

THINKING WITH THEORY: USING LIFE COURSE THEORY TO RETHINK BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP



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INTRODUCTION

- Longitudinal “like” study
- 27 year span 1993, 2007, 2016
- Survey research of Women Superintendents in Washington State (informed by Shakeshaft, 1985,1987)
- Total n: 133 participants 2016
- Used the same survey for all participants
- Socio-historical forces shape women’s lives

THINKING WITH THEORY

- Marn (2015) Start with theory first instead of traditional forms of qualitative data analysis
- Analyzed survey data and comments with the lens of Life Course Theory without use of codes or themes, but rather embedding data into the pillars of the theory
- Marn (2015) “Once a researcher starts *thinking with theory* to analyze data, it is difficult to return to more traditional forms of analysis.”
- More nuanced results using this theory instead of coding first.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Life Course Theory (Elder, 1998)

“Life course theory and research alert us to this real world, a world in which lives are lived and where people work out paths of development as best they can. It tells us how lives are socially organized in biological and historical time, and how the resulting social pattern affects the way we think, feel, and act. (p.9)”

- Historical Time and Place
- Timing as a Critical Feature of Decision Making
- Linked Lives
- Human Agency

HISTORICAL TIME AND PLACE

- 2016: A Year of Promise and Disappointment for Women
- Gender Parity is still an issue for women in leadership positions
- 59% women elementary principals, 28.5% women secondary principals
- Only 24% women superintendents
 - Kerr & Kerr (2014)

TOP THREE BARRIERS

1993	2007	2016
Sex Role Stereotyping	Barriers to securing the position as often self-imposed	Job Stress
Sex Discrimination	“Good old boys” network helps men, not women	Job Responsibilities
Lack of role models/mentors to guide women into the superintendency	School Board not well informed regarding the qualification of female candidates	”Good old boys” network helps men, not women



TIMING

- Women older than men when entering superintendency – three positions or “chairs” to move through
- Too late in career
- Family responsibilities 44% women, 27 % men note this impacts their decisions to be a superintendent(Kowalski)
- Women superintendents believe there is no “right timing” and go for it. (Ward, Hill, McDonald)

SURVEY RESPONSES CLASSIFIED FOR “TIMING”

Survey Items	Seated Superintendents	Aspiring Superintendents	Mean Difference
Raising children	2.53	3.21	.32
Caring for elderly parents	2.28	3.75	1.47
Timing in my career (too late)	1.9	3.09	1.19
Desirable Geographical location	2.19	2.69	.05
Proximity to higher education opportunities	3.92	3.84	-.08

Values reported represent standardized means based upon a 5.0 scale.



LINKED LIVES

- 90% of women superintendents married (Kowalski)
- Elder – “notion of linked or interdependent lives, and its relation to the dramatic trends in women’s lives with multiple, interlocking careers or pathways...”
- Marriages a casualty for many...Grogan and Brunner (2005)
- Marriages affect mobility. Mean tenure 5-6 years mobility a factor in pursuing the position.
- Commuter marriages, less acceptable for a woman than a man to move my kids for a job.
- Women are moving into superintendencies with supportive spouses
- Helping Aging Parents



HUMAN AGENCY

- Having Female Role Models, Professional Development, and encouragement by other female administrators.
- Position and pay not worth the stress.
- Superintendents – fulfilling occupation –would do it again...(Kowalski)
- Several myths about elements of practice
- Women in the study construct their lives by effectively managing work and family, and choosing their paths deliberately rather than letting linked lives, timing, or historical time and place dictate decision making.

IMPLICATIONS

- Highlight the stories of successful women superintendents and the life course strategies that have enabled them to combine work and family.
- Reframe the story of the superintendency from a positive perspective.
- Women need to form networks to mentor and tap other women in early and mid-career stages to influence life choices in a positive, timely fashion.



IMPLICATIONS

- Superintendent training programs need to provide outreach to early and mid-pipeline women and minorities and to embed their stories in training programs and promotional brochures.
- Superintendent certification and doctoral programs need to be designed in such a way that early and mid-career women administrators can participate while balancing the demanding roles of family and work.
- Superintendent certification and doctoral programs need to be designed to provide maximum opportunity for job embedded learning and network building.



THANK YOU AND QUESTIONS

Any further questions contact:

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