throughout the country (Bitterman et al., 2013; Hammer & Rohr, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Current data show that while the majority of principals at the elementary level are women, the number decreases dramatically at the secondary level with only 30% of high schools being led by women (ACSA, 2015; Bitterman et al., 2013; Hammer & Rohr, 1994).
Public High Schools in the United States

High schools, by definition, differ from elementary and middle schools, and as such, high schools require principals to meet a unique set of expectations (Sizer, 2013). The English High School, established in the 1820s, was the first high school in the United States and was created in direct response to parent complaints about not having access to academy schools where curriculum was taught in the classical subjects, English, geography, math, history, and the like (Spring, 2008). Thus, the English High school was created in Boston and alleviated the concerns of parents who did not want to send their children to distant boarding schools for an education.

During this time, the definition of the role of high school came to include the belief that high schools would lead to a well-educated population that would afford everyone opportunities, that high schools would train adolescents to obey authority, and that high schools would promote individual responsibility for one’s own destiny (Spring, 2008). The comprehensive high school gained popularity in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and at one point, “new high schools had been opening at the rate of one per day” (Bernard & Mondale, 2001, p. 97). In the 1920s, high schools began to include more and more extracurricular activities in an effort to maintain order and to acquiesce to student demand (Spring, 2008). Students were graduating at a rapid pace. In 1900, only 6% of 17-year-olds were high school graduates in the United States, but by 1945, this percentage increased to 51, and school had changed from a predominantly academic arena to one marked by progressive ideals of socialization (Bernard & Mondale, 2001). A “life adjustment” curriculum was added to high schools’ repertoire in the 1950s to
make high school relevant for teenagers, and it centered on lessons in family life, hygiene, and health (Bernard & Mondale, 2001; Spring, 2008).

Today’s high school, with its multifaceted and comprehensive list of extracurricular sports and clubs, also supports state mandates that student engagement is in fact a priority for schools, elementary and secondary, to function appropriately (Spring, 2008; Warren, 2013, 2014). The expectation that public high school is a vehicle for socialization and behavior modification continues to this day, as evidenced by the increased interest in implementing positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) and restorative justice practices in public schools (Bebee, 2015; Brown-Kersey, 2011; M. Clifford et al., 2012; K. Y. Cole, 2013; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Koumas, 2015). A 2015 study on the influence of PBIS found that school climate is affected positively through the implementation of this initiative designed to change student behavior through positive reinforcements rather than punitive consequences (Bebee, 2015). Restorative justice practices have also impacted the modern high school. Restorative justice, like PBIS, avoids punitive action for misbehavior and instead encourages victims and offenders to have dialogue that facilitates change by examining harmful actions and addressing the healing process (K. Y. Cole, 2013). Studies have found that restorative justice practices increase communication among stakeholders and positively affect high school climate (Brown-Kersey, 2011; K. Y. Cole, 2013). High schools, reflecting the early objectives of the comprehensive high school, continue to strive for modified adolescent behavior that fosters positive social and academic growth.

As a number of studies have shown, the push to reduce suspensions and expulsions on high school campuses has dramatically changed the manner in which high
school administrators deal with behavior issues (Batsell, 2013; Bebee, 2015; Brown-Kersey, 2011; K. Y. Cole, 2013; Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Koumas, 2015). As indicated by Ruglis and Freudenberg (2010), the American high school is seeing a resurgence in the interest of health education and wellness curriculum to promote healthy lifestyles among American teenagers. The belief that wellness and basic needs awareness are inextricably connected to student achievement and school success continues to make the high school a complex matrix that encompasses academic and social aspects.

Today’s traditional, comprehensive high school in the United States services students from Grades 9-12 and encompasses the adolescent years of 14-18 (Sizer, 2013; Spring, 2008). Invoking early incarnations of high school objectives, it is during this time that students are expected to be prepared to enter either a university or the workforce (Rothman, 2012; Sizer, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). With the new emphasis on college and career readiness, high schools build on early visions of vocational as well as academic centers where those beyond eighth grade can gain valuable life experience (Bernard & Mondale, 2001; Snyder & Bristol, 2015; Spring, 2008). High schools are places in which students not only learn the academics of the high school curriculum but also have the opportunity to complete pathways that engage them in learning about a profession on which they will be ready to embark post-high school (Mishkind, 2014; Willian, 2014). According to President Obama’s High School Redesign Initiative of 2013, high schools are expected to provide a comprehensive educational experience for all students that is marked by rigor in academic curriculum, equity of all experiences and learning on the campus, and relevance to the adolescent American experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Sizer (2013) argued against
past practices of tracking students by abilities and even by interest so that all students are offered equitable access to curriculum, both core and elective.

In response to concerns expressed by university professors and workforce executives in regard to the quality of applicants’ skills, school reforms have been put into place to address these at the public school level (Balduf, 2009; Moore et al., 2010). These include new funding formulas that address student needs as indicated by demographic information, state priorities that address higher achievement, a redesigning of America’s high schools, and increased autonomy for individual school districts when establishing metrics by which to measure school effectiveness (Knudson, 2014; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2013; Warren, 2013, 2014). As a result, high schools are facing an educational landscape that is more global in scope, where more rigorous curriculum is expected to be presented to students daily and where performance is assessed by multiple and varied measures (Robinson, 2015; The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Today, high schools are also subject to accreditation issues that require them to conduct regular self-studies so that student transcripts will be considered valid for university acceptance and to provide a standard by which all secondary programs are measured (Rosa, 2014). The accreditation process validates the high schools’ self-study in that it requires schools to reflect on and provide evidence for academic, athletic, and extracurricular opportunities they offer (Rosa, 2014). Only high schools participate in this rigorous evaluative process that promotes the ideals that early high school proponents envisioned.
Current school reformers have indicated a need to further redesign America’s high schools (Sizer, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Research has shown that some effective school reforms that are currently being implemented into America’s high schools provide more equitable access to advanced curriculum and more intensive college exploration and career planning, provide supportive and personalized learning opportunities for all students, and offer opportunities to earn postsecondary credit (Sizer, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). High schools today, while much more complex than those at the turn of the 20th century, continue to work within ideals that address the academic and social needs of society.

**Current Education Initiatives Affecting High Schools**

According to Affeldt (2015), “California is in the midst of the nation’s most significant current overhaul of a state school funding and accountability system” (p. 1). This overhaul was in response to underperforming school systems and a necessity to better prepare students to be globally competitive in the 21st century, which prompted enacting five major initiatives of educational reform that have a significant impact on the role and responsibilities of high school principals serving educational institutions across the nation and in the state of California (Affeldt, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Warren, 2014). Warren (2014) identified the major features of the K-12 accountability program and how they have changed in the past 15 years. In this current era of educational reforms, the high school principal’s role is evolving (Jackson, 2014; Warren, 2014). The ESSA of 2015, CCSS, college and career readiness initiatives, the LCFF and LCAP, and reforms in discipline procedures currently impact the manner in which high school principals lead their schools (Jackson, 2014; Warren, 2014). These
initiatives highlight the new era in which high school principals lead and mark a departure from previous eras of accountability.

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015**

In December 2015, Congress passed the ESSA (American Library Association, 2015). This act replaced the previous education act known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that was defined by an era of accountability that ranked schools as high or low performing based on state test scores (Rand Corporation, 2016). The ESSA initiative changes the manner in which school performance is measured by introducing new measures of accountability (Hiler & Hatalsky, 2015). While NCLB required annual testing, ESSA gives states the freedom to choose the testing platforms by which students will be assessed (Hiler & Hatalsky, 2015). In California, the new assessments have taken the form of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which tests students in Grades 3-8 and 11 in English language arts (ELA) and math (California Department of Education, 2016c). For high schools, this represents a departure from the annual testing that occurred every spring as part of the NCLB requirements, and it also represents an increased urgency to provide classroom teachers and students with access to the technology necessary to complete the test, as this computer-adaptive test is not dependent on test packets (California Department of Education, 2016c).

In addition, ESSA has also required a reworking of states’ academic standards and has moved away from the federal oversight of state standards, whereas NCLB required states to submit their plans to the U.S. Department of Education for approval (California Department of Education, 2015, 2016b, 2016c). Moreover, ESSA represents a marked change from the federally regulated accountability measures introduced by
NCLB. ESSA would instead hold schools accountable by new indicators created by the state. Notably, high schools will be held accountable by a variety of measures unique to high school, among them graduation rates and career and technical education (CTE) completion (Hiler & Hatalsky, 2015). Due to the recent passage of this initiative, research has yet to be completed as to the expected or actual impact this act will have on high school principals and their effectiveness. However, the act itself does define new foci for high schools in terms of college and career readiness, university requirements, and career pathway completion, as well as more equitable advanced course offerings at the high school level (Fitzgerald, 2012; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Mishkind et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2010; Pierson, 2015; Willian, 2014). As a result of the new accountability measures, principals will need to navigate their school communities through the organizational and paradigm shifts that will occur (Macias, 2014; The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

**Common Core State Standards**

As the NCLB initiative began to sunset, states began to design new academic standards that represented a more comprehensive view of the state school systems and linked skills learned in elementary and middle schools, and how these skills progressed toward a more complex educational landscape in high school (California Department of Education, 2016b). The CCSS mark a new era of educational reform as they are at the core of one of California’s funding priorities under the new rules of LCFF (Affeldt, 2015; Knudson, 2014; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Warren, 2014). Students must demonstrate achievement of these standards in order to meet funding goals (Affeldt, 2015; Knudson, 2014; Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Warren, 2014). Since 2010,
therefore, California has made the transition from state standards to the CCSS by redesigning curriculum that implements the standards and the new skills needed by students that span and build on each other from elementary up through high school (California Department of Education, 2016b).

Studies have shown that the principal’s role has changed as a result of the adoption of the CCSS, and thus the requirements to become a high school principal have changed as well (Jackson, 2014; Macias, 2014). Jackson (2014) emphasized that funding is tied to the CCSS and that principals are responsible for the instructional leadership that comes with the adoption of rigorous new standards. A sense of urgency accompanies the instructional shifts that are necessary to address the changing expectations for high school students (Achieve et al., 2013). With the adoption of the CCSS, high school principals must be well-versed in secondary curriculum and instructional methods in addition to leading the cultural shift that is taking place in U.S. public high schools as new initiatives such as the CCSS revise expectations regarding student mastery of content and student success (Achieve et al., 2013; Fitzgerald, 2012; Huff, 2011; Robinson, 2015; Willian, 2014).

**College and Career Readiness**

As the CCSS came to the fore in 2010, another movement gained momentum. Rothman (2012) stated that “the common core state standards . . . were explicitly designed around the goal of ensuring college and career readiness for all students” (p. 10). Because of the intricate relationship between CCSS and college and career readiness, this initiative also affects how high school principals focus their efforts. California has adopted college and career readiness standards that outline the
competencies that students must master in order to be ready for post-public-school life (California Department of Education, 2015). This initiative redefines the goal of high school so that the focus shifts away from high school graduation and toward preparing students for university and workplace skills, namely in the fields of communication, technology, critical thinking, and community involvement (California Department of Education, 2014; Mishkind, 2014). Some studies have indicated that students are underprepared for the rigors of college and the workplace, and it has become the high school principal’s responsibility to support the college and career readiness initiatives by supplementing the high school experience with instruction that fills this need (Balduf, 2009; Moore et al., 2010).

The current era of educational reform will redefine the goals of high school principals as they lead their schools with more global and far-reaching objectives in pursuit of college and career readiness (Snyder & Bristol, 2015). Principals will need to concentrate on building a climate that offers support to all students as they plan for post-high school life, but they will also need to foster more intensive support for those students who lack support outside of the school system (Education Funders Research Initiative & Philanthropy New York, 2013; Moore et al., 2010). This new piece of accountability could take the form of graduation rates, completion of college entrance requirements, and completion of career pathways, which is a departure from accountability measures based entirely on test scores (Warren, 2013, 2014).

**LCAP/LCFF**

New funding initiatives have changed the way high school principals are able to fund the various programs on their campuses. Resource allocation has changed in that
the amount of resources allocated to California schools is based on the demographics of the district and district needs that result from these demographics (Ragusa, 2013). The LCAP, which is written by local districts using the LCFF as their budgetary structure, was developed in 2013 by the California Legislature (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). This K-12 finance system is a radical departure from previous funding formulas that districts used to provide resources to their school sites (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Warren, 2013, 2014). Knudson (2014) stated that “the changes introduced by LCFF alter the conditions under which . . . administrators . . . approach their roles in the K-12 education system” (p. 1). The LCFF grants monies to school districts through base grants, which fund by grade level; supplement grants, which fund 20% for low-income, English learner, and foster care students; and concentration grants, which fund an additional 50% for each of the disadvantaged student groups, about 55% of a district’s enrollment (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). Further, this alteration of conditions requires school leaders to be instructional leaders and, at times, to make budgetary and program decisions that in the past were not their responsibility (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015).

The eight priorities under the LCFF include providing basic services to all students, implementing the CCSS, creating opportunities for parental involvement, demonstrating growth in student achievement, increasing student engagement, improving school climate, enhancing access to a broad curriculum, and describing other student outcomes as decided on by local school districts (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). While the LCFF and LCAP provide an alternate and option-rich funding environment for school leaders, recent research has indicated that high school principals who are working
within this new funding environment have had to face increased scrutiny and accountability measures to ensure that funds are being allocated to programs that are producing positive results (Batsell, 2013; Ragusa, 2013). This represents a stark contrast to past funding, which was distributed in a manner by which school districts that had the most need-based student populations often did not receive the resources needed to close the achievement gap.

**Positive Behavior Interventions and Restorative Justice Practices**

In the past, high schools have consistently responded to unruly and defiant behavior with punitive action, such as suspension or expulsion. However, recent studies have examined current educational reforms in the arena of school discipline, including the restorative justice movement, where students are encouraged to resolve conflicts through open communication and mediation techniques led by trained adults, and PBIS, which affects student behavior by reinforcing positive behaviors and redirecting negative behaviors (Bebee, 2015; Brown-Kersey, 2011; K. Y. Cole, 2013; Eacho, 2013; Koumas, 2015; Priester, 2015; Zulfa, 2015). Gregory and Cornell (2009) contended that adolescents’ developmental needs are inconsistent with the authoritarian discipline policies that often define high school administrators. Yet, the outcome of a 2010 study “suggests that discipline practices should not be polarized into a ‘get tough’ versus ‘give support’ debate because both structure and support contribute to school safety for adolescents” (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 483), which adds to the ambiguous nature of school discipline in this current era of educational reform. Another 2009 study of the impact of PBIS on school climate found that PBIS does have positive impacts on school climate but that it takes years to implement fully (Bradshaw, Koth, Thornton, & Leaf, 2009). This
requires school leaders to not only be patient in the implementation of the programs but also to be effective communicators with all stakeholders during the lengthy implementation process for programs that redefine responses to student behavior (Bradshaw et al., 2009).

Principals are affected by this change in philosophy surrounding student discipline. The majority of both restorative justice practices and PBIS emphasize the role of the principals in setting the right expectations for their stakeholders, providing adequate training for their teachers, and measuring the overall climate of their schools by lower suspension and expulsion rates (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Eacho, 2013; Koumas, 2015; Priester, 2015). The literature shows that there has been a shift in what is expected from high school leaders in terms of changing school culture and climate and how the new expectations impact the manner in which high school principals balance supporting staff discipline concerns and supporting student behavior modifications (Brown-Kersey, 2011; M. Clifford et al., 2012; K. Y. Cole, 2013; Gregory et al., 2010; Priester, 2015).

Student behavior has historically been a point of interest and concern for public high schools, and often, dealing with negative student behaviors was traditionally left to male principals to address (Bernard & Mondale, 2001).

When discussing the role of principal, external pressures from educational policies greatly impact the daily functioning of a high school and its leader. Women high school principals, while underrepresented, work with their male counterparts to traverse new legislation and expectations and yet continue to encounter barriers that necessitate support systems that their male counterparts do not (Eckman, 2003; Hansen, 2014; Mertz, 2006). Given the added layer of gender inequity of high school principals, the current era
of educational reform creates a more complex professional landscape for all high school
principals (Jackson, 2014).

