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Standing Side by Side with 'The Brethren': A Study of Leadership From Female High School Principals' Perspectives

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Educational administration has long been a masculinist enterprise. There is a significant theoretical gap and lack of explanations grounded in the experience and language of women (Blackmore, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1987). In addressing that gap related to the experiences of female educational leaders, predominant research on women has primarily surrounded their dilemmas rather than their contributions (Papalewis, 1995). This study addressed both the challenges and contributions of women principals serving in male-dominated, secondary school arenas. We explored the nature of the leadership experiences of three female high school principals by focusing on the perceptions of leadership from the standpoint of female leaders and highlighting how women interact with the male-constructed role of the high school principal. Qualitative methods, including a multiple case study approach, were used. Participants were interviewed and shadowed in their positions for observational data collection.

The most salient themes emerging included: (a) in the shadow of an image, (b) proving oneself while being put on watch, (c) invisible networks made visible, (d) mentoring for leadership development, and (e) balancing silence and the rules. In addition, these women presented several characterizations of leadership that included: (a) collaborative communities developed through open doors and open ears, (b) emotional investments and nurturing reap returns, (c) instruction must prevail, and (d) children must be the focus of schools.

This study sought to expand our understandings of the challenges that campus-based female leaders face as well as their contributions, thereby broadening our perspectives of female educational leadership, specifically at the high school level.

Although women are more represented in leadership positions in the field of educational administration than they have ever been, they are still markedly underrepresented when one considers that they make up almost three-quarters of educators (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Women comprise nearly 80% of the elementary teaching force and half of the teaching force in secondary settings. Riehl and Byrd (1997) suggest that 41% of elementary principals and 16% of

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secondary principals are women, and women overall hold 34% of principalships and 41% of assistant principalships. More promising, however, Henke, Choy, Geis, and Broughman (1996) contend that females comprise 83% of the teaching force at the elementary level and 54% of the secondary teaching force, and, although women constitute 52% of the elementary principalships, they hold only 26% of high school positions. Moreover, data illustrate that women hold 35% of public school principalships, when all elementary and secondary positions are combined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

Determination of the actual number of women serving in educational leadership posts is elusive, particularly when sorting leaders by position or school level. Data are presented differently by different researchers. To illustrate, Mertz and McNeely (1988, 1998) outlined a myriad of statistical analyses regarding the ascent of women into the upper echelons of educational administration. They found great inconsistency with regard to the way that data were interpreted and presented. They argue that unclear data samples make it difficult to gauge the extent to which female representation in educational administration is increasing or decreasing. Nevertheless, regardless of their exact approach to accounting for male and female representation in the field, women have not reached parity with men in educational leadership positions, particularly at the high school principalship level, and the proportion of women in leadership positions still decreases as the age of the student increases (Ozga, 1993).

The under-representation of women in top leadership positions relates to their under-representation in the literature as well. Even with increases in the number of women serving in the administrative ranks, the message remains that *women teach and men manage*. Put simply, Marshall (1993) challenges, "When theory, and the models and practices that flow from theory, ignore the fact that those structural characteristics filter out women and minorities, then theory is missing a large chunk of the picture" (p. 168). Too few women have spoken on the nature of the experiences of women in educational leadership, in general, and particularly at the campus level. Cooper (1995) found that women often must carry out a private discourse with themselves with regard to their leadership and she notes that, "They carry their female views with them into the male bureaucratic realm and must consciously put some of them aside to 'succeed' in this world on its own terms" (p. 244). The dearth of public discourse from women's perspectives affects not only current but also prospective female administrators.

In more recent years, researchers in women's studies, and particularly in educational administration, have begun to question traditional theories of school leadership that borrow from the fields of business, management, sociology and others (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). They argue that "the texts, conversations, writings, and professional activities that construct our knowing and understanding of leadership come from an embedded privileged perspective which largely ignores issues of status, gender, and race..." (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995, p. 12). Indeed, Blackmore (1993) contends that the field of educational administration and its theories constitute a 'masculinist enterprise.' Moreover, Banks (1995) argues, "The assumption that leadership requires male characteristics has led to a body of research in which women and people of color are compared to white men.... Conceptualizing research on leadership as a mirror in which women and people of color are expected to be a reflection of white men ultimately marginalizes these two groups because they are viewed as having fewer skills and less power" (p. 71).

The eradication of such marginalization of women, in particular, will not occur immediately, and it must begin with multiple challenges to universal truths purported by those studying educational administration. Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) suggest the need for "...promoting a pro-equity discourse about and among female school leaders" (p. 45). Although their study focuses on the female superintendency, the results imply further research in educational administration by suggesting the widening of conversations about gender issues and discrimination in the field as having the potential to "...nourish the growth of the stifled or absent activist discourse about women's issues and concerns" (p. 71). This form of conversational widening deserves attention from female principals serving in a variety of contexts.

This article presents a study of the nature of the leadership experiences of female high school principals, that is, how they perceive the notion of school leadership, as well as how, as women, they interact with the male-constructed role of the high school principal. The study examined how female high school principals provide alternative notions of leadership and uncovered how these

women interpret and act upon societal notions of leadership based on gender-role expectations through ongoing negotiation of conflict and power relationships from their female perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

Women do not have adequate entry into leadership positions considered more prestigious in the field, as they are more visible in the leadership of education offered to young students and less proportionately represented as leaders when the age of pupils increases (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Ozga, 1993). Shakeshaft (1987) refers to this as "the higher you go, the fewer you see syndrome." As educational arenas (particularly outside the elementary level) become more open to female leaders, the multifaceted construct of educational leadership must be continually redefined. Consequently, to truly address the theoretical gap suggested by feminist scholars, the entire notion of leadership should reflect more completely the experiences of underrepresented groups, especially women in varied contexts (Papalewis, 1995).

Shakeshaft's (1989, 1999) theoretical framework serves as the foundation for this study. This framework illustrates the development and direction of research on women and gender in educational administration. Utilizing six stages, this framework is useful in gauging the extent to which feminist scholarship in the field is making progress and where it is still stifled.

