

From the Dollhouse to the Schoolhouse: The Changing Experience of Women Principals in British Columbia, 1980 to 1990

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This study sought to determine if and how the experiences of recently appointed women principals differ from those of earlier appointees in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Interviews revealed both differences and similarities. Although recent women principals continue to face sex-role stereotyping from outsiders, they are now accepted and supported by their male peers. They demonstrate greater career initiative than their earlier counterparts and have a wider range of experience in both teaching and administration. Both groups are well-educated, expert teachers. They focus on learning for themselves, developing collegial relationships with teachers and caring relationships with children, who are their priority. They are career-oriented women whether mothers and wives or not. They perceive themselves as *women* principals whose leadership is characterized by their gender and accentuated by their feminine qualities. They are redefining the world of educational administration to include the woman's voice.

La recherche menée par les auteurs visait à déterminer si les expériences de directrices d'école nommées récemment diffèrent de celles de directrices nommées antérieurement dans le Lower Mainland de la Colombie-Britannique. Des entrevues ont permis de révéler à la fois des différences et des similitudes. Bien que les directrices en poste depuis plus récemment continuent à faire face à des stéréotypes reliés au sexe et au rôle de la part de personnes extérieures, elles sont maintenant acceptées et appuyées par leurs pairs de sexe masculin. Elles font preuve d'une plus grande initiative vis-à-vis de leur carrière que leurs homologues précédentes et ont une plus vaste expérience de l'enseignement et de l'administration. Les deux groupes sont constitués d'enseignantes chevronnées. Ces dernières mettent l'accent sur l'auto-apprentissage et l'établissement de relations collégiales avec les enseignants et de liens chaleureux avec les enfants, qui sont leur priorité. Il s'agit de femmes pour qui la carrière revêt une grande importance, qu'elles soient ou non mères ou épouses. Elles se perçoivent comme des *femmes* dont le leadership est caractérisé par leur sexe et accentué par leurs qualités féminines. Elles sont en train de redéfinir le monde de l'administration scolaire afin de donner aux femmes une voix au chapitre.

Despite the recruitment of educational administrators almost exclusively from the professional ranks of teaching, where women are in the majority, there are still relatively few female administrators. In 1990/91, 60% of all elementary and

secondary school teachers were women; 72% of all administrative positions (principal, vice-principal, department head) were occupied by men. Also, 29% of men, but only 6% of women, teachers in elementary and secondary schools were administrators (Statistics Canada, 1992). The percentage of women administrators has nearly doubled in the last ten years, but there are still large and seemingly inexplicable differences in representation.

One explanation for the scarcity of women in school administration is that men make better principals. But early studies on women in administration (see Fishel & Pottker 1973, 1979; Frasher & Frasher 1979; Meskin 1974, 1979) showed that women were slightly better elementary school principals than men. These studies have been discounted for methods of research that were "of doubtful quality" (Charters & Jovick, 1981, p. 307) and an androcentric bias that measured women against male standards (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 162). Notwithstanding these empirical studies, male administrative superiority seems an untenable position.

Other putative explanations include the presence of male bias among those responsible for appointing principals, or the unattractiveness of the job itself to women. Surveys of central office administrators and school board members have indeed shown that they tend to hold attitudes more favourable to men than women in administration (Adkison, 1981; Stockard, 1980; Taylor, 1977). Despite equal opportunity legislation, unfavourable attitudes continue to affect the appointment of women to administrative positions (Porat, 1985; Shakeshaft, 1986), particularly to advanced "line" positions (Fishel & Pottker, 1979; Schmuck & Wyant, 1981; Stockard, 1980). Teaching has traditionally provided an entry into administrative careers primarily for men, who have an "up or out" orientation (Adkison, 1981) representing a definition of career that includes commitment demonstrated by lack of interruptions (Biklen, 1986). Women do not always define career and success this way and consequently do not see administration as a logical career step up from the classroom (Biklen, 1986; Carlson & Schmuck, 1981; Stockard, 1980). They desire leadership roles in education, but they do not see such roles as necessarily administrative (Shakeshaft, 1986; Stockard, 1980). And because the teaching profession does enable women to move in and out easily as their life circumstances change, and the decision to parent at home continues primarily to affect the careers of women, senior administrators have assumed that women are less committed to their careers than are men, and less concerned with upward mobility (Biklen, 1986).

