

10-1-2004

Does Gender Make a Difference? Voices of Male and Female High School Principals

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DOES GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE? VOICES OF MALE AND FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Introduction

The aim of this study is to increase our understanding of the high school principalship by examining the similarities and differences between how males and females experience the role. This information continues the process of developing a more inclusive theory of educational administration by further exploring the “differences and deficits” models (Shakeshaft, 1989; Scott, 2003). Researchers who theorize these models have examined the under-representation of women in administrative positions through studies of “sex-role differences, leadership styles, organizational structure, lack of females in the pipeline, and sex-role stereotypes” (Scott, 2003, p. 83). This article provides insights into the high school principalship that can be useful to both males and females who might consider the position as a career choice.

To expose how the high school principalship is experienced I surveyed and interviewed both male and female high school principals about their careers, their role conflicts and commitments, their areas of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and their leadership styles. Data analysis was performed to examine the constructs of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction as well as the personal attributes of age, ethnicity, marital status, children living at home, and age at first principalship. Professional attributes examined were career paths, experience, aspirations, mentoring, and leadership styles. The following describes how I operationalized the constructs of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction in this study.

Role conflict. Role conflict occurs when the demands of work conflict with the demands of family and home. In their study of elementary and secondary school principals, Kochan, Spencer, and Mathews (2000) found that the primary issue facing both males and females was “managing their work and their time and coping with the stresses, tasks and responsibilities of the job” (p. 305). Several researchers have found that although conflicts between the demands of work and family affect both men and women, women experience greater work-family conflict than do men (Greenglass, Pantony, & Burke, 1989; Riehl & Byrd, 1997). Hochschild (1989) described these role conflicts in terms of the “second shift” that most working women face at the end of the day as they turn to their personal roles as parents and wives.

Role commitment. The construct of role commitment measures how individuals prioritize between commitments to their work and their personal lives. Burke (2002) noted that business organizations have two types of employees: (a) work-committed or (b) personal life or family committed. They do not have employees who are both work-committed and family-committed. In a study of secondary school principals, which included 48 males and 2 females, Vadella and Willower (1990) found that a majority of

the principals felt that their commitment to their work as high school principals had taken a toll on their families. Copland (2001) argued that the "myth of the superprincipal" has created such unreasonably high expectations for the role of the school principal that it has become difficult for principals to maintain a balance between their commitments to both work and family.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is considered an important and desirable goal for organizations because satisfied workers perform at higher levels than do those who are not satisfied (Chambers, 1999). Research focusing specifically on job satisfaction for high school principals identified several sources of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. High school principals expressed satisfaction in the following areas: variability of tasks, amount of recognition, development of personal relations, hiring of new staff, instituting program changes, and working with students. Major sources of dissatisfaction were sacrifices in personal life, difficulties with existing policies, lack of achievement and opportunities for growth, limited autonomy, and problems with superintendents, school boards, and central office personnel (Duke, 1988; Gunn & Holdaway, 1986; Merrill & Pounder, 1999; Rogus, Poppenhagen & Mingus, 1980). However, these studies did not differentiate between female and male high school principals in describing the sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies were used to explore the experiences of female and male high school principals in three midwestern states. The quantitative phase of the investigation was designed to measure male and female high school principals' levels of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction as well as to provide demographic information on age, ethnicity, marital status, presence of children at home, career paths, and aspirations. A survey was conducted using: (a) the Role Conflict Questionnaire (Nevill & Damico, 1974), (b) the Role Commitment Questionnaire (Napholz, 1995), and (c) the Job Satisfaction Survey (Mendenhall, 1977, revised Schneider, 1984). The names of high school principals were obtained from the Departments of Education in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The qualitative phase of the study used a structured interview guide to explore in more detail the findings from the quantitative phase. This article presents findings mainly from these interviews, which were conducted from 2000-2002.

