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**The Principalship: Five Women Principals'
Relationships and Responsibilities**

Renée LeBlanc

June 2002

**Thesis Presented to
the Faculty of Education and the Women's Studies Department
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts (Education - Women's Studies)**

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0-612-76598-9

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Abstract
The Principalship: Five Women Principals' Relationships and Responsibilities
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Many women currently occupy the position of high school principal, and the number of studies conducted with women educational administrators has increased to reflect that reality. In the past, women who became school administrators had to have succeeded according to rules that they had no part in making; they were accommodating the demands of administrative roles shaped by men (Young, 1995). Since Young wrote that conclusion in 1995, the landscape has changed, and even more women occupy educational administrative positions. This study attempted to ascertain to what extent and in what ways women are now able to shape administrative roles to suit themselves; in terms of their leadership approach, and their conception of power, and authority.

The qualitative study is based on data collected from semi-structured, open-ended interviews with five women high school principals, as well as observations conducted at their work place. The aim of the study was to further our understanding of how they enact their role as the principal of a high school.

The thesis report includes a brief summary of the participants' working lives, which helps to contextualize the findings and allows the reader to become acquainted with the women on whom the study is based. This is followed by a discussion of the major findings which are categorized into two themes: relationships and responsibilities. The relationships of the high school principal are numerous and central to the role; in addition, they also constitute a responsibility for the principal, and are therefore demanding. There are also many other responsibilities that are in constant competition for the principal's attention and resources. The consequence of these competing responsibilities and relationships is that the women struggle to maintain a balance.

That the principalship is founded on relationships and responsibilities is not a new finding. However, it is perhaps an extension of our understanding of the principalship of women that their relationships are also responsibilities, and that a connection exists between the "consideration" aspect of their leadership and the "task" aspect of their leadership. Previously, these two components of leadership were seen as distinct. One of the objectives of this study was to explore the participants' definition and enactment of leadership, power, and authority. It was discovered that these concepts are also integrally connected to their sense of responsibility.

The participants' gender emerged as an important factor in how they understand and enact the role of principal. It shapes their attitude towards the relationships, responsibilities, leadership, power, and authority.

In the end, this study found that the participants can, to a certain extent, shape the role of the principalship to suit them, but that they are experiencing the principalship in a difficult time. The job of principal is becoming increasingly challenging, with increasingly difficult demands and fewer resources with which to meet those demands. A cynical view proposes that women are occupying the position because it is becoming less attractive to men; a more optimistic view is that women are entering the positions because they are seen as being capable of meeting the increasing demands.

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been quite a journey. It began before I enrolled in the University of Ottawa, when I attended Mount Saint Vincent University to pursue research courses with Dr. Lorri Neilsen. It was then that I became interested in conducting research and in writing a thesis. The Halifax Regional School Board, and the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, encouraged me to continue my journey when they granted me a sabbatical year to pursue my M.A. at the University of Ottawa.

In Ottawa, I received guidance and advice from many professors, notably Dr. Christabelle Sethna whose advice to "remember to enjoy the process" I often repeated to myself.

Eventually, I was to select two thesis committee members. I was very fortunate in enlisting the assistance of Dr. Colla MacDonald and Dr. Judith Robertson. Their valuable guidance at the proposal stage helped significantly to shape the research. Their involvement during the writing of the final report was even more insightful: They recommended changes that greatly enhanced the thesis.

The one professor who has been my main source of support and encouragement during the whole journey has been my thesis director, Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway. Dr. Ahola-Sidaway played a vital role during the entire process. I was amazed at her level of commitment and dedication. This thesis would not have been possible without her. There were times when her belief in my ability to "get the job done" inspired me to do just that.

Lastly, my husband Karl Seidenz offered his unwavering support and encouragement in undertaking and finishing this journey. In the end, Karl's input into the final drafts made an incredible difference. He proved to be, in thesis writing and in life, the best partner I could ever hope for.

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PART ONE
THE FOUNDATION:
METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis is about five women who chose unusual careers: they are high school principals. Although high school principals are common enough, most of them are men. By reading this thesis, you will get to know these five women, and find out how they enact the role of high school principal. Specifically, you will learn about their feelings regarding their career and professional choices as educational leaders.

There are three chapters in this first part of the thesis. The first chapter introduces the thesis, the second chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework and of the literature review, and the third chapter outlines the methodology used in this study.