Much of the literature about women in educational administration is still concentrated in the first three stages of this framework. For instance, Pounder (2000) argues that, in the last decade, studies encompassing women's experience (stage 4) have made some of the greatest contributions to the line of inquiry regarding women in the field of educational administration. Research on women serving as high school principals is more limited than research on female superintendents; for example, female secondary leaders have been studied little beyond the first three stages of the framework. Thus, the stages guided the development of this study. Through exploration into and documentation of the experiences of female high school principals, we thereby expand the line of inquiry into the nature of educational leadership for female high school principals studied on their own terms.

Study Design

This study examined, through a feminist lens, three female participants serving in the high school principalship. Feminist perspectives suggest a myriad of methods and approaches for research (Lather, 1987). Ferguson (1984) contends, "Feminist theory is not simply about women, although it is that; it is about the world, but seen from the usually ignored and devalued vantage point of women's experience" (p. 18). Various researchers have offered theories regarding the exclusion of women from the field of educational leadership since 1975. Initially deficit, and more recently structural, theories have challenged the persistent under-representation of women in the field (Ozga,

Stages of Research in Educational Administration

Stage	Description
1. Absence of women documented.	Survey analyses of how many women are administrators and what positions do they hold.
2. Search for current and previous female administrators.	Historical research on key women leaders or surveys of women administrators illustrating their characteristics.
3. Women as disadvantaged or subordinate.	Surveys of attitudes towards women and their experiences that attempt to document the under-representation of female leaders.
4. Women studied on their own terms.	Through surveys, interviews, or observations, women describe their lives and experiences.
5. Women as challenge to theory.	Theoretical analyses that describe required changes for theory to include women's experience.
6. Transformation of theory.	Introduction/discussion of new theories of human behavior in organizations.

Source: Shakeshaft, C. (1999). The struggle to create a more gender-inclusive profession. In J. Murphy and K. L. Lewis (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational administration* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

1993). Gosetti and Rusch (1995) and Shakeshaft (1995) continue to argue that an androcentric bias in educational research, primarily rooted in positivist paradigms that gauge women against male-defined constructs, leads to a great absence of research that takes into account the female world. Research from a feminist perspective seeks to remedy this absence, this silence.

Feminist research that is "designed *for* women...to provide explanations of social phenomena that *they* want and need, rather than providing answers for questions...that have arisen from desires to pacify...or manipulate women [is still needed]" (Harding, 1987, p. 6) (emphasis added). Indeed, the field has rarely looked at the high school principalship from a feminist perspective.

Method
This study explored the nature of the leadership experiences of female high school principals. Acknowledging arguments that predominant research on

female educational leaders strictly focuses on their dilemmas and overlooks their contributions (Papalewis, 1995), we expand understandings of the nature of the experiences of female high school principals by addressing two areas. We emphasize the important intersection of gender and the role of the high school principal and the dilemmas that these women face in relation to that intersection. Moreover, the participants' perceptions and notions of leadership contribute to new and perhaps unconventional perspectives on leadership. Specifically, the study explored one main research question and two supporting sub-questions: What is the nature of the leadership experiences of female high school principals?

1. How do female high school principals interpret and interact with societal constructions of leadership and the high school principalship in relation to gender role expectations?
2. What are the perspectives on leadership provided by these female principals and how do they contribute to new understandings or theories of educational leadership?

Qualitative methods that relied on a multiple case study approach were employed to examine the experiences of three current female high school principals (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990). Stake (1995) contends that qualitative research is not monolithic, and multiple "curiosities" and approaches to humankind from various disciplines in the social sciences inform it. A qualitative approach supported by in-depth interviewing and conversational partnership techniques (Chirban, 1996; Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) allowed for a heightened level of interaction among the researchers and participants as well as the expression of voice, also central to a feminist study.

Sampling

This study focused on three forms of purposeful sampling: *intensity sampling, homogeneous sampling,* and *convenience sampling.* According to Patton (1990), the purpose of intensity sampling is to pursue information-rich cases with the potential of manifesting phenomena or experiences intensely, albeit not critically or extremely. Homogenous sampling draws from a similar group of subjects, and it is useful in facilitating group interaction. Convenience sampling uses the proximity of subjects in selection. If done as the sole form of sampling, convenience sampling minimizes the credibility of the study and has the potential for yielding information-poor cases (Patton, 1990). However, since convenience sampling was only one of three methods of selection in this study and more importantly, the least emphasized, it had limited impact on the credibility of the study and the integrity of its results.

Several criteria guided the selection of participants: (a) service as a high school principal at their current high school for at least one full year; (b) service as a campus administrator (either principal or assistant) a minimum of three years; and (c) current leadership as a principal of a high school considered

academically *acceptable* by Texas accountability measures. Again, the proximity of participants was the final consideration for sampling, as an interactive group interview requiring their travel to a central location was conducted.

Participants and Organizations

Organizational Settings

Three principals, one from each of three settings (small, medium, and large-sized districts), were selected. The small district had less than 10,000 students, the medium-sized district had more than 20,000 students but less than 60,000, and the large district had more than 60,000 students and is considered to be one of "The Big 8" school districts in Texas. Since the state ranks districts and schools based on their levels of student performance, attendance, and drop-out rates into the categories of *exemplary, recognized, acceptable*, or *low-performing*, the districts selected for this study had to be at least academically *acceptable* based on state accountability measures. Of the three districts, one was deemed *acceptable* and two were *recognized* by the state. The high schools where the participants lead were all considered *acceptable* based on state accountability measures. The principals selected have served as campus administrators (either principals or assistants) a minimum of three years and have also served on their current high school campus as principals a minimum of one year.

Participant Characteristics

The three women participants in this study come from unique schools, districts, and educational contexts. Likewise, they each pursued unique paths to the principalship and were influenced in their positions by different individuals and circumstances. Each of the participants had more than 20 years of experience in education. One spent a significant portion of her career at the community college level, another served as a central office director for music education, and the last developed her skills in the teaching and coaching ranks before pursuing a job in administration. Two of the women in this study worked solely with male principals as assistant principals prior to assuming their current roles as high school leaders; the third began her campus administrative career in partnership with a female colleague with whom she had taught and trained previously in another district. All three women participating in this study were serving in their first high school principalship. None was a campus principal at a different level prior to her current position.