Another explanation involves women's lack of access to informal processes socializing individuals toward administration. Sponsorship is particularly important for aspirants to administrative posts (Ortiz & Marshall, 1988), and women have traditionally had difficulty obtaining sponsorship from men (Ortiz, 1982). This has been compounded by the small number of female role models for women, from which sponsors might be drawn (Carlson & Schmuck, 1981; Tibbets, 1979). Thus, anticipatory socialization (Adkison, 1981), in which "the individual

becomes oriented toward a new status before occupying it" (p. 332), is less likely to occur for women. Consequent uncertainty about leadership expectations has prevented many women from formally applying for leadership positions (Adkison, 1981; Tibbets, 1979).

During the 1970s, however, women's participation in graduate education programs increased dramatically. Doctoral programs in educational administration in the United States reported that over 50% of students in the 1980s were women (Shakeshaft, 1987). The greater numbers of women qualifying for administrative positions indicate that they do aspire to leadership (Adkison, 1981; Fauth, 1984; Shakeshaft, 1987). Recent increases in the number of women assuming principalships in schools in British Columbia confirm that here too they aspire to leadership, and suggest also that conditions in the administrative world, and hence the experiences of women appointees to the principalship, may have changed.

METHOD

Research in educational administration has often eliminated or ignored the female experience and point of view. Shakeshaft (1987) accounts for this by explaining that "The funding of research, the objects of study, the use of research have to date been dominated by white males. Not unexpectedly, they have forged forms of thought within an all-male world" (p. 150). Ultimately this has led to the creation of an essentially male conception of the principalship. But now, Biklen et al. (1983) argue,

intellectually, we are taking leaps in the sociology of knowledge beyond a view of the world where "man is the measure." We are therefore confronted with the task of putting together a way of looking at the world, of reconceptualizing knowledge, so that all lives count. (p. 14)

Understanding the situations of female principals from their perspective is necessary to help develop a greater understanding of the nature of the principalship. Our study was intended to contribute to this understanding by examining an important research question: "How do the experiences of recent women appointees to administration differ from those of earlier appointees?"

Data Collection

Our study required two cohorts of women administrators composed of both new and experienced principals. We defined "recent" as those appointed to the principalship in September 1987 or later, "earlier" as those appointed to the principalship in September 1982 or before. Thus, recent appointees had a maximum of two-and-a-half years' experience in the principalship, and earlier appointees a minimum of eight years at the time of the study. Since very few high school

principalships in British Columbia are held by women, we limited our study to principals at the elementary school level.

The 17 principals interviewed held positions in seven different school districts in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, all within a 90-minute drive from Vancouver. The recent appointees administered schools varying in enrolment from 100 to 340 students. Three of these principals were each responsible for two schools, with the largest combined enrolment being 356 students. The earlier appointees administered schools varying in enrolment from 100 to 650 students. One principal was responsible for two schools with a combined enrolment of 530 students. Each group included urban, suburban, and rural schools.

Given the relative paucity of descriptive Canadian research in this area, open-ended interviews were considered the most appropriate means of eliciting from women principals information about their careers. We formulated a series of interview questions on: the nature of elementary, high school, and university education; types of teaching and administrative experience; formation of the decision to aspire to administration; impact of non-professional life on career; appointment to the principalship; effect of gender on career; influence and support from others; allocation of time between various responsibilities; individual sense of the principal's job; frustrations and satisfactions with the principalship; feelings about their work within the school; regrets about career; advice to prospective women principals; and career goals and aspirations.