Chapter One

The Nature, Rationale, and Purpose of the Study

Introduction

Why study women high school principals? First, they are principals; their position is one of leadership within schools, and I wanted to explore educational leadership in schools. Second, they are women, and I wanted to know how their gender has helped shape their working lives specifically, how their gender has shaped their enactment and conceptualization of leadership. Third, they are working in high schools. Until recently, there were few women principals, and most of them worked at the elementary level (Blackmore, 1998; Collay & LaMar, 1995; Kennington Edson, 1995; Poplin Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999; Young, B., 1995). Traditionally women were the teachers (workers) and men were the principals (management). As some researchers have pointed out, “the silence of women has been especially true in education where women have dominated by sheer numbers since the late nineteenth century, but never dominated in recognized positions of organizational authority” (Schmuck & Dunlap, 1995, p.2). But this situation is changing, and women are now occupying positions such as principal in increasing numbers. The change started at the elementary school level, and has now reached the high school level. All of the women in this study are high school principals, four of the five are the first woman to occupy the position of principal at their school. All but one of them have been principal for less than four years, and most are nearing retirement.

In deciding what to investigate about women high school principals, I was curious about how concepts mean different things to men and women; men and women experience and define the world in different ways. The first concept that I decided to investigate was leadership. When

I started to read articles on the subject, and when I attended classes and workshops in educational administration, the term “leadership” was repeated constantly. It meant different things to different people. I read that women were redefining leadership and enacting leadership in new ways (Dunlap, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999). How do women high school principals define leadership? I also discovered in my feminist studies courses and readings that the term “power” was defined differently by men and women (Shakeshaft, 1989). I read that not only do “women tend to view power over others as domination and illegitimate” (Blackmore, 1989, p. 122), but that “women’s use of power is often viewed as illegitimate” (Lips, 2001, p. 849). I agreed with what Beth Young (1995) said about power, there is not nearly enough discussion in our literature about access to and use of formal and informal power by women leaders. Perhaps that is because of their reluctance, or ours, to acknowledge the power relations in education organizations” (p. 249). How do women administrators define power? Finally, the concept of “authority” was identified as problematic for women leaders because of its cultural association with masculinity (Blackmore, 1989). How do women high school principals define these concepts that the literature has identified as being central to educational administration?

Starting from Oneself

Feminist theory underlies this thesis, and the feminist tradition asks me, as the researcher, to start with myself and to include my own voice in the research. Therefore, I have decided to reveal something about myself in this introductory chapter. Specifically, I want the reader to know why I am researching this topic. The idea for this research sprang from my personal experiences. I have been teaching high school for over ten years. Despite that teaching remains a challenging and fulfilling career, I decided to pursue the possibility of becoming a school

administrator, specifically a school principal. I have completed a Master of Education, and will soon complete a Master of Arts in Education Administration combined with a Women's Studies Program. I have also completed a mentorship program in school administration. Despite my initial interest in school administration, I hesitated to pursue a position as a school administrator for many reasons. I was uncomfortable with the idea of being a school principal because it is a position of power and authority. I could not see myself occupying such a position. Seeking a position of power and authority did not agree with my self-image as a teacher who loves teaching. I was torn between furthering my career goals, and my discomfort with what I perceived to be outright ambition. I am more comfortable with wanting to be a better teacher than with wanting to be a principal.

While completing my Master of Education I was exposed to gender issues in education. I realized that discomfort with leadership, power, and authority was related to my gender identity. I was comfortable with the idea of being a teacher, and being seen as a nurturing and caring person. I did not want to be perceived as being ambitious. For example, I did not tell colleagues that I was participating in the administration mentorship program. When I started my research, I discovered that my personal reservations about becoming an administrator were common among many female teachers. One woman wrote about her experience in pursuing an administrative position, and her words reflected my own feelings. She said, "I was uncomfortable with the notion of being seen as "power hungry" for I did not see myself in those terms" (Worrall, 1995, p. 167). Other researchers discovered that women teachers were not entering administration for a variety of reasons, "there are still deep societal tensions between expectations of what it means to be a 'good woman' and what it means to be a 'good leader'" (Dunlap, 1995, p. 425). Blackmore

(1998) found that for women, “formal leadership meant rejecting what they were passionate about - their teaching and their professional and personal values” (p. 474). Blackmore (1998) adds:

Nor were the ‘superwomen’ in the principal positions the role models to which many women aspired, as they saw those women in leadership positions struggle to uphold their long held values and beliefs about education and social justice, working long hours, and ‘putting their family and social life on hold’ in the face of an increasingly unsympathetic, if not antagonistic, system. (p. 474)

When I decided to pursue a thesis, I knew that I wanted to work with women principals because of my own interest in becoming a principal. I wanted to discover how they felt about being a principal. I wanted to explore how they conceptualized and enacted leadership, power, and authority within the traditional leadership role of principal. I wanted to know how they felt about themselves, and about their power and authority as school leaders. I also wanted to explore how they defined and approached leadership, power, and authority. I read many studies about women in educational leadership positions and found that there are many issues left unexamined, and many questions remain unanswered. As Dunlap (1995) says in the conclusion of her book:

**Do we need to continue to study how women lead, how politics and policy affect their leadership, and how theory-building might contribute to an increased understanding of leadership potential?
The studies and theories in this volume answer a resounding,
‘Yes!’. (p. 423)**

My selection of a research topic arose from my interest in working with women principals. The next step was finding the right research question.

Research Questions

Because I wanted to work with women high school principals, I researched the literature and narrowed my focus. I became intrigued with the notion that people can create their professional identity. I was curious to discover how women who were principals had fashioned their identity and their role as women, and as principals, because the research indicated that leadership and femininity were thought to be incompatible. I have since distanced myself from the word identity as it is a very complex and ambiguous term. In particular, the concepts of leadership, power, and authority intrigued me. How did women reconcile the idea of being women with occupying positions of leadership, power, and authority? Why did women choose to become principals? How did they talk about their job? What do they enjoy about their job? What do they dislike about their job? As principals of high schools, how do they relate to people? How do they define and approach leadership, power, and authority? Feminist scholars argue that these concepts have been defined by men because most of the leaders, and most of the researchers writing about leadership, have been men. Therefore, men defined these concepts according to their male experiences and characteristics (Blackmore, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Hurty, 1995; Ross Epp, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995). All this considered, I decided to use the following research questions to guide my study: How do women principals define and enact their role as principal of a high school, and how do they define and approach leadership, power, and authority in ways that suit them?

Justification for Proposed Research

Despite that many studies have been conducted regarding women in educational administration, many issues remain to be explored. Most researchers believe that more research needs to focus on women and educational leadership. Women educational leaders contribute in unique ways to educational leadership, and to ignore their contributions is to waste much human potential (Dardaine-Ragguet et al., 1994; Wyn et al., 2000). Analyzing the meaning of inclusion must go beyond numbers: it must examine how leadership itself will change when the number of women administrators increases (Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1999). How power and leadership are redefined in feminist terms is also fertile ground for further research (Troen & Boles, 1995). There is a call for research that will enable us to recognize and to explore the many ways women enact leadership, how they access and use formal and informal power, and how authority is socially constituted in our schools (Dunlap, 1995; Hoffman, 1995; Nan Restine, 1993; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Strachan, 1999; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Thompson Witmer, 1995; Young, B., 1995).

A Brief Introduction to the Theoretical Framework

As my research interest took shape and I was exposed to research paradigms at the master's level, it became clear to me that my research would be a qualitative study. The research topic, question, and aim fit into a qualitative research framework. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to offer anything but a very brief description of what constitutes qualitative research. However, I will say a few words about it because the following thoughts convinced me that my study would be a qualitative research project. The first description that I found appealing was given by Glesne (1999) who says, "learning to listen well to others' stories and to interpret and

retell the accounts is part of the qualitative researchers' trade... qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect" (p. 1). Others say this about qualitative research "qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied ... They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; p. 4). Qualitative research appeals more to me than quantitative research, which is more concerned with quantity, amount, intensity, frequency, and measurement (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

After having followed a number of feminist courses at the master's level, I knew that my research would be based on feminist theories, and that it would follow feminist methodologies. As Glesne (1999) states, "feminist research is a broad category used to hold multiple perspectives and methods...An underlying assumption to feminist work is the belief that women experience oppression and exploitation and that this experience varies" (p. 12). The traditional views about leadership in education have been male-centered. Feminists believe that the experiences of men do not reflect the experiences of women. The strength of feminist research, as Poplin Gosetti and Rusch (1995) explain, "is its ability to focus on the gaps and blank spaces of male-dominant culture, knowledge, and behaviour" (p. 15). This is only a very brief introduction to feminist theory; it is further discussed in the next chapter.