Consistent with national statistics that indicate male dominance in the role of the high school principalship, these women work in district settings where men also dominate high school principalships. In the small and medium-sized districts, the participants are the only female high school principals in their districts. The small school district has two high schools, one led by a woman. In the larger school district, four women leaders serve among the twelve high schools in the district. The women leading in the small and large districts are not the first women appointed to the high school principalship in

their districts. However, the participant from a medium-sized district is the first female principal of a comprehensive high school in her school district. Significantly, none of the women participants moved up through the ranks in their own school district to become a high school principal. After years as high school assistant principals, two of the women relocated to new school districts to assume their high school principalships, while one moved to a new district to begin her high school administrative career as the 12th grade principal with a fellow female colleague.

Data Gathering Steps

By using the Texas School Directory for 2000-2001, female high school principals were highlighted and identified. For those school districts having at least one female high school principal, an accountability search had to indicate that both the district and the high school had acceptable ratings. Furthermore, the high schools themselves had to perform at or above the state average on all of Texas' Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) academic performance indicators.

Contact was first made with those districts meeting the aforementioned criteria and in close proximity. Potential participants were already pre-screened by the aforementioned criteria to determine their qualification for the study. Access to the districts and contact with the participants (principals) was initiated by phone with a follow-up letter.

Interviewing was used as the primary source of data collection in this analysis. Prior to meeting, the participants in this study were made aware of its focus and emphasis on the concept of gender as it related to their lives as female high school administrators. Two in-depth individual interviews (Chirban, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and one collaborative group interview (Fontana & Frey, 1994) were conducted. These allowed the participants' voices and key themes from their interactions to emerge. A multiple case study approach was employed in this analysis to capture the stories and the nature of the experiences of those female high principals whose stories have been minimally heard.

Interviews

Two interviews were conducted individually with all participants. The first interview followed the structure of an interview guide; however, it was rooted in an open-ended, conversational partnership (Chirban, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The guide included direct questions as well as general themes for discussion to foster heightened conversation rather than a strict question and answer session. Areas for future investigation arose based on the participants' initial responses during the first interview. A second individual interview was conducted also using open-ended interview techniques and an overarching interview guide, with individual adjustments made for each participant.

To complete the study, a third, collaborative group interview was conducted. In this interview, all of the participants had an opportunity to interact

and share their responses in a small group setting (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This process reflected an open-ended interview centered on predetermined concepts derived from the coding and analysis process of the first two interviews. The participants were provided with these general themes at the start of the collaborative interview. Likewise, they were provided with profiles of each other and their school and district contexts in advance. Having access to this information ahead of time, the participants were more apt to share openly. They enhanced the richness of this interview with their abilities to sense and respond to reiterations of their own experiences and voice by acknowledging the voices and experiences of other female high school leaders.

All interviews were audio taped with the participants' permission. During interviewing and visits, observational and personal notes were recorded in a log. This was particularly important to capture the nuances of the participants' language and posturing as well the researchers' own perceptions and interpretations of the events that transpired. Audiotaped interviews were transcribed and coded following each interview, and member checks were performed with each participant following site visits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Site Visits/Observations

In order to enrich and enhance the validity of the study, observations of the participants were also conducted during school visits (Stake, 1995). Principals were shadowed in their natural settings during daily routines and meetings during the course of two to three days visits per participant. This additional source of information at least partially supported the triangulation of data gathered in face-to face interviews, as some of the statements and the perceptions shared by the participants were connected to the actual behaviors they exhibited (Patton, 1990).

During the site visits, observational notes and personal reflections were recorded in an effort to accurately characterize the setting and events transpiring. A reflective process was used throughout the study and aided in identifying the emerging patterns and themes uncovered as well as areas of limitation needing further development in the research design (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data Analysis

Data analysis started with manual coding of the interview transcripts. Prompt transcription and coding enhanced credibility, as member checks were performed with each participant following their individual and group sessions. Bracketing techniques were used to ensure trustworthiness and adherence to emerging themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

To analyze these interviews, tapes were reviewed several times after each interview and while waiting on transcription. Furthermore, all transcripts were read prior to analysis to capture a sense of the whole and the voices of participants. Afterward, manual coding of reappearing categories was completed. Participants were given opportunities to provide feedback and clarify the meaning of their statements during follow-up conversations and the

collaborative interview. They further provided feedback after the collaborative group interview. Moreover, participants were given the opportunity to comment upon and expand the researchers' analysis, ensuring credibility and trustworthiness in the interviewing and shadowing processes.

Results/Findings

The findings from this study are based on the constructions and interpretations of the researchers, as well as the initial constructions and interpretations of the participants themselves. Thus, these findings are better stated as descriptions that attempt to represent these women and their stories in a meaningful way. This first section of findings addresses the manner in which participants interact with and interpret the role of the high school principal, which is largely still male-defined. The second section addresses their varied perspectives on leadership at the high school level.

Leadership Interpretations and Interactions
of Female High School Principals

The salient themes emerging from the participants' responses included: (a) their sense of being in the shadow of an image, (b) their perceptions of requirements that they prove themselves as female leaders who are put on watch, (c) their observations of seemingly invisible yet tangible networks working in the field primarily to benefit their male counterparts, (d) their interpretations of what is lacking in the area of mentoring female leadership development, and (e) their encounters with balancing their silence on gender issues as female leaders.

In the shadow of an image.   All three participants spoke of the male-domination of the high school principalship described in the literature. Although the tough male disciplinarian *strong enough* to handle older students was an image prevalent among the public, these women shared alternative constructions of leadership that define strength on different terms. These include: an ability to develop others, a knack for listening, and a collaborative work ethic.

These female leaders were reminded that they simply did not reflect the image of the high school principal held in the minds of others—examples in which they were ignored, challenged and asked if they were the 'real principal,' and confronted by others who wanted to see the principal and demanded to see *him*. Their stories strengthen the argument that the under-representation of women in top leadership posts in the field supports society's constructed image of the male school leader juxtaposed with the image of the female teacher (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988). The participants recognized that they are often still viewed as incongruent reflections of that societal image of the high school principal as female leaders. Although they acknowledge that in principalship preparation programs, the image of the principal connotes a visionary leader with high expectations for students and a broad knowledge of effective

pedagogical practices, they cite a lack of congruency between what they are taught and what they encounter as female leaders. For example, one participant cogently illustrated her perception that the high school principalship is still largely male-defined:

> I think if you looked in the dictionary under the word 'principal', there would be a man's picture there, because perception—...you know, my secretary gets so irritated because people will call or a parent will show up to see the principal, 'Well I want to see him now.' It's an automatic assumption by the general public that the [high school] principal is a man.

