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Carolyn S. Carr

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None [of these principals] had adopted male behaviors entirely, but all had relaxed the stereotypic restrained and closed female behaviors and speech reported in research of two decades ago. In addition, each of these principals utilized traditional 'female' behaviors in new ways.

# HOW FEMALE PRINCIPALS COMMUNICATE: Verbal and Nonverbal Micropolitical Communication Behaviors of Female Anglo and Hispanic School Principals

Carolyn S. Carr

## Background

Educational administration is a career field which clearly exemplifies male domination,<sup>1</sup> with women vastly outnumbered in leadership roles at all levels.<sup>2</sup> In 1992 only 7.6% of the secondary principals, 23% of the middle school principals, and 37% of the elementary principals in the United States were female in spite of the fact that over one-half the students in educational administration preparation programs have been female since the mid-1980's.<sup>3</sup> The question of why this discrepancy exists remains to be answered conclusively. Bell and Chase<sup>4</sup> claim that stereotypes related to female assertiveness and authority are major questions in hiring school administrators, and further, that gender stratification is maintained by differential access to advancement opportunities in schools

Carolyn Carr is Assistant Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Texas-Pan American.

provided by 'gatekeepers' who hold these stereotypic views and who are also predominantly male. Since language is one means by which assertiveness and authority may be expressed, one area for investigation which may hold significant clues for understanding and potential change is the verbal and nonverbal micropolitical communication behaviors displayed by female school administrators. As Fairclough<sup>5</sup> asserts, increased consciousness of the manner in which language contributes to the domination of some persons by others is the first step toward emancipation.

Staley<sup>6</sup> claimed the communicative potential of female professionals has been overlooked in the focus on general female communicative power. Women have brought knowledge of female as well as male culture to their jobs,<sup>7</sup> making their potential contributions to the workplace unique. Other studies demonstrated frequent use of informal styles,<sup>8</sup> need to be of service as opposed to seeking prestige and status,<sup>9</sup> and satisfaction derived from supervision rather than administrative tasks.<sup>10</sup> Few studies have been conducted explicitly on female political behavior and micropolitics in school settings.<sup>11</sup> Gronn's<sup>12</sup> analysis of language use in management contexts in education has been one of the few field studies conducted in a natural setting.

Research on female micropolitical communication is sparse in the literature,<sup>13</sup> as are attempts at an explanation of this phenomenon of gender imbalance in school administration. Ng and Bradac<sup>14</sup> describe widely held stereotypic opinion regarding how men and women talk, even though objective empirical linguistic differences appear small and inconclusive. Shakeshaft<sup>15</sup> concluded in her research that most studies of women administrators have been conducted by survey, thus presenting a picture of the average, not the individual. More research has been needed on what characterizes in positive terms the women who have engaged in non-traditional, formerly 'male' roles, research requiring a look into the things that bring changes to society rather than a concern for the past or the status quo.<sup>16</sup> The following pages report an ethnographic study which examined five female principals' verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors and analyzed the salience of derived micropolitical strategies in work-related contexts, for acquiring influence or using power as school principals. The intent was to provide empirical data related to the actual communication behaviors of female principals in the micropolitical environment of the school.

## Perspectives related to gender and language

Edelman<sup>17</sup> distinguished between "language of dominance and authority" typically employed by males, and that of "helpfulness and reinforcement" used by women, a 'difference' often seen as 'inadequacy' by male standards. Feminists<sup>18</sup> described language as a reflection of a deeply patriarchal society resulting in the relative powerlessness of women. Increasingly, however, researchers have been asserting the variability and similarity between the stereotypic views of male and female cultures<sup>19</sup> rather than the hierarchical views of male superiority described in early anthropological works such as those of Mead.<sup>20</sup> The attribution of gender has even been described as 'relational,' rather than as an established 'essence'.<sup>21</sup> Terborg<sup>22</sup> found that when relevant variables such as job type, tenure, and position in the organization are controlled, few differences are found between perceptions of power demonstrated by males and females. Similarly other studies have found that powerful managers, both male and female, use positive strategies of teamwork and esprit de corp to influence followers, whereas those who are less powerful resort to domination through threats and rules, and that this finding is true for both males and females.<sup>23</sup>



When examining language and communication, Lakoff<sup>24</sup> has given extensive examples of female features of verbal language form, meaning, and syntax. She describes female usage of 'tag questions,' weak expletives, 'fluffy' adjectives, hedges, hesitations, and personalisms as weak language. Female grammar has been described as more correct, polite, and tactful, and with fewer examples of humor than are found than in typical male conversation. Such usage is also described by Lakoff as powerless.

Nonverbal communication has presented clues about ways female language is seen as powerless and docile. Listening, questioning, and opting for small personal boundaries are typical female behaviors indicating less power in relationship.<sup>25</sup> Smiling,<sup>26</sup> touching,<sup>27</sup> and greater eye contact<sup>28</sup> are similarly seen as powerless behaviors on the part of females.