Because I wanted to explore how the participants understood their role as principal, and how they defined leadership, power, and authority, it made sense to follow a symbolic interactionist approach. Symbolic interactionism focuses on participants' understanding of society, their role in it, and the meaning that they give to key concepts (Charon, 1998).

The theoretical framework was particularly important because, although I chose it with the study's questions and aims in mind, it eventually shaped the study itself. It shaped the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data. The theoretical framework is not only the structure upon which the study is built, it is also a force that guided the research. The study's lodestars of feminist theory and symbolic interactionism will be presented in the chapters that follow.

Conclusion

This thesis presents a study of five women high school principals. It includes a description of the study, its methodology, the data collected, and the interpretation of that data. You will meet the women, hear their stories, and see how their experiences confirm or refute the findings and theories of other researchers and writers in the field of educational leadership. These women will discuss what leadership, power, and authority mean to them, and how these ideas relate to them as high school principals. In the end, I hope, you will learn what being a principal means to the women who are at the center of this study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Chapter two reviews the existing literature on women educational leaders, operational definitions that are central to the research question, and similar research. This chapter will also describe both theories that guide this study: feminist theory and symbolic interactionism.

As noted earlier, the literature review focussed my study's objectives. Two factors became central to my research question: the need to hear more from women practitioners, and the need to discover how women are redefining leadership. My research question became: How do women principals define and enact their role as principal of a high school, and how do they define and approach leadership, power, and authority in ways that suit them?

I have defined many concepts in the "operational definitions" section to help the reader further understand the research question. I have also included a short description of two similar studies that illustrate my objective. I end this chapter by describing feminist theory and symbolic interactionism. Both theories provided me with a perspective from which to approach the research question. Feminist researchers and symbolic interactionists encourage the researcher to discover what meanings participants give to their role and to specific concepts; they encourage researchers to find these answers by asking the participants themselves what they think and believe.

Literature Review

The literature review presented in this section begins with a brief discussion of the concepts that are central to the study: women as meaning-makers, and women in educational administration. This literature review also discusses the principalship, which includes other

topics such as principals as traditional school leaders, becoming a principal, the role of the principal, and the challenges and rewards of being a principal.

Women as Meaning-Makers

The belief that women are meaning-makers is central to the research question, and to most feminist research (Reynolds, 1995; Reynolds & Young, B., 1995). Feminist research tries to restructure knowledge; women are seen as actively constructing as well as interpreting the social processes and social relations (Stanley & Wise, 1990). Gilligan (1982) proposes that “women perceive and construe social reality differently from men and that these differences center around experiences of attachment and separation” (p. 152). In addition to making meaning of the outside world, women are seen as making meaning of their own lives. Specifically, this study was interested in how women make sense of their roles *as women*. Some researchers use the term “gender identity”. This term can be problematic for, as Benjamin (1995) states, “the idea of gender identity implies an inevitability, a coherence, a singularity, and a uniformity that belies psychoanalytic notions of fantasy, sexuality and the unconscious (p. 50). She adds that, “in giving up the notion of identity, reified as thing, one need not (and should not) throw out the notion of identification, as internal psychic process” (p. 51). For these reasons, I resist using the term “gender identity” and prefer to use the term “gender identification”.

According to some feminist scholars, concepts of leadership, power, and authority have been traditionally defined as masculine traits by the dominant male culture; the result was the exclusion of women from formal leadership positions (Blackmore, 1989; Cooper, 1995; Hurty, 1995; Logan, 1998; Ross Epp, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995). Those scholars have gone on to ask an important question: How can feminist theory deconstruct these dominant

epistemological and political perspectives, and simultaneously reconstruct an alternative that offers different ways of seeing and of defining educational leadership? (Benham, 1997; Blackmore, 1989; Hurty, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Valentine, 1995; Weaver Hart, 1995). The perspective that sees people as social constructors is one that allows for optimism; for as social constructors people can appreciate the inherent problems of inequality and act to change the situation (Héritier, 1996).