For the other two participants, their contrast as females with the 'embedded assumptions' held by society with regard to the high school principalship was evident in more direct experiences (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995). One participant reported being ignored when talking with people as the school's leader. When others were unhappy, they disregarded her efforts and demanded that they see 'the real principal.' She has often been questioned in her position, as she did not reflect the male image that many have constructed in their minds. She noted:

> Or you'll introduce yourself, and they're like 'The principal? The real principal?' I've had them use those words, the 'real principal' like I'm just...'No, I'd just thought I'd try that title on for size'...Or, I've gone some place with a male AP and people will talk to him as though he's the principal – if they want to talk to the principal, and we'll be together, and they'll be looking at the AP and talking to him. And then he'll say, 'She's the principal.' But they just assume that I...I don't know what they think I am, the assistant or the secretary or the floozy who's tagging along. I don't know what they think I am.

As a result of imposed social constructs, these women acknowledged additional challenges they face as female leaders, watched by others and required to overcome obstacles not fairly dispersed across gender lines. Conversations in the field of educational administration, both among professors and practitioners, highlight the need for competent, instructional leaders at the secondary level (both male and female). In contrast, women in this study report that the general public and those with whom they interact on a daily basis have not been as open to broadening their image of the high school principal.

Proving oneself while being put on watch. All three participants shared the tensions they have experienced when constructions of their roles as women intersected with varied and dominant constructions of the high school principalship. They acknowledged that their incongruent reflections of that dominant image have often led them to be required to pass through tangible rites of passage and to counter varied forms of isolation, arm-flexing, and intimidation that reminds these women that they *do not fit in*. These principals sensed a need to demonstrate over and over again their competence and leadership skills

when stereotypes and a questioning of their abilities as female leaders have arisen. Even when they were confident and successful in their roles, they have still been required to contend with those operating under dominant myths of leadership and a woman's role in the first place. In other words, when the participants themselves were able to separate gender from their leadership in a particular situation, they still have encountered countless others who have not made that separation.

Proving oneself as a female high school principal often brings with it certain gendered rites of passage. The study participants articulated hidden environmental barriers or rites of passage that were particularly prevalent when they were assuming new leadership roles as principals. These barriers required that they prove themselves and establish their worthiness as leaders. Women must establish a professional identity within the context of prevalent social expectations and while negotiating the fault-lines of what is and what is not deemed as acceptable leadership in public school administration (Regan, 1995). Indeed, operating in the context of prevalent values and leadership expectations, the participants in this study indicated that they have been challenged to prove themselves *worthy* in ways they feel are not required of their male colleagues.

Scholars point out that tangible manifestations of gendered gate keeping in educational administration persist through an *absent presence* (Apple, 1983; Kanter, 1977; Lather, 1987 as cited in Blackmore, 1993). That is to say that certain additional challenges often exist specifically for women even though they are not publicly acknowledged. The participants became frustrated because the parameters surrounding the ways in which they prove themselves were often dictated by gender stereotypes and social scripts. This is most significant with individuals with whom these women have not had an opportunity to interact before—those guided by embedded, gendered assumptions about women in leadership. The participants felt tested and watched, not strictly because they were leaders but because they were female leaders. Their success had great implications not only for them but for other women.

Williams and Willower (1983) found that, "Some female executives feel they must face and survive a special trial in which they and their kind are at risk. As individuals, but more importantly, as women, they must succeed not just for themselves, but for the sake of their gender" (p. 19). The lone female principal in her district noted:

> It's important that I am successful because it sends the message that, hey, a woman in high school is okay. The world as we know it is not going to stop. The kids will be fine. And that is important. So what I do is important.... Because you've got to be successful. If you are unsuccessful...See, I knew a woman, I knew she couldn't do it. People watch that.

The other principals indicated a sense that they must prove themselves not only as leaders but as female leaders. One participant reported that others doubt her success and observe her moves carefully:

> Since I've gone into administration, I feel like I'm on watch all the time. But I think that goes back to my feeling that I have to prove myself.... A new school—can she keep it up and running? It's going in the right direction, but can she maintain it?...I know they're out there watching.

Although the idea of being put on watch and being required to prove themselves is shared by the participants, they conveyed general confidence in their roles and in their leadership styles. Of course, they may have chosen to overlook, oppose, or ignore those watching—those whom they perceived as passing judgment. Nevertheless, even with decisions that fly in the face of what is expected of them, they were not unaware of the persistent presence of opposing societal constructions of the high school principalship within which they do not fit.

What is acceptable behavior for one gender is not always acceptable for the other (Banks, 1995). Collaborative feminine practices of leadership, for example, are only valued when they are coupled with masculinist virtues (Worrall, 1995). Tannen (1990) argues that women are often caught in a double bind as leaders that leaves them *damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't*. The participants in this study did not allow dominant views to consistently govern their leadership, yet they were cognizant that they are on watch because they are female leaders. This was a quandary. To be successful in the field, they could not work in complete isolation. They had to negotiate and develop professional and personal relationships with those around them. Gaining acceptance in a field in which one is underrepresented is not easy. Moreover, being formally hired for a position is not equivalent to gaining actual acceptance among a group of (mostly male) peers at the high school level. Other barriers exist.

Invisible networks made visible: Gaining acceptance among the brethren. Gaining formal acceptance among colleagues held a very different meaning for these women than gaining actual acceptance into the high school principalship ranks. Although they admitted that they cannot dwell on instances of different treatment, the participants spoke openly about their exclusion from internal networks utilized by their male high school principal colleagues within their own districts. Referred to by the participants as 'the boys club' and 'the brethren,' these networks did not grant easy access to these women who have already gained acceptance into the formal district ranks with their appointments to the principalship. This finding is consistent with research that uncovers a limit to female participation within male-dominated professions and a discernible juxtaposition between authority and influence versus isolationism and exclusion for female educational leaders working with mostly male colleagues (Bell, 1995; Hart, 1995). Invisible, but tangible, networks and the membership exclusions associated with them continue to exist, and the women in this study have observed that such exclusionary, informal support networks were available to men but not necessarily to women in their field.