### Perspectives related to language and politics

Lakoff<sup>29</sup> and Corcoran<sup>30</sup> asserted the 'synonymous nature of language and politics.' The use of language to achieve influence or power over others is a clear reflection of language as political activity.<sup>31</sup> Feminist researchers have argued convincingly that language has reflected a deeply patriarchal society, that the 'theft of language' has been part of women's state of relative powerlessness.<sup>32</sup>

Lakoff<sup>33</sup> has described the components of language as form, meaning, and structure. 'Form' has included phonology, lexicon, and syntactic rules that specify how words fit together to form grammatical sentences. 'Meaning' has referred to the semantics of language. 'Function' has referred to the intention of language, its pragmatics. Increasingly, however, language has been interpreted as including cultural norms of spoken interaction.<sup>34</sup>

Nonverbal cues and conversational inference have also been part of the communication act, signaling how semantic content is to be understood, and how each idea relates to what precedes or follows in the conversation. Missed cues have led to misunderstandings and miscommunication.<sup>35</sup> Other nonverbal characteristics of women have been demonstrated in research through comparisons with men. Some of these are: preference for closer positioning during conversations and smaller personal space boundaries,<sup>36</sup> greater eye contact,<sup>37</sup> more frequent smiling,<sup>38</sup> and more frequent touching.<sup>39</sup> Such patterns of interpersonal relationship have helped establish and maintain power relationships in the micropolitical structure of social life.<sup>40</sup> Linguistic imbalance has therefore been considered worthy of study as a medium which spotlights real-world inequality. Corcoran has expanded this thought by positing that

... while language shapes and empowers its users, the unhappy consequence is that language reproduces and reinforces exploitation, inequality, and other traditions of power. . . . All language is political because every speech setting, however private and intimate, involves power relations, social roles, privileges and contested meanings.<sup>41</sup>

Power has been defined by some as energy, effective interaction, and empowerment, a definition which departs from the view of power as domination and control.<sup>42</sup> Pfeffer asserted that "language and symbolism are important in the exercise of power",<sup>43</sup> in contrast to control of resources and interdependence which traditionally defined power. The extent of female political activity has largely depended upon the individual's sense of life space control and the salience of the political arena for that individual. The challenge for females has become the transformation of institutions based within the traditional organizational theories of dominance to enable a new vision incorporating verbal and nonverbal behaviors which transform these observed gender asymmetries.<sup>44</sup>

Ball identified such behavior as the interpersonal control style, emphasizing personal relationships and private persuasion as opposed to managerial and hierarchical styles, or politi-

cal and adversarial styles.<sup>45</sup> For females who achieve such styles, career choices would seem to expand. Pfeffer brings focus to this idea with his suggestion that one aspect of stature, or power, which may be ascertained without great difficulty, is one's appearance, verbal skills, or articulateness. "Politics and the wielding of power are, after all, activities which involve argumentation, presentation, and debate".<sup>46</sup>

Micropolitics has been described as behaviors centered on the strategic use of power for the purpose of either influence or protection.<sup>47</sup> Thorne and Henley described the micropolitical structure of every day details as patterns seen in both physical actions and verbal expression which establish, express, and maintain a power relationship.<sup>48</sup> If indeed men and women have represented different political realities, then language has become a viable way of approaching understanding. Within organizations, language, symbols, rituals, and ceremonies have become fundamental in the process of establishing meaning for action and events.<sup>49</sup> Leaders who have utilized language to that end have acquired considerable power or influence. In that context, the following research attempts to describe the language of female school principals with the goal of furthering the understanding of female micropolitical behavior in schools as described. Research questions were:

1. What are the verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors manifested by female school principals in their work related settings?
2. What are the micropolitical strategies employed by female school principals in their verbal and nonverbal communications?
3. What is the nature of micropolitical communication behaviors of female school principals at the elementary and secondary levels?
4. Are there recognizable ethnic differences between the communication behaviors of the Anglo and the Hispanic principals?
5. Are there recognizable ethnic differences in the micropolitical strategies employed by female Anglo and Hispanic school principals in their verbal and nonverbal communications?

### Methodology

A qualitative method was chosen for discovering the administrators' communication behaviors and identifying their related micropolitical strategies. Consistent with the guidelines for grounded theory research the relationship of the data to theory unfolds during the course of the study through analysis by the researcher. Theoretical propositions contributing to the study were drawn from Homans' theory of social behavior,<sup>50</sup> Blau's exchange theory,<sup>51</sup> and the micropolitical perspective related to schools drawn from the work of Ball,<sup>52</sup> Blase,<sup>53</sup> and Hoyle.<sup>54</sup> Critical discourse analysis applied to the transcripts follows in the tradition of Lakoff,<sup>55</sup> Gumperz<sup>56</sup> and Fairclough.<sup>57</sup> Such analysis combines a description of the text with interpretation of the interaction occurring within a specified social context.<sup>58</sup>

The data sources are five female public school principals, two representing elementary (Celia and Helen), one representing middle school (Jan), and two representing high school level (Maria and Laura). Celia and Maria are Hispanic; Helen, Jan, and Laura are Anglo. With the exception of ethnicity, the five principals are otherwise well matched. All are in their late 40's, all grew up in stable two-parent homes where education and religion were valued, all claim middle class status, all have at least two degrees, and all except Jan are married and have either one or two children. All five have been professional educators since graduating from college, a period of at least twenty years, and have been in their current school districts for at least 5 years. They are all serving their first or second year as principal in their present schools. Laura is the only one who had previously been a principal, having served 5 years in a



middle school in the same district in which she is presently serving. Their willingness to participate in this study grew from a strong commitment to help other aspiring female administrators. In addition, each of these women display a secure sense of self esteem which supported them while being observed as closely as they were during the course of the research.