The participants for the qualitative phase of the study were purposefully selected from the high school principals who responded to the survey, which comprised 60% of the 564 principals surveyed. The selection process was designed to include a representative sample of levels of role conflict, job satisfaction, and role commitment for each gender as well as to include participants from urban, suburban, and rural high schools. Eight women and eight men participated in interviews that were specifically structured to allow them to describe their careers and aspirations; to expand on their perspectives about role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction; and to discuss their styles of leadership. Transcriptions of the interviews were

entered into the N*Vivo® software package to facilitate analysis and to allow for the coding and the identification of themes. Following the methods of qualitative research outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992), the participants were given an opportunity to review the written transcripts of their interviews, and follow-up interviews were conducted to document reactions to the transcriptions and to allow for further clarification.

Findings

The presentation of the findings for this study begins with a description of the personal and professional attributes of the participants. The findings related to the participants' experiences of role conflict, role commitment, and job satisfaction then follow. Finally, the findings on leadership styles are presented. A comparison of the quantitative study population and the qualitative sub-sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Attributes of Female and Male High School Principals

	Quantitative sample		Qualitative sub-sample	
	Female (<i>n</i> =164) (69% return)	Male (<i>n</i> =174) (53% return)	Female (<i>n</i> =8)	Male (<i>n</i> =8)
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Age	47.4 (7.8)	48.2 (7.7)	49.0 (3.7)	49.0 (6.7)
Age 1 st principalship	42.1 (6.9)	38.6 (7.2)	40.3	32.5
Years in teaching	13.1 (6.7)	11.4 (6.2)	10.9	7.8
Years in present position	4.3 (2.9)	6.7 (6.3)	3.1	6.3
Married	67.9%	92.6%	7 of 8	8 of 8
Children	75.0%	95.0%	7 of 8	7 of 8
Children living at home	23.5%	59.0%	4 of 7	4 of 7

Personal Attributes

Age and ethnicity. The female and male high school principals interviewed in this study shared similar personal attributes. All but one of the participants were White. The mean age for both the females and males was 49 years. The ages for the females ranged from 43 to 53 years (*SD* = 3.70); the males ranged from 36 to 56 years (*SD* = 6.71).

Family structure. Seven of the female high school principals were married and had children; one was single and had never been married. Of the seven females with children, four of them had children still living at home. All of the males were married and all but one had children. Four of the males still had children living at home. One female had a grade school age child living at home, while two of the males had grade school age children living at home.

Having young children at home delayed the careers of five females, while having young children at home inspired four males to seek administrative positions. As one male noted, "My wife had just had our second child...I thought I probably should start looking at a different way to make more money for my family." Another male reported, "I had a very young family...I thought, 'you know what? I need to channel my energies differently.' Then I began my administration (certification) program." One female stated that she had not taken a "high powered" administrative position until her only child was in high school. Another female noted, "I go to work all the time and anytime, and if I had younger children of any age that really needed me, it never could have happened." A female with grade school age children acknowledged that she did not attend professional conferences that took her away overnight because of child-care demands.

Professional Attributes

Experience. All of the participants began their careers as teachers. The males moved out of the classroom more quickly than did the females. The females spent an average of 10.9 years as classroom teachers, with a range of 3 to 23 years, while the average length of teaching for the males was only 7.8 years with a range of 5 to 14 years. Though the current ages of the participants are comparable, the males had begun their tenures as high school principals at a younger age than had the females and consequently they had been in their positions as high school principals for more years than had the females. The males had been in their present position an average of 6.3 years, ranging from 2 to 13 years. The females had only been in their positions an average of 3.5 years, ranging from 1 to 8 years. This was the second principalship for six of the eight males and the second principalship for only two of the females. Two of the females had completed their Ph.D. degrees, while none of the males had obtained a Ph.D. at the time of the interviews.

In describing the career paths of her male colleagues, one female commented, "They [males] were coaches, and the coaches would be the leaders." Half of the males had been coaches of high school athletic teams. A male stated, "I was coaching two sports at the time and I thought I probably should start looking at a different way to make more money for my family...I thought I'd try to get into administration. Typically coaches move into that ladder." A female noted that when she began teaching, "I couldn't coach, because there were no female sports at that time." None of the female high school principals had been coaches of athletic teams.