Interviews lasted from one to one-and-a-half hours and were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Respondents were asked to clarify and elaborate where necessary, and to give specific examples, especially where their first responses were minimal.

Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1984) state that "form follows function. Formats must always be driven by the research question(s) involved, and their associated codes" (p. 80). We analyzed the data collected from the 17 principals with this in mind. Miles and Huberman affirm that "induction and deduction are dialectical, rather than mutually exclusive research procedures" (p. 134). Our analysis of data began deductively, with the establishment of some beginning codes based on the questions, and then was completed inductively, in response to emerging data.

RESULTS

We report results in four major emergent categories: Developmental Experiences; Career Development; Administrative Beliefs and Practices; and Assessing the Experience. In each category data are presented by contrasting recent with earlier appointees, and quotations illustrate one group or the other.

Developmental Experiences

When discussing their decision to become teachers, all earlier appointees except one revealed that they either always knew they would be a teacher or knew at least from elementary or high school. Almost all reported there were not many choices available: teaching, nursing, and perhaps dietetics or secretarial work. Several women recounted having thought about other careers, but said their decisions were affected not only by the social limitations related to gender, but by their inability to finance a long degree. "If the truth was known," confided one experienced principal, "I probably always wanted to be a doctor. And at that time there wasn't the encouragement or the money to do that."

In contrast, only a few recent appointees reported always having known, or having decided early on, that they would be teachers. They maintained that helping others learn and enjoying children motivated them to choose teaching.

All these women, by their account, chose their careers freely and are happy. Constrained choice, however, is more characteristic of the earlier group. Recent appointees seem to have chosen to become teachers because they wanted to teach and help children, whereas earlier appointees saw teaching as the only option or the most appealing of the limited choices available to them: women not wanting to nurse became teachers by default.

At the time of the study all the recent appointees (nine principals in total) were either enrolled in or had completed Master's degree programs. Five of the eight earlier appointees had Master's degrees and two had two each. The group of recent appointees had slightly more formal training than the earlier appointees. (Recent male appointees are likely equally well qualified, given current district expectations.) Several earlier appointees, however, also fit in this extra-qualified category: these women had to be very well certified to obtain their positions as administrators (Adkison, 1981; Fauth, 1984; Shakeshaft, 1987; Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkison, 1986).

Most of the women we interviewed (12 of 17) studied part-time to complete their degrees, while they worked full-time or part-time, and had young children at home. In 14 cases the Master's degrees were also completed through part-time study, most often, once again, while working full- or part-time with children at home. Like the principals in Edson's (1988) study, these women were determined to further their education, and exhibited much tenacity in doing so.

Career Development

Most recent appointees interviewed have quite a broad range of teaching experience. Four were appointed to the principalship after approximately 12 professional years (excluding time out to study or to care for children). The rest were appointed to the principalship after 15 to 22 years. The youngest became a principal at 34 years of age. Most were older.

In speaking of their careers all recent appointees revealed a personal focus on learning—from other teachers, from principals, from the variety of positions they held. These women also sought out new experience. One principal said that when she applied for a head teachership, “what I was looking for was another challenge,” a motivation expressed by most principals in this group. These principals also chose professional development carefully, as another means of learning more.

Almost all recent appointees reported becoming known in their districts because of their teaching, and their activities and leadership at the school and district levels. They were noticed by supervisors and their attention-getting (GASing: getting the attention of superiors, cited in Ortiz, 1982; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Wolcott, 1973) was active and deliberate: “I personally was hired because I covered every base that I had to to become a principal. And I have to tell you that I did that as a strategy.” About half the recent appointees said administration was not originally a career goal, but they were bored and needed a change. The decision to try administration came gradually as they taught. Among these women there was no doubt about whether they could do the job, but, rather, a sense of determining ahead of time what they wanted to do in the job: “the principal as an agent of change,” “the best way to implement my philosophy.” They did not need encouragement from or prodding by others.