The methodology employed was a descriptive, qualitative field study. Field observation and elite interviewing techniques focused on verbal and nonverbal micropolitical communication behaviors of the principals in several prescribed work related settings selected because they were typical events in the lives of school principals and would allow for comparison of behaviors in similar contexts. The specific events focused upon for were: 1) faculty meetings conducted by the principal, 2) district principals' meetings, 3) teacher conferences, 4) parent-teacher organization meetings, 5) parent conferences, 6) student conferences, 7) departmental meetings, and 8) random informal hallway and office interchanges observed during the course of two working days. Informal interviews were held at the conclusion of each event to verify researcher impressions and check for understanding. An extended, formally structured interview was conducted with each subject at the conclusion of the observation period to gather personal data and philosophical information from the subjects.<sup>59</sup> Observations were recorded through the use of audio taping, videotaping, and note taking techniques.

Naturalistic equivalents of conventional trustworthiness criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were employed, as were triangulation of data, peer debriefing and member check techniques. Constant comparative analysis<sup>60</sup> by the researcher was used to identify patterns, assign codes, and categorize findings derived from written transcriptions of an average of fifteen hours of verbal and nonverbal communications by each principal. Field notes, audio and video recordings, daily logs, and personal journal were correlated for ongoing and summative analysis through an audit trail.<sup>61</sup>

Components of verbal communication observed were form, meaning, and function as suggested by Lakoff<sup>62</sup> and Fairclough.<sup>63</sup> Nonverbal communication components noted were such behaviors as posture, facial expression, body movements and positions, expressions such as vocal frequency and intensity, error or pauses, and subtly conveyed feelings.<sup>64</sup> Micropolitical communication behaviors or tactics noted were those interpreted by the researcher as conveying attempts to express formal or informal power or influence to obtain preferred outcomes. When these individual behaviors, or tactics, became patterns, they were described as strategies.

**Table 1. Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Categories and Descriptors**

Verbal communication	Nonverbal communication
1. Listening techniques: um umm, right, okay, uh huh, yes, yeah	1. Appearance: conservative, businesslike, stylized
2. Vocabulary: positive motion words, qualifiers, colloquialisms, compliments	2. Power position selected: standing, seated, close proximity
3. Usage: finishes sentences for others, incomplete phrases, fillers, signals, filters negatives, questioning, metaphors	3. Hand position: in motion, clasped, near face, expressive
4. Humor: general, self-directed, facetious, teasing, collegial	4. Facial expression: eye contact, reflects emotion, nodding, smiling, glasses used as a signal of attention
	5. Body: shifting position, legs crossed, touches others, expansive arm position

**Findings**

*Verbal behavior*

The verbal communication behaviors of these principals demonstrated many of the same characteristics. Categories of verbal behavior developed through analysis of the transcripts included active listening techniques, vocabulary, usage, and humor. Active listening behaviors of all five subjects included minimal responses such as 'um umm,' 'right,' 'okay,' 'yeah,' and 'uh huh.' These were commonly employed as prompts and seemed to encourage further communication from the speaker, rather than signify simple agreement with the speaker. The following interchange with middle school principal Jan was typical, and demonstrates this verbal behavior. (This and all other transcriptions attempt to replicate actual speech and have not been edited for grammatical correctness.)

- 273 Ada: Okay last year we lost Barbara and we have Carla.
- 274 Jan: Right  
 Ada: Okay, so Carla filled Barbara's shoes and Barbara had a regular ED class also, so Carla/  
 Jan: /And student Council/  
 Ada: uhh, yes.  
 Jan: Okay.  
 Ada: Yeah, and she did have a student council period last year, I forgot about that. Umm, Okay so Carla just picked up one class there.  
 Jan: Right  
 Ada: Okay, I've lost one class  
 Jan: Okay  
 Ada: And then Dane has lost a section. Because she's doing two science when last year she did one.  
 Jan: um umm

Use of vocabulary among the principals reflected strongly positive connotations. Words such as 'great,' 'good,' 'wonderful,' 'excellent,' and 'super' dotted their communications liberally, sometimes in extensive strings as in this excerpt from high school principal Laura.

- 226 Laura: /Okay, great, okay, that's something we need to do today too is to kind of brainstorm those kinds of things  
 Alice: And so that's kinda just a start and I /  
 Laura: /an idea/  
 Alice: /and I'm continuing to look at articles and stuff that have been written to see if I can come up with some more ideas.  
 Laura: Sounds great, super dooper, okay good.