**High School Principals**

Nogay and Beebe (2008) described the high school principalship as “truly a
coveted position” (p. 600). High school principals historically have been responsible for
a number of duties that equate to a varied and challenging position of leadership within
the public school system (Jackson, 2014). Not only are they responsible for the
managerial piece of running high schools, but studies have shown that they also influence
student achievement, school climate, and instructional leadership (Macias, 2014; Rice,
2010; Sam, 2011). Studies that examined high school principals’ time management skills
found that principals who are more rigid in managing the high demands on their time to
complete tasks that are required of high school principals at times sacrifice the
interpersonal relationships that are important to staff morale (Grissom et al., 2013;
Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2015). Tirozzi (2001) investigated the changing role of the
high school principal in the 21st century and cited a number of new challenges that high
school principals must address. Among these are demographic changes, the advent of
virtual learning and the increased dependence on technology in the classroom, and the
changing needs of adolescents (Tirozzi, 2001). She contended that there is a shortage of
high school principal candidates due to the stress and long hours associated with being a
secondary principal (Tirozzi, 2001). In addition, she found that the United States lacks
effective recruitment and mentoring programs to assist aspiring principals in their journey
toward secondary leadership (Tirozzi, 2001). Additionally, a 2011 study examining
principals’ perceptions of readiness found that principals feel that additional training is
necessary for leaders of today’s schools to be ready for their new accountability environment (Huff, 2011).

As education changes in its focus and its path toward student achievement, high school principals have had to adapt to a career that is decreasingly managerial and increasingly based on vision and leadership (Jackson, 2014; Tirozzi, 2001; Valentine & Prater, 2011). A 2010 study found that the culture of a high school improves if the principal has a focused vision that is communicated clearly to all stakeholders (Bolton, 2010). Another study from 2015 found that district-level support in providing high school principals with professional development designed to develop their transformational leadership skills is also important to improving the efficacy of the leaders (Allen, 2015). Macias’s (2014) qualitative study found that superintendents overwhelmingly stated that a high school principal’s interpersonal skills are of paramount importance when doing the job of leading a high school. Highlighting this need for excellent communication and relationship-building skills, high school principals are also responsible for increasing parent engagement and community partnerships (Sink, 2010). Studies have indicated that high schools can benefit from strong parent engagement and community involvement programs, and as such, parent engagement has become part of the new era of educational accountability (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015; Tirozzi, 2001; Warren, 2013, 2014). This speaks to the need for principals to be effective communicators and to demonstrate strong interpersonal skills (Macias, 2014).

High school principals are also being called on to navigate changes in the accountability system. A recent study listed the challenges that current high school principals face that differ from those of decades past. These included a reliance on
technology for assessment, implementation of the CCSS with limited or no curriculum to support them, and administrative programs that do not prepare principals to be instructional leaders but rather managers (Robinson, 2015). Rice (2010) summarized longitudinal state data findings that indicated that in this era of changing accountability, good high school principals staff their schools more effectively, use their experience as leaders to navigate changes within school structures, are experienced organizational managers, and evaluate teachers with valuable feedback based on their instructional experience and leadership tendencies. With the changing accountability system, which includes funding tied to accountability measures at school sites, principals need to draw on their organizational leadership skills as well as their transformative leadership skills to enact the change that is expected in this current era of educational reform (Macias, 2014; Rice, 2010; Warren, 2013, 2014).

In order to fulfill the responsibilities required to lead today’s high schools, several studies have found that principals’ time management skills are vital to their effectiveness on their campuses (Grissom et al., 2015; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2009; Khan et al., 2015). In a 2010 study conducted on all high schools in the Miami Dade County Public School District, researchers found that high school principals performed 43 different tasks recorded at 5-minute intervals over the course of a full school day (Horng et al., 2009). These tasks varied from organizational activities to day-to-day instructional activities such as classroom observations and teacher evaluations (Horng et al., 2009). Grissom et al. (2015) found that principals with excellent time management skills are perceived to be more effective leaders and actually experience less stress than their counterparts who do not possess strong time management skills. Their findings also
indicated that principals’ effective time management skills are associated with an increase in the time spent leading their schools instructionally (Grissom et al., 2015).

Subsequently, as high school principals continue to traverse the current era of educational reform and move their schools toward achieving a changing set of accountability measures, they continue to be responsible for a number of organization and managerial tasks that define the job, by some standards, as “undoable” (Johnston, 2001, p. 1). A review of the literature on the job of a high school principal, therefore, emphasizes the complex challenges facing the high school principal of today’s educational landscape.

**Women High School Principals**

Navigating the current era of educational reform and performing the complex job duties of a high school principal makes the high school principalship a unique experience (Batsell, 2013; California Department of Education, 2014; Horng et al., 2009; Horowitz, 2005; Jackson, 2014; Johnston, 2001; Sizer, 2013; Tirozzi, 2001; Warren, 2013). The situation for women is even more unique, since they are far outnumbered by men when it comes to being a high school principal (ACSA, 2015; Bitterman et al., 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Women represent about 30% of all high school principals even though they make up over 50% of the high school teaching staffs across the country (ACSA, 2015; Bitterman et al., 2013; Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Figures 2 and 3 reflect the available data that highlight the percentage of female and male teachers and principals at each level of public education in the United States.

A 2006 analysis of existing data on school administrators noted that while women have made significant strides in terms of attaining positions as school administrators, they still lag behind in four of nine categories, those being superintendent, deputy superintendent, high school principal, and high school assistant principal (Mertz, 2006). Noteworthy to this analysis is the fact that in this data analysis, Mertz (2006) also found that from 1972 through 2002, women not only made significant strides as elementary and middle school administrators but “extended their dominance” in these positions (p. 549). Despite the fact that women outnumber their male counterparts in educational administration preparation programs, the underrepresentation of women as high school principals continues to be well-documented in staff surveys and data reports (ACSA, 2015; Bitterman et al., 2013; Department for Professional Employees, 2014; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Gupton, 2009).

Although women are underrepresented as high school principals, some research has shown that the leadership practices of female principals are conducive to their environment in public high schools (Buckner, 2011; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; R. C. Walker & Aritz, 2015). Buckner (2011) found that female principals in Tennessee reflected Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, which include modeling leadership, inspiring vision, challenging ineffective processes, encouraging others to act, and encouraging the hearts of their followers. Another study using the same instrument to measure the relationship between gender and leadership style in the Massachusetts high school principalship found no difference between female and male leadership behaviors, and both genders engaged in positive leadership behaviors (Lally, 2008). A 1997 qualitative study using the Principal Instructional Management Rating
Scale as the data collection instrument found that teachers felt that female high school principals were more adept at framing and communicating school goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, maintaining high visibility, and promoting professional development (Nogay & Beebe, 2008). The researchers concluded that “certain relationships exist between the gender of leaders and the perceived effectiveness of their leadership” (Nogay & Beebe, 2008, p. 598). Other studies have found that there is no significant difference in the leadership behaviors of women and men (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

However, Grogan and Shakeshaft’s (2011) exploration into the world of women in educational leadership cited several studies that indicated that women are more collaborative and more inclusive in their leadership styles. They contended that women focus on instructional leadership and are more likely “to introduce and support strong programs in staff development, to encourage innovation, and to experiment with instructional approaches” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 18). Studies have shown that teachers’ perceptions of effective leadership abilities encompass these same attributes of collaboration, inclusivity, and instructional leadership (Allen, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Litmanovitz (2011) conducted a series of interviews of women in educational leadership. The themes that emerged as a result of these interviews provide women who aspire to be high school principals with a glimpse into the gender gap in educational leadership. Litmanovitz concluded that there exists a lack of role models and there are leadership stereotypes for women who aspire to become educational leaders. Furthermore, she found that those women who did “make it” reflected on having a strong
relationship with a mentor who “encouraged them to and pushed them to pursue higher leadership positions” (Litmanovitz, 2011, p. 27). Additionally, those women who worked their way to the top echelons of educational leadership looked to other strong educational leaders as role models (Litmanovitz, 2011). Litmanovitz stressed that in order to provide more women with a pipeline to educational leadership positions, such as the high school principalship and beyond, more formal mentoring programs that target young, promising female teachers would be useful.

On the whole, women high school principals are a unique set of individuals, who, as studies have shown, bring a desired skill set to the realm of educational leadership at the high school level (Genge, 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Conversely, some studies have shown that there is little or no difference in leadership qualities of men and women (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Neither premise explains the underrepresentation of women as high school principals, since their leadership abilities represent generally accepted and positive definitions of leadership, regardless of gender (Allen, 2015; Bolton, 2011; Genge, 2000; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Ziegler & Ramage, 2012). Nevertheless, the voices of those who have served or are currently serving as female high school principals provide rich insight into the barriers that exist for this underrepresented set of individuals and add to the existing body of literature pertaining to this phenomenon.

**Barriers Experienced by Women High School Principals**

Whether one is using the glass ceiling or another, more current metaphor that expresses the barriers that women overcome to reach high levels of leadership, data have shown that women high school principals continue to be outnumbered by their male
counterparts (ACSA, 2015; Bitterman et al., 2013; Hammer & Rohr, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Numerous studies have discussed many of the barriers women high school principals experience (Baxter, 2009; Cook, 2007; Gupton, 2009; Hilliard, 2000; James, 2009; Kruse, 2012; Litmanovitz, 2011; Rhodes, 2001; Schnabel Kattula, 2011; T. H. Walker, 2013). Three barriers that have been cited by women high school principals in past studies include a concern for a work-life balance that includes caring for a family, the perceived glass ceiling that prevents women from attaining leadership positions beyond the elementary school principalship that ties to the societal expectations that women are more suited to the classroom than to the position of high school principal or superintendent, and the women themselves and their perceptions of their potential to be effective high school principals (Eckman, 2003, 2004; Gupton, 2009; Hilliard, 2000; Kruse, 2012; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; T. H. Walker, 2013).

The first barrier cited by women high school principals in past studies was a concern for work-life balance. Eckman’s 2003 study, which examined the similarities and differences in role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction for female and male high school principals, found that while men and women both reported the same level of role commitment and job satisfaction, a significant difference was found pertaining to female role conflict over household management as opposed to male role conflict, which centered on financial concerns. Eckman (2003) cited Napholz (1995), who explored the nature of work-family conflicts and found that women who committed to both work and significant relationships experienced much more role conflict than those women who chose either one or the other. The findings from Eckman’s 2003 study suggested that women wait until later in life to pursue high school principal positions due...
to the role conflict created by the demands of the job. Of her participants, “only 24% of the female high school principals had children at home, while 59% of the male high school principals had children at home” (Eckman, 2003, p. 382). A 2011 quantitative study explored the barriers experienced by high school principals in the Metropolitan Detroit area and found that the strongest barriers identified by the collected data included family/career conflict and long hours (Schnabel Kattula, 2011).

Other studies, both national and international, have also identified home and work balance as a barrier to women entering the ranks of the high school principalship (Eckman, 2004; Guendouzi, 2006; James, 2009; Lad, 1996; Richison, 2011). Another barrier that was identified by researchers was the lack of mentoring and networking programs designed to support those women who have attained high-level educational leadership positions including the high school principalship (Kruse, 2012; Martin, 2011; Mertz, 2006). Litmanovitz (2011) reiterated that there currently is a lack of role models for female administrators at the high school level and beyond, and she highlighted the importance of mentorship for women who aspire to leave the classroom for positions in administration. In a 2012 study of female high school principals in Oklahoma, the researcher found that existing female high school principals expressed a concern that there were not more mentoring and networking groups to help women progress as administrators (Kruse, 2012).

A second barrier pertains to the perceived glass ceiling that ties into societal expectations of women in the workforce. A 2000 descriptive study that discussed a variety of barriers for female high school principals in Georgia found that women high school principals perceive a variety of barriers that prevent women from entering the
ranks of the high school principalship (Hilliard, 2000). Among the most cited were the perception that women have to work harder to prove they are qualified to “handle” a high school, a lack of same-gender role models, and the time commitment of being a high school principal (Hilliard, 2000).

A third barrier that women encounter pertains to their self-perception. A 2006 study stated that “the pressure to conform to the norms of the job was overwhelming . . . and at times it seemed that the biggest roadblock to success was not necessarily the biases of other people, but their own fear” (Pecora, 2006, p. 163). In effect, women face barriers that complicate and at times hinder their ascension to the high school principalship from both external and internal sources.

In this era of educational change, barriers still exist on the path to the high school principalship, but as Eagly and Carli (2007) stated, the paths exist and some women do find them. In order to overcome the barriers that prevent many from finding the path to the top, some women have identified a number of support systems that have allowed them access to the “truly coveted” position of high school principal (Nogay & Beebe, 2008, p. 600).

**Support Systems Experienced by Women High School Principals**

According to Eagly and Carli (2007), “Paths to the top exist, and some women find them” (p. 14). It is important to note that there are many women who access the high school principalship despite the barriers listed in the literature. Even though data show that 70% of all high schools in the United States are led by men, they also highlight the fact that 30% of women have journeyed the path to the high school principalship successfully (ACSA, 2015; Bitterman et al., 2013; Riverside County Office of Education,
A discussion of females in the high school principalship, therefore, would not be complete without a discussion of support systems that prove to be important to the success of these high school principals. A review of the literature emphasized the need for and the importance of systems that allow women high school principals to pursue leadership positions and to act as engaged, visible leaders for their school communities (Eckman, 2004; Hansen, 2014; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; T. H. Walker, 2013).

Women cited a number of support systems that included mentorships, networking groups, and district-level support (Eckman, 2003; Gupton, 2009; Hansen, 2014; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Relationships with others, particularly other high school principals and superintendents, regardless of gender, were also cited as important support systems (Pecora, 2006). Gupton (2009) published a reflective perspective on a 1993 study that gathered data from 150 female leaders in education, and concluded that of the seven major categories of advice that women administrative leaders would give to aspiring women leaders, “develop and maintain strong support systems” was among the most frequent (p. 5). Among these support systems cited were networking groups that allowed women to not only receive support but also extend support to other women who serve as high school principals, therefore strengthening the bond of mentorship for both parties (Gupton, 2009).

Most recent studies have cited personal, family support as an invaluable support system in women’s ascent to and performance as high school principals (Hansen, 2014; James, 2009; Litmanovitz, 2011; Pecora, 2006; T. H. Walker, 2013). Hansen (2014) interviewed Utah female high school principals in her qualitative study that focused on support systems. Her findings indicated that the support systems that were most helpful
to her participants included the support received from spouses, family members, and friends, all of whom assisted these female principals in fulfilling the requirements of the time-consuming job (Hansen, 2014). Another study found that the tension experienced by women administrators when doing the work of both a high school principal and a mother is eased when spouses and/or family members are relied on to help with home responsibilities (Schnabel Kattula, 2011). As cited earlier, Eckman (2003) addressed this tension in citing Nahpolz’s 1995 study, which found that women who commit to both career and family, without choosing one or the other, experience more role conflict than women who do make a choice; however, studies done on support systems have indicated that this tension decreases when adequate familial or communal support systems are in place (Gupton, 2009; Kruse, 2012; Richison, 2011; Schnabel Kattula, 2011).

The literature emphasizes the need for support systems as a way to mitigate the effect barriers have on women’s ascension to the high school principalship. As high schools enter a new era of accountability measures that call for leadership that is marked by the ability to transform institutions rather than simply manage them, the women who have experienced the essential supports toward serving as a high school principal provide insight into how tensions inherent in being a female high school principal can be overcome in order to thrive in a career dominated by men. Using a theoretical framework through which to examine this experience lent itself to a unique discussion of tensions and how these affect the outcome of becoming a female high school principal.

Activity Theory

Activity theory reflects the theories and research of Russian psychologists L. S. Vygotsky, A. N. Leontiev, and A. R. Luria in the 1920s and 1930s (Engeström, 2000).
The first-generation model, adapted from the work of Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Engeström, 2000), known as the “mediational model” (Figure 4), illustrates impacts of social and systematic situations on human activities; this model was later introduced in the context of a hierarchical model of human activity, developed by Leontiev (1978, as cited in Engeström, 2000).

![Figure 4](image)

*Figure 4. Visual representation of first-generation mediational model. Adapted from “A Cultural-Historical Approach to Distributed Cognition,” by M. Cole and Y. Engeström, 1993, in G. Salmon (Ed.), *Distributed Cognitions: Psychological and Educational Considerations*, p. 5 (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press).*

This theoretical framework was later expanded by Yrjö Engeström (2000). Engeström’s model weaved social and cultural aspects into the model of human activity, suggesting a more complex system of interrelated processes between identified tensions, which ultimately impact the relationship between subject and outcome (see Figure 1, repeated here for ease of reference). These social tensions are categorized as instruments (also known as tools or artifacts), rules, community, or division of labor (Engeström et al., 1999; University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009).