Career paths. Most of the males described their career paths from teaching to administration as having been well planned. Half of the males decided to leave classroom teaching and move into administration because they sought opportunities to make more money. "Certainly, money was a factor. We knew that we wanted a lifestyle that was better than what our parents had, so I threw my name in the hat as a dean of students." Another male noted that his initial interest in administration came from an awareness of the pay differential between the dean of students (assistant principal) and the high school principal positions. Three of the males described planning a career path that would lead them to the principalship of a large high school with a competitive athletic program.

Most of the male high school principals described developing an interest in administration because they had role models in terms of male colleagues who were administrators themselves or who were taking courses to become administrators. One male said, "I kind of followed in his footsteps. He's about a year or so ahead of me. And I ended up getting into an administrative certification program."

None of the females had planned on becoming high school principals. As one noted, "I just developed into it. It wasn't something that I was actually looking for." Another female described her career as "zigging and zagging" as she moved from the classroom to supervision, then to teaching in higher education, and finally to the high school principalship. Seven of the eight females indicated that they had considered educational administration only after someone encouraged them to apply for a position or to enroll in administrative certification programs. One female noted, "I never saw myself moving into administration until my mentor suggested something for me."

Only two females mentioned having role models of other females who were high school principals or females who were taking courses to prepare for administrative positions. All of the women recognized that in fact they were role models for the female educators in their buildings, as well as for their students. "I think it's good for our kids that someone like myself is here, so they can see that women can do a variety of things without standing there saying 'I can do this' but just by virtue of doing it."

Aspirations. When asked about their career aspirations, five of the eight males expressed interest in becoming a superintendent. One male mentioned retirement; he planned on retiring at the end of the year of the study. Two males were weighing their career options. "I either look at a superintendency, which is very difficult at my age. I'm not really ready to retire. But I've run into really a kind of dilemma, whether to stay in a situation that I know, that I like, that I understand, that I have seemed to have some success at, or do I venture out?" The other male, who was in his fifties, explained that though he aspired to the superintendency he had some reservations. "I don't want to go back to a smaller community to take a superintendency, to start that career path. At least not at this stage in my life." The youngest male participant, who was 36 at the time of the interview, was quite clear about his career goals. "I definitely do want to be a superintendent some day and whether that's in the next ten years or the next fifteen, I don't know."

In contrast, when asked about their career aspirations a majority of the females focused on retirement. Only two females expressed an interest in pursuing the position of superintendent. One commented, "I don't know. I know what I want to do when I retire in terms of my next life, and I'm probably about five years away from that." Another, who had indicated some interest in the superintendency, stated that the longer she studied the superintendent's role the less certain she had become about seeking that position. "It [the superintendency] strikes me as so much hand-holding with the school board. I don't know if that's me. I'm terribly hands on and I really do value my relationships with people." Finally, one female, who was 49 at the time of the interview, stated, "I don't really have a goal for five years at this point. Maybe if I was twenty years younger I would do the superintendency."

The "good old boys." Many of the participants described the influence that the "good old boys' club" has had on the high school principalship. A male commented, "It's not an objective system where the best person gets to the right places. It's still a good ol' boy network, with all kinds of favoritism, demonstrated in all kinds of ways." Six males described the way the "good old boys' club" had helped them become high school principals. They described a system of phone calls and contacts that aided them in finding their positions as high school principal. "I spent two years as a high school principal in a rural district and then I got a call from the superintendent where I had previously been an assistant principal. The principal there had announced his retirement. The superintendent asked me, 'Would you be interested? I'd like to have you apply.' I got the job." Another male reported receiving a call from a colleague who had just taken a new high school principalship, "'Hey, here's a job that's open for you. Our superintendent asked me who might be available, might be looking, and I mentioned your name.'" A third male commented, "My best friend, who was a principal, called and said 'You know the principal job is open. You should apply for it.'" Only one of the males discussed the downside to this "good old boys' network." "I mean, it's very difficult for females to get into administration because they, I mean, all the good ol' boys didn't want to let the females in because they were afraid they couldn't handle the discipline."