Mentorship, however—strong, supportive guidance, and active help in developing leadership skills and solidifying philosophy—was important for most recent appointees. This mentorship was usually provided by principals, all male: “The principal that I called my mentor was strongly supportive in terms of being very vocal about me in the district, really selling me . . . suggesting that I take on certain tasks. So he was very active in guiding me.”

Most earlier appointees also have a fairly broad range of teaching experience. At the time of interview, all had been in education for at least 25 years. These appointees also revealed a focus on learning, but not on “seeking out.” They rarely mentioned asking for or choosing new assignments, or looking for challenges in new positions.

About half the earlier appointees reported that administration was not originally their career goal. They say they were encouraged by others—husband, principals, district office personnel, colleagues—and recounted being asked to apply for administrative postings, especially their first. Of her former principal, one experienced administrator recounted:

He brought the posting to me one day in early June and waved it under my nose and said, “Here’s a posting you might be interested in.” And I just laughed and said, “Well, that’s very flattering of you to say that, but, you know, I’m not trained to be a principal.” And he said, “Well, you certainly have the skills. I think you should apply.”

Her husband supported her principal: "Well, why don't you, then? You could do it." Only three principals in the "earlier" group mention mentorship; for two of them it was provided by other women.

Earlier appointees are as interested in learning and growth as recent appointees, but their responses to this interest were generally more passive. Recent appointees definitely contemplated the activities they were to become involved in and chose this involvement carefully and deliberately. Earlier appointees were not as openly aggressive about looking for and obtaining positions. Most earlier appointees had never seen a woman principal, or had seen women systematically removed from the principalship (Shakeshaft, 1987). They therefore could not imagine the job being done by women. Ortiz (1982) notes that women have often been censured for revealing administrative aspirations. Earlier appointees felt pressure to be self-deprecating and were reluctant to be seen as ambitious, thus laughing at the suggestion that they become principals. Sex-role stereotyping seems important here. Most recent appointees, by contrast, appeared to have been much less influenced by stereotypical constraints on women's career behaviour.

Concerning support for aspiring women principals, few earlier appointees had mentorship; if they sought it they could not obtain it (Ortiz, 1982). Recent appointees did not seek mentorship either, but it was provided to them by their male principals. This represents a substantial change in inter-gender social relations. Earlier appointees who were not explicit about their career goals may not have received support for this reason; additionally, they were beginning to tread unfamiliar paths for women, paths less socially acceptable (Adkison, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1987).

Once having become principals, however, earlier appointees networked extensively, especially with other women principals. Like Edson's (1988) principals, these women spoke gratefully of the support they received from others as they undertook new careers. Often they met formally in a group when numbers were small; meetings ceased when more women administrators were hired in their districts. In this case networking was clearly a function of numbers; formal gatherings provided an opportunity for underrepresented women to encourage and support one another and helped offset the negative feelings associated with being tokens (Adkison, 1981; Kanter, 1977; Ortiz, 1982).

Recent appointees we interviewed do not network specifically with other women; because of the greater numbers of women principals, they do not have to make a special effort to develop support, as did earlier appointees. At the same time, recent appointees did not mention exclusion from the old-boys' network. One might assume that entry into this group is open to them. On the other hand, the old-boys' network may still be exclusionary, with recent appointees simply not acknowledging this exclusion. A third scenario is also possible: recent women appointees may be choosing to chart their own course alone, establishing their own individual priorities and styles as principals.

As a possible consequence of their experience-seeking activities, recent appointees have come to the principalship with far more non-school, adult-oriented, supervisory experience than earlier appointees. The specialization roles of these women, either at the school level as learning assistance teachers or at the district office as helping or resource teachers, are unsurprising, as women have traditionally and still hold these specialty positions (Ortiz, 1982).