Based on the definition of activity as a “specific form of the societal existence of humans consisting of purposeful changing of natural and social reality,” activity theory lends itself to the analysis of any human activity where a subject reaches a goal or outcome by means of interacting with his or her environment in specific ways (Engeström et al., 1999, p. 39). The activity model is based on the dynamic relationship between a subject and an outcome, where tensions aid or impede that process and one another, thus forming an activity system, and instruments, also known as artifacts or tools, allow a subject to communicate and interact with his or her environment; these can include, but are not limited to, strategic plans, books, Internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics (Engeström, 2000; University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009). Rules act as a mediating component between subject and community, and these rules determine how the subject is to work within his or her community and rely on cultural and societal expectations and roles in order to work within the social structure (Engeström, 2000; University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009).
Community refers to the social context and systems in which the subject functions as a part of a whole (University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009). The community is governed by rules that define the subject’s role within the communal context (Engeström et al., 1999; University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009). Division of labor refers to the hierarchical structure of activity in an environment; it also refers to the roles individuals execute within an organization (Engeström et al., 1999; University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009). This system culminates in a complex web of tensions and supports by which social interactions can be analyzed.

Activity theory can be applied to any number of human processes that involve interactions with the environment, either social or physical or both, that affect a desired outcome (Bourke et al., 2013; Engeström, 2000; Engeström et al., 1999). It is a descriptive theory, not a predictive theory, and as such, it is useful when used to undertake qualitative research (Hashim & Jones, 2007; University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009). As a theoretical framework, activity theory has been used extensively in educational studies that analyze educational systems, social systems, and work systems (Bourke et al., 2013; Engeström, 2000; Hashim & Jones, 2007; Heo & Lee, 2013; Lee & Sparks, 2014; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). Bourke et al. (2013) used activity theory to evaluate a professional development and learning initiative in New Zealand. In this study, activity theory provided the basis by which researchers could examine and evaluate narrative
assessments and the process by which teachers were provided with the professional
development necessary to support this initiative in their classrooms (Bourke et al., 2013).

Heo and Lee (2013) provided an analysis of adult blogs and social networks
through the activity theory framework and described activity theory as “a psychological
and multidisciplinary framework useful for study human practice by interlinking the
individual and social levels” (p. 135). In this study, Heo and Lee categorized each
domain of activity theory to include the subject (adult web users), tools (web-based
spaces), object (an implied objective toward which web users are motivated), and
outcome (the “final state achieved” [pp. 137-138]). This study emphasized the
interaction between the subject and tools to achieve the object, in this study’s case a blog
or social networking website, and how this interaction affected the outcome, which often
pertained to the deeper sense of learning experienced by the subject (Heo & Lee, 2013).

Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2008) described how activity theory can be
used as a guide when researching educational technology. As a descriptive theory too,
they contended that activity theory is useful when examining and describing the
contradictions, often termed as tensions, that present themselves in “any study of
information and communication technologies in educational contexts” (Murphy &
Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008, p. 442). In quoting Engeström (1993), the authors
described activity theory as “the best kept secret in academia” (Murphy & Rodriguez-
Manzanares, 2008, p. 442). As a lens through which to view human activities, it provides
a complex and in-depth structure by which to analyze interactions within environments
that are marked by contradictions or tensions produced either by rules, tools, community,
or division or labor.
Lee and Sparks’s (2014) ethnographic study centered in Nepal examined telecenters’ sustainability in the small village of Sankhu. This study used activity theory as a framework to examine and describe how the “tensions within the system impact the activity of the subject, the object and the outcome” (Lee & Sparks, 2014, p. 47). This study highlighted the appropriateness of activity theory as a framework for this qualitative study, as it is a descriptive, not predictive, theory (Lee & Sparks, 2014). In describing the tensions in the Nepali community in regard to telecenter use, the researchers used activity theory to describe the major and minor tensions and found that some tensions pertained to tools and division of labor, others to community, and still others to rules that affected telecenter sustainability and use within the village (Lee & Sparks, 2014). This study, therefore, provides a basis by which human interaction with its environment can be explored and described using activity theory as a viable theoretical lens.

Considering the current era of educational reform, the new expectations for high school principals, and the underrepresentation of women as high school principals in particular, activity theory is a lens through which the dynamics of gender can be analyzed when examining the high school principalship as a societal role and function. The activity that was examined in this study through this theoretical framework was attaining the role of and serving as a California female high school principal in this current era of educational reform.

The Gap in the Literature

A review of the literature pertaining to female high school principals indicated that the underrepresentation of women as high school principals is well-documented
In addition, barriers experienced by women high school principals are unique to their gender, namely, the work-home balance that creates professional and often personal tensions (Eckman, 2003, 2004; Gupton, 2009; Hansen, 2014; Hilliard, 2000; James, 2009; Martin, 2011; T. H. Walker, 2013). There are a number of studies that have examined the experiences of female leaders in general and female high school principals specifically through a feminist lens (Cuadrado et al., 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Kropiewnicki & Shapiro, 2001; Mertz, 2006; Pecora, 2006; Skinner, 2009). However, examining this experience through the lens of activity theory has not been addressed in any literature pertaining to female high school principals. Activity theory lends itself to a discussion of barriers and support systems as its domains include an investigation of tensions, rules, and community as factors in the relationship between subject and object (Hashim & Jones, 2007; University of Helsinki, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, 2009). Additionally, limited research has been documented regarding the current era of accountability and how that is experienced by women high school principals. Therefore, a gap in the literature exists in terms of an activity-theory-based exploration of the lived experiences of women high school principals leading in this time of educational reform. Activity theory provides a framework for understanding the tensions or barriers within an activity system in a systematic way, thus inviting research to also investigate the support systems for some of those barriers. As a framework, activity theory allowed for the exploration of how the rules of society, the educational community, and the division of labor within the school
system interact to provide the female high school principal with a unique and challenging professional journey.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the pertinent literature that focused on the variables that were explored in this study. After providing a foundational history of women in the workforce and leadership roles, the researcher focused on women in educational leadership. The literature shows that while the “glass ceiling” may not be as pronounced as in previous decades, women still face barriers when aspiring to top-level leadership roles. Education is no exception. Historically, women have fulfilled the nurturing teacher archetype and have served as principals in elementary and middle schools either more than or equitably with their male counterparts. While women constitute the majority of teachers at elementary and middle schools and approximately half of all high school teachers, they only represent about 30% of all high school principals.

As public high schools change, so does the role of the high school principal. As a result, today’s high school principal is responsible for a number of initiatives that define this era of educational reform. Among these are the ESSA of 2015, CCSS, college and career readiness initiatives, the LCFF and LCAP, and reforms in discipline procedures, namely PBIS and restorative justice. The literature revealed that high school principals today face job duties that differ from those of decades past and that high school principals are responsible for a changing set of expectations. They are expected to serve not only as leaders in terms of staffing, discipline, community, and parent relations but also as instructional agents of change.
For women, the high school landscape is as complicated as it is for men; however, women high school principals also have to face barriers that studies have shown are unique to their gender. The literature highlighted the fact that women experience work-life balance barriers that men may not experience as poignantly. Other barriers include caring for children, societal expectations for high school principals, and at times a personal fear of leading organizations in positions historically reserved for men. Support systems also exist, however, and these include supportive mentors, family members, and role models.

Finally, a review of activity theory was provided to describe how this theory was applied to the current study. Considering the current era of educational reform and the new expectations for high school principals, this theory lent itself to a study of those female high school principals who have overcome barriers and embraced support systems in their quest for the high school principalship.

This review of the literature revealed that a gap in the literature exists when examining female high school principals through the lens of activity theory in this current era of educational reform. The research questions were created based on how this gap in the research could be explored using a theoretical framework to examine female high school principals in a unique time of change.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter introduces and describes the methodology that was used to address the research questions outlined in Chapter I. The purpose statement and research questions are restated as part of Chapter III, and a description of the research design follows. Additionally, this chapter consists of a description of the population as well as an explanation of the sample selection process. A detailed discussion pertaining to instrumentation follows that touches on reliability, validity, and the relevance of the field test that was performed as a precursor to the actual study. Following the discussion on instrumentation, this chapter explains the data collection process as well as the process by which the data were scored and analyzed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study’s limitations and an overall summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female high school principals experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California.

Research Questions

Central Question

How do female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California describe the barriers and supports they experienced,
through the lens of activity theory, while attaining their current position and during the
newest era of educational reform?

**Research Subquestions**

1. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California
   public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current
   position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?

2. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female
   California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining
   their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?

3. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California
   public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in
   Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of
   educational reform?

4. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female
   California public high school principals describe they experience in their current
   position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest
   era of educational reform?

**Research Design**

The qualitative methodology chosen for this study was a phenomenological study
exploring the lived experiences of women high school principals in Riverside, Tulare,
Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. This methodology was appropriate
for the purpose of this study, as it sought to describe the essence of the experience of the
female high school principal. The insight that was gained from this study will assist other
women who aspire to be high school principals in the geographical area studied, although the results can be generalized to California. Patton (2015) noted that phenomenological studies “focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (p. 104). Additionally, Patton noted that the phenomenon studied can be a culture. Women in administration seem to create a culture of support for each other, as suggested by organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Women’s Leadership Network that exists in Riverside County, California (ACSA, 2015).

Of the 54 comprehensive public high schools in Riverside County alone, only 16, or 27%, are led by women, as noted in the California Public School Directory for Riverside (Riverside County Office of Education, 2015). A recent U.S. Department of Education study reported that nationally, only 30.1% of public high schools are led by women, while 69.9% are led by men (Bitterman et al., 2013). This, in turn, leads to what Patton (2015) highlighted as a defining characteristic of a phenomenological study, that is, the “essence” of a shared experience (p. 116). In this phenomenological study, the essence of being a woman high school principal was of interest due to the fact that women high school principals are vastly outnumbered by men, and yet there are some women who attain this position and who currently serve as principals. Researching the experience of the woman high school principal in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties, therefore, required a study that explored what women high school principals have lived and learned during their tenure in a male-dominated career path. A qualitative phenomenological methodology was the most appropriate framework with which to undertake this study.
For the purposes of this study, the researcher conducted a series of face-to-face semistructured interviews that addressed different aspects of the research questions as viewed through the lens of activity theory. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A. After the interviews were concluded, the researcher analyzed the transcription of the interviews and created codes for emergent themes. These codes, therefore, generated the data that addressed the research problem.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) defined a population as “a group of . . . individuals . . . that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). Thus, a population can be any size and come from any particular area. The population for this study consisted of high school principals who served in California. The population comprised those principals who led at comprehensive high schools and excluded those from continuation, charter, and private schools. According to the California Department of Education (2016a), 1,301 schools met that criterion. Therefore, the population was the high school principals who served those 1,301 schools at the time of the study.

Target Population

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings of a survey are meant to be generalized, and it is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The target population for this study was women high school principals who led comprehensive high schools in
Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The results of this study can be generalized to all women high school principals in the comprehensive high school setting throughout the state of California.

Sample

The researcher for this study used a purposeful sampling method to gather data. Patton (2015) described purposeful sampling as a strategic selection of “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (p. 215).

In this case, the researcher used a purposive sampling strategy to study women high school principals in a specific geographical region, namely Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties. These participants were selected based on gender, geographical location, and career criteria. The small sample for this study encompassed those women who served as high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The sample size for this homogeneous study was small due to the fact that the research problem pertained specifically to the small percentage of female high school principals in the comprehensive high school setting. The population included all high school principals who led the 1,301 public high schools in California at the time of the study (California Department of Education, 2016a). The target population included all female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The original sample consisted of the 16 female high school principals in Riverside County, California (Riverside County Office of Education, 2015).
Patton (2015) contended that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample depends on what you want to know” (p. 311). For the purpose of this study, the researcher sought to describe the lived experiences of female high school principals in order to provide useful insight to other females in secondary education who might aspire to lead a high school. The small sample size for this study reflects the broader issue that there are simply not many female high school principals. The voices of those who have attained this position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in a male-dominated field are relatively few but were vital to the larger purpose of the study. Patton contended that purposeful sampling should not be judged on the size of the sample but rather on the purpose and rationale of the study. Other qualitative researchers have identified small sample sizes as necessary when engaging in time-consuming interactions with participants, such as lengthy interviews (Patten, 2012). Therefore, the small sample size for this study not only underscored the problem outlined in Chapter I and supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter II but also provided the researcher with an opportunity to study each participant’s lived experience thoroughly.

**Sample Selection Process**

The sample for this study was women high school principals at comprehensive public high schools in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The researcher began the study by using a directory of all Riverside schools to identify female high school principals in this county alone. This directory was obtained through the Riverside County Office of Education. This directory is organized by county departments for the county department of education, and then it is organized by district and by school. The districts represented encompassed all of Riverside County.
Within each district, a section of the directory listed all administrators for each school—elementary, middle, and high schools. The researcher analyzed this document as a source of data to identify those comprehensive, noncontinuation, noncharter high schools that had female high school principals. The researcher used this document to collect the purposeful sample for this study. Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study because the participants, by nature of their gender and job position, provided the information required to answer the research questions (Patton, 2015). Due to the small number of participants in Riverside County, the researcher enlarged the scope of the study to include additional counties of Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino. The researcher used a purposive sampling strategy to study women high school principals in the specific geographical region of Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. These participants were selected based on gender, geographical location, and career criteria. The process included the following steps:

1. identify female high school principals from the Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties;

2. contact Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino County female high school principals to secure participation in the study (Appendix B);

3. provide confidentiality assurances and informed consent documents (Appendix C) to the participants; and

4. schedule and conduct the interviews.
Instrumentation

Instruments

The most complex and important instrument in this research study was the researcher herself, who determined processes and executed the development of instruments and the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher ensured that steps were taken to address and reduce the effect of researcher bias so as to produce a reliable study.

The secondary data collection instrument used to gather data from research participants was a list of questions developed as a phenomenological interview. These questions were designed in May 2016 by the researcher to provide a more in-depth discussion of each broad research question. The questions addressed each of the domains of the activity theory universe as well as the domains of barriers and supports. Therefore, qualitative data sets were gathered through the use of in-depth, semistructured interviews. A protocol of 16 interview questions, including background and follow-up questions, was written in alignment with the research questions and the activity theory domains.

Patton (2015) indicated that the sequence of interview questions beginning with experiential or contextual questions regarding the subjects’ activity in the area being researched produces a desirable introduction to the more probing questions that are designed to pertain to the study’s research questions. The researcher used the variables in the research questions and purpose statement to develop the series of questions that focused on the research topic. Questions ranged from demographic questions to open-ended questions designed to elicit honest responses that would provide the researcher with a clear picture of the lived experience of each participant. The researcher ensured
all interview questions were meaningful to the respondents based on the respondents’ sampling profile, correlated each interview question to the research questions, avoided the use of biased or leading language, and applied standard language rules (Fink, 2009).

The interviews were conducted in September of 2016 at locations selected by the participants, which included participants’ school sites, district offices, and off-campus locations preferred by the participants. The researcher used the Rev Transcription program to record the interviews, which were then remotely transcribed by Rev Transcription and returned to the researcher electronically. Additionally, the researcher electronically sent the transcription of the interviews to each participant to check for accuracy in meaning and content. Once the transcription was approved by each participant, the researcher analyzed each interview response for emergent themes.

Reliability

While one of the hallmarks of the research process lies in the expectations of its objectivity, the issue of reliability and validity must be addressed. In this study, as is true of all qualitative research, the researcher was the most complex and pertinent data collection instrument that analyzed the data that, in turn, informed the study itself. The researcher in this study approached the topic based on her experience and interest in the experiences of women high school principals. The researcher conducted a field test prior to contacting participants; triangulated data to increase credibility by gathering documents as artifacts to supplement the data from the interview portion of the study; and developed an audit trail that ensured accurate documentation of interviews and artifacts, such as funding plans that establish job priorities in this new era of educational reform, job descriptions and postings for high school principals, and agendas and minutes from
support structures such as the ACSA Women’s Leadership Network. Additionally, the researcher worked collaboratively with another researcher to design the study and provide peer review and debriefing, and engaged external auditors to examine the study and review the coding process, which resulted in thick, detailed descriptive data (Brantlinger, Jiminez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005).