Several of the females described the effect this "good old boys' club" had on their careers. None received phone calls about high school principal job openings. Rather, four females described hiring practices that favored male applicants. "I have no proof of this. I think they were just looking for men. Of course, they would never say that...I think token interviews have definitely happened." Another female felt that she had been interviewed by a consulting firm "just so they could check off that they had interviewed a diverse group of people." One female reported submitting applications to over ten different school districts before she was hired for a high school position.

Most of the females recognized that the "good old boys' club" continued to operate in ways that disadvantaged them as high school principals. They described meetings where, as the only female present, they were expected to take the minutes. They were aware that conversations changed

when they approached their male colleagues. One female reported that though the male principals in her area called each other for advice, they never consulted with her. "I don't think they intentionally don't call me. I just think they don't think of it. I mean, we're colleagues and we talk and we visit, but as far as calling for any suggestions—no."

Encouragement and mentoring. Three males characterized their experience with mentoring as being informal and most often in the form of job opportunities. "I think while it wasn't a formal program, I think they were always very willing to get me involved." Another commented, "The informal mentor is the one that has had the greatest influence." Seven males described having benefited from male high school principals who encouraged them to apply for positions and provided them with contacts and job opportunities. As one male explained, "that encouragement was a significant contributor to making a move to the principalship...I think it's critical." Another commented, "I worked with some wonderful principals who then encouraged me." One male mentioned that a female administrator had encouraged him to consider the principalship.

The female participants had a different perspective on the role encouragement and mentoring played in their careers. All of the females acknowledged that without direct encouragement they would never have considered educational administration and in particular the high school principalship as career options. None of the females described an 'informal program' that served to encourage or mentor them. Five females identified a specific female administrator who had provided the encouragement to consider administrative careers. Two females mentioned being encouraged by a male administrator.

Four males described mentoring their assistant principals, providing them with leadership responsibilities at the school, and guiding them in finding their own high school principal positions. "I've always looked upon that as one of my goals as a building administrator, to train future administrators. To give them opportunities to do things on the job, rather than just be a disciplinarian or an attendance person." Another male supported his assistant principals as they began their job search, "I think it's my role and responsibility to say, 'Are you ready for that?'" They talked with pride about the assistant principals that they had helped become principals. One male noted, "In the past three years, I've had two male assistants become principals and two others who have looked at interviewing for principalships." Only two males mentioned encouraging teachers to move into administration. One male commented, "There are tremendous staff out here that I think would make very, very good administrators, but I haven't really taken the time to say, 'Hey, do you ever think about administration?'"

When the females were asked about being mentors, most of them did not discuss their work with assistant principals. Rather they described their efforts to encourage their teachers to consider administration by placing them in leadership positions. As one female noted, "Part of the principal's job is going out there and tapping teachers [males and females] on the shoulder and saying, 'Have you thought about going into administration? I've noticed that you do x, y, z really well.'" She found that female teachers

were particularly flattered when she noticed their leadership capabilities. Another voiced the sentiments of most of the other females when she commented, "I feel that it's important to mentor women, whom I work with, who might, with some encouragement, be interested in a high school principalship."

Balancing Role Commitments and Role Conflicts

All of the participants described the enormous time demands faced by high school principals. A female noted, "I work seventy hours every week. There is never a week I work less than seventy hours. It's a minimum of a twelve hour day, and it's very often fifteen hours, and it's another eight hours on the weekends." Another female reported working "two, three nights a week, 60-hour work weeks." A third commented, "I know that I can stay here until nine o'clock every night." In addition, she was aware that absences from work would not be tolerated. "People can be nice and understanding, but the reality is 'We want you here. You've got to be here.'"

