

ORDERED CHAOS:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHILDREARING IN
THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
POSITIONS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

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POSITIONS. (MAY 2008)

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The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the intersection of the roles of motherhood and educational leadership. The primary focus of this feminist research was to explore how women maintain dual roles as mothers of young children and senior-level educational leaders in public schools, community colleges, and universities. More specifically, this research examined how women who maintain these dual roles describe maneuvering through the personal and professional dimensions of their lives and the perceptions they develop of themselves along the way. The results of this research are intended to contribute to theory that helps explicate the dual meanings held by women attempting to straddle the social categories of “mother” and “professional,” specifically mothers caring for young children who also maintain high-level positions in educational leadership.

Multiple interview sessions were conducted and supporting documents gathered from the six participants of the study. In addition, the author maintained a personal journal

throughout the research process to respond reflectively to questions that emerged regarding research methodology and her own personal experiences as a mother and educational leader. Feminist content analysis was applied to the interview data, documents, and the author's journal. The subsequent results are presented through a work of autoethnographic fiction and then a detailed exploration of emergent themes.

The six participants of the study came from vastly different backgrounds but often relayed similar "stories" about their lives as mothers and educational leaders. The constructs that emerged from the interviews were bound together within the two overarching themes of *sacrifice* and *self-perception*. The results of these interviews suggest that women who occupy the dual roles of mother and educational leader may find they sacrifice their health and their time due to the conflicting demands of the job and parenting. The perceptions that these women developed of themselves were influenced by three primary sources: society, co-workers, and their own children. These perceptions often conveyed conflicted feelings about how others perceived them in their dual roles.

The results of this dissertation support the notion that mothers who attempt to maintain a senior-level position of educational leadership while simultaneously parenting young children risk encountering a "maternal wall" (Williams, 2000). The primary findings suggest women encounter this obstacle due to the conflicting demands of both roles and the outside perceptions that influence how they perceive themselves. These findings help expand upon and provide needed context for theories that purport to explain the current underrepresentation of mothers with young children in senior-level positions of educational leadership.