Perhaps as a result, they do not appear to be coming to the principalship any younger than the earlier principal group. If women have traditionally become principals later than men (Ortiz, 1982; Prolman, 1982), which was true for the earlier appointee group, then recent appointees are becoming principals even later. Because of time out with children some of these new principals may not have as many years in total teaching time as their counterparts without children, but their careers are as long. By interrupting their careers to bear and raise children, all these principals match the "in and out" orientation Biklen (1986) described, but they are at the same time very strongly career-oriented. Importantly, the careers of these women principals with children do not differ significantly from those of the women principals without. Children are often thought to delay and/or permanently limit a woman's chances for career advancement; our sample does not show this effect.

In mentioning boredom in the classroom and the lack of opportunities for leadership in school (Biklen, 1986), these women suggested their need for more challenges that others who perceive teaching as a satisfactory career do not necessarily seek (McLaughlin & Yee, 1988). Such women may be a special strain of teacher who become principals because there is nothing else to do. But developing what one principal terms the "assumption that one is administrative material," an orientation to administration based on knowledge and confidence in one's abilities, and at the same time a clear idea about what one hopes to accomplish as a principal, is new for women aspirants.

Administrative Style

Almost all principals demonstrate a strong sense of personal priorities and can articulate lists of school goals that apply to teachers, students, and curriculum development.

Among the earlier appointees, however, two principals did not show this clear sense of priorities. These are the oldest of the entire group and have taught and administered the longest. Both these principals have always chosen to continue to teach while principaling; they measure their successes as teachers rather than as principals. It is possible that the experience and age of these two women leads them to speak less confidently or to articulate their vision and priorities less clearly. Neither had expected they would become principals nor had had confidence that they could. These two older principals are particularly important cases in showing change over time in women's perceptions of their work in

education. Corwin argued in 1970 that teaching and school administration were two separate careers. Subsequent developments in unionization in the United States and in British Columbia have made this separation even more clear. The women who appear most comfortable in their roles perceive themselves clearly to be principals, first, and demonstrate strong priorities and vision. The sense of oneself as principal is perhaps developing more quickly and strongly among current aspirants.

A number of recent appointees mentioned a positive relationship with children as an aspect of their administrative style, and described their relationship with staff as one of support and encouragement, facilitating rather than directing. "My decision to go into administration was based more on working with teachers in workshop situations rather than in a manager/employee kind of relationship," explained one principal; "I enjoy being able to facilitate a group of adults in a direction that we all want to go." Most recent appointees also described their approach as people-oriented, open-door, warm, humanistic, caring, emotional, intuitive, and reflective. Earlier appointees also focus on a positive relationship with children. They too boasted of a supportive, encouraging relationship with staff. But only two spoke of the caring, personal aspect of being a principal, which is quite strong among recent appointees.

In describing their administrative styles, recent appointees' emphasis on what might traditionally be called the feminine stands out. These women spoke of the special skills and characteristics of women as principals: empathy, intuition, emotion, nurturing, cooperation, and understanding. "I think the new women administrators are more democratic, are more willing to go to the staff and say 'Let's make this decision together,'" stated one new principal. Earlier appointees, on the other hand, did not describe their administrative styles in feminine terms. But they seem to have come to the same conclusions recent appointees held right from the start: that one does not have to be a man to be a good principal, that a good woman makes a good or even better principal.

Assessing the Experience

Recent appointees did not report the effects of tokenism, exclusion, discrimination, or harassment and criticism from men. Each is among an increasing number of women administrators in their school district. Neither did they speak of limited options, and only one mentioned another preferred career.

For these women, however, sex-role stereotyping from the outside persists. One principal related a typical story:

In dealing with parents, especially early in my career, it was very difficult for some of them to believe that a female would have any position of authority. . . . And even this year people come and say "I'd like to see the principal" and are sort of taken aback that it's a woman.

In addition, these recent appointees still have to work harder than the men to prove to others that they merit their positions.

Almost all recent appointees cited the effects of affirmative action. "I think in some ways it helped to be a woman," stated one principal; "it's very seldom that I've found that being a woman has worked against me." But there is uneasiness about hiring on this basis. One principal spoke forthrightly:

In our school district this last year I believe there were seven administrative positions and six of them went to women because the district felt that the time was right for women to get these positions and I don't like that at all. I think that that's a real insult.