Women in Educational Leadership

Researchers have conducted a considerable amount of study with women educational leaders, and many have found evidence to support the idea that, in general, women tend to use participative, collaborative, supportive, communicative, facilitative, consensus-building, democratic, inclusive types of leadership (Acker, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Regan, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993). Researchers have recently identified these more “feminine” approaches to leadership as being preferable and more effective than the traditional “masculine” approaches to leadership (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Kruger, 1996; Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993; Logan, 1998; Nan-Restine, 1993; Nelson Pavan & Andrade Reid, 1994; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Thompson Witmer, 1995; Young, J.H., 1993). However, women’s approaches to leadership are likely complex, ambiguous, and tension-filled. The context in which female, and male, principals carry out their jobs are too complex for their leadership approaches to be captured in a short and simple list. For example, Kruger (1996) has stressed that other variables such as school culture are as important as gender in shaping a person’s leadership approach.

Some qualities that are commonly associated with femininity include caring, collaboration, nurturing, understanding, compassion, emotion, affection, warmth, sympathy, sensitivity, and intuition. These qualities allow women, to the extent that they embody femininity, to be effective leaders. Ironically, this same list of attributes is also used to promote the idea that women lack the characteristics that are needed to be good leaders, that women are “naturally” weaker and poorer leaders (Mills, 1997; Benham, 1997; Blackmore, 1989; Collay & LaMar, 1995; Dardaine-Ragguet, et al., 1994; Nan Restine, 1993; Ortiz, 1982; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Thompson Witmer, 1995). Because the qualities associated with femininity are seen as strengths or weaknesses, depending upon which model of leadership one adheres to, it is important to identify what is meant by the term “leadership”.

Researchers have discovered that women leaders often experience isolation (Alston, 2000; Cooper, 1995; Dunlap, 1995; Russell, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Young, B., 1994), frustration (Blackmore, 1998; Dunlap, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998), a lack of self-confidence (Blackmore, 1998; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Russell, 1995; Schmuck, 1995), a loss of sense of self (Blackmore, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Schmuck, 1995), tokenism (Hawk, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993), powerlessness (Blackmore, 1998; Hurty, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Tabin & Coleman, 1993), a feeling of being left out of decision-making processes (Dunlap, 1995; Hawk, 1995; Russell, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Young, B., 1994), and feelings of guilt and inadequacy due to their combining their responsibilities of work and home (Blackmore, 1998; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Young, B., 1994). Some women suffer from the tension between being a “good woman” and being a “good leader” (Bell, 1995;

Blackmore, 1998; Dardaine-Ragguet, et al., 1994; Dunlap, 1995; Gill, 1995; Pence, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998).

It has also been noted that women cannot use their preferred approach to leadership in today's schools. Women principals are often placed in difficult administrative positions that have been refused by more senior male administrators (Mertz & McNeely, 1994). Principals are also constrained by discourses of economic rationalism and the practice of corporate management (Acker, 1995; Benham, 1997; Blackmore, 1995, 1998; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Prichard & Deem, 1999; Young, B., 1995; Young, J.H., 1993). Women who are hired for their caring and sharing democratic styles of leadership quickly learn that they lack the power and/or resources to implement change in the collaborative and consultative ways that they prefer (Blackmore, 1998). Many researchers have argued that, for economic, cultural, and structural reasons, women may feel compelled to conform to existing norms and traditional concepts of administration (Acker, 1995; Blackmore, 1989, 1998; Gill, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Weaver Hart, 1995).

However, it needs to be stressed that not all women enact leadership in the same way. Women are not a homogeneous group, and differences between women result in different leadership approaches. Gutek (2001) suggests that "overall it is important to keep in mind that there is generally more variation within sex (that is, among women or among men) than there is between the sexes in preference for various job attributes" (p. 1201). Furthermore, Mertz and McNeely (1998) report that "an equally vigorous and compelling group of writers argue that there are few, if any, differences in the ways females and males lead" (p. 197). For example, Kruger (1996) reported on a study conducted with heads of secondary schools in Europe and

concluded that:

Many prejudices have to be rejected: for instance, in general, female heads do not rate the 'consideration' dimension more highly than men, they do not seem more democratic in their leadership style, they do not feel more isolated as a leader, they do not feel more powerless, and they have more confidence in themselves as leader than men. (p. 457)

It is difficult to account for Kruger's conclusions. One explanation may be that the study was conducted in the Netherlands, a country that is known for its progressive social policies.