The males described a similar demand for their time and presence. "You find yourself coming early, staying late, maybe going home quickly and coming back for either a concert, a football game, a meeting of the parent booster group, coming back for a number of things." Another "worked eleven hour days almost every day of the week." One male summarized, "You're a high school principal 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year."

The participants shared similar sentiments on the support that they received from their families. All of the females described receiving support from their husbands, parents, or other relatives, and acknowledged the importance of that support. One female had a mother who cared for her young children; another relied on her husband for support in the summer and during school breaks; and a third received support from her sister. Most of the males noted that it was their wives that provided them with support. As one male commented, "My wife is very supportive, very helpful and has made a big difference in my ability to be successful, because she doesn't fight me on the time and all of that sort of stuff. She supports me." Another male described how important it was to have that level of spousal support. "You cannot have chaos and conflict and challenges at school and at home together...you can't fight two front wars."

Despite similar statements of spousal support, there was a difference in how the female and male high school principals balanced the role conflicts between their personal and professional lives. One female commented, "As a parent you're constantly torn between the job and your family. So, how do you balance that? Work your way through it the best you can. To me, family is the most important thing." Another female resolved her struggle between personal and professional roles by dividing the week. "I'd say Monday through Friday, it's work first. On Saturday, it's family first. On Sunday, it's half-and-half. I'm able to do that because I'm at an age where I have an empty nest so I think that allows me some leeway. Until my child was a junior in high school, family came first."

The males also sought to balance the conflicts caused by the

demands of their personal and professional roles. One male, with young children, noted, "I love spending time with my kids and when I go home, I try to leave my job here as much as I possibly can. It's always a balancing act." Two of the males reported not needing to balance their roles because their wives were the primary caregivers and had stayed home (or were staying home) with their children. "We have chosen for my wife to stay at home. She is very involved with our kids and very involved with me in the high school." Another male described how he had resolved conflicts when rearing his young children. "Fortunately my wife stayed home several years when the kids were younger to handle most of that. But when she went back to work, it was always a matter of kind of balancing who would miss [work]. As I became an administrator, it was much more difficult for me to miss in certain instances than it would be for her as a school librarian."

Two males with older children described conflicts around balancing the time demands of their principalships with the desire to support their children's activities. One male noted, "If my son's playing at his high school and my school has a game on the same night, I have to make a choice of which to go to." Another commented, "When I started, work came first. [Now] I can say, 'Wait a minute. My kid and my family come first, and yeah, I'm going to take a day off' ...but I felt terrible about it."

Several males talked about faculty members knowing their wives and families and noted that their children spent significant amounts of time at the high school and high school athletic events. "The kids were always coming along with me to school. I think if you can do the two things...make it feel like it's a whole package. That it's a community type of thing, between your family and the school." Another noted, "The wife and family...it's their principalship as well. I work very hard for our kids and my wife to see the goodness in this building and to embrace it, and they really have." However, one male principal noted, "Some wives of principals feel like they have to go to all the school functions. [My wife] chooses not to, and that's O.K. So what that means, though, is a lot of times when we're separated."

A majority of the females did not perceive that the way to balance the conflicts between their personal and professional roles was to make the high school part of the lives of their spouses and children. Rather, they spoke about trying to confront the extensive time demands of their positions by trying to provide a balance between their professional and personal roles. As one female noted, "you just make it happen and fit it around your life, fit it around your children." Another commented that she was "very purposeful about balancing, trying to keep a focus. I do what I can. And beyond that I've got a family and I've got things that I like to do." Another female told her faculty that "I will not be the first person to arrive in the morning and I will not be the last one out every night." A third noted, "I will attend as many activities as I can, but I don't stay for the entire thing."