At the same time several cited resistance to affirmative action. One recent appointee applied for a principalship several times in her former district. One of her friends suggested to her that, "it's because I'm a woman that I did not get anything, because we're in the backlash." Although affirmative action may, initially, raise awareness of imbalances (based on race, gender, or other distinctions), it rapidly becomes insulting to those for whom it has been established, and sometimes provokes negative responses.

All earlier appointees reported on the effects of tokenism, exclusion, discrimination, chauvinism, and harassment from male colleagues. When she was appointed, said one principal, "most of the women who were applying for jobs at that time had their Master's programs. And very few of the men did. They were playing the old-boy network." There was an absence of career-building direction from men. Even after they had become principals, these women reported, their male colleagues reacted negatively to their activities and leadership: "When I was at [my first school], the school was sometimes referred to as the 'dollhouse.'" These women encountered much sex-role stereotyping and fought a double standard regarding their conduct. Personal traits and actions that would have been accepted quite calmly in men were criticized in them. As the only, or one of the first few, woman administrators in their districts, they were watched carefully:

I think I have to do better because I always think people want me to fall on my face. They want it to say, "Oh, it's just that woman. She's crazy." And so I have to make sure that message doesn't get out.

Two earlier appointees mentioned that the time was right for them, as women were beginning to obtain principalships. One principal spoke positively about the fairness of her district's hiring practices: "I think that the applications were considered by merit and they sort of went over backwards to be fair to the men when women started to produce better resumés than the men did."

Earlier appointees recognize that women were usually not hired as administrators at the time when they became principals and often this, as well others' perception of affirmative action, intensified their resolve to become principals:

When I went in to be interviewed [as a principal for the first time] I was waiting with a fellow and I could tell that he was surprised that I was there. He was next in. When the fellow that was in the room at that time came out he looked at me and he said, "Oh, you'll probably get this because you're a woman." And, you know, I can remember thinking, "You're damn right I'll get it." It seemed like he made me so determined where I don't think I was that determined before.

Despite their often negative experiences these women did not perceive themselves to have been subject to discrimination.

By far the largest non-professional influence on these women's careers is their family. Although they laugh and exclaim about how difficult it is to manage a career and family, they do not seem particularly overwhelmed by all they are doing. Two earlier appointees did mention "not being able to do it all." Despite this, all the women with children, particularly the recent appointees with younger children, do appear to be doing it all. Given that many of these women worked when their children were small, surprisingly few mentioned concern over childcare.

Their hearts are not at home—at least not between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday. To say this is not to deny these women's feelings for their children. It is their careers and lifestyles, rather than their feelings, that do not conform to the traditional view of motherhood. To the outside observer, these women, who make time stretch to fit their needs, are exceptional.

For both new and experienced principals the most satisfying aspect of their job concerns children and teachers. Satisfaction comes from seeing pleasing and rewarding results before one's eyes, that is, student and teacher success, and not from pay cheques, status, or praise from superiors. Most of these women said they enjoy their jobs and look forward to coming to work each day. They find their work challenging and meaningful. Stated one principal: "I like being an administrator. I'm never bored. I don't have time to be bored and I am grateful for that. I really like my job."

Recent appointees feel very lucky. They have enjoyed everything they have done and they feel rewarded and gratified. They are, however, concerned about decreasing contact with children as they move further and further away from the classroom. Said one principal:

People tease and they say, "So, assistant superintendent," and I think there's a desperate need for assistant superintendents to be women, but I'm not sure that's what I want. The frustration I feel in this job is the not immediate contact with children.

When asked to discuss job satisfaction, none of the earlier appointees expressed concern about decreased contact with children in the principalship and only one earlier appointee spoke of feeling lucky.