Intercoder reliability indicates that at least 10% of the data will result in 80% or higher accuracy when double-coded by a separate researcher (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2010). Intercoder reliability addressed and solidified the validity of the analysis of the collected data. In order to ensure that the data were analyzed in a manner that reflected accurate results, the process of intercoder reliability was conducted in the following sequence:

- **Step 1:** Primary researcher selected 10% of the collected data.
- **Step 2:** Primary researcher coded 100% of the collected data using the NVivo program.
- **Step 3:** Primary researcher gave the themes developed in the coding process to second researcher/coder.
- **Step 4:** Secondary researcher/coder scanned the data (before coding) to validate the themes already identified by the main researcher. If more or fewer themes were identified by the second coder, a discussion was necessary to consider coding themes.
- **Step 5:** Secondary researcher/coder then coded the information using themes developed.
• Step 6: After coding data, secondary researcher/coder gave coded information back to primary researcher to compare primary researcher and secondary researcher/coder data frequencies (number of references) for each theme (Lombard et al., 2010).

Besides keeping scrupulous records of data collection, which included a verbatim transcription of each interview session, a procedure known as member checking was utilized in an attempt to limit researcher bias and self-reporting errors, where each participant of this study was asked to check the interview transcription for accuracy in content and meaning (Creswell, 2002). Furthermore, the researcher used a peer researcher, known as an external audit (Creswell, 2002), to conduct a review of the study’s methodology and coding process, gaining feedback on strengths and weaknesses. An external audit process was conducted throughout and at the conclusion of the study.

Field Test

The interview protocol, developed by the researcher, was designed to directly correlate to the research questions of this study. The protocol was field tested with an informed and experienced test group of voluntary participants, composed of retired female high school principals, during the summer of 2016. The field test was conducted to ensure accuracy of the correlation between interview questions, responses, and research questions. Pilot interviews were also recorded using the Rev Transcription program. Following the field test, feedback was solicited from each field-test participant on the researcher’s methods for interview, interview questions, length of interview, and recording process, and changes were made based on that feedback.
Validity

Prior to the field test being conducted, an external audit of the research questions was conducted to strengthen the validity of the interview questions and the data collection process. This external audit process addressed the issue of interviewer bias and validity of interviewing skills through expert feedback (Creswell, 2002). This process preceded the data collection process, and interview questions were revised and resubmitted to limit leading language and eliminate the potential for biased question presentation. The researcher applied intercoder reliability, a process where a peer researcher codes a portion of the data until a common conclusion is reached (Lombard et al., 2010; Tinsley & Weiss, 2000). Intercoder reliability indicates that at least 10% of the data results in 80% accuracy when double-coded by a separate researcher (Lombard et al., 2010).

To strengthen internal and external validity of this study, data for this study were aligned to the concepts of activity theory, which was used as the theoretical framework through which to view the barriers and support systems that had been experienced by female high school principals. Engeström et al.’s (1999) theoretical approach of activity theory allows researchers to organize qualitative data sets of complex human interactions, appropriate for social constructs such as interactions within educational organizations. Activity theory is a descriptive theoretical approach, which analyzes factors impacting a person (subject) in achieving a particular outcome in a societal structure by categorizing such factors into one of the following four categories: instruments (also known as tools or artifacts), rules, community, and division of labor (see Figure 1, repeated here for ease of
reference); this framework has been identified as most appropriate for fields of inquiry such as education (Engeström et al., 1999).

*Figure 1. Visual representation of Engeström’s activity theory framework. Adapted from* Perspectives on Activity Theory, *by Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, and R.-L. Punamäki-Gitai, 1999, p. 31 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press).*

For the purposes of this study, instruments included funding plans, job descriptions, and agendas for groups that give evidence of external support systems specifically designed for women in educational leadership. The researcher also used existing literature on activity theory to analyze the rules, community, and division of labor that serve as barriers or support systems for female high school principals. Ultimately, the study used activity theory as a valid theoretical framework through which to analyze the experiences of women who had achieved the desired outcome of leading comprehensive high schools despite existing barriers. Activity theory has been used to analyze a variety of social settings (Bourke et al., 2013) and to describe the processes by which subjects achieve outcomes (Engeström et al., 1999). Further, Bourke et al. (2013) described activity theory as a means by which researchers can evaluate professional learning in the use of narrative assessment. This theory, therefore, provided a scholarly and valid theoretical framework for this study, as the study’s objective was to describe
the processes that impede or assist female high school principals in this era of educational reform.

In Chapter II, the literature reviewed indicated that the rich history of women in education has its foundation in women who wanted education to be more than a reiteration of women’s role in society (Lewis, 2009; Madigan, 2009; Weiler, 2009). In addition, studies have found that women experience barriers in the form of role conflict, life and work balance, and gender expectations when attaining positions in educational leadership (Eckman, 2003; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Pecora, 2006; T. H. Walker, 2013). Overall, existing data show that while women are strongly represented in leadership roles at the elementary level and equitably represented at the middle school level, they only represent a minority of high school principals (Bitterman et al., 2013; Martin, 2011; Riverside County Office of Education, 2015). After conducting a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to female high school principals, the researcher developed an overarching research question and four research subquestions that provided the foundation for the phenomenological interview questions developed for this study. Because the purpose statement and research questions were supported by an in-depth review of the literature, the interview questions were aligned to the purpose statement and research questions and addressed the research problem as contextualized by the literature review in Chapter II. This study, therefore, focused on the lived experiences of female high school principals, which required that a comprehensive set of oral interview questions be designed to address the study’s purpose.

A field test was conducted to ensure accuracy of the correlation between interview questions, responses, and research questions. This field test was conducted
with retired female high school principals. Following the field-test process, the researcher contacted the study participants via e-mail to set up initial interview appointments. A follow-up phone call was made the week and the day prior to each interview to ensure that the participants were willing to engage in the face-to-face interviews for the study.

**Data Collection**

A request for approval to conduct this study was submitted to the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) for approval prior to data collection. No data were collected for this study until approval was received from the BUIRB.

Data were collected from women high school principals who were employed in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California at the time of the study. All participants were informed through e-mail of the study’s purpose and research questions prior to the interviews. Confidentiality assurance and consent forms were also e-mailed to the participants 2 weeks prior to the interviews, which included requests for permission to interview participants and to gather documents that would triangulate the data garnered from the interviews. Each participant’s identity was protected by using a pseudonym rather than the participant’s actual name. Signed consent forms, data, and research records were stored in locked cabinets at the researcher’s residence and were shredded and disposed of following the defense of the study.

Meetings were confirmed through each principal’s office manager in the week prior to the interview. Face-to-face or phone interviews were conducted during the month of September 2016 at locations and times of the participants’ choosing. Interviews were recorded using the Rev Transcription iPad application and subsequently sent to the
Rev Processing Center for transcription. The Rev Transcription service e-mailed the researcher the completed transcription, and the researcher submitted the transcribed interview to each participant so as to ensure that the transcribed interview reflected the participant’s honest and clear responses as intended during the interview itself. Once the interview transcription was reviewed by the participant, the researcher analyzed the data using NVivo research and coding software for themes that correlated to the research questions.

After the interview process, the researcher collected documents such as funding plans, job descriptions and postings, and agendas from support system meetings designed as networking structures for women in educational leadership as archival data to further delineate emergent codes that responded to the research questions presented. The researcher asked the participants for permission to access documents that pertained to the study as outlined in the previously e-mailed consent form. The artifacts were also analyzed using the NVivo research and coding software. Archival data provided necessary triangulation to support the study’s validity.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis “examines a story, a case study, a set of interviews, or a collection of field notes” to interpret meaning and draw conclusions (Patton, 2015, p. 570). The primary focus of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of female leaders in education. In this study, data were collected through in-depth interviews and archived artifacts, which were analyzed for the purpose of drawing conclusions based on the research questions of this study.
The interview with each participant was recorded using the Rev Transcription IOS application. After each interview, the researcher submitted the recording to the Rev Transcription service and waited for the documented interview. Once the transcription was complete and was reviewed by the participants for accuracy, the data analysis process began.

Coding is the process of synthesizing data for themes, ideas, and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so data can be counted to determine high-frequency themes (Patton, 2015). Coding of data was completed for each interview transcription and analyzed for frequency of themes using NVivo coding software. Although NVivo assisted the researcher in organizing and sorting themes (Patton, 2015), the researcher was responsible for actively reading the transcription, analyzing the data, and identifying emergent themes. NVivo was the vehicle by which the researcher stored the data that were gathered. The data collected for this study were coded for emergent themes (Patton, 2015) that described the lived experiences of women high school principals. Coded transcriptions and emergent themes were peer reviewed for accuracy of coding analysis. Each of the interview questions correlated with the broader research questions. The codes that emerged after the interviews were analyzed correlated to the study’s research questions. As codes emerged for each research question, this qualitative analysis resulted in the study’s findings (Patton, 2015). These findings are discussed in detail in Chapter IV of this study.

Activity theory was used as the theoretical framework through which the data were analyzed. The researcher discusses the emergent themes in terms of the four categories that mirror the ideals of activity theory: instruments (also known as tools or
artifacts), rules, community, and division of labor. These ideals created either barriers or support systems with which the subjects (female high school principals) interacted to obtain the outcome of becoming high school principals. As a theory, this lens provided a valid and reliable source by which to analyze data gathered in a study of a phenomenon. The collected data were analyzed to align with activity theory’s domains through which the phenomenon of female high school principals can be described. Ultimately, the researcher describes the female high school principals’ lived experiences using activity theory as a manner in which to explain the impact of barriers and support systems on the activity of becoming a female high school principal in a male-dominated field.

**Limitations**

This study’s limitations include the small sample size and limited geographical locations. Due to time constraints, the relative scarcity of female high school principals, and the nature of the study, the sample size was small. In-depth and time-consuming interviews took place with participants, which limited the size of the sample. In addition, throughout the state of California, approximately 30% of all high school principals are women (Bitterman et al., 2013). Riverside County is not an exception. Only 29.6% of all comprehensive high school principals are women in this region (Riverside County Office of Education, 2015). This represents a small number, which in part defines the problem studied and is to be expected when choosing a purposeful sample based on gender, geographical location, and career criteria. Other limitations relate to interviewer bias. As a recently hired female high school principal, the interviewer was aware of the inherent bias that existed with the topic. To mitigate bias, the researcher conducted a field test prior to the study, worked collaboratively with a peer researcher to review
transcriptions, and engaged external auditors to examine the interview questions as well as the transcriptions of the interviews. In addition, valid data depended on honest answers from those interviewed, and limitations related to forthright and honest answers to interview questions were addressed by assuring participants through a confidentiality agreement signed by both the researcher and the participant prior to each interview. A final limitation is the inherent bias of the researcher, who currently serves as a female high school principal and selected this topic based on personal interest and observations. Moreover, the study design involved self-reported data and self-coding, which introduced the potential for researcher bias. A process was instituted to mitigate these limitations.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology that was used to conduct this study. After a review of the purpose statement and a restatement of the research questions, the qualitative research design was described as an appropriate method to explore the lived experiences of women high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The study population consisted of high school principals who served in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The population comprised those principals who led at comprehensive high schools and excluded those from continuation, charter, and private schools. The population for this study was generalized to the state of California. The target population was female high school principals in California, and originally, the purposeful sample was taken from Riverside County, California, where 16 of the 54 high schools were led by women at the time of the study (Riverside County Office of Education, 2015).
However, due to the limited number of participants in Riverside County, the researcher expanded the scope of the study to include Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties.

The chapter also included a detailed discussion of the instrumentation that was used to gather data. The researcher designed a list of interview questions to present to the participants. After obtaining approval from participants and protecting the confidentiality of the research process through formal consent forms, the researcher conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews at the locations of the participants’ choosing. A recording of the interviews was sent to the Rev Transcription Center, and the researcher subsequently received a documented transcription of each interview. Interviews were coded with the NVivo coding software to find emergent themes that pertained to each research question. To ensure reliability and validity of the data gathered, documents were collected from school sites that triangulated the data. In order to further ensure reliability and validity of the data, the researcher worked collaboratively with another researcher to design the study and provide peer debriefing and engaged in reviews with external auditors to examine the study, which resulted in the study’s findings.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female high school principals experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. Chapter IV of this study reviews the purpose and research questions, methodology, and population/sample and concludes with a presentation of the data.

Purpose Statement

As a phenomenological study, this research study sought to examine lived experiences as relayed by female high school principals in their own words. Although women are strongly represented as teachers at all levels of public education, data show that women represent only a minority of high school principals (Bitterman et al., 2013). Despite statistics such as these, women continue to enroll in and graduate from administrative and doctoral programs in greater numbers than men (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). While some studies have shown women to differ from men in some of their approaches to leadership, others have shown that there is virtually no difference in the way women and men lead organizations (Buckner, 2011; Eckman, 2004; Snedden, 2013). Given the great number of women who are in education as teachers, the large number of women who have enrolled and graduated from graduate-level programs geared toward administration, the inconsistent findings relating to gender-based leadership styles, and the persistently low percentage of women high school principals, the researcher desired to expand the existing body of literature on women high school principals by examining, through the theoretical framework of activity theory, the
barriers and support systems that exist while attaining and serving in the position of high school principal as described by the women themselves.

**Research Questions**

**Central Question**

How do female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California describe the barriers and support systems they experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining their current position and during the newest era of educational reform?

**Research Subquestions**

1. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?

2. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?

3. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?

4. As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?
Methodology

The qualitative methodology chosen for this study was a phenomenological study exploring the lived experiences of women high school principals in California. This methodology was appropriate for the purpose of this study, as it sought to describe the essence of the experience of the female high school principal. For the purposes of this study, the researcher met with female high school principals and conducted a series of semistructured, face-to-face and phone interviews that addressed different aspects of the research questions as viewed through the lens of activity theory. These interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Rev application and transcription service. The interview protocol is found in Appendix A. Following the interviews, the researcher used the NVivo coding software to categorize the transcribed interview responses into themes, or codes, which, in turn, resulted in data that addressed each research question.

Population/Sample

The population for this study consisted of high school principals who served in California. This population excluded principals of continuation, charter, and private schools. The target population of a study is the entire set of individuals chosen about which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings of a study are meant to be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The target population for this study was women high school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Tulare, and Placer Counties in California. The results of the study can be generalized to all women high school principals in California.

The researcher used a purposeful sampling method to gather data for this homogeneous study by strategically selecting cases to study that met the selection
criteria. In this case, the criteria included gender, career, and geographic location. The sample originally consisted of the 16 high school principals in Riverside County, California. However, once the researcher began the fieldwork, she was unable to collect the full sample from Riverside County alone. The researcher consequently expanded the scope to include Tulare County, Placer County, and San Bernardino County. A total of 13 female principals participated in the study.

**Presentation of the Data**

The central research question asked, “How do female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California describe the barriers and supports they experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining their current position and during the newest era of educational reform?” The data were organized to reflect codes that emerged in response to the four research subquestions and according to the domains of activity theory, which included the role of community, division of labor, instruments, and rules. For Research Subquestions 3 and 4, an additional thread of coding emerged as respondents described their experience of navigating change in this time of educational reform.

Activity theory was used as the lens through which to view female high school principals’ lived experiences. The tensions created by activity theory domains interacting with one another as well as the subjects resulted in a complex relationship between the subjects and their environments, both social and professional. A figure below the presentation of data for each research subquestion illustrates the interaction of the subjects with the domains of activity theory and how these tensions emerged and related
to one another in the participants’ quest to not only attain the high school principalship but also to serve in this position during a time of organizational change.