The tension that women feel between being a "good woman" and being a "good leader" is central to much of the research with women educational leaders. How do women enact positions of leadership while maintaining their gender identification. Perhaps women feel obliged to enact a leadership that is centred on relationships and nurturance, caring, and collaboration because these are characteristics that society tends to expect of women. O'Leary and Flanagan (2001) explain that women's enactments of leadership are based on cultural factors including "sex-role, stereotypes, social roles, the male managerial model and myths about female competence" (p. 645). But how do women who do not embody these "feminine" characteristics enact leadership, and how are these women perceived?

The Principalship

This section includes some of the topics that I chose to explore with the participants, such as why they became principals in the first place, how they define the role of principal, and what they find challenging and rewarding in their jobs.

Principals as school leaders. Seeing the role of principal as school leader is an admittedly traditional point of view (Blackmore, 1989; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Nan Restine, 1993; Ortiz, 1982; Prestine, 1994; Rosenblum, et al., 1994; Thompson Witmer, 1995; Weaver Hart, 1995; Young, B., 1995). It is recognized that others, such as teachers, can and should be leaders within schools (Collay & LaMar, 1995; McCall, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Thompson Witmer, 1995; Troen & Boles, 1995; Webb, 1995; Young, B., et al., 1993).

It has been argued that the principalship is not truly a position of leadership, but rather that it is becoming increasingly a “middle management” position that is declining in power and influence (Blackmore, 1989; Shakeshaft, 1999). The recent decentralization in education has actually added layers in the hierarchy, and some argue that the principal’s authority to command has eroded even as the school’s responsibility to act has been heightened (Hallinger & Hausman, 1994; Nan Restine, 1993; Riehl & Byrd, 1997). *Per contra*, others believe that as centralized bureaucracies crumble and give way to site-based models, principals are being given greater autonomy and more administrative tasks to perform than ever before. These events lead principals to conclude that they feel more like superintendents or CEOs (McPherson & Crowson, 1994; Murphy, 1994; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Rosenblum, et al., 1994). Whether women principals see themselves as leaders, or as middle managers, or as some combination thereof, is an important question because their views influence their ability to be the type of leader that they want to be.

On becoming a high school principal. Women in educational leadership follow a different career path than their male counterparts. Moreover, women become administrators for

different reasons than their male counterparts. Women usually enter into the teaching profession to teach, but men often enter into the teaching profession to become administrators (Shakeshaft, 1989). Women normally remain in teaching positions for a much longer period of time than men, and therefore, women administrators have more teaching experience than men do (Ortiz, 1982; Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989, Young, B., 1992). Men and women follow the same path to becoming high school principals: high school teacher, department head, vice-principal, and principal (Ortiz, 1982). However men typically aspire to higher-level positions, such as becoming principal at a larger or higher-profile high school, or achieving a school board administrative position. Women are not expected to go any further than principal, if they even get that far (Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Ortiz, 1982; Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999).

Women seem to enter into school administration for different reasons than men. In a study comparing women and men, women were found to enter into administration for its collegiality and intrinsic rewards (Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999). The most common reasons why women enter into administration include: to work with teachers in school improvement efforts; to have a personally satisfying job; to make a contribution to society; to pursue an interesting career with interesting colleagues (Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999). However, men typically entered into administration to increase their occupational and social mobility, and to increase their income. It was found that men see an administrative position as a status symbol, and are more dedicated to the formal hierarchy and to the personal power that is needed to advance further up the career ladder (Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999). Having said that, it should be noted that Gutek (2001) concluded that “men and women might have different

preferences about work for two reasons. Sex roles might encourage women and men to prefer different job attributes.... Different preferences may also arise from personality differences between men and women” (p. 1200).

The role of principal. Many researchers have discussed the role of principal and its related duties. All agree that it is a complex role with many challenges, and one that is becoming increasingly demanding (Blackmore, 1989, 1998, Leithwood & Duke, 2000; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Nan Restine, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1991; Weaver Hart, 1995; Young B., 1995). Sergiovanni proposes the following list of ideal administrative processes, task areas, and activities for school principals. The process includes the following components: planning, decision-making, coordinating, communicating, influencing, and evaluating. The task areas include school program, pupil personnel, staff personnel, community relations, physical facilities and management. For each task area there is a component of the process, and too many activities to list here. Examples of activities include identifying specific objectives, exchanging information, controlling pupils, selecting staff, and assigning teaching duties, and so on (Sergiovanni, 1991). Furthermore, the position of principal includes a variety of roles: principal as servant, principal as person in community, principal as moral agent, principal as organizational architect, principal as social advocate and activist, principal as educator (Murphy & Beck, 1994).