Numerous processes in male-dominated professions limit female partici-
pation, and those most evident are institutionalized avenues for recruitment
and protégé networks (Banks, 2000). These networks and the expectations
associated with them continue to exist. Furthermore, since some women, like
these three participants, now operate *on the inside* and within the parameters
of the high school principalship, they are able to shed light on additional in-
ternal networks at play. As one female leader explained,

> There's a boy's club in our district. And there's that whole surface of formal
> meetings where we all go, but you'll see it come out in certain things. .[For ex-
> ample], there was this one meeting where just the principals met on the side...I
> didn't know about it, and one of the men was to call me and invite me to this
> side meeting, but somehow he forgot to do that ...That's not uncommon. So
> they don't call themselves the brethren or the boy's club, but they operate in
> that manner sometimes.

In one of the school districts studied, the male high school principals actually
referred to themselves as 'the brethren.' They jokingly called their lone fe-
male high school principal colleague 'Old What's Her Name.' She admitted,
"When we're in meetings, we're very cordial to each other. We talk. We com-
municate. We laugh. We joke. But it's different when you walk outside of the
central office or our school. There are other networks at play."

Although these women may have somehow achieved parity coupled with
acceptance and value as high school principals in a formal sense, they often
faced additional barriers to that acceptance and a devaluing of their roles in
the informal sense. In formally structured settings with an established hierar-
chy, the women appeared to "fit in." Nevertheless, several instances in which
they were devalued and overlooked within hierarchies that are not formally
sanctioned were significant. There are times when these women hold a dif-
ferent status than their male colleagues. Their invitation into the formal
power structure of the organization did not encompass access into a seem-
ingly informal *inner sanctum*.

In addition to being isolated (either occasionally or completely) from male-
dominated internal networks within their districts, the three participants ex-
pressed their perceptions of a broader male-dominated network for secondary
principals. At large state and national secondary conferences that provide the
only forum to discuss strictly secondary issues, the participants have noticed a
significant amount of networking to which they are not privy. In addition to ob-
serving heightened levels of colleagueship within these networks, the partici-
pants also witnessed them functioning as sources for male sponsorship and
mentorship. They are not granted access to such networks to develop and sup-
port them as secondary leaders. Instead, they often have relied on themselves
or pursued other means to foster their own leadership development.

Mentoring for leadership development. In addition to being iso-
lated from male-dominated networks that sponsor, mentor, and primarily

develop other males as leaders, the study participants felt that a lack of mentorship and development for women aspiring to or serving in educational leadership positions was significant. This lack of mentoring was even more prevalent when they served as assistant principals. Although, in some cases, the participants developed positive working relationships with their male and female colleagues and immediate supervisors, they were less often mentored and encouraged to take the next step to the principalship level. Instead, they were seemingly expected to appreciate their positions. Even while many colleagues complimented these women on their outstanding abilities and leadership, others were less open to the idea of these women aspiring to assume full principalship roles.

Historically, women have not been encouraged to pursue leadership positions in educational administration (Banks, 1995; Gardiner et al., 2000; Shakeshaft, 1987). Often women are directed into other areas of educational administration outside the principalship by the male patriarchy that continues to dominate educational leadership posts, particularly at the secondary level. The persistent imbalance between men and women serving at the high school principalship level affected the study participants when they tried to pursue new opportunities and apply for principalships.

Participants initially did not see themselves as high school principals, and they encountered limited mentoring and support in pursuing such positions. One of them acknowledged,

> I never thought about being a principal, never thought about it. I—really, to be honest with you—haven't been around that many women principals, high school principals....and in my previous district, there were no women principals....so it's really hard. Do you realize that I am the first and only woman in this district? The only woman high school principal. Sometimes I look in the mirror and think, I can't believe it.

The women in this study pointed out that women are directed into curriculum positions at the secondary level but less often to the comprehensive high school principalship position. They spoke of high schools being divided around "boy jobs" and "girl jobs," with the principalship falling into the former category. Getting to a point where they saw themselves as strong, capable administrators ready for the high school principalship was an important step for these women. They had to overcome both direct opposition and the intangible barriers to the principalship in the absence of female leadership role models.

The participants in this study illustrated patterns of sexual stratification that have persisted in educational leadership and remain overlooked in the field (Blackmore, 1993; Papalewis, 1995; Skrla et al., 2000; Yeakey et al., 1992). Although they have broken into the highest ranks of female leadership at the campus level, these women leaders recognized that they are in fact the exception and not the rule. The lack of female mentors reported by these women leaders is duly noted in the literature (e.g., Gardiner et al., 2000; Hart,

1995; Williams & Willower, 1983). While a few specific male colleagues may support women, as was the case to some degree in this study, the greater established male patriarchy more often mentors and develops its own male members. The participants noted that they have been excluded from male-dominated avenues that foster colleagueship, mentorship, and leadership development, particularly during the beginning of their principalships. However, even within their work situations, these women could not look to a network of women leaders for support, guidance, or development. Too few females exist in the field. Today many women are less often encouraged to pursue the principalship at the high school level and not seeing other women in those positions can influence their own administrative pursuits (Banks, 1995). All participants felt it is important to reverse the lack of mentorship and leadership development for other women in the field.

Balancing silence and the rules.   One of the most interesting findings in this study was that the expanded conversation and awareness expressed by the participants contrasted with their initial reticence in discussing the role that gender continues to play in their unique positions as underrepresented females. Initially, the participants were quick to point out that gender and constructions related to genderized notions of the high school principalship had little or nothing to do with their experiences as leaders. When asked about her feelings on women who feel like their gender has kept them back, one promptly retorted, "That's ridiculous. You need to look for the opportunities where they lie." Shortly thereafter, the participants admitted that they were, in fact, aware of instances where women were held back in other districts or situations and where they themselves had been held back. As they recounted their own stories of frustration and tension, the participants' acknowledgement of the additional challenges that they and other women have faced at the high school level became more noticeable. By the end of the study, the participants spoke more candidly about societal silencing as well as their own self-silencing and self-sanctioning as female high school leaders, bringing this phenomenon to a level of consciousness. In a sense, they began to break their silence, at least within the confines of this study. However, this level of openness was not easy for them, and initially the participants seemed almost opposed to talking about gender discrimination issues they may have faced.