Traditionally, women have been said to use colloquialisms far less than men in their conversation. This held true among these principals, where only the high school principals used these commonly in their speech. Laura frequently employed such examples as 'squared away,' 'hard core,' and 'down the road', sometimes more than once in the same verbal sequence. Maria used 'bottom line,' 'class act,' and 'go from there' frequently. The other three principals used colloquialisms rarely, if at all.

Qualifiers such as 'kind of,' 'just,' 'well,' and 'I guess' were distinguishing features of these principals' speech, but they occurred with varying frequencies. The usage patterns of the principals varied to a greater degree than their vocabularies. High school principals Laura and Maria demonstrated a tendency to interrupt and finish others' sentences and to use incomplete phrases frequently as in the interchange immediately above and in this interchange between Maria and a secretary:

- 24 Sec: He can come as early as next week but I didn't think it could pass that fast, so  
 Maria: ok



Sec: So I'm gonna pick a/  
 Maria: /a date?  
 Sec: A date a little bit further/  
 Maria: /for both schools?  
 Sec: For both schools.

These interruptions became supportive overlap showing high involvement in the conversation.<sup>65</sup>

Questioning techniques were used frequently by all the principals for the purpose of eliciting information, and as in this case, to settle disputes. The following excerpt from a discipline session between Maria and two students who had just been in a fight outside Maria's office demonstrates her ability to perceive student problems.

41 Maria: And you threw the bracelet at her?  
 Jesse: I didn't call her anything mam!  
 Maria: Why would she slap you?  
 Jesse: huh?  
 Maria: Why would she slap you?  
 Jesse: Because I was talking back to her.  
 Maria: You were telling her stuff?  
 Jesse: No, not like bad stuff. I just said that I was (UNCLEAR) because I wanted to and stuff, that's about it.  
 Maria: Is this the way you want to be treated? Have people throw things at you?  
 Jesse: No mam.  
 Maria: Were you all friends before this or what?  
 Jesse: Yes  
 Maria: And were you boyfriend and girlfriend or what?  
 Jesse: Matter of fact I do like her right now.

Humor characterized the speech of all the principals. In the transcripts of her conversations, Laura demonstrated over fifty instances of humor in a variety of situations, such as this one with a slightly irritated mother who had been unable to locate her son.

238 Parent: I think so, the Lord willing I did it correctly, I asked Karl to meet me here, and of course he didn't show. He's in the hall somewhere, and I'm sure wherever that, she is, that's where he is.  
 Laura: You'll find him. Do you want us to go out and make an all call, (BOTH LAUGH)? He'd never speak to you or to us! (LAUGHS AS USHERS MOM OUT) Bye, see you tomorrow. (BACK TO DESK) Well okay, arightly.

With elementary principal Helen a similar use of humor occurred in her faculty meeting as she poetically lamented the shortage of duplicating paper supplies.

80 Helen: Okay. (EYES DOWN, GRINNING AS SHE READS, RIGHT HAND UP WITH PENCIL) Number 3: Roses are red, violets are blue, paper is dwindling, what to do, what to do? (LAUGHS)  
 Librarian: And you thought we didn't have anything for the Pegasus contest! (LAUGHTER OF GROUP PRECEDED LENGTHY GROUP DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONSENSUS ON PAPER ALLOTMENT)

The following example of laughing at herself illustrated an embarrassing mistake regarding the misunderstanding of a title of a requested addition to the school's reading list. Middle school principal Jan handled the incident with gracious good humor and considerable blushing at her own error. In deference to her power position as leader the teachers did not point out the principal's error until she herself realized it. The outcome was an opportunity for increased trust and collegiality, foundations for increased micropolitical influence.

327 Faye: A Quail Robert.  
 Jan: No, I didn't put that one on there.  
 Faye: That one I think is hard to get.

Jan: Well, you know why I didn't put that one on there? I thought it wasn't of lasting value. I thought it was more, not that Robert Quayle is not of lasting value, but that umm, there'll be a time that he won't be such an interesting figure. Right? Maybe?  
 Faye: I don't know. I haven't read the book.  
 Jan: Have you read the book?  
 Glenda: uh huh. (PAUSE)  
 Jan: Robert! Not Dan!  
 328 Faye: Not Dan! (SLIGHT LAUGH)  
 Jan: OH! Wonderful, it just occurred to me! Well put it back on. Oh, I'm just so . . . Ohh! . . .  
 Faye: It's Okay.  
 Jan: (HIDES FACE IN HANDS, BLUSHES AND LAUGHS) I thought it was a book about the Vice President.  
 Faye: No, no.  
 Jan: I thought, oh, you know, that's going to be hard to justify. . .  
 Faye: Oh, that's cute! I love that! (ALL LAUGH)  
 Jan: It's gonna be hard to justify, and I didn't want to do anything political.  
 Glenda: No this is not political.  
 Jan: Alright!  
 Glenda: This is quite appropriate 6th grade material.  
 Jan: Gooood!  
 Jan: Well I am not embarrassed, much!  
 Faye: Good, I'm so, it's so wonderful to know she's human!  
 ALL LAUGH AGAIN.  
 Jan: And you all were just being so nice about it!