All of the participants discussed ways they coped with the stress of their work schedules. The most common strategy used by both groups was to get involved in exercise programs. They walked, jogged, swam, played racquetball, golfed, and/or belonged to health clubs. One male noted "My second year, the stress was getting to me and I wasn't reacting very well. I'd

always been an exerciser. I had to do something different." A female found balance in her church activities. "I try to participate in Sunday school teaching, just as I've always done. They are the things that keep me centered." Two females expressed specific concerns over health issues. One noted that she had not been successful in finding a healthy way to balance the demands of her principalship. "My health has not been as good as I want it to be. I've gained weight in the three years that I've had this position. I stopped exercising, because I don't have time to do it. I get more colds and flu...If I had to do this a long, long time, I think that it would definitely have a more detrimental effect on my health." The other female was concerned about "the number of administrators who've had cancer and I just want to make sure I'm not getting stressed out."

Job Satisfaction

The females and males were equally satisfied with their positions as high school principals. When asked about job satisfaction, a female commented, "I consider this a fantastic job. I like every facet of it. Nobody really talked about how much fun it is, because I think it can be." A male agreed, "As time consuming as it is, and as stressful as it can be, I still enjoy it and that's the key thing. I still enjoy coming to work and doing the things I have to do."

A majority of males and females felt that the more years they served as high school principals the more their satisfaction with the position grew. A female in her third year as a high school principal noticed that she had begun "feeling more comfortable with the role. I've got a little better handle on what's going on and how to anticipate things." Another female, who was in her eighth year as a high school principal, felt as though she was "not getting into as many struggles." A male, in his eighth year, agreed, "I was not very comfortable as an administrator in the first three years. And that was probably because when you first go into it you're primarily a disciplinarian."

A major source of satisfaction mentioned by all of the participants was the interactions they had with their students. A male commented, "I get a tremendous natural high from seeing kids achieve. It's great to see that." A female concurred, "I really enjoy watching kids succeed. My very best day of the year is graduation. It's not because it's over. No. No! It's because it's so nice to watch every kid walk across the stage."

All of the participants mentioned that working with teachers was both a source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. They liked encouraging teacher growth and professional development, but they disliked teachers who refused to improve. All of the high school principals were affected by contract negotiations with their teachers and were disappointed when settlements were not finalized. They discussed the difficulty of asking teachers to take on new programs or do something extra when they were still negotiating their contracts.

The bureaucracy and the politics of their school districts caused dissatisfaction for some of the high school principals in terms of the amount of paperwork, their lack of autonomy, and their frustration with school board

governance systems. As one male commented, "Some school boards clearly understand their role as policy makers and trust the superintendent and the administrator. And other school boards want their fingers in everything. When you get a board like that and a superintendent who allows it to happen, life for a principal is crazy."

Five of the eight males expressed dissatisfaction with their contracts and the lack of vacation days. These males expressed annoyance regarding the change from a ten-month teacher contract to a twelve-month administrator contract. One male noted, "It's 230 days and there's no, like, paid vacation, so after your days are up, then you're done with your responsibilities, supposedly. But it doesn't work that way." Another male commented, "I've lost three weeks of vacation every year since I've been here." Despite having also moved from 10-month teacher contracts to 12-month administrator contracts, none of the females shared this source of dissatisfaction.

An area of dissatisfaction unique to the females was the male image of the high school principal. Several females shared incidents in which they had not been acknowledged as the high school principal. "Most people will come in and they'll say to me, 'I need to see the principal. Where is the principal?' And I'll say, 'I'm the principal.' And then there is this surprised response, 'Oh! I thought that was a man.'" Another noted, "In high schools you tend to get this belief that you have to have the building under control. Control is linked to being a man. Men can control things better than women." A third commented, "There are so few high school principals that are women because the people who hire high school principals see the high school principal as somebody who manages the building and deals with discipline. And they feel that men are better at that."

Leadership Style

When asked about their leadership styles, five of the eight males responded with terms related to athletics, coaching, and power. One male, who had played sports and been a high school coach, commented, "I think it's more about teaming...I grew up in that laboratory, about the importance of team and the importance of recognizing your role for that team and also recognizing who were the leaders of the team and then recognizing that within that team you had the coaches. The hierarchy is identical in education." In commenting about sharing decision making, another male noted, "I'll get as much input as I can, but I'm not going to sit around and argue the nuances. We're going to move now and I'll make the decision." Finally, a male admitted, "It's great being in charge. I love being able to make all of these decisions."