Such initial reticence should not be surprising for women who have essentially "made it" to the high school principal level and who are still practicing within an arena highly stratified by gender. It is expected that they would have difficulty talking about barriers and limits to female advancement. These women have, in fact, advanced in the very system that has held other women back. The study fostered some turning points in the participants' level of awareness and their openness on the subject as they began to speak about their challenges and perceptions. The participants acknowledged that noticing when different treatment may be related to their gender provides them no benefit. Instead, it essentially added another layer of tension and

complexity to a job that is already tense and complex. Thus, they often remained silent on or ignored gender issues. The idea of silence and abiding by the rules appeared to be an unspoken source of survival for these women. This finding, in particular, advances those findings regarding the silence of female superintendents (primarily those who exited) on gender issues in the field (e.g., Grogan, 1996; Skrla, 1997; Skrla et al., 2000). An acknowledgement of silence among women who have not "gained their voices" by exiting their positions as in the case of the previously listed studies is significant. These current practitioners serving at the campus level provide a new perspective that sheds further light on the idea that unwritten and unspoken rules that foster a silent ignoring of gender issues are not only recognizable to those who work at the superintendency level or to those who have left their positions and begin to reflect on such barriers in retrospect. Instead, the participants in this study illustrated that these gendered influences and unwritten rules are clearly evident even to those currently practicing on the inside and within the context of leading in a male-dominated arena.

With support structures, networks, and societal constructions of the role of the high school principal continuing to tip the scales in favor of men, one might expect a sense of anger and frustration on the part of the participants. Although some of the statements made by these women to female researchers studying gender issues would support that conclusion, the participants conveyed that day-to-day interactions with them would not hint at any anger or frustration with gender stratification or imbalance. To illustrate, one participant addressed her need to forget about the issue of gender quite directly,

> I mean it doesn't help me to think that somebody is picking on me because I am a woman. I mean, it just doesn't change anything, so I have to just do the best I can with what I've got. The stereotypical 60s and 70s Women's Lib doesn't fit…and that's sort of where you go when you're like—it's like having a chip on your shoulder, so that's not really a reality in my life.

The other two participants likewise noted a sense that they must complete their jobs without focusing on the perception that others may have. Admittedly, upon reflection, these women noted several instances where their being female created additional obstacles for them as high school principals. However, they attempted to separate gender from their daily work, even when they were still actually 'doing gender' through the eyes of those observing (West & Zimmerman, 1992). These women illustrated a denial of gender discrimination or the presence of hidden gendered rules. This process is characterized as being a *survival mechanism* for female leaders (Erickson, 1984). Reiterating Westkott's and Ferguson's earlier works, Bell (1995) argues that women's gender consciousness can be shaped by either autonomy or manipulation, depending upon the contexts of their leadership. She notes women in educational leadership experience "simultaneous belonging and alienation [and they are often found] opposing the very conditions to which they

conform" (p. 292). Serving currently as female high school principals in settings where varied networks, role constructs, and informal support structures do no necessarily work to their advantage, the participants admitted that opposing those differences publicly is of little benefit to them and, in fact, it could be detrimental. As one of the principals stated,

> I think our conversations here and everything now has just given me time to pause and think about it. You know these things—that there are not many women—but you can't think about it everyday, and I can't think that people treat me differently than they do my colleagues. It doesn't—I don't benefit from that...

Ortiz and Marshall (1988) contend that four themes encompass the development of educational administration and the under-representation of women in leadership positions. One of these themes suggests that *the discussion of gender issues and power are discouraged.* For female practitioners a level of silence is one of the unwritten rules. Female self-silencing in the field of educational administration is a by-product of a male-dominated culture that downplays female isolation and gender discrimination (Marshall, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1992). According to the participants, it was better for them to 'separate' gender issues from their daily running of schools. Indeed, bucking the system on the basis of gender is not sanctioned. Certain qualities associated with 'the feminine' that these women have are not always sanctioned either. To *make it* as high school principals, these women often negotiated alternative rules governing their behavior. Through collaborative dialogue, one participant highlighted similar pressures:

> I think there are hidden rules that we—the unspoken rules if you are a woman in terms of the principalship—...I'm not going to let them see me cry because in their eyes that would be weakness. I'm not going to let them see me scared....I don't think all men would have those rules, but I think they are important for me because I think when my staff of central administration would see that in me, they would automatically put that together with being a woman—whereas, it's not your personality, it's not character—it's because you're a woman...You're going to have to suck it up...and assume those traits that a man would supposedly have...

Another concurred,

> I guess I want relationships in my job to be nice, and I know that's what's expected. And when they don't feel nice, I feel I should go repair the relationship—that I should somehow make up. And I know that I shouldn't have to do that....[but] if I don't....Then I'm a bitch. The one I told you about. Sometimes I think I shouldn't have to deal with those expectations or that I need to be feminine. I don't think my male colleagues feel that way...

The study participants' report that they are expected to be nice and supportive appears to connect to the societal notion of being feminine—that is, passive and at times, subservient. The minimization of conflict is socially expected for them to get ahead. Social scripts associated with the feminine often connote an expectation that women behave in ways that depict them as caring, open, and even mothering. However, these and other traditionally feminine characteristics may be interpreted by others as antithetical to the strong leadership characteristics conjured up by more traditional definitions of secondary school leadership (Banks, 2000). Thus, one hidden rule requires that women balance their employment of the feminine and the masculine. Although they seek to make the best decisions possible, they also admit that they further consider the ways in which they present their decisions and how they will be interpreted by others coming from women leaders.

Aware of hidden rules and numerous instances in which they faced additional challenges as female high school principals, the participants still had difficulty directly acknowledging the influence of gender stratification and gender role expectations on their individual lives. Moreover, outside of the confines of the conversations associated with this study, their silence on such issues prevailed. It fostered survival within the system.

Perspectives on Leadership Through a Different Lens

In addition to addressing those areas associated with the ways in which these women interact with dominant constructions of the high school principalship as female leaders, the study also focused on their characterizations of leadership. Through interviews and during shadowing visits, these women illustrated their beliefs about leadership and approaches to varied situations. Nevertheless, the findings presented here do not fully capture how these women *actually* lead, although the shadowing visits shed some light on their leadership. Instead, the anecdotes and findings presented here are the characterizations of leadership provided by the participants themselves; that is, how they perceive themselves as leaders. Based on analysis and categorization of these findings, the following themes emerged: (a) collaborative communities developed through open doors and open ears, (b) emotional investments and nurturing reap returns, (c) instruction must prevail; and (d) children must be the focus of schools.