**Research Subquestion 1**

*As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?*

**Barriers related to community.** In activity theory, the community with which the subject interacts can consist of people and groups who shape the activity and affect the outcome for the subject. The code that emerged with the most frequency in responses regarding barriers related to community was that there is an intangible, unspoken community that often excludes females (see Table 1 and Figure 5). Several participants expressed that they perceived a barrier in terms of a “good ol’ boys” network from which they felt excluded when it came to interviewing for positions. One participant, Principal 12, stated that she felt that males were “hired for their potential while females are hired for their achievements.” While none of the participants could articulate obvious and visible barriers that were created by this community, the code emerged as many of the participants referred to this club as an understood barrier, a given that did not have the explicit structure of other community barriers. The role of the community often presented barriers for the participants as they attained their position of high school principal, as they felt that they were not privy to meaningful connections that might be made while this networking group was meeting informally.
Table 1

**Codes for Barriers Related to Community While Attaining the Position of High School Principal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An unspoken male-dominated culture that excludes females—“good ol’ boys” network</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of support from other women</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lack of structured mentoring programs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. A visual representation of identified community barriers while attaining a position as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.*

The professional community often lacked professional female mentors, and in three instances, participants felt that other women were not supportive. One participant, Principal 7, stated the following: “What I felt coming into this position was that females were the ones that were my toughest critics.” Another participant, Principal 1, who was hired as the second female high school principal in her district, stated, “I think people looked at it like, ‘How are they going to interact with each other as women?’ . . . We’ve had situations where women leaders don’t always get along. I think people were waiting for that.”
Another common theme was the lack of guidance in attaining the position and the necessity for the participants to take it upon themselves to reach out to other principals for guidance. This lack of structured mentoring programs required these participants to make their own connections, and at times this made them feel isolated from the greater network of serving principals.

**Barriers related to the division of labor.** When discussing barriers, themes pertaining to the division of labor occurred with far more frequency than other domains in activity theory. For the purposes of this study, the division of labor was correlated with comments pertaining to perceived gender roles and how these affected the subjects’ attaining the object, the high school principalship. All 13 participants cited the division of labor as a barrier to attaining the position. The theme that emerged most frequently was that statistically, there are simply more men hired as high school principals than women (see Table 2 and Figure 6). Many participants noted that comments were made by peers pertaining to their ability to care for their children and serve the long hours required of a high school principal. Several participants noted that they felt that they needed to respond to concerns that they did not see their male counterparts addressing, namely what they would “do” with their children as they led a high school. As stated by Principal 8, “When people know you’re a mom . . . the social barrier for that is already the ridiculous debate between working mom versus stay-at-home mom.”

Several participants noted that they needed to become more “masculine” in their approach to issues so as not to be seen as “too emotional.” In terms of gender roles, Principal 7 stated, “I think in a way I had to become more masculine in my appearance or
Table 2

Codes for Barriers Related to Division of Labor While Attaining the Position of High School Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The majority of high school principals are male</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The perception that a female high school principal would not be able to balance work and home</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The perception that the high school principalship is masculine in nature</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The implied “good ol’ boys” club</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The novelty of a female high school principal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different communication expectations for women and men</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are hired for potential and women for accomplishments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subject: Women
Outcome: Women attaining high school principalship

Division of Labor:
- The majority of high school principals are male
- The perception that a female high school principal would not be able to balance work and home
- The perception that the high school principalship is masculine in nature
- The implied “good ol’ boys” club
- The novelty of a female high school principal
- Different communication expectations for women and men
- Men are hired for potential and women for accomplishments

Figure 6. A visual representation of identified division-of-labor barriers while attaining a position as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.
maybe just play their game.” Additionally, when discussing this theme, two participants, Principal 6 and Principal 8, cited athletics as a potential barrier relating to the division of labor because these two participants, while exhibiting experience and strength in the areas of curriculum and instruction, had not been coaches. It was noted by these participants that those with a coaching background were often seen as more valuable candidates than those who lacked this experience. A number of participants acknowledged that there still existed a “good ol’ boys” club from which they were excluded, perhaps not consciously but obviously. When discussing this theme, participants referred to social gatherings where connections were made between men but to which they were not invited or included. They defined this as a barrier related to gender roles and the continued division of women and men based on gender role perception.

**Barriers related to instruments.** In the 13 interviews, the codes for barriers relating to instruments appeared with relatively low frequency, resulting in only eight total occurrences. Some participants felt that no instruments were barriers to their attainment of their position (see Table 3 and Figure 7). Others felt that media coverage and statistics were major barriers to their attainment of the principalship because these instruments emphasized the dominance of males in this field and prevented them from believing that they could become high school principals. The theme pertaining to new accountability formulas and funding plans with which the participants were not familiar at this stage in their careers was seen as a barrier as well.
Table 3

*Codes for Barriers Related to Instruments While Attaining the Position of High School Principal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No instruments presented barriers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage and statistics of predominantly males in the position</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New accountability formulas and funding plans</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7*. A visual representation of identified instruments as barriers while attaining a position as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

**Barriers related to rules.** Rules can be described as codes, practices, and even customs that the subjects follow while performing the activity that leads to the object, in this case, the attainment of the position of high school principal. Barriers related to rules while attaining their position were mentioned by participants in 10 instances. Principal 9 was asked to go through four rounds of interviews instead of two and was coached on what to wear (a suit) to the interviews. Two other participants spoke of the bias that arose when they felt the need to explain during the interview process that they would be able to balance home and work responsibilities properly (see Table 4). Other participants felt that practices such as not having more than one female principal in the district or more than one female assistant principal on an administrative team affected their chances of being hired. Two participants mentioned that they felt an overarching concern for
their ability to connect with the demographically diverse campuses that had historically had male principals (see Figure 8).

Table 4

*Codes for Barriers Related to Rules While Attaining the Position of High School Principal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiring practices that were perceived as biased</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The custom of having more male high school principals than female high school principals in a district</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A limited ability to connect with the school community based on perceptions of weakness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8.* A visual representation of identified rules as barriers while attaining a position as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

As the lens through which the data were analyzed, activity theory was the tool by which the barriers participants experienced while attaining the position of high school principal were analyzed. Figure 9 is a representation of these barriers through this lens.
Research Subquestion 2

As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?

Support systems related to community. All 13 participants referred to support systems relating to community while attaining their position of high school principal. Not only were immediate family members identified as supports but also extended family, friends, colleagues, and network connections made while attending professional
conferences or trainings (see Table 5 and Figure 10). Principal 10 identified men as being her most visible mentors, stating, “All of my mentors have been male, all of them.” This theme was repeated by two other participants. Another participant, Principal 8, stated,

What I would say was my network, it was male mentors. . . . A lot of them were male, but they were people too who were open-minded enough to keep pushing me when I would say, “There’s never going to be a female high school principal in this district. I’m not even going to try.”

This correlates with the earlier finding relating to community barriers where participants reported that other women were at times unsupportive. However, participants did not identify one gender over another as being supportive while they worked to attain the principalship. Principal 12 stated, “I just had really good mentors. I had really good administrators that saw my value, saw my worth.” Principal 6 and Principal 10 both identified female leaders as models of strength and perseverance as they themselves attained a position of leadership.

### Table 5

*Codes for Support Systems Related to Community While Attaining the Position of High School Principal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support system</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with other professionals through networking</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentored by other educational leaders</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The support of family and friends</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As many of the participants attained their current position, they reached out to other principals and sought out connections and relationships through leadership meetings and networking conferences. Networking with other professionals, either through structured networking groups such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) or through informal conversations, emerged as the theme with the most frequency. All participants found professionals from whom to gain support while attaining the high school principalship.

**Support systems related to the division of labor.** The division-of-labor domain yielded only five references from two interviews. Most participants did not see a support system related to a division of labor while attaining their position as principal. The theme with the greatest frequency was taking on leadership positions while teaching (see Table 6 and Figure 11). This was seen as a positive example of the division of labor early on in these women’s careers that allowed them to be successful assistant principals and to draw on those experiences when interviewing for the job of principal. One participant,
Principal 5, discussed the fact that she expanded her leadership role on campus while working as a teacher so that she was given more responsibilities as a leader early in her career in education. This was a support system for her in that it gave her visibility and enabled her to learn about administration at an early stage. She redefined her role as a teacher and then as a coordinator by redefining the work responsibilities that were given to her.

Table 6  
*Codes for Support Systems Related to Division of Labor While Attaining the Position of High School Principal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support system</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking on leadership positions while teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family supports to balance work and home</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11. A visual representation of identified division-of-labor supports while attaining a position as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.*

The other theme that emerged was family supports to balance work and home; specifically, two participants’ husbands helped them with the work-home balance.

Principal 1 and Principal 8 explained that their husbands took care of child-rearing
responsibilities so that the participants could work toward their current position. Principal 8, referring to her husband, stated, “If I didn’t have him, I wouldn’t have been able to do any of this.”

**Support systems related to instruments.** Instruments, which are tangible objects used by the subject to reach the outcome, were mentioned a total of 21 times as supports. Of the instruments identified, the most frequent were graduate programs that supported the principals in developing the leadership skills needed to lead a high school. Additionally, professional books and articles pertaining to leadership were supportive in helping participants navigate the male-dominated community of high school principals (see Table 7 and Figure 12). For example, Principal 4 mentioned, “I read a lot and used a lot of books and loved data and made sure that I looked for statistics that I could use to my advantage. I actually think that helped me.” Another principal, Principal 12, noted that journal articles and magazines geared toward educational leadership helped her as she made her way to the principalship. Others identified the Internet as a support system, as it allowed them to communicate with other principals and network. Principal 13 identified the Internet, specifically Twitter, as her biggest support and stated that she still used that tool as a serving principal to communicate with the professional community.

Two participants described the statistics that show that the high school principalship is a male-dominated position as a challenge that supported their motivation level as they applied and interviewed for positions. Artifacts that were collected as support for this theme included a Twitter account dedicated to women in education as well an informational flyer from a local doctoral program in which two of the participants were enrolled (see Appendix D).
Table 7

Codes for Support Systems Related to Instruments While Attaining the Position of High School Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support system</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading books and articles on women in leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being enrolled in or having completed a graduate program</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet articles or postings on social media regarding educational leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending leadership conferences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People as instruments who helped their job functions prior to becoming principals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics that challenged them to attain the high school principalship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12. A visual representation of identified instruments as supports while attaining a position as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

Support systems related to rules. As a convention or practice that supported female high school principals while attaining their position, it was noted that holding previous leadership positions, such as assistant principal or coordinator at the site, was an important experience on their way to the high school principalship (see Table 8 and Figure 13). All participants mentioned that they had been assistant principals before becoming principals as part of their background summary. All participants also had overseen the master schedule at some point in their assistant principalship, and as one
participant, Principal 8, noted, she “had the curriculum knowledge . . . that I think made me more well-rounded than some of my counterparts.” Artifacts that were collected to corroborate these data included the job posting for high school principal in Riverside County, which outlined the prerequisites for the job (see Appendix D). Additionally, one participant also discussed networking and shadowing currently serving principals as a practice and custom in her district that supported her as she was attaining her position.

Table 8

**Codes for Support Systems Related to Rules While Attaining the Position of High School Principal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support system</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having held a previous position in administration (assistant principal, coordinator)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 13](image)

*Figure 13.* A visual representation of identified rules as supports while attaining a position as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

As the lens through which the data were analyzed, activity theory was the tool by which the support systems participants experienced while attaining the position of high
school principal were analyzed. Figure 14 is a representation of these support systems through this lens.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 14. Visual representation of identified support systems while attaining the position of high school principal as viewed through the lens of activity theory.*

**Research Subquestion 3**

*As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?*

**Barriers related to community.** Of the barriers experienced while serving as high school principals, participants referenced the community a total of 17 times. A lack of support systems, either formally structured or informal, was cited with great frequency (see Table 9 and Figure 15). These support systems were seen as important while serving
as principal due to the demands of the profession cognitively, socially, and physically. Several of the participants identified other women as being a large barrier in navigating their existing professional community of high school principals. This could come in the form of outright questioning of the principals’ skills or more subtle and nuanced statements of concern for the principals’ families. Principal 13 stated, “I still believe, in my position as a female at a high school, there is a little bit of a boys club barrier. . . . Other people may say I’m crazy, but it’s that poker night mentality.” Another participant, Principal 13, felt that not being married to an educator was in some ways a barrier to her serving as a principal because she felt that her husband did not understand the demands, both physical and political, placed on high school principals.

Table 9
Codes for Barriers Related to Community While Serving as a High School Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from superiors</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of structured support at district or county for principals currently serving</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female leaders unsupportive of other female leaders</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the principals located in small geographical areas felt that they lacked community outside of their small sphere. Many felt that they were alone in their endeavors to be effective principals. Principal 11 described her feelings in this way: “The biggest barrier is just not having the training, that mentorship, and then just trying to take it all on and be all things to all people without a lot of guidance.” Principal 9 was succinct in stating, “I’ve received no mentoring, really.” Another participant, Principal
10, identified politics as a barrier she faced as a new principal in a new community, stating, “It’s the politics game. I am learning those connections here, which took time . . . that’s always a barrier.”

**Barriers related to the division of labor.** Much like the barriers related to the division of labor while attaining the position of principal, the data revealed that these same barriers existed while these women were serving as principals. Athletics being perceived as a more masculine endeavor and the differing expectations, albeit unspoken, between men and women high school principals were cited frequently when discussing the division-of-labor domain (see Table 10 and Figure 16). Principal 1 described her personality as “softer” than those of the males who preceded her. She also described interactions with parents as interesting when they expressed genuine surprise when they met her, which indicated to her, again, that the role continues to be seen as a male’s position by some. Principal 1 described “mom guilt” as a struggle as she attempted to
maintain a balance as a working leader on a large campus and a mother of several children.

Table 10

*Codes for Barriers Related to Division of Labor While Serving as a High School Principal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The perception that there are different expectations for male and female principals in terms of communication, experience, and knowledge</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of gender-based personality traits</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics seen as a more masculine endeavor to oversee</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to break through the top inner circle of women</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially being excluded from informal male-centered activities (&quot;good ol’ boys club&quot;)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tendency to feel the need to prove oneself</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 16.* A visual representation of identified division-of-labor barriers while serving as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.
In addition, three participants described serving as high school principals as a factor in what they perceived to be a change in their personality to become more “masculine,” as Principal 7 described. Of those three participants, Principal 6 expressed that she became less emotional because she did not want to be seen as weak because of her gender and felt she had to be “cold and harsh sometimes” to fit into the stereotype of a high school principal, a stereotype that has been dominated by male archetypes.

Participant 13 stated, “I think as a woman, in particular, I have that drive and tendency to want to do everything, be everything, serve everyone, support everyone, help everyone, and always, always, always critical of myself, second guessing” as a reflection of her interpreted barrier pertaining to gender roles and the division that inexplicitly exists between men and women.

**Barriers related to instruments.** Instruments that the participants identified as barriers they faced in their position as principal were cited six times during the interviews. There were four instances where participants articulated that there were not instruments that were barriers while they served as high school principals (see Table 11).

Two participants mentioned the lack of clarity surrounding current accountability formulas for the state of California as an instrument, or lack thereof, that was perceived as a barrier as they served in this newest era of educational reform (see Figure 17).

| Table 11 |
| Codes for Barriers Related to Instruments While Serving as a High School Principal |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No instruments that serve as barriers while serving as principal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability formulas and assessments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 17. A visual representation of identified instruments as barriers while serving as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

Other principals cited specific barriers related to instruments, but these themes did not appear more than once in the data-coding process. However, the researcher felt that these were also important discussion points during individual interviews. For example, Principal 5 stated that statistics often posed a barrier for her because she did not have the female colleagues who she felt would be useful. Another respondent, Principal 10, cited social media as a barrier because it increased the visibility of the principal, and she felt this put her under scrutiny. She stated, “I don’t use that instrument fully because I don’t do very well with public exposure.” Principal 8 cited the budget as an instrument that had posed a barrier for her as she served for two reasons: (a) she had no experience with budgeting for a school prior to her serving as principal, and (b) the budget often limited what she could do to support programs since it dictated her site’s financial allotment.

Artifacts submitted that triangulated the data in terms of barriers relating to the instruments cited by participants included the new accountability formulas for California, which had not been finalized at the time of this study (see Appendix E).

**Barriers related to rules.** When discussing barriers related to rules, participants cited only five instances where rules posed barriers to their current position. However, all of these were unspoken rules (see Table 12 and Figure 18). Principal 5 stated, “A lot
of unspoken ‘know your place’ rules . . . in meetings you don’t call somebody out even if
you know they’re wrong, or you have to be very strategic when you disagree with
somebody above you.” Another participant, Principal 6, stated,

    In this district, there is a definite pecking order, and you have to be very careful
    how you offer alternative suggestions to somebody above you. . . . If you don’t
    pay attention to the very specific social cues and nuances that this culture has
    developed over time, that could hold a person back.