It is ironic that the women who have been much more deliberate and instrumental in developing their careers and aiming for the principalship cite luck so

often. Hard work, dedication, and careful choices seem to have been much more important to their career success than luck. And the group of women who more often found themselves in promising situations accidentally, without having used much deliberate control, do not mention luck. From the perspective of these earlier appointees, however, getting to the principalship may not have been a matter of luck at all, but, rather, a course requiring much hard work and perseverance given the difficulties and obstacles before them. Perhaps when new women principals compare themselves to earlier appointees, they feel particularly lucky, as women, to have achieved what they have more easily.

All recent appointees are, not surprisingly, interested in expanding on their experience as principals. About half would like to pursue their administrative careers at the district level as directors in curriculum development, professional development, or special education, and the other half aspire to the superintendency. Interestingly, not one of these women independently mentioned becoming superintendent. Asked directly if she would be interested, one new principal confided, "I was going to say [superintendent], but I thought, no, assistant superintendent."

Over half the earlier appointees plan to remain a principal with possibly one last principalship at a different school before retirement. Several mentioned directorships or district principalships and hope to move on in this direction from their schools. Three earlier appointees mentioned specifically not having had a desire to be a superintendent and one revealed that she had thought about it early in her career but had given up on it a long time ago because of family responsibilities.

It is interesting that no earlier appointees mentioned an interest in the superintendency even though some are still of an age to aspire to that position. Prior expectation and sex-role socialization may be important here. These women did not aspire to the principalship until well into their careers, having seen very few women principals. And aspiring to the superintendency might, in their eyes, have been ludicrous, and certainly beyond reach. The higher aspirations of the recent appointees are understandable within the context of their professional, social, and cultural experience, and realistic given their prior expectation and career orientation.

When asked to give advice to prospective women principals both earlier and recent appointees offered much, freely. Earlier appointees advise women to be prepared to do anything the job entails. These principals advise women not to try to compete with men, but to deal with male colleagues on an intellectual level, and not to feel that as women they're less able. They encourage women to work differently and to eschew traditional male models:

I think that the most important thing is to be yourself and don't be afraid to be a woman. You don't have to outman the men. You don't have to be hard and tough and so on. You can still be feminine.

Another experienced principal advises female candidates to “look at what we are as women and bring it to the job rather than try to compete with men. Don’t go for the traditional male model. You don’t have to do it that way.” Earlier appointees encourage capable women to consider the principalship and to go for it if they want it: “Don’t be ashamed of ambition because I think some women are . . . there’s nothing wrong with it.”

Recent appointees gave much specific advice concerning traditional feminine attributes: be caring, be personal, be supportive, be compassionate. Both groups contribute to the impression of a new and developing role for women in the principalship.

SUMMARY

Although the experiences of individual women within these groups vary, we have developed composite sketches that show the sharp contrasts between the groups.

The Earlier Principal

The earlier appointee enjoyed school and performed well. She always knew she would be a teacher because, for the most part, there were few choices open to her as a woman. She began teaching young, with no expectation of becoming a principal. Along the way she married and had several children, staying at home full-time for a year or two when they were born, returning to work part-time quickly, and then full-time by the time her children were four or five years old.

As a teacher she did not independently seek new assignments. She received unsought attention as a by-product of good teaching. She was asked to apply for her first administrative position and encouraged to move in that direction. She thought she could do the job as well as other principals she had seen, was intrigued by the new challenge and so became a principal after more than 15 years as a teacher. She was the best candidate, hired not because of affirmative action, but at a time when women were just beginning to join administrative ranks in greater numbers. Part of her motivation included boredom with the classroom role.

Along the way to becoming a principal she received no pre-administrative mentoring. While a principal, she completed a Master’s degree in education, part-time while working. She began her administrative career in a small school and is now in her third school. As a principal, her top priority is children. Other major priorities are working through teachers to best teach and accommodate children, and ethos building.