A majority of the females described using a leadership style that they perceived was different than that of their male counterparts. As a female explained, "I try and lead by being a leader with instruction and curriculum. And many of the males that I work with and have worked with in the past were hired as principals who were managers." They felt that as female principals they were more concerned with interpersonal relationships than were their male colleagues. "I rely more on relationships than the

men I've worked for. I spend a lot more time listening than I do pontificating, and I think that's a female characteristic.... I use a lot more feeling words and terms and strategies." In describing her shared decision-making style, one of the females noted, "I think sometimes they [teachers] look to the leader, especially if it's a guy, to just hand the answers of 'this is how it's going to be.' I would say my style has been different."

Several females saw themselves as leaders who were closely attuned to the family issues that confronted their employees. One female noted, "There is a nuance that females bring to leadership that really understands family and the commitment to family." Another commented on the advantage a female leader has around family concerns, "I have a real relationship with the majority of my staff. It's that nurturing, empathetic side." Another told her staff, "If you've got an issue where you've got to go deal with something with your family, that's a priority. Go do it, because you won't be effective unless you are dealing with that."

A female participant offered this summary of the differences between female and male high school principals:

I think it's a real different position for a woman than it is for a man because she brings a different set of techniques with her. The job still has to get done, and I don't think that you could make a blanket statement and say the majority of women will bring one type of style, because it's going to be as varied as their personalities. But we do bring a female perspective and we have a little bit different approach—often, but not always.

Discussion and Implications

This study identified similarities and differences between females and males in their experiences as high school principals. That both groups shared similar experiences confirms the findings of Mertz and McNeely (1998) that males and females do the 'what' and 'how' of the high school principalship in many of the same ways. Areas where there were differences between the males and females occurred in terms of their ages at their first principalship, experiences, career paths, mentoring opportunities, ways of handling role conflict, and perceived leadership styles.

The careers of the male and female high school principals differed in terms of the paths taken. The males followed a self-directed and earlier path to the high school principalship receiving support from a network of male administrators and male high school principals. The females, on the other hand, delayed their careers due to family responsibilities, and considered educational administration and the high school principalship only when specifically encouraged by others.

Shakeshaft (1989) indicated that since 1977 the route to the high school principalship has often been through the positions of athletic director or high school coach. Indeed, half of the males in this study had become high school principals following a position as a high school coach. Despite the success of Title IX legislation in creating athletic opportunities for females in high schools, there has not been an increase in the number of women gaining coaching opportunities (Blount, 1998; Klenke, 1996). The

Title IX requirement that coaches for women's athletic teams receive pay has actually resulted in men becoming coaches of women's athletic teams (Blount, 1998). This implies that using the coaching position as a stepping stone to the high school principalship has not yet become a viable option for females.

Another way that gender influenced the career paths of the participants was reflected in the progression of their careers. The males described a steady progression from teaching into administration that was motivated by the financial needs of their young and growing families. The females described careers that had been disrupted and delayed by child rearing. In fact, the delayed entry of the female participants into the high school principalship had a direct effect on their tenures as principals and their career aspirations. The females were older than their male colleagues when they began as high school principals and they felt this position marked the end of their careers. They discussed retirement rather than future career aspirations. The females also experienced shorter tenures as high school principals than did the males. Since job satisfaction increases with the number of years as a high school principal (Eckman, 2004), the females did not have the same opportunity to maximize their job satisfaction.

The type of encouragement and mentoring experienced by the males and females also differed. The males acknowledged that they benefited from an informal system of mentoring that provided them with contacts, job opportunities, and role models. As Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000) noted, "When the term networking is used, it refers most often to the 'the old boys network'—an invisible network of sponsorship whereby older professionals groom younger versions of themselves for leadership positions. They have typically been white men who promoted other white men" (p. 188). The "old boy's network" worked to encourage the male participants in this study to develop career paths and to "move up" the career ladder to the high school principalship. They were privileged by traditional mentoring practices that continued to reproduce the status quo in educational administration (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Mertz, Welch, & Henderson, 1988).