Another principal, Principal 3, indicated that customs associated with past practice had
become rules of the district, and often, those “old ideals” have not kept up with new
instructional strategies. These rules or customs posed a barrier for this principal to move
her school forward as quickly as she would have liked.

Table 12

    Codes for Barriers Related to Rules While Serving as a High School Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unspoken political rules to navigate the principalship</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[Figure 18\] A visual representation of identified rules as barriers while serving as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.
As the lens through which the data were analyzed, activity theory was the tool by which the barriers participants experienced in their current position of high school principal during the newest era of educational reform were analyzed. Figure 19 is a representation of these barriers through this lens.

**Figure 19.** Visual representation of identified barriers while serving in the position of high school principal as viewed through the lens of activity theory.

**Research Subquestion 4**

*As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current...*
position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?

**Support systems related to community.** Much like the themes that emerged when analyzing the data on support systems for female high school principals while attaining their positions, the frequency with which support systems pertaining to community were cited outnumbered support systems within all other domains. Family and friends were the most frequently cited support systems in answer to this question (see Table 13 and Figure 20). Principal 8 cited her husband as the most important support person in her life, saying, “My other support system is truly, out of everyone, probably my husband. He’s the one who keeps kicking me back into the game and saying, ‘Yeah . . . you know you can do this.”’ Other supports were relationships with other principals, strong administrative teams, and strong assistants who provided a supportive work community for the principals.

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support system</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong community with family and friends</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with other principals within the district</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a strong administration and site team</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with other principals outside of the district</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community of self</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More women as supports</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 20. A visual representation of identified community supports while serving as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

Two participants were active members in the ACSA and perceived this organization to be a supportive professional community outside their districts. Principal 12 described her relationships with the community and parents as a support system as she worked in her high school. In addition, Principal 13 explained that her online community of supports existed in the social media realm, most specifically Twitter. Artifacts that were collected that supported the role of community in supporting women leaders in education were a newspaper article that highlighted the appointment of a female high school principal as a member of a leadership forum dedicated to women who aspire to be school superintendents and agendas from local meetings of the ACSA “Women in Leadership” groups (see Appendix F).

Support systems related to the division of labor. Five codes emerged in this domain for support systems while serving as high school principal. The codes within this
domain emerged most frequently when speaking about the division of labor at the site. The activity of serving as a high school principal differed from the activity of becoming a principal in that the serving principals could divide the labor among secretaries, administrative teams, and other supportive personnel to whom the principals could delegate tasks (see Table 14 and Figure 21). Only one respondent, Principal 8, referred to the division of labor in the home, namely her husband and family supporting her with childcare and home-work balance, while the rest of the participants identified professional supports in this category. Artifacts for this support included an organizational chart from one female principal’s site to show the division of labor at the site (see Appendix F).

Table 14

| Codes for Support Systems Related to Division of Labor While Serving as a High School Principal |
|---|---|
| Support system | Frequency |
| Dividing the labor among assistant principals and secretaries | 5 |

Figure 21. A visual representation of identified division-of-labor supports while serving as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.
Support systems related to instruments. The use of tangible instruments as support systems was cited by the majority of participants. The three most frequently cited instruments used by the participants while serving in their current position included professional reads, social media and the Internet, and surveys (see Table 15 and Figure 22). These instruments included strategic plans from the district that helped clarify the principals’ focus, assessment and accountability structures that also helped them focus on goals that were supporting district initiatives, and e-mail. E-mail specifically was cited once as a way to stay connected with other principals and to communicate ideas across sites and districts. Artifacts that were collected to triangulate these data included agendas from recent principal meetings that outlined the process for establishing professional goals and e-mail exchanges between a community of principals in a Riverside County district (see Appendix F).

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support system</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readings in professional journals and books</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using surveys to gain feedback that supports the principal’s work at the site</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Internet and social media</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using e-mail to connect with others</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support systems related to rules. In terms of rules, only three participants referred to support systems that applied to customs or practices. Principal 13 referred to the personal practice of establishing boundaries and being consistent with them when
Figure 22. A visual representation of identified instruments as supports while serving as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

dealing with conflict or personality conflicts, and knowing the human resources policies that surround those conflicts. Another principal, Principal 8, identified a support in the written job duties or rules of the district in terms of her job description and the clarity that provided at the outset (see Table 16 and Figure 23). In addition, another rule that supported Principal 4 was her knowledge of curriculum and instruction and the practice of the district to hire instructional leaders on her campus. Other participants were unable to specify rules that acted as supports for them as they served as principals. An artifact that correlated to this category was the job description for high school principals.

Table 16

| Codes for Support Systems Related to Rules While Serving as a High School Principal |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Support system                  | Frequency |
| Written job duties and district policies | 3 |

As the lens through which the data were analyzed, activity theory was the tool by which the support systems participants experienced in their current position of high school principal during the newest era of educational reform were analyzed. Figure 24 is a representation of these support systems through this lens.
Figure 23. A visual representation of identified rules as supports while serving as high school principal, through the lens of activity theory.

Figure 24. Visual representation of identified support systems while serving in the position of high school principal as viewed through the lens of activity theory.
Navigating Change in the Newest Era of Educational Reform

An additional theme emerged as the researcher analyzed the data. This theme was related to one of the research question variables, namely leading in a time of educational reform. Eight of the 13 participants referred to the new era of educational reform and referenced being a change agent or a leader of change a total of 14 times. The code that occurred with the most frequency was leading change with a growth mindset, not accepting what is, and always looking forward and making adjustments for maximum growth. Principal 12 described her experiences in this way: “It’s really becoming a leader that knows how to navigate change and make people feel comfortable with change. . . . It’s creating a culture of being comfortable with being uncomfortable.” Principal 6 attributed her doctoral work, which she cited as an instrument of support while serving as a principal, to helping her become a leader who impacted and facilitated change on her campus. Other participants discussed how to prioritize their goals so that their schools made the most forward movement on key issues. Building teams and relationships was also a code that emerged three times as a way to navigate change at a school site (see Table 17).

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes for Leading in an Era of Educational Reform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading change with a growth mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing priorities carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building teams and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on guidance from district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making the discomfort of change palatable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Most Frequent Codes**

Table 18 shows the codes that emerged most frequently in the interviews as a whole.

Table 18

*Most Frequent Codes for Support and Barriers Experienced by Female High School Principals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with other professionals through networking</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>2–attaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentored by other educational leaders</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>2–attaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having held previous positions in administration</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>2–attaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(assistant principal, coordinator)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The majority of high school principals are male</td>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>1–attaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The support of family and friends</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>2–attaining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the five most frequent codes, only one pertained to a barrier. The single most coded barrier was the fact that the majority of high school principals are male. All other frequently coded themes pertained to supports experienced by female high school principals while attaining their position. These codes included relationships, mentoring opportunities, familial supports, and the experience of being in administration prior to being hired as the principal. The coded support systems or barriers identified while serving in the position of principal were mentioned with less frequency than those discussed when answering interview questions pertaining to the attainment of the position.

**Summary**

Chapter IV presented the collected data and findings for this study. This study focused on the lived experiences of female high school principals leading in this time of
educational reform, using the lens of activity theory through which to analyze their experiences. The population for this study was high school principals in California. The target population for this study was female high school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Tulare, and Placer Counties in California. The researcher ultimately expanded the scope of the sample to include Tulare County, Placer County, and San Bernardino County. A total of 13 female high school principals participated in this study.

The main research question asked, “How do female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California describe the barriers and supports they experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining their current position and during the newest era of educational reform?” Four subquestions followed the main research question. These questions further defined the lived experience by two distinctions: (a) barriers and support systems while attaining the position and (b) barriers and support systems while serving in the position of principal. A list of 12 interview questions was presented to each participant in a semistructured, face-to-face or phone interview. The interviews were recorded using the Rev application and were transcribed using the Rev transcription service. Interviews were then analyzed for emergent themes, or codes, by the researcher using the NVivo software as a tool by which to organize the codes.

To analyze the data, the researcher used activity theory as a guide to categorize the codes. Codes were subsequently categorized in the following manner: barriers related to community, barriers related to division of labor, barriers related to instruments, barriers related to rules, support systems related to community, support systems related to division of labor, support systems related to instruments, and support systems related to
rules. An additional thread of codes emerged relating to navigating change as a change agent during this time of educational reform.

Findings indicated that the most frequent support systems and barriers occurred while the principals were attaining their positions, not while serving in them. The most coded themes revolved around support systems. Also, several coded barriers while attaining the position revolved around unspoken perceptions surrounding gender roles. As such, gender role expectations were seen as a barrier for all participants. Findings indicated that females were not supported by other females and that mentoring programs dedicated to females in educational leadership were few and far between. Many participants cited the perception that they were not attentive mothers or wives due to the fact that they were aspiring to be or serving as high school principals. Conversely, while the perception of skewed gender roles surrounding home and child-rearing was seen as a barrier, the community of the family was mentioned with great frequency as a support system both while attaining the position and serving as a high school principal by all participants. Findings also indicated that assistant principals, secretaries, and leadership teams provided supportive structures that fell under the division-of-labor code. Most participants mentioned administrative networking and leadership groups as communities of support.

In terms of instruments, participants cited doctoral programs, graduate programs, credential programs, readings, journals, and social media as tools that had assisted them in both attaining the position and serving as high school principals. Rules that were mentioned with frequency as barriers included political rules that were unique to the
participants’ districts. Rules that supported their experience as serving principals included experience as an assistant principal or coordinator.

A code that emerged from one of the research variables was the perception that this time of educational reform required the female high school principals to serve as leaders of change in their organizations. Participants spoke of leading change in their schools and drawing on their experiences as assistant principals or utilizing their professional networks, both within and outside of their districts, as supports.

Artifacts were collected that supported the interview data findings. Artifacts included agendas, programs, Twitter and Facebook pages for women’s educational leadership organizations, organizational charts, accountability formulas, and newspaper articles.

Chapter V presents conclusions based on these findings as well as implications for action and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female high school principals experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California. The overarching research question asked, “How do female high school principals in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties in California describe the barriers and supports they experienced, through the lens of activity theory, while attaining their current position and during the newest era of educational reform?”

This broad research question was followed by four subquestions that narrowed the scope of each variable by barriers and support systems in two different time frames, the first being the time while attaining the position and the second pertaining to the time actually serving as principal. This nuanced distinction of context provided the researcher with a more specific set of research questions.

The qualitative methodology was used to describe the essence of the experience of the female high school principal, and semistructured, face-to-face or phone interviews were used to collect data. The population for this study consisted of high school principals who served in California. The target population for this study was women high school principals in Riverside, San Bernardino, Tulare, and Placer Counties in California. The original sample was limited to Riverside County; however, due to the limited number of female high school principals serving in Riverside County, the scope of the sample was expanded to include Tulare County, Placer County, and San Bernardino County. The sample population was female high school principals from
Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties. A total of 13 female high school principals participated in this study.

**Major Findings**

The major findings of this study are organized by research question.

**Research Subquestion 1**

*As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?*

The major findings indicated that the barriers that female high school principals cited with the most frequency were related to community and division of labor. Participants, for the most part, felt that the community of secondary education did not afford them mentoring opportunities. Specifically noted was the lack of support and often the wealth of criticism when it came to other females. This finding emerged as a theme that permeated several interviews and was as much of a finding pertaining to community barriers as the unspoken and exclusive “good ol’ boys” club. In addition, the division of labor presented a barrier due to the perceived gender role of male high school principals. This often discouraged the participants during their attainment of the high school principalship and often resulted in self-doubt. Instruments and rules did not result in major findings in terms of barriers.

**Research Subquestion 2**

*As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experienced while attaining their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties?*
The major findings indicated that community was the most cited support system for female high school principals while they were attaining their positions. All participants referred to the support of family during the time they were working toward being hired as high school principals. Instruments were a large support system for participants, and they cited graduate programs or structured leadership programs that assisted them in getting hired. The Internet was referenced with less frequency, but e-mail and social media were mentioned as instruments that supported aspiring high school principals.

**Research Subquestion 3**

*As examined through the lens of activity theory, what barriers do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?*

Barriers related to the division of labor, again, were the most cited. This was true of the responses pertaining to the time when the principals were attaining the position as well as the responses to this question, which asked about the time while serving as principal. The division-of-labor barriers were seen most often when referencing gender roles. The principals interviewed, as a whole, felt that the male-dominated quality of the high school principalship led to it being perceived as a masculine position, and they felt that they needed to change to fit this gender role. Others described the home-work balance as a barrier, expressing, as one participant put it, “mom guilt.” Another major finding was that several participants cited community as a barrier, referencing a “good ol’ boys” network where informal connections were made during meetings from which the
female high school principals felt excluded. Others felt that other women leaders were a barrier instead of a support. In terms of rules, participants most often discussed “old ideals” or past practice as a barrier to progress while serving as high school principals, especially during the newest era of educational reform.

Research Subquestion 4

As examined through the lens of activity theory, what support systems do female California public high school principals describe they experience in their current position in Riverside, Tulare, Placer, and San Bernardino Counties during the newest era of educational reform?

Mirroring the support systems experienced while attaining the position, community was referenced with the most frequency. All 13 participants referenced communities, either personal or professional, as the most important support system they experienced while serving as high school principals. While the personal communities were made up of family and friends, the professional communities ranged from those on social media, to leadership organizations dedicated to women’s leadership in education, to the collaborative relationships participants experienced with other principals in their districts. The division of labor was also a major finding in this area. The division of labor experienced while serving as a high school principal was most often defined as having a cohesive, capable administrative team, teacher leaders, and secretaries. Instruments that were described as supports included plans and initiatives as outlined by district expectations, such as templates for professional goals. The Internet as an instrument of support also was mentioned by participants.
Another thread of codes that emerged developed through the variable pertaining to the newest era of educational reform. Participants agreed that they were navigating change as change leaders. Participants perceived their role as leading change through collaboration, focus, and adaptability. They experienced the tensions that might arise when all domains of activity theory—community, instruments, division of labor, and rules—are in play. At times these domains were seen as barriers to their function as change leaders, and at other times these domains were seen as supports.

Unexpected Findings

During the data collection process, there were a few unexpected findings. The first pertained to the barrier of community. While a review of the literature found that women in past studies felt that there was a lack of female role models or female mentors, it was unexpected that in this newest era of educational reform this not only continues to be an issue for aspiring female high school principals, but several participants perceived other women as actual barriers to their advancement. Several described the community in which they worked as critical. Another unexpected finding was that although the “good ol’ boys” network of high school principals was still perceived to exist, all participants benefited from mentoring from males, and several specifically identified men as their biggest support systems.

One last unexpected finding, and an optimistic one at that, was that the most frequently coded themes pertained to support systems. This was unexpected in that because of the statistics, one might expect to find that women perceive their experiences laden with barriers. However, that was not the case. Of the top five themes that emerged in these interviews, four pertained to support systems while attaining the position of
principal. The relationships that these women had built, whether with other professionals, family, or friends, and the professional experiences that they lived prior to becoming principals were prominent in the essence of their experiences.

**Conclusions**

Based on the findings of this study as supported by the literature, it is concluded that the hiring of more male principals than female principals results in a perceived barrier for aspiring female high school principals. In addition, female high school principals continue to lack formal as well as informal mentoring by other women that would support them as they traverse the male-dominated field of the high school principalship. While attaining the position and serving as high school principals, mentoring groups for women are scarce. If more structured programs for women high school principals were available, these professionals would feel more structurally supported as they traverse a new era of educational change.

A conclusion supported by the major findings is that community provides the greatest support system for aspiring and serving female high school principals. These community supports most frequently come from networking opportunities, but they also emerge through mentoring opportunities, when they exist, with other professionals. In order to support more female principals in their attainment of the principalship at the high school level, more structured, professional networking groups need to be accessible and focused on the secondary educational experience.

It is also concluded, based on the findings of this study as supported by the literature, that the interaction of female high school principals, whether during the time of attaining their position or while serving in their position, with their environment as
defined by activity theory creates both barriers and supports that result in a complex web of tensions that are unique to the female experience. The combined interaction of community, division of labor, rules, and instruments provides the female high school principals with an intricate set of barriers and supports that males may not be exposed to as they attain the position and serve as high school principals due to their statistical dominance in the profession.