Collaborative communities developed through open doors and open ears. The participants in this study emphasized the importance of leadership rooted in relationships with their colleagues, students, parents, and communities. These relationships are deeply cultivated and bring with them a heightened sense of trust and confidence. As the participants spoke of building a sense of team to pursue collective results, they illustrated a level of mutual contribution and interdependence among their colleagues. These female leaders referred to relationship building and relational power in a manner that closely parallels research on transformational leadership (Johnson,

1996). The three participants focused on moving stakeholders in their schools beyond calculated relationships and action to a level of mutual commitment and interdependence based on shared relationships.

Inclusive leadership approaches rooted in developing relationships heighten community investment and collective capacity. Echoing the previously mentioned notions of transformational leadership, the participants realized that interdependence and mutual responsibility breed participative environments with investment of members. The idea of genuinely involving the entire community in school decision-making requires openness and vulnerability on the part of school principals—setting a course for community commitment and shared beliefs. Such a course was illustrated by one of the participants who noted,

> I think it's building trust and building community and forming relationships. Without being disparaging, the campus I inherited didn't have a lot of established trust. There weren't a lot of relationships. And so there was a lot of defensive posturing, and a lot of naming and blaming. That doesn't get us anywhere. So being visible, forming trusting relationships, taking others' ideas and doing what you can to help them be successful with their ideas, never sawing off the limb and leaving somebody out there to crash alone, begins to get you going there where folks are willing to share with you not only their successes but other things.

Such heightened communication to foster a sense of community collaboration in their schools did not occur automatically for the three participants in this study. Both were developed through attuned listening and acknowledgement on the part of these female leaders. All three participants prided themselves on their collaborative work ethics and their ability to listen to and acknowledge others. However, they noted that the collaborative leadership styles they employed were somewhat contrary to the expectations first placed on them as high school principals. One participant shared,

> The traditional wisdom in schools has told us not to do that [use an open, collaborative approach]. I mean, you're supposed to know the answers. You're in charge, and never let them see you sweat. For me I think you can't be totally inept, but sharing those areas that you struggle with, as well as those areas that you can be strong in, sort of can give other people permission to say, 'Well I'm really good here, but I really need to work here.' And that's true for all of us.

The leaders in this study aligned their notions of leadership with an inclusive approach rooted in reciprocal communication through which everyone can share their talents and admit their limitations. With heightened communication and vulnerability, fears are broken down and community members feel more equipped to actually contribute to collective ends. In other words, the participants' visions were not internal maps that they brought with them to their schools. Instead, they were developed over time through the acknowledgement of individual and collective opinions shared and uncovered by listening in open

forums. The three women spoke of and illustrated by their actions a genuine concern for valuing all members of their communities by creating open channels for listening, acknowledging, risk-taking, and therefore, community building. This position is consistent with contemporary concepts of effective school leadership (Murphy, 2000; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 1999).

Emotional investments and nurturing reap returns. The three women demonstrated a significant emotional investment in their positions as school leaders. Admitting that such investments were integral to their gaining the trust and respect of the community, the participants acknowledged that this driving passion is draining. Not inconsistent with findings that women leaders often blur the public and private realms and often draw on their emotional energy and experiences in dealing with professional situations (Hurty, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987), these women leaders could not leave their emotional ties on the schoolhouse steps. Each spoke of the importance of care and compassion central to a nurturing leadership style, but further admitted that such attachments can take their toll. In contradiction to certain theorists who challenge that the idea of women's nurturing further supports a limited and monolithic view of women as less assertive (and perhaps weaker) leaders (Banks, 1995), the participants in this study challenged that their emotional commitment and nurturing are a strength. In fact, the participants used those exact words several times throughout the study. As one female leader noted,

> I think we get very passionate about our job, about the kids, about the teachers, about the results, about our parents, and so we have an emotional connection that I think is a natural occurrence with our nurturing side, that I'm not sure that males have that same emotional attachment. Women bring more nurturing, and high schools haven't always been really nurturing environments. They should be. That's our strength. Women pay attention to others.

Although they are much more than simply nurturing leaders, these women asserted that their ability to nurture and invest emotionally in their students and faculties had great implications for the type of relationships and communities they have built and continued to develop each day.

Consistent with notions of nurturing leadership and an *ethic of care* posited by various theorists (Gilligan, 1982; Hurty, 1995; Noddings; 1984), the three participants conveyed the importance they place on the principles of dignity and respect. These two principles are central to the nurturing side of their leadership. All three women shared that the manner in which others are treated, the level of respect for the school environment, and the tone in which individuals are greeted, for example, greatly influence the sense of pride, investment, and credence that students and community members give to the school's curriculum and instructional program. They value their schools when they, too, feel valued themselves. The participants' shared beliefs regarding the need for dignity and respect in their schools further illustrated a

goal of these women to modify the orientation of their high school campuses to become more dignified, respectful, and caring communities for adults and especially for students. Ozga (1993) outlines women's emphasis on the development of climate and culture in educational settings. The three participants in this study strongly pushed for school cultures centered on dignity and respect.

Instruction must prevail. The women leaders in this study placed great emphasis on instructional endeavors. They were keenly aware of the need for an instructional focus and consistently referred to specific examples that illustrated their commitment to student learning and teacher development. Furthermore, the participants gave examples in which they did not merely delegate instructional tasks. Instead, they developed structures, academic teams, and content groupings. They pursued numerous training opportunities to develop their own instructional repertoires and to share with other faculty, and they worked alongside staff members to analyze instruction, provide peer support, or delve into lesson design. Two of the participants came to their positions through the instructional ranks and felt their background was of great benefit to their leadership. As one leader indicated,

> I came to the principalship with an instructional background. You see women going into the instructional side, becoming the curriculum directors and instructional specialists, things like that. So they are often your curriculum directors, they're in other leadership positions, but they don't get that managerial position. And in some schools, the principalship is looked on as a manager's role....I think you have the power to shape the principalship, so I have a very instructionally focused principalship.