The traditional "old boys' network" was not accessible to the females. Most of them credited individual women with encouraging them to move from teaching to administration. Mentors for the females were rarely high school principals, probably because there are so few female high school principals (Grady & O'Connell, 1993; Mertz & McNeely, 1990). Only two females reported having male mentors. One was in a rural school district; the other had a male friend whom she turned to for advice.

Researchers have reported that women in educational administration have benefited from having female mentors because they could explain the unwritten rules of the organization and identify the informal networks (Fleming, 1991; Hill & Ragland, 1995). All of the females reported a commitment to encouraging female teachers to consider educational administration as their career path and to mentoring them in their careers. If an increasing number of females become high school principals, younger female educators may find more role models and mentors. However, until that time, male high school principals should assume responsibility for men-

toring both males and females who might, with some encouragement, consider the high school principalship.

Both groups described the time demands imposed by the role of the high school principalship, such as long days, supervision of extracurricular activities, attendance at numerous evening meetings, and weekend work. What is different is their responses to the conflicts created by their roles in their families and their roles as principals. The males handled the role conflicts by having their wives and children share the principalship through their attendance at school functions and activities. The females attempted to balance their home and work lives without imposing the principalship on their families. These responses reflect the dominant gendered discourse, which expects women to balance their lives and careers around the needs of their children and the careers of their husbands (Grogan, 1996).

Hochschild's (1989) "second shift" phenomenon becomes even more problematic for female high school principals who have professional obligations that require them to be at the high school in the evenings and on weekends. Though all of the female participants acknowledged receiving support from spouses or family members, none of them had husbands who stayed at home and none of them reported that their husbands were anything more than "helpful" or supportive. Most of the females stated that the number one issue for them is the time commitment, because at the end of the day it is the wives and mothers who are usually "the nurturers, the caregivers and the worrywarts." However, as several of the females made clear, the role conflicts changed as their children were high school age and/or out of the home. It was only at that point in their life cycles that most of the female participants became high school principals.

A specific difference between the males and females was found in the dissatisfaction expressed by the males over their lack of vacation time. Though all of the participants had twelve-month contracts, I was surprised that none of the females shared similar dissatisfaction with their contracts or their amount of vacation days. One could speculate that men consider vacation time as their time with families whereas women are involved with their families on a daily basis. It is also possible that the women, with less experience in their positions, were not comfortable taking time off. In order to make the high school principalship an attractive position for both females and males, factors contributing to job dissatisfaction, such as time demands and vacation time need further exploration.

The females felt that they had a different approach to leadership than their male colleagues. The females described their leadership styles in terms of interpersonal relationships and dealing with instructional issues, while the males used athletic and coaching terms to define their leadership styles. However, the information presented on the leadership styles of the high school principals in this study was limited to the participants' views. It did not include the perspectives of other administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members. Differences in the leadership styles of male and female high school principals warrant further exploration.

Schmuck (1999) noted that "males and females live in different realities in our gendered society" (p. xi). In the twenty-first century, will younger female educators, who have had the benefit and support of Title IX

legislation in their formative years, face a less gendered environment? Will they, like the male participants in this study, experience opportunities in athletics and coaching that lead them to develop their career plans earlier and to include the high school principalship as a goal? Will they, in addition, or even instead, alter this as the typical career path to the principalship? Finally, will female educators build the same network of role models that has worked to encourage male educators along a career path to the high school principalship?

Both males and females voiced their satisfaction with the high school principalship while acknowledging the conflicts they faced in meeting the demands and responsibilities of their personal and professional lives. Gender has made a difference in their paths to the high school principalship as well as in the way they experience that position. More reasonable parameters should be developed for the position of the high school principal so that both females and males can manage the demands of their professional and personal lives (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002; Hurley, 2001; Riehl & Byrd, 1997). Hopefully, in the near future, women will be as likely to lead high schools as they presently are to teach in them.

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