During her career, the earlier appointee suffered many negative consequences of being a woman. She received little career-building support, and was excluded from the old-boys’ network. She had to contend with male colleagues’ negative

reactions to her and with harassment by them. She had to work harder to become a principal and had to continue prove herself once there. She felt a responsibility to do well for the sake of those women coming up behind her. Along the way, she began to perceive that women often do things differently. She decided not to compete with men, but rather to be a principal in her own individual non-male way.

The earlier appointee enjoys her job and especially likes working with good teachers. She feels rewarded and gratified, and has no regrets about her career. She often found the demands of family, husband, career, and studies difficult and pressing, but not daunting. A preference not to lose contact with children, as well as family responsibilities prevented her from seriously considering the superintendency.

The Recent Principal

The recent appointee also liked school and performed well. She made the decision to become a teacher freely, not because of limited options. She liked working with children and wanted to teach others. She was also fairly young as a new teacher. The idea of being an administrator occurred to her, and grew, while she taught.

She sought variety in her teaching, at a number of levels. She has always had a focus on learning and constantly sought new experience and new assignments. She became known in her district for her teaching and also for school and district leadership. She took on extra responsibilities for more challenge. Unlike the earlier appointee, she deliberately managed her career to enhance promotability. She was bored in the classroom and needed a new challenge. She knew she could be a good principal and knew what to do to get there. She took the initiative to apply for an administrative posting.

The recent principal was appointed, she believes, because of her good track record as a teacher, because she was well-qualified with a specialty area, and also because of affirmative action. Along the way the recent appointee was also mentored by the male principal with whom she worked as a vice-principal. His support, which was provided and not sought, was active and guiding.

As a principal her top priority is that children learn. Developing the school as a warm, comfortable, safe place for children—building climate—is also important. And working with teachers, facilitating and acting as an instructional leader, is also at the top of her list of priorities.

Because the recent appointee is now among a number of women administrators in her district, she does not suffer the effects of tokenism. But sex-role stereotyping from others continues, as do the double standard and behavioral stereotyping for women principals. She believes, however, that the feminine characteristics she accentuates in her everyday work—understanding, warmth, empathy, nurturing—are a hallmark of women's administrative style.

The recent appointee loves her job and is happy to work with good teachers. She feels very lucky, and has no regrets about her career. She wants to gain more experience as a principal, then plans for a position at the district office, either a directorship or the superintendency. She advises administrative aspirants to gain credibility as teachers, and, before they become principals, to sort out their beliefs and philosophy and to develop a vision of what they wish to accomplish. She believes they should use their unique characteristics as women to best advantage to simply be good women principals.

CONCLUSION

The differences we found between the careers of recent and earlier women appointees to the principalship demonstrate significant changes over the last few years in the social context and work of women principals in elementary schools. Although the recent women principals we interviewed may still have to prove themselves to outsiders, and still do face sex-role stereotyping from society as well, they are now at least accepted and supported by their male peers, unlike earlier appointees. New women principals also demonstrate greater career initiative than their earlier counterparts and are more active in their planning and pursuit of career goals; they show much less false modesty about their attainments and prospects. They also have a greater range of experience in both teaching and administrative areas and, aspiring to district management as they all do, their upward career orientation is greater than that of earlier appointees.

The differences summarized above reflect growth and change in educational administration. Earlier female appointees were not accepted as equals by the male majority of principals with whom they worked. They remained on the outside and chose to do so because they were not male principals and realized that, despite effort, they could never become a natural part of the group. In proceeding to be themselves and following their own individual paths they realized that they were different. They found their own voices, their voices as women.

Recent women appointees also perceive themselves as different. They have gone one step further, however, accentuating and highlighting the feminine character of their leadership. To apply Carol Gilligan's (1982) phrase, these women speak collectively as principals "in a different voice." What they clearly articulate as theirs is a leadership stamped by the fact that they are women. In their commentary on their lives, their experiences, and their goals these women, whether feminist or not, individually have articulated distinctive values and are beginning to reshape the world of educational administration to include the woman's voice.

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