#### Nonverbal behavior

Nonverbally, all five principals demonstrated concern for their personal appearance as well as their environment. The secondary principals tended to dress in conservative business dresses or suits. The elementary principals tended to wear colorful and less conservative attire. Helen wore brightly color-coordinated outfits with matching jewelry and shoes. On one occasion Celia wore walking shorts and a sweater to a faculty meeting. The ease of access for visitors to the principals' offices because of consistently open office doors, and warm furnishings chosen (such as student art work, green plants or flowers, school symbols, and pictures of family) promoted an inviting atmosphere.<sup>66</sup> Helen and Celia had numerous children's drawings, books and toys in evidence in their offices. The secondary principals had school symbols on display. They all utilized physical positioning effectively as a conscious power tool. Their desks faced the doors of their offices. Each deliberately chose when to sit behind her desk and when to sit beside a visitor at a round table or in arm chairs. At staff meetings each sat at the head of the conference table.

Each principal employed body motions in communication. For example, each maintained consistent eye contact, reflected group moods through facial expression, and utilized expansive hand motions for emphasis and personal expression. Body position of the middle and high school principals demonstrated use of physical space in an open and expansive manner. They casually placed an arm over the backs of their chairs and shifted their seating positions frequently. The elementary principals demonstrated the more traditionally stereotypical female closed body position, with arms and legs close to the body. All five typically leaned toward or away from others as the topic met their approval or as their involvement in the conversation grew. Behaviors such as nodding, minimal responses (um mmm, uh huh), and smiling seemed to represent encouragement rather than submissive behaviors. Jan and Helen wore reading glasses which they invariably removed



when someone else had the floor, and put back on when they resumed control of the conversation. Even interruptions of the speech of others, seen in the literature as powerful and dominating behavior,<sup>67</sup> served these principals in a manner which appeared to encourage further conversation from companions rather than blocking it.<sup>68</sup>

**Strategies and Behaviors**

Overall micropolitical strategies employed by all these principals were similar and included personal skills in organization, interpersonal influence, and advocacy of favored causes. Table 2 presents a display matrix of these observed categories of strategies and tactics. Laura and Maria consciously utilized strong negotiation skills including confrontation to obtain their goals. In the following telephone interchange Maria politely made herself very clear to an irate patron without losing control of herself until after she hung up the phone.

79 Maria: Ok . . . Mr . . . Mr. Trevino, do not use that tone of voice with me sir . . . I'm trying to, please change your tone of voice with me . . . yes sir, but you can . . . I didn't have anything to do with that so please treat me cordially. Change your tone of voice with me. . . Ok. . . We will work with you in as much as we will keep Smiley here today and Monday morning you can get his shot for him . . . He only has 30 days to get it done . . . ok, I understand. . . Thank you, goodbye. (HANGS UP.) OOOOOH!

All five principals focused on framing an environment reflective of their personal values of caring for and supporting others. Celia exemplified this as she walked from classroom to classroom visiting students and giving several in each room a personal encouraging note:

18 Celia: I am carrying notes around to give the kids. Last week they imitated me doing the 'Principal's Walk' with the clipboard like this.(CHUCKLING WITH OBVIOUS PLEASURE)

Micropolitical behaviors or tactics employed by the principals in implementation of their strategies were also similar. The organizational strategy was implemented by each principal through tactical behaviors such as planning, note taking, and time management. Each prepared for and controlled meetings by having a printed agenda, but each also included on that agenda a time for each participant to speak concerns. In each department chair meeting the principals went around the group specifically offering the floor to each in attendance.

The principals' strategy of interpersonal influence was carried out through utilization of a team approach to management

**Table 2. Micropolitical Strategies and Behaviors to Obtain Preferred Outcomes**

Micropolitical strategies	Micropolitical behaviors
1. Organization	1. Planning, note taking, time management, staff preparation
2. Interpersonal influence	2. Team approach, personal involvement, positive approach, self awareness, networking
3. Negotiation	3. Change agency, mediation, trust building
4. Environmental framing	4. Symbolism, caring, gift-giving
5. Advocacy	5. Gender awareness, children, mentoring

and personal involvement with teachers through ready accessibility and frequent offers to assist teachers in a variety of ways. The avoidance of any semblance of negativism in front of the group was apparent in the behaviors of all five principals. Compliments and praise typified their comments to both staff and students.

64 Maria: She is worth her weight in gold, my registrar. She is a paraprofessional, but sh...ooooh! I know that when I, when we do valedictorian and salutatorian, those GPA's are absolutely correct, everything is clean. she . . . thank you James, I got your note, next Tuesday, is it? . . . that's fine, no problem. Good, ok? . . . Doing ok? . . . Good. One of our great English teachers. Works so hard with the kids.