According to Murphy and Beck (1994), the principals of today occupy a role with peculiarly contradictory demands:

On the one hand, they are expected to work actively to transform, restructure, and redefine schools and the processes and persons

therein (Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Murphy, 1992). On the other hand, they hold organizational positions historically and traditionally committed to resisting change and maintaining stability (Bredeson, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1987, 1992). In addition, principals today are being forced to clarify roles and responsibilities at a time when the schools and societies they inhabit are in a state of turmoil. (p. 5)

The contradictory demands placed on all principals are heightened for women principals because their gender adds a different set of challenges (Blackmore, 1998; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1999). Gender is an added concern for women principals because, as stated by Mertz and McNeely (1998), “women think and do principaling” in a way that requires “a more complicated, multidimensional explanatory model, one that addresses sociocultural and contextual factors as well as gender” (p. 219). According to Mertz and McNeely (1998), “the literature on women and leadership suggests an either-or paradigm, that is, either they think and act like their male counterparts or they think and act differently” (p. 219). It may be that most heterosexual men do not have the added pressure of trying to decide whether or not to conform to their other men’s behaviour, because their gender identifications are consistent with expectations of being a good leader.

The rewards and challenges of being a high school principal. One of the biggest challenges that principals must face is the extreme demands placed on them (Blackmore, 1998; Marshall, 1993; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989; Strachan, 1999). Principals must handle many forces that make their jobs more demanding. These forces

include demands for accountability, cutbacks to education, changing social fabric, and the evolution toward a post-industrial world (Murphy & Beck, 1994). It has been found that managing these forces is difficult for all principals, but is especially difficult for women on an emotional level (Blackmore, 1998; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998).

Despite that being a high school principal is very challenging, the position can also be very rewarding. Many women feel rewarded when they develop connections and relationships as principal, because they are able to support, encourage, and empower others, and because they feel that they can make a difference in people's lives (Cooper, 1995; Fennell, 1995; Hurty, 1995; Lee, Smith, & Cioci, 1993; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999; Russell, 1995; Strachan, 1999).

Operational Definitions

My research question requires operational definitions for the terms "role", "leadership", "power", and "authority", and "gender". I chose these concepts because they are related to the role of principal. They are not easy to define. Complex concepts are often defined only vaguely (Leithwood & Duke, 2000). The aim of this study is to discern what the concepts of leadership, power, and authority mean to the participants. It is therefore important to investigate their definitions because "those working in the field of educational leadership theory need to consider the experiences and practices of these feminist leaders" (Strachan, 1999, p. 321). In addition to what the participants have to say about leadership, power, and authority, I have included definitions given by researchers in the field of educational administration.

The role of principal has traditionally been a position of leadership, power, and authority. I chose leadership as a concept because principals are considered to be school leaders

(Blackmore, 1989; Murphy & Beck, 1994; Nan Restine, 1993; Ortiz, 1982; Prestine, 1994; Rosenblum, et al., 1994; Thompson Witmer, 1995; Weaver Hart, 1995; Young, B., 1995). I chose power because power is a component of administration and of leadership. Power is the basis for the relationships of people within a hierarchical organization, and it determines how people will behave (Mills, 1997). I chose authority because “without socially validated authority there is no leadership” (Weaver Hart, 1995, p. 107). Finally, I decided to include a definition of the word “role” because it too is a vague concept that means different things to different people.

Role

In this study, “role” is used to describe the position of the participants as principals. I use the word “role” because it conveys a more profound and personal experience than the word “job”. According to symbolic interactionists and feminists, one’s role enactment and understanding are influenced by gender. Symbolic interactionists try to understand gender differences by looking at how the individual is socialized, and how individuals take on their roles, and define how they are supposed to behave and think (Charon, 1998). Some feminists believe that gender discrimination has negatively affected the role played by women, and has even affected their sense of self. Charon (1998) suggests that patriarchy has denied women the opportunity to construct their own separate identity, their own sense of selfhood and purpose apart from the definitions imposed on them by men.