Based on the most frequently coded themes that emerged, it can also be concluded that most women felt the most support while attaining their positions. This support came from relationships, networking, and mentors most frequently but also from the job experiences they gained while serving as assistant principals. This conclusion points to the importance of networking groups and structured mentorships for female high school principals. Additionally, based on the most frequently coded themes that emerged, the single most coded barrier was the statistical fact that the majority of high school principals continue to be male. It can be concluded, therefore, that there is still a need for more equity in hiring practices.

A final conclusion that is made based on the findings and as supported by the literature pertains to gender roles and the division of labor. While themes pertaining to these findings were not seen with the same frequency as the tangible data that more male principals are hired than female principals or that networking groups are important to the support structure of the principalship, participants did comment on the gender issues that are raised by the topic of this study. Based on the relatively high frequency with which the division of labor was seen as a barrier and the relatively low frequency with which the division of labor was viewed as a support, it can be concluded that women continue to
perceive gender roles as a challenge when attaining the position and serving as high school principals. It can be concluded that gender role theory, therefore, continues to play a part in the perception of the high school principalship as a masculine endeavor. The findings also point to the fact that because of the male-dominated culture of the high school principalship, many women feel the need to change their approach to problem solving to seem more decisive, to alter their responses to align more with the perceived masculine nature of the job, and to adjust their communication styles to reflect the social expectations that have historically defined the high school principalship. It can be concluded, therefore, that gender dynamics continue to be at play in terms of attaining the position of and serving as a high school principal despite statistical gains of females being hired to the position. In other words, while more females are being hired as high school principals, they continue to feel the need to be perceived in a certain way that fits the high school principal stereotype—one that has been created by decades of male leaders.

As a whole, the research showed the immense power of relationships. These relationships can have the power to either build a support system or create barriers. Networking, family, friends, and mentors all were cited with great frequency as support systems and all are based on relationships. However, while the obvious supportive relationships of family and friends or professional mentors played a vital part in attaining and serving in the position of high school principal, less supportive relationships point to the insidious nature of gender dynamics in the position.

The relationships of the “good ol’ boys” network were referenced by participants both while attaining the position and while serving as principals. One of the major
findings was that a barrier that existed pertained to the fact that more males are hired than females. Statistically, this is a concrete piece of evidence that was characterized as a barrier for the participants. However, it should be noted that many participants also mentioned the “good ol’ boys” club, and while there is no tangible evidence of this network of males that creates a barrier for female high school principals—no agendas to their meetings, no minutes that document action points or decisions—the perception data gathered spoke loudly to the divisive nature of this social practice. Participants felt excluded, isolated, and often overlooked because they had not been included in meaningful professional conversations that happened during informal networking sessions dubbed by one participant as the “poker night mentality.”

Perhaps another, more disturbing dynamic of relationships is not only the lack of female mentors but also the theme that emerged pertaining to the absence of any support from other females in education. Participants reported feeling criticized, targeted, and betrayed by other females in educational leadership. It is of no surprise, then, that many of the mentors that these participants gravitated toward were not females. Not only does this perpetuate the perception that males are more suited to this job, but it also undermines the impact that females in positions of high school leadership have on other females.

These findings point to the unspoken rules, the intangible relationships, and the ethereal nature of human dynamics that often inhibit qualified and experienced female professionals from reaching their full potential to the same extent as their male counterparts. The tangibles—graduate programs, professional libraries, husbands, mothers, assistant principals, and conferences—were much easier to define as barriers or
support systems for these participants. However, it was the unspoken rules of the
game—whether it be the perceived necessity of changing one’s communication style,
modifying one’s personality, playing the political game of pecking order, appearing
“tough,” ignoring the “good ol’ boys” club, or traversing the “mean girls” club—that
brought a true richness and depth and even a bit of pathos to this study.

The literature review in Chapter II revealed that these barriers existed in past eras
of educational reform, and this study corroborated those findings by emphasizing that the
field has not come as far as some perhaps believe it has. Supportive and healing
communities marked by collaboration, inclusivity, and strong relationships; an equitable
division of labor founded on mutual respect; instruments that build on people’s strengths
and allow them to interact fully with their environment; and rules, specifically those that
remain unspoken and yet resonate the most loudly, have the power to build relationships
that support the greatest human potential, regardless of gender or perception. Therefore,
it is important that educational institutions and their leaders avoid the complacency that
often accompanies the unspoken truths that underlie hiring practices and professional
interactions. The urgency, then, lies not in hiring more women as high school principals,
because, in truth, this is already happening. In fact, as more females become high school
principals, the importance of acknowledging the damaging effect of negative peer
relationships has the potential to become more prevalent. In that same vein, however, so
does the opportunity to create more networking groups designed to support the female
high school principals. The urgency lies in structuring a professional and candid dialogue
surrounding the dichotomy that presents itself as more females are hired as high school
principals, that is, the less obvious and yet potentially more destructive dynamics of the relationship piece of this phenomenon.

**Implications for Action**

Based on the results of this study, implications for action are tied to the three conclusions drawn from the findings. The first implication for action requires school districts in California to establish more formal and structured mentoring groups designed specifically to support women in secondary education. Local county offices of education should create groups that address the needs of female high school principals at the secondary level to focus on the unique experiences of the high school principal and the challenges that therein lie. In the same manner in which all administrators are now required to participate in an induction program to obtain an administrative credential in the state of California, it would be helpful to have a similar structure created to support recently hired female high school principals. This would also address the second conclusion, which revealed that the female high school principal experience is unique due to the continued perception of the high school principalship as a masculine professional endeavor and the impact that traditional gender roles continue to have on those women who currently serve as high school principals.

Another implication for action involves the hiring practices of California school districts in terms of high school principals. One participant shared that she felt males are hired based on potential and females are hired for achievements. It is important that females have the same opportunities based on the same qualifications regardless of gender. Hiring practices should reflect the needs of the district and should mitigate the political and social effects of gender preference by ensuring that interview panels are
diverse in nature and that interview protocols highlight both potential and achievement-based experiences of the applicants.

Because of the high-frequency coding of support structures based on instruments such as doctoral programs and professional readings, graduate programs should increase the required reading of books by female authors who have broken through the “glass ceiling” and have thrived despite barriers. Additionally, because of the value the participants in this study placed on the experience of being an assistant principal prior to becoming a principal, more leadership mentoring resources should be placed at the assistant principal level to help aspiring female high school principals navigate the barriers encountered while working toward serving as a high school principal.

Finally, hiring practices in school districts must be reviewed to ensure that unspoken norms, assumptions, and practices are revealed and exposed. All assumptions, norms, and criteria for hiring need to be made explicit so that the decision to hire any individual, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or any other factor, is based solely on the person’s ability to do the job in question, whether it be for the position of high school principal or for any other position. Progress has been made with regard to eliminating explicit bias in hiring. However, the implicit, unspoken arena needs to be identified, called out, and dealt with. Unspoken practices must be abolished and replaced with clear, explicit practices that ensure the best candidates are hired in every case.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

It is recommended that future research surrounding this topic be completed in the following areas:
1. Explore the level of female-to-female support groups that serve as formal support
groups throughout California.

2. Describe the degree to which women who engage in the support structures that are
available through structured leadership styles differ in their success as principals from
those who do not take advantage of these structures.

3. Describe the lived experiences of male high school principals and their perceived
barriers and support systems as viewed through the lens of activity theory.

4. Compare the perceived barriers and support systems of female high school principals
with the perceived barriers and support systems of female elementary and/or middle
school principals.

5. Explore the behaviors in which female high school principals engage that combat the
perceived gender role discrepancy between female and male high school principals.

6. Explore the role that athletic coaching experience plays in the hiring of high school
principals and the extent to which this impacts the athletic program on high school
campuses.

7. Describe the motivations that lead women to the high school principal position.

8. Explore, describe, and explicitly clarify the “unspoken” rules pertaining to the high
school principal position.

9. Explore the perception of personal power in regard to the high school principal
position and how it affects an individual’s confidence in this position.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

When I started my doctoral program 2.5 years ago, I was a newly minted assistant
principal. I now serve as a female high school principal in Riverside County, California.
Almost 20 years ago, I first walked into a high school as a first-time English teacher, and while I never thought I would be in the position to lead a high school, I found myself in just that position approximately six months ago—almost exactly when I began this research study. Not only was I interested in hearing the lived experiences of women as they lead high schools, but I was also interested in looking at their experiences through an academic, theory-based framework. Activity theory provided the perfect tool through which to analyze the experiences of women I admired solely based on their ability to reach a position denied to many women. This theory, which allowed me to examine the complex tensions created by community, division of labor, instruments, and rules, enhanced my understanding of the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of attaining and serving in a position often defined by its masculine perception.

Through the research process, I was able to speak to 13 women, many of whom had the same career path as I did. Some participants felt that they experienced no barriers, but as the interviews progressed, they began to see that, in fact, there were barriers they successfully navigated. Others eloquently described the rules, spoken and unspoken, and the community, supportive and critical, that made their ascension to the high school principalship unique and impressive. Additionally, this research process allowed me to connect the past to the present and to look to the future. A review of the literature provided a context for the research study—a context that reflected on past histories and studies pertaining to women in educational leadership and that magnified the multifaceted era of reform in which the educational community finds itself today. The data collection process allowed me, as an objective researcher, the opportunity to engage in fieldwork that either corroborated or contradicted the findings of other studies.
Artifact collection triangulated the data but also highlighted the fact that while there was tangible evidence of support systems in place for female leaders, the barriers were much more abstract and perception based. And yet, while the barriers were not corroborated by archival evidence, statistics prove that these barriers exist. The stories of these female high school principals were fascinating as they created a tapestry of experiences that, through this study, created a picture of the modern-day female high school principal, her struggles, and her strengths.

This study, therefore, represents both a culmination and a beginning. As a culmination, it is the ending of a journey that began as a way to assuage my genuine curiosity about those few women who led the high schools in which I taught for almost two decades. As a beginning, it was a delving into the lived experiences of female high school principals as I was just beginning my own experience. To say that this process was meaningful is a gross understatement, and yet it was, ultimately and truthfully, the most professionally insightful endeavor of my career as a secondary school leader.
REFERENCES


areas, school’s level, locality and complexity. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(2), 82-94.


Rosa, V. M. (2014). *Perceptions of high school principals on the effectiveness of the WASC self-study process in bringing about school improvement* (Doctoral


APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Background Questions:

1. Share a little about yourself personally and professionally.
2. What positions did you hold prior to serving as a high school principal? For how long in each position?
3. What aspects of your current position are the most challenging?
4. What aspects of your current position do you enjoy the most?
5. How would you describe the current era of educational reform?
6. What current educational initiatives, either at the local or state level, are the most compelling for your organization? (Example: Implementation of new standards, PBIS, LCAP Funding Initiatives.)

Content Questions:

7. While attaining the position of high school principal, what ways do you feel that it was challenging to navigate the existing professional community of high school principals?
   a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
8. What rules, as defined by AT, spoken or unspoken, could be perceived as barriers to your advancement?
   a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
9. As defined by AT, instruments are defined as “factors that allow a subject to communicate and interact with their environment. Instruments can include, but are not limited to, strategic plans, books, internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics.” What factors, if any, do you feel prevented you from interacting with your professional environment as an aspiring high school principal to your fullest potential?
   a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
10. What social structures or expectations, inside or outside the organization, could be perceived as barriers in attaining your current position?
    a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
11. Please share any other barriers, personal and/or professional, that you experienced while you were attaining the [principal/superintendent] position.
    a. What personal or professional support system(s), if any, did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
12. While currently serving as high school principal during this time of educational reform, what ways do you feel that it is challenging to navigate the existing professional community of high school principals (superintendents)?
    a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
13. What rules, spoken or unspoken, could be perceived as barriers to accomplishing what you feel is important to your organization today?
    a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
14. As defined by AT, instruments are defined as “factors that allow a subject to communicate and interact with their environment. Instruments can include, but are not limited to, strategic plans, books, internet, electronic devices, journals, media coverage, and statistics.” What factors, if any, do you feel prevent you from interacting with your professional environment in the most efficient manner?
a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

15. What social structures or expectations, inside or outside the organization, could be perceived as barriers while currently serving as a high school principal?
   a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?

16. Please share any other barriers, personal and/or professional, that you experience while currently serving as a high school principal during this era of educational reform.
   a. What personal or professional support system(s) did you use to overcome this/these barrier(s)?
APPENDIX B

Invitation Letter

RESEARCH STUDY INVITATION LETTER

FOR FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN RIVERSIDE, TULARE, PLACER AND SAN BERNARDINO COUNTIES, CA

June 2016

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted in Riverside, Tulare, Placer and San Bernardino Counties, California. The main investigator of this study is Janice M. Jones, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a female high school principal of a public school in Riverside, Tulare, Placer and San Bernardino Counties, California. Approximately 10 high school principals will be enrolled in this study. Participation should require about one hour of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female high school principals experienced through the lens of Activity Theory while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside, Tulare, Placer and San Bernardino Counties.

PROCEDURES: In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in an interview. The interview will take a minimum of 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. The focus group will take place at a location of your choosing. During this interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a California female high school principal. Additionally, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire that will include questions that capture your background information.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. The session will be held at a location of your choosing to minimize inconvenience. Some interview questions may cause you to reflect on barriers and support systems that are unique to your lived experience, and sharing your experience in an interview setting may cause minor discomfort.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but a potential may be that you will have an opportunity to share your lived experiences as a female high school principals. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of the barriers and support systems that female high school principals experience.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.
You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact the investigator, Ms. Jones, by phone at (951) 966-0894 or email jjones12@mail.brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Very Respectfully,

Janice M. Jones
Principal Investigator
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: From the Voices of California Female High School Principal: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform through the Lens of Activity Theory

From the Voices of California Female Superintendents: Examining Barriers and Support Systems in a New Era of Educational Reform through the Lens of Activity Theory

Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Janice M. Jones, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Research Participant’s Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the perceived barriers and support systems female high school principals experienced through the lens of Activity Theory while attaining and serving in their current position during the newest era of educational reform in Riverside, Tulare, Placer and San Bernardino Counties. This study explores the lived experiences of research participants and captures the essence of their experiences to better understand the barriers and support systems experienced by female high school principals.

In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in an interview. The interview will take a minimum of 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. The focus group will take place at a location of your choosing. During this interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a California female high school principal. Additionally, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire that will include questions that capture your background information.

I understand that:

a. There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. The session will be held at a location of my choosing to minimize inconvenience. Some interview questions may cause me to reflect on barriers and support systems that are unique to my lived experience, and sharing my experience in an interview setting may cause minor discomfort.

b. There are no major benefits to me for participation, but a potential may be that I will have an opportunity to share my lived experiences as a female high school principal. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators of the barriers and support systems that female high school principals experience.

c. Money will not be provided for my time and involvement; however, I will receive gift of appreciation from the researcher following the interview.
d. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Janice M. Jones, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Ms. Jones may be contacted by phone at (951) 966-0894 or email at jjones12@mail.brandman.edu.

e. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

f. I understand that the study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project.

g. I understand that the audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interview. Once the interview is transcribed, the audio, interview transcripts, and demographic questionnaire will be kept for a minimum of five years by the researcher in a secure location.

h. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures(s) set forth.

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| Signature of Principal Investigator         | Date |
| Brandman University IRB May 2014            |      |
APPENDIX D

Research Subquestion 2 Artifacts

Twitter results for “Women in Educational Leadership”
JOIN AGSA IN AN
#EDEQUITY TWITTERCHAT
HOST NICOLE ANDERSON,
AGSA DIVERSITY AND
EQUAL ACCESS EXECUTIVE
WEDNESDAY SEPT. 14TH
1 P.M.
@AGSA_INFO
QUESTIONS RELEASED 9.12.16
Thank you to everyone who attended the #ISTE2016 networking mixer! What a great night! #womenintech #edtech #ETWchat
Facebook page “Women in School Leadership” Forum

Women are underrepresented in all areas of school leadership. Let’s work together to level the playing field. The Women in School Leadership Forum is the premier networking and educational experience designed to engage, inform, and empower women education leaders from across the country. This joint collaborative event hosted by AASA and ACAEA is sure to be a powerful experience for all participants.