Each principal exhibited a strong sense of self awareness, including self confidence, dedication to her profession, and commitment to hard work. Each was gracious, poised, calm, and skilled in interpersonal relations. Networking within the community was a common tactic. In her final interview each espoused value for the uniqueness of her contribution to the principalship in words not unlike the following:

61 Maria: I could never see myself as principal of a high school . . . and look look where I am! (LAUGHS) It's just one of those things that you say that I'm never gonna do, but, once you get in there and you know, I'm glad I did. I love the job, I love what I do. I have a lot of fun with it. And uhh, I enjoy it. Tremendously! (LAUGHS) and I think it's made me a better person. I think I've grown. Ummm and I think I've helped a lot of people in their . . . search for whatever, you know . . . in life and as professionals, as teachers, as students . . . I feel like I have impacted positively upon a lot of people. And that makes me feel good. Because that's what we're about.

The interpersonal influence strategy was demonstrated repeatedly by all the principals through the tactics of consultation with teachers and parents, and sharing of information. Shared decision making was the norm. Each principal knew and called by name her entire faculty and many students. Each principal was also actively involved on her campus, participating in activities, walking around throughout the day observing events, and practices, and even participating in 'setting up' or 'cleaning up,' behaviors not usually associated with management level positions, as shown in this interchange between middle school principal Jan with a parent volunteer group.

90 Jan: Well, what I would normally do is find out who is next door and then I would go walk through 8th grade lunch, (GOES TO OUTER OFFICE TO SEE SECRETARY ABOUT GROUP IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM.)

91 Jan: Okay. Thank you. And do you think they need anything?

Secretary: uh They were just happy to know they had the room until 12.

Jan: (LAUGHS—THEN SHE KNOCKS AND ENTERS THE ROOM) A room of workers? (ALL EXCHANGE HI'S ETC.) How are you? . . . Do you all need anything?

Parent: We're doing okay right now. We have our work cut out for us.

Jan: you do!

Parent: We're trying to put people in slots where we think they'd be good and where they would like to be. It's challenging!

Jan: Ooooh, yeah!



Parent: We're making a lot of progress and we're doing some things we feel real good about and some big unknowns.

Jan: Well, from what I've seen this year, matching is critical, and I think you always make some great matches so I/

Parent: /that's why it takes so long to do it/

Jan: /It's probably worth all the . . . it probably is worth all the time ya'll are putting into it. It's a year's worth of. . .

Parent: Well, um umm, yes

Jan: but you don't need anything?

This interchange shows clearly the typical positive attitude and team approach common among these subjects.

All five subjects adopted a strategy of framing an environmental context reflective of their value systems. Each displayed this strategy through symbolic tactical acts such as gift giving and ceremonies. Jan consistently referred to her personal philosophy of behavior and represented that philosophical approach to life in each of the groups with whom she worked in the school. Her leadership decisions promoted the overall atmosphere she aimed to foster in her school. A clear example of the positive context within which she framed her approach to school administration was the habitual closing of her morning announcements.

28 Jan: . . . And I remind us that we have been given this day for life and learning. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Helen gave musical red roses to her department chairpersons on Valentine's Day and personalized 'survival kits' and plastic monogrammed 'hard hats' to the faculty as a building renovation program began. Celia arranged for her entire faculty to go out to lunch during Teacher Appreciation Week. Laura provided brown bag lunches for her faculty meetings held during the lunch hour. Maria gave 'beginning of the year' gifts to her entire faculty and staff, and regularly provided unexpected treats in the faculty lounge or at meetings. All five made a point to write notes of appreciation to faculty and staff regularly.

A fourth strategy common to all the principals was advocacy of favored causes. Laura saw herself as a change agent responding to the community value system. Each was an active and unabashed campaigner for causes of her choosing, as shown in advocacy of children and schools. Laura and Jan demonstrated this strategy in relation to gender issues through their tactic of mentoring aspiring female students in local university administration preparation programs. Laura expressed her view in this way in her final interview with the researcher:

312 Laura: I think my strategies I mean I've had an intern I think four different years. My basic belief is to just have em see and do everything. And very rarely has an intern been excluded from conferences or meetings or anything like that. And I think that's probably the best way to see what actually goes on, to be a part of it.

Why do you do it?

Laura: Why, oh, cause I like Alice (LAUGHS) because I feel like its important to be a mentor. And um and um I guess I had some that were men, but I guess recently they've all been women and I guess I feel like that's real important, cause I think we do things differently.

How?

Laura: I think we, well, at least, some of my initial principals I used to work with were good ole boy coaches, ex coaches and so they had a different style, it was kind of a bull in a china shop approach, and not very participatory, and I guess

in a believer in participation you know in all elements and so uh I think probly women do more consensus building and umm we're not afraid of new ideas perhaps as much.

### Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

With regard to the verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors of the these female principals, this study has shown a shift from stereotypical female behaviors among these five professionals. Both verbal and nonverbal communications of these principals reflected more expansive and relaxed vocabularies and usage than found in studies of the past. For example, they did not demonstrate the high inflection 'tag questions' or 'fluffy adjectives' described as typical female usage by Lakoff.<sup>66</sup> Though the nodding, smiling, questioning, and minimal responses described by the literature were present, as utilized by these principals they seemed to reflect collegial encouragement of others rather than the traditional view of submission to authority. Additionally, in the secondary principals a definite break in the pattern of traditional physical movements associated with 'feminine' and 'masculine' was apparent, though the more expansive positioning did not seem inappropriate as employed by these women.