The challenge of maintaining one's focus as an instructional leader is pervasive, and the literature in the field on the topic of instructional leadership is certainly not lacking. The need to foster student learning and growth through a heightened instructional focus is purported by many scholars (Elmore, 2000; Stewart, Prebble, & Duncan, 1997). Instruction was a primary focus of the participants' leadership, and they likewise illustrated their ability to speak about and engage in activities related to instruction with relative ease. All three women demonstrated during the site visits and later spoke with clarity and confidence about their efforts to be involved in meaningful dialogue and activities regarding instruction on their campuses. In their schools, these things were not simply delegated to instructional specialists, curriculum coordinators, or department chairpersons and therefore outside of the purview of these female leaders. The participants themselves, much like other women studied in other areas of educational administration, committed their own time and energy to guiding instructional tasks and research on their campuses (Shakeshaft, 1987).

Children are the focus. The final theme vehemently expressed by the participants in this study was their deep investment in students and their

welfare. These female leaders echoed their deep concern for students and that their schools first be centered on the needs of children. They acknowledged that leadership has many facets in school settings, but it requires placing the needs of students first. Likewise, these women pointed out their feeling that not all principals openly express this type of commitment in their deeds or their rhetoric. Their passion for children was evident in statements like the following:

> I love kids. I love kids. You've got to know, I love these kids. They drive you crazy. They kill me sometimes, but I love the kids. That's why I'm here. That's why I do what I do. I love the kids. No matter where you are or what school you're in, it's not about you, it's about the kids. So the bottom line is, I'm going to do what I need to for the kids. No matter what, I will do that.

The manner in which the participants interacted with students, talked about them, and shared their successes with them indicated that, in their schools, children are the priority. Interestingly, all of the participants spoke of their love of children and their hopes to run complex organizations at the high school level to better serve students as their primary motivations for pursuing the principalship. Although they expected to be fairly compensated for their positions, advancement and greater financial means were not mentioned as reasons why they chose and still choose to do what they do. Their motivation to help schools be better places for children is consistent with goals shared by other female principals who were concerned about what was happening to children in schools and who viewed their leadership positions as vehicles to nurture children's growth (Hurty, 1995). This study advances the idea that a genuine investment in students' growth must not stop at the primary or elementary levels. Such an investment must guide decision-making at the high school level as well.

Conclusions

The findings generated by this study provide support for specific implications in the field of educational administration both in the preparation and support of women aspiring to or holding leadership positions. Although more than half of advanced degrees in educational administration are awarded to females, few preparation programs offer gender and leadership courses, and general leadership courses at the university level most often incorporate readings that reflect an androcentric bias (Gupton & Slick, 1996). The design of principalship preparation programs for those aspiring to educational administration should place careful consideration on selecting texts and literature reflective of challenges to traditional dominant views in the field and inclusive of feminist standpoints. Curriculum should be better integrated to challenge *gender-neutral* theories and provide a more complete view of varied perspectives on leadership. Similarly, the supporting literature included in preparation programs should reflect practice and leadership at all levels from varied, female viewpoints: elementary, middle, and high school. Special attention should be paid to incorporating literature that includes the standpoints of the underrepresented in the

areas where they are most underrepresented. The case in point is the female high school principalship.

The under-representation of women as principals at the high school level is not only a product of preparation, it is a product of recruitment. The search for and recruitment of qualified female candidates for high school principalships is critical. Training for human resource personnel should address screening and recruitment strategies that seek out female candidates. Furthermore, human resource directors should be versed on the pitfalls of using internal, word-of-mouth recruitment tactics that rely on persons (typically men at the high school level) who are already a part of the establishment and privy to exclusionary invisible support and recruitment networks. Since appointment to a high school principalship often requires that a candidate have some leadership experience at the high school level, additional attention should be placed on expanding the pool of qualified female assistant principal candidates for recruitment. As most decisions in the hiring of assistant principals are made at the campus level and by the principal, school districts should provide the high school principals with access to the applicant pool and encourage the recruitment of qualified candidates underrepresented at the high school level.

The three participants indicated that they felt out of place as members of the professional organizations designated for high school principals. They spoke candidly about how male-dominated networks visibly operate at the conferences and meetings that these professional organizations conduct. Beginning to incorporate topics and sessions associated with gender equity and the high school principalship would be a first step in the professional organizations' acknowledgement of the unique positions of female leaders. More importantly, the structure of conferences should be revisited to minimize the perpetuation of dominant informal exclusionary networks that reinforce the position of male high school principals and further isolate female leaders attending these conferences. These networks may continue to exist. However, it should be contrary to the mission of a professional organization that represents *all* secondary principals to reinforce exclusionary networks and practices.

In addition to providing a forum for an underrepresented group of women subject to exclusion and serving in a male-dominated profession, the study's results serve as a *contribution to* rather than *standard for* the literature in the field of educational administration. It has provided a glimpse into the nature of the experiences of three female high school principals negotiating their leadership roles in tandem with those roles and constructs socially imposed on them and has initiated a more focused discourse grounded in the language and experiences of women serving as high school leaders. More research and investigation into the experiences of women leaders in school administration or those aspiring to school leadership positions at all levels is still necessary. Additional studies, based on female perspectives, are imperative in challenging dominant leadership theories and perspectives

The three women in this study were Anglo. Although the researchers acknowledge that there is no universal experience among Anglo women in the field, it is crucial to recognize that there is no universal experience for all

women across racial and ethnic groups. Other researchers contend that race is more influential on women's experiences than gender (hooks, 1984; Sleeter, 1996). Studies that capture the language and experiences of women who grapple with both the intersections of race and gender and their roles as educational leaders could provide rich perspectives and understandings not possible in more monolithic studies of women still affiliated with the dominant culture. The potential for research focused on women of diverse backgrounds leading at the high school level is great.

Without question, it could be argued that this study points to more questions and areas for further investigation than it does answers or conclusions. Although it does shed some initial light on the nature of the leadership experiences of three female high school principals, much more study is needed in this area. The study offered data and commentary on both the dilemmas faced and contributions made by female high school principals. The important intersection of gender and the role of the high school principal as well as varied perceptions and notions of leadership offered by women leaders may contribute to new and unconventional perspectives on leadership. By informing educational research with the genuine voices of women serving as high school principals, this study has attempted to widen the conversation on leadership in the field by including alternative, differing perspectives often neglected in traditional research that supposes gender neutrality and/or that analyzes the experiences of high school leaders in general. Through this medium, the female high school principals participating in this study were empowered to reflect upon their situations and experiences and characterize them both in their own words and by their own ways of knowing.

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