Event Registration & Information
Sept. 28-30, 2016
Island Hotel, Newport Beach, CA

Add to Calendar

- Register for the Forum
- Schedule of Events
- Hotel and Travel

Sponsors and Exhibitors

http://www.aasa.org/Educators-Services/Conferences/Women
We are currently accepting sponsors and exhibitors for the Forum. The Women in School Leadership Forum is the place to network with over 200 women in school leadership from all across the U.S. Join us and showcase how your company can partner and build the leadership skills of these incredible female leaders. We're this year is the "Boutique"—we're looking to add local artisans who can showcase their handmade goods and beauty items for a fun "shopping" experience for our attendees.

Download Sponsorship Guide here

Keynote Speakers

Joanne Quinn
Director of Human Space Change and Capstone Building, National Science Foundation

Dr. Mary Alice Hartsell
Deputy Director, USDA Programs, SBA Hawaii

Agnieszka Antoinette
Post-Doctoral Fellow, National Arts EducationOffice

Meredith O'Connor
Executive Director, National Anti-Bullying Movement

Melissa Zehlka
President, Hapa Na Na Educators Corp.

Schedule of Events

View online interactive schedule for Women's Leadership Forum (https://2016wf.sched.org/)

Wednesday

3:30 - 5:00 p.m.: Registration
5:00 - 7:00 p.m.: Sponsored Reception

Thursday

9:30 - 10:00 a.m.: General Session
10:15 - 11:15 a.m.: Breakout Sessions
11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.: Breakout Sessions
12:30 - 2:30 p.m.: Keynote Luncheon
2:10 - 3:10 p.m.: Breakout Sessions
3:20 - 4:20 p.m.: Breakout Sessions
4:30 - 6:30 p.m.: Sponsored Reception

Friday

http://www.acsa.org/Educational-Services/Conferences/WomenInLeadership
Women in School Leadership Forum

9:30 – 9:30 a.m. General Session
9:45 – 10:45 a.m. Breakout Sessions
10:55 – 11:55 a.m. Breakout Sessions
12:30 – 2:30 p.m. Luncheon
2:15 – 3:15 p.m. General Session

Registration

Registration Fees:
- ACSA Member: $299
- ANA Member: $299
- Non-Member: $349

Fees include:
- All educational activities Thursday and Friday
- Receptions on Wednesday and Thursday nights
- Continental breakfast and lunch on Thursday and Friday

Register online now [https://www.nsgonline.com/RegistrationCheckin.aspx?EventId=1826067]

Hotel and Travel Information
Doctoral program informational flyer

**Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership**

**Ed.D. Program Launching August 2012**

**MISSION**
Brandman University, part of the Chapman University System, now offers an Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership that will develop:

- Visionary leaders who are creative agents of social transformation
- Equitable educators who understand the complex factors influencing student learning and are dedicated to closing learning gaps

The Ed.D. Program provides the tools and resources for professional development and increased influence within the work of social justice.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY DEGREE**
The Ed.D. Program integrates the latest theory and research in a format that reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the field and prepares leaders to address the complex challenges of organizational leadership.

**CONSORTIAL PROGRAM**
The Ed.D. Program is a consortium of five institutions in Southern California: Brandman University, CSU Fullerton, CSU Long Beach, CSU Los Angeles, and CSU Northridge. Each program offers a unique blend of courses and faculty expertise, providing students with a comprehensive and well-rounded education.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES OF EDD IN ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP**
Prepares leaders to:
- Engage in inquiry-based leadership
- Analyze complex social issues
- Develop and implement innovative solutions
- Foster collaborative relationships
- Cultivate ethical decision-making
- Lead with empathy and authenticity

98.4% of students in education and business perceive the Brandman Ed.D. Program Mission to be "relevant" or "highly relevant" to the field.

**ACT NOW**
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- Email: edd@brandman.edu
- Click: brandman.edu/EdD
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Applications will be accepted January 6th, 2012. Classes start August 2012.

IMMERSIONS
- Weekends during the academic year on campus at 10 sites
- Students will meet at the host site campus for extensive hands-on public forums with faculty and students
- Professional programs, presentations by expert speakers, and in-depth engagement in applied organizational skills

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS
- A working knowledge of organizational leadership
- Relevant professional experience in a leadership position
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- A strong commitment to the field of study

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE PROJECT
- To integrate the competencies of the education leadership program into the student's professional environment
- Students will develop and implement a change project that will transform a real organization
- Students will be evaluated on their project and its impact on the organization

THEMATIC DISSERTATION
- On the final project of the DEd program, students will have the opportunity to conduct research or engage in a thematic experience
- The thematic dissertation is a scholarly collaboration with a faculty advisor and other dissertation students who share the same research interest
-(Contact the program coordinator for more information on the thematic dissertation)

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE
- Scholarships are available for students meeting certain criteria. Applications are due March 30, 2012.

ACT NOW
- Phone 949-564-961
- Email edd@brandman.edu
- Website brandman.edu/EDD
- Follow us on Facebook and Twitter
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

The University of California, San Diego (http://www.ucsd.edu) and California State University, San Marcos (http://www.csusm.edu) offers a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership. This cohort-based three-year (including summers) doctor of education degree is designed to enable education leaders to participate in a research-based program while working in an educational setting.

We seek educators who wish to expand their knowledge of discipline-specific pedagogy, research methodology, and education reform in order to lead curricular and pedagogical improvement efforts with pre-service, beginning, and experienced teachers in local schools. Our students represent groups of great depth in diversity and professional experience. Students include primary, secondary and post-secondary educational practitioners. We address a broad range of educational issues specifically concentrating on:

- K-12 Leadership/Administration
- Higher Education Administration & Student Affairs

The Joint Doctorate in Educational Leadership has three foci. First, we are committed to a program of study that addresses issues of social justice in all aspects of education. Second, we teach and use a strengths and asset-based inquiry approach that enables you to embrace your own strengths and to identify and build on the strengths of others as stepping stones to powerful leadership. Third, we engage you in exploring cutting edge research and practices that will enable you to design and lead educational systems in and for the future.

The deadline is August 1st, 2016.

Which is for me? Ph.D. and Ed.D. Comparison Chart (/phd/phd-edd-comparison.html)

Expand All

About
Admission
Courses
Faculty & Staff
High school principal job description
EDUCATION:
Masters Degree, including all courses needed to meet credential requirements.

CREDENTIAL:
Elementary Administration, General Administration or Administrative Services Credential

EXPERIENCE:
Successful teaching experience. Administrative experience at either an elementary, middle, or High school is desirable.

ABILITY TO:
Follow safety procedures and written and verbal instructions; work co-operatively with staff, students & public; make independent decisions; work autonomously; demonstrate good judgment & good problem-solving skills; organize tasks, set priorities & meet deadlines; manage multiple tasks; direct, supervise, evaluate & instruct others; respond appropriately to evaluation & changes in the work setting.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS AND WORKING CONDITIONS
The physical requirements indicated below are examples of the physical aspects that must be performed in carrying out the essential functions listed above.

Physical Requirements: Sit, look downward, reach, stand, walk, bend, stoop, squat, push, pull, climb stairs, twist, repetitive hand activities within close reach, such as files, keyboard and handwriting, lift/carry up to 25 pounds, speaking (including in-person and public address.)

Working Conditions: Indoor office and classrooms, outside school grounds. Exposure to: seasonal temperature variations, dust and wind, food preparation smell, use of office equipment and desk supplies. Reasonable accommodation may be made to enable a person with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job.
APPENDIX E

Research Question 3 Artifacts

College/career indicator model/accountability formula

---

**College/Career Indicator Model**

Performance level is based on a student's highest achievement on any one measure. Students included in the model are those in the CALPADS 4-year graduation cohort.

### WELL PREPARED

**Does the student meet at least 1 measure below?**

- Three or more Advanced Placement (AP) Exams (Score of 3 or Higher)
- Scored “Ready” on Early Assessment Program (EAP) for both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math
- Scored “Ready” and “Conditional Ready” on EAP plus Passed Approved Grade 12 Course
- International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma
- Three or More IB Exams (Score of 4 or Higher)
- Two or More Years of Academic/Career Technical Education (CTE) Dual Enrollment
- CTE Pathway Completion plus one year of Dual Enrollment

### PREPARED

**Does the student meet at least 1 measure below?**

- Two AP Exams (Score of 3 or Higher)
- Scored “Ready” in one EAP subject area and “Conditional Ready” in the other EAP subject area but Did Not Take or Pass Approved Grade 12 Course
- Scored “Conditional Ready” on EAP for both ELA and Math plus Passed Approved Grade 12 Courses
- Two IB Exams (Score of 4 or Higher)
- A-g completion plus a College/Career Indicator (CCI) Measure from “Approaching Prepared”
- One Year of Academic/CTE Dual Enrollment
- CTE Concentrator and scored “Conditional Ready” on EAP for both ELA and Math
- CTE Pathway Completion plus one CCI Measure from “Approaching Prepared”

### APPROACHING PREPARED

**Does the student meet at least 1 measure below?**

- One AP Exam (Score of 3 or Higher)
- Scored “Conditional Ready” on both ELA and Math EAP
- Scored “Ready” and “Not Ready” on EAP
- One IB Exam (Score of 4 or Higher)
- A-g completion only
- CTE Concentrator and scored “Conditional Ready” in one EAP subject and “Not Ready” in the other EAP subject
- CTE Pathway Completion

### NOT PREPARED

The student did not meet any measures above. This student is NOT PREPARED for college/career.

---

*Measure: Each measure identified in this conceptual model may be a college measure, a career measure, or a combination of both.

**Note:** The following measures will be added when statewide data are available (2017-18).

- State Seal of Biliteracy
- Golden State Seal of Merit Diploma
- Articulated CTE Pathways
- IB Career Related Programs

177
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>CA high school graduation requirements</th>
<th>CBI subject requirements</th>
<th>UC A–G subject requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) History/social science</td>
<td>3 years U.S. history and geography, world history or culture and geography, and ½ science, ½ civics</td>
<td>2 years U.S. History or American government and a social science course</td>
<td>2 years World History, cultures and historical geography and either U.S. History or U.S. History and Gov.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) English</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>4 years college preparatory English that includes composition and literature</td>
<td>4 years college preparatory English that includes literature, reading, speaking and listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Mathematics</td>
<td>2 years including Algebra I</td>
<td>3 years (4 recommended) Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II</td>
<td>3 years (4 recommended) Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Laboratory science</td>
<td>2 years Biological and physical sciences</td>
<td>2 years Biology and physical science</td>
<td>2 years (3 recommended) chosen from biology, chemistry, and physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Language other than English</td>
<td>1 year on, foreign language, or career technical education</td>
<td>2 years of the same language, including American Sign Language</td>
<td>2 years (3 recommended) chosen from biology, chemistry, and physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Visual and performing arts</td>
<td>1 year on, foreign language, or career technical education</td>
<td>1 year dance, drama/theater, music, or visual art</td>
<td>1 year dance, drama/theater, music, or visual art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) College preparatory elective</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) Career Technical Education (CTE) Pathway Completion: The completion of a sequence of courses (typically 3-4) totaling at least 300 hours, including the completion of a capstone course with a grade of C or better in all pathway courses. Note that these 300 hours could be distributed in multiple ways; one district’s pathway completion might be accomplished over two years and another district’s pathway might be accomplished over three years. But both pathways must consist of the same minimum of 300 hours with the completion of a capstone course.

(4) CTE Concentrator: A student who has completed either:
- 50% of a planned program sequence (in hours or credits) in a state-recognized CTE sequence and is enrolled in the next course in that sequence, or
- 50% of a single state-recognized multi-hour course and is enrolled in the second half of that course.

(5) Dual Enrollment: Credit given to students achieving a grade of “C-” or better in courses delivered at a college. Dual enrollment courses may be in either academic disciplines such as
Math, English Language Arts, and Arts, or also in CTE disciplines such as Welding or Refrigeration. However, Physical Education classes are not counted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Content Area</th>
<th>Number of Different Courses Offered for Each Content Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Technical Education</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama/Theater</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English-language arts</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Languages</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/Social Science</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Instruction-Related Assignments</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6) Advanced Placement (AP): College-level courses offered by the College Board in 34 subjects. Exams are scored on a scale of 1-5, where 3 and above is considered passing. Students do not have to be enrolled in an AP course to take an AP exam.

(7) International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB): The IB Diploma is achieved by passing 6 exams in the 6 IB subject areas in addition to completing the Core, which requires an essay, service activities, and a Theory of Knowledge class. The 6 IB exams are graded on a scale of 1-7, making 42 the greatest number of points possible. A score of 4 is considered passing, and a total of 24 points is the minimum necessary to receive an IB diploma.
APPENDIX F

Research Question 4 Artifacts

Newspaper article

Hemet High principal selected for leadership program

Hemet High School Principal Emily Shaw is among 20
women selected to participate in the new Aspiring
Women Leaders Program, an initiative to increase the
number of women becoming school superintendents.

AASA, School Superintendents Association, has
selected female leaders from school districts across the
country for the inaugural program. Shaw and other
participants, all of whom aspire to become
superintendents, will receive mentoring and coaching, networking opportunities and
gain visibility through presentations at AASA events.

The superintendents association works to support and develop effective school
system leaders.

Contact the writers 903-356-9006 or cahultz@asong.com

Women’s leadership conference agenda

ACS

AOSA Region XIX
Women’s Leadership Network

presents

Changing Mindset
Through Coaching

FALL 2019 NETWORKING DINNER
September 25, 2019
AOSA Region XIX

180
ACSA Region XIX
Women’s Leadership Network

Vision
All women educational leaders will have the opportunity to improve their practice through collaboration, mentoring, and networking.

Mission
To provide professional development and support for women educational leaders in education that enhances their leadership, management, communication, and reflection.

Goals
• Develop a safe and supportive network for women leaders to address the challenges and opportunities.
• Provide current and relevant educational research, information, tools, and protocols.
• Inspire and motivate network members to pursue and achieve their personal and professional goals.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION
Twitter: www.twitter.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com
LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com
ACSA Region XIX Women’s Leadership Network

Agenda
3:00-6:00 p.m.
• Welcome
• Introductions
• Networking

6:00 p.m.
• Dinner

6:45-7:20 p.m.
• Changing Mindsets through Coaching: Amelie Pacheco/Gretchen Sarah refrigeri

7:20-7:50 p.m.
• Networking Activity: Maria Teresa Pena

7:50-8:00 p.m.
• Drinks & Closing
Division of labor organizational chart
### September 14, 2016 Leadership Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Presenters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:30</td>
<td>Coffee &amp; Conversation (issue B1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30-8:45</td>
<td>Welcome &amp; Cautions &amp; Attendees celebrations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45 - 9:00</td>
<td>Follow-up on Action Plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 - 9:16</td>
<td>Action Plans - Going Deeper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15 - 10:00</td>
<td>Break-out Sessions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 - 10:15</td>
<td>MIP Discussion &amp; Activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15 - 11:45</td>
<td>Action Plans Working</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45 - 12:00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 - 1:00</td>
<td>Continue with Action Plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 - 1:30</td>
<td>Drill-Cohach Convocation Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PLEASE TAKE OUR SURVEY**

**YOUR FEEDBACK IS ANONYMOUS.**

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8am6k9](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/8am6k9)
Goals
3 messages

[Email body]

Attached are the Goals and Action Steps for each. I met with Dave today at a conference we are both at. We refined some notes but other than that he said they were spot on and suggested that I share them with you.

If you need to know more about any item please ask.

I was going to take the action steps into my admin team meeting on Monday and ask my AP’s who wants to take on what and let them help me finish out the responsibility places. I meet with Department Leaders on Monday and I was going to get their feedback to see if there is anything on them they can’t live with or anything they think needs to be added.

Thoughts?

[Attachment: Action Plan Goals.docx]

[Email body]

Thank you so much.

[Attachment: Action Plan Goals.docx]

"Make everyday a GREAT day to be a Mustang for every student!"
Graduation
Readiness
Engagement
Attendance
Teaching and Learning

[Email body]

Thank you so much for sharing! Yes, parsing out certain actions inside your goals to AP’s is very smart. Tell them to use the tracking sheets at least once a week for some part of the actions and have it handy for any visit from the supt, and of course, to meet as an admin team.

Said from my iPhone
[Quoted text hidden]

[Attachment: Action Plan Goals.docx]

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=fae0b3e958&pli=1&view=pt&shadic=00000000000000000000000000000000&sf胜=0&shbi=10739...