The interpersonal influence strategy employed by all the principals was reflected in the tactic of strong involvement with coworkers on a personal level in addition to demonstration of professional expertise. As an apparent result, the hierarchical separation of management and worker seemed blurred in all five schools by the principals' accessibility and collegial approach to leadership. The schools' atmospheres were reflective of a team rather than a hierarchy, though the staffs did reflect respect for the positional power of the principals. All five principals participated actively and with apparent effectiveness in disciplinary procedures rather than delegating it entirely to male assistant principals.

None of the principals saw herself as 'powerful,' though in the final interviews all would admit to having personal 'influence.' The aversion to usage of the word 'powerful' was not an unexpected finding in light of the literature related to early socialization of females. The negative connotations attributed to the word were described with the terms 'aggressive' and 'pushy,' though for the secondary principals the latter were behaviors they admitted to having employed when necessary to achieve their organizational goals. For these five women, early socialization patterns made the term 'aggression' aversive when applied to their personal behaviors, but less negative when related to goals of their professional lives.

When asked in the final interviews about their micropolitical relationships with male educators, each principal had a different reaction. Interestingly, these reactions were reflective of various views found commonly in today's society. Laura saw little difference in the current quality of interaction between professional males and females. She felt equally supported and comfortable within each group. She recalled earlier career experiences of ten to fifteen years in the past of being 'left out' of 'male' conversations in staff meetings, however. Helen and Celia described male-female relationships in traditional language, appreciating stereotypic differences and their complimentary nature. Helen remarked that these differences might be more conflictual outside the profession of education, a field in which she saw men and women in a collegial relationship. In stark contrast, Jan described a pronounced gender gap and stressed the importance to women of careful and perceptive assessment of their professional relationships with men in order to avoid situations of micropolitical domination or manipulation. Maria expressed keen awareness of being judged professionally as a woman and as a 'Mexican', and felt compelled to perform well as a representative of both her gender and ethnicity.



Even though Celia and Maria were Hispanic, their communication behaviors and micropolitical strategies were not dissimilar from those of the Anglo principals, with the exception that they benefitted in their work from being bilingual and bicultural and were able to converse skillfully with monolingual Hispanic families. Though neither of their parents had achieved more than a high school education, both sets of parents had stressed education and English proficiency to their daughters. Each of the five principals could point to a mentor who had influenced her professional career. Each of the women described her mother as being a very strong influence on her personal life and professional achievement.

Each principal felt keenly the pervasive and diverse political elements associated with her role in the community and had accepted these as a normal part of her life. All of the principals saw open communication and interpersonal relationships and networking as the keys to their successful leadership styles. None felt she had significant problems communicating with others. In addition, all demonstrated in their actions and expressed openly to others a concern for 'doing the right thing' as opposed to 'doing things right.' Jan even quoted this in her staff meeting as a measure of leadership.

The findings of this research (see Tables 1 and 2) reveal verbal and nonverbal micropolitical communication behaviors of female school principals in their work settings which were strong, influential and warmly collegial. The traditional restrained and closed body positions, as well as the submissive verbal and nonverbal behaviors were diminished among these principals to varying degrees, but most obviously among the secondary principals. None had adopted male behaviors entirely, but all had relaxed the stereotypic restrained and closed female behaviors and speech reported in research of two decades ago.<sup>70</sup>

In addition, each of these principals utilized traditional 'female' behaviors in new ways. For example, formerly interpreted as submissive and signs of powerlessness, attentive listening and concurrent behaviors such as nodding, smiling, questioning, and minimal responses seem to have become powerful behaviors enabling the principals to prolong conversation, support others, and elicit further information. Strong interpersonal and nurturing relationships, long described as typical of females and examples of low personal power, were for these principals a highly effective micropolitical strategy<sup>71</sup> enabling exchange and the reciprocity of team work, mutual decision making, and collegiality between the principals and their faculties and communities.<sup>72</sup>

Ball described such behavior as the "preferred view of professionalism"<sup>73</sup> and a tool for reducing confusion, resentment and dissatisfaction. The literature has long reflected the stabilizing effects of such mutual exchange and reciprocity.<sup>74</sup> Blase described the levels of exchange as both tangible and intangible, with both substantive elements expressed in work, and symbolic elements finding expression in style.<sup>75</sup> The environmental framing strategy was reflective of this claim. The ceremonial gift giving aspects of meetings were representative of this means of mobilizing support and perhaps quieting current or potential opposition.<sup>76</sup>

These principals also exhibited a proactive strategic approach to leadership through conscious tactics of networking and advocacy of causes reflective of their values. These values did not reflect a personal quest for power, but a motivation based in concern for the welfare of others, especially the children in their charge. This finding was reflective of Marshall's research of atypical leaders, and her resulting claim that with such "values guiding the flow of action, schools could be more human, fair, equitable places."<sup>77</sup> More philosophically, their approach to micropolitical influence reflected Vaclav Havel's claim that:

... if there is to be any chance at all of success, there is only one way to strive for decency, reason, responsibility, sincerity, civility, and tolerance, and that is decently, reasonably, responsibly, sincerely, civilly, and tolerantly.<sup>78</sup>

Further empirical investigation of the findings of this research related to female principals' micropolitical communication could inform practice and training of both female and male administrators through increased understanding of each other and should be conducted. Conclusions to be drawn from this study are limited due to the size and limitations of the sample, but findings point to the following:

1. Micropolitical influence of female principals is expressed through verbal and nonverbal language differing from traditional stereotypic female or male language represented in the literature.
2. Strong interpersonal relationships rather than interpersonal dominance form the basis of effective micropolitical leadership strategies for female principals where dissensus exists.
3. Female principals utilize environmental framing and ceremony as micropolitical strategies for mobilizing support and quieting opposition.
4. Female principals utilize micropolitical influence to promote the welfare of others rather than to promote their own personal power.
5. Female principals are likely to be involved with others as mentors or as advocates of causes reflective of their own values.
6. Female principals' verbal and nonverbal language reflects predominant goals of persuasion, collaboration, consensus, and affiliation rather than confrontation, coercion, or threat.
7. Interpersonal communication skills and micropolitical strategies of Hispanic and Anglo females of similar training and in similar contexts are similar.
8. Interpersonal communication skills and micropolitical strategies of elementary and secondary principals are similar.

### Implications for Practice

Because schools as organizations are becoming increasingly politicized as a result of demands on scarce resources, and communities reflect a more heterogeneous society,<sup>79</sup> school administrators have become a key element in implementation of positive change among diverse demands and dissensus.

Where subsystems link with each other, either because of intertwining tasks or common ideologies, we see common language, values, priorities, and potential for political power.<sup>80</sup>

Implications for the education of school administrators are clear. Marshall asserts that

... the field of educational administration maintains—in professional preparation, bureaucratic structures, and selection and socialization—a professional culture that still pretends neutral technical competence and avoids controversy.<sup>81</sup>

The uncertainty and conflict inherent in organizations as political entities require that school administrators develop not only traditional management and technical skills, but also micropolitical skills in negotiation and bargaining, problem analysis and problem solving, decision making, and symbolic acts such as those expressed in language. Language is a powerful tool in exercising micropolitical influence since how ideas are expressed in conversation and debate often shapes how the ideas are perceived,<sup>82</sup> and by implication, how the speaker is



seen as well: Language may differ in meaning when expressed by males or by females and in turn, males and females may listen to the same words, but hear them differently.<sup>83</sup> If this is the case, then administrative preparation programs should include training in language perception and delivery. Communication skill is essential in an era of increasing involvement of diverse communities and interests with the schools.

In addition, schools of education and professional development institutions serving practicing administrators and teachers would do well to focus on understanding and developing on-going staff development programs in verbal and nonverbal micropolitical communication skills. In their research both Goodlad<sup>84</sup> and Sizer<sup>85</sup> have explored ways in which administrators and teachers can potentially share both responsibility and power in public schools. Sharing a common language would go far toward that end if it were employed as the administrators in this study have employed it, in diffusion of micropolitical conflict and building of affiliations and coalitions. Implications for the act of supervision are similarly important when gender difference is part of the relationship.

School districts hiring administrators, and administrators seeking positions would do well to develop an understanding of language with which to examine verbal and nonverbal micropolitical communication as an expression of the values and administrative practices each employs. Such a practice would contribute toward matching or coordinating individual styles and aptitudes with emerging organizational styles and requirements for coalitions and collaborative decision making. This could open possibilities for increased success and improved performance both individually and institutionally, and go far toward eliminating an increasingly irrelevant androcentric focus in hiring practices.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Because of the limited number of subjects available for this research the study should be replicated among other female school principals until a substantial body of data exists relative to female public school principals. In addition, female principals from other demographic groups should be examined, including those representative of differences in age, race, geographic location, school district size, cultural and educational backgrounds, with the eventual goal of constructing a theory of micropolitical communication behavior. An examination of the variables surrounding the various verbal and nonverbal cues employed by the female principals might further illuminate female micropolitical behavior.

Another potentially fruitful approach to the study of micropolitical communication behaviors of female principals would be to replicate the study from different perspectives. The perspectives of teachers or of parents might potentially reveal a different body of information. The technical addition of increased videotaping would broaden the data base as well. Examination of the principals of schools judged to be effective and less effective might reveal a possible impact of communication skills and micropolitical behaviors on school performance.

The overriding conclusion derived from this research has been that the apparently effective micropolitical communications of these five principals derived from their expressions of genuine caring for both their institutions and the persons within them. As individuals all five of these principals consistently examined her own motivations and goals in light of what was most beneficial to her school and its students. By their example, through verbal and nonverbal micropolitical communication behaviors, they resolved dissensus and built and sustained trust among students, faculty and community.

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