How women interpret the role of leader is intriguing because it requires women to embody characteristics that have traditionally been associated with men or masculinity (Blackmore, 1989; Collay & LaMar, 1995; Nan Restine, 1993; Ortiz, 1982; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Thompson Witmer, 1995). I limited my study to exploring the participants’ role as

principal. I investigated various components of that role including their career path and decision to become principal, how they describe the role of principal, what they find rewarding and challenging as a principal, and how they perceive their strengths and weaknesses. I also explored their definitions of, and approaches to, leadership, power, and authority, and I related their observations to their role and to their gender.

Leadership

There are many definitions of leadership in the literature; they share the assumption that leadership involves a social influence process in which intentional influence is exerted by one individual over others to structure activities and relationships in a group or organization (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Leadership varies; it is evolving and emerging (Dunlap, 1995). Leadership has changed; we are no longer stuck in the traditional mindset of leadership as legitimate authority and managerial control (Logan, 1998; Schmuck, 1995; Young, B., 1994). There are many new leadership models in educational administration, such as instructional leadership, transformational leadership, democratic leadership, and participative leadership. These models share common leadership values such as fostering vision, common goals, communication, teamwork, critical thinking, pedagogical leadership, school culture, empowerment, commitment, and motivation (Blackmore, 1989; Leithwood & Duke, 2000; Leithwood, Jantzi & Fernandez, 1994; Logan, 1998; Nan Restine, 1993; Poplin Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Rosenblum, et al., 1994; Thompson Witmer, 1995). It is also noteworthy that these new leadership descriptions appear to reflect many women's leadership approaches. Many scholars believe that women seek to transform people's lives, to encourage participation, to share power and information, to focus on internal teaching processes, to enhance other people's self-worth, to get others excited about their

work, and to lead from the centre (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Hurty, 1995; McCall, 1995; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Nelson Pavan & Adrade Reid, 1994; Regan, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Valentine, 1995).

Current research on women and leadership seeks to discover how women are transforming the nature of leadership itself (Benham, 1997; Dunlap, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1999; Young, B., 1992; Young, B., et al., 1993). Women are actively involved in the construction of their own alternative theory of educational leadership (Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Strachan, 1999; Young, B., et al., 1993). According to Shakeshaft (1999), women seek ways to make leadership even more gender inclusive. In a similar vein, Riehl and Byrd (1997) state that if women are to make serious and unique contributions to educational administration, it will be when a critical mass of women administrators emerges. *Per contra*, Prichard and Deem (1999) see no reason to celebrate the influx of women to management work because the result has been the feminisation of work and “attempts to drive down the cost or intensify the return from labour” (p. 324).

Others agree that, if administration is no longer treated separately from teaching, if the division between public and private is diminished, if the workplace is made more humane, then leadership may itself be more gender inclusive (Blackmore, 1989; Cooper, 1995; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Russell, 1995; Valentine, 1995; Young, B., 1992). Still others believe that the lack of role models for women has allowed them the freedom to be more innovative and creative in the development of leadership (Benham, 1997; Weaver Hart, 1995).

Power

I will attempt to define the meaning of “power” as it exists for women leaders within the educational system. The classic definition of power is the ability to get others to do what you want them to do (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Power includes control that is starkly coercive as well as control that is based on nonthreatening persuasion and suggestion (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Educators are not comfortable with the concept of power; they do not acknowledge the power relations in educational organizations, nor do they discuss access to and use of formal and informal power (Young, B., 1995). We must discuss and define power because it is the basis for the relationships between people within a hierarchical organization and determines how they will behave (Mills, 1997). The issues of power, and of powerlessness, are pivotal aspects of the culture of schools (Nan Restine, 1993). A person who feels powerless is limited in her confidence, in her ability to perform, and in her sense of well-being (Nan Restine, 1993).

The notion of power is important to feminist theorists who are concerned with analyzing power relations, and with the way that women as individuals, and as members of groups, negotiate relations of power (Mills, 1997). An aspect of power that is of particular interest to feminists is that power is related to who speaks (Mills, 1997). Gatenby and Humphries (1999) state that “feminists have long had an acute awareness of the power of both voice and silence in the discursive construction of our worlds” (p. 282). They add that “we suspect that examining silences in women’s talk, and in talk about women, may reveal some of the myriad of ways in which gender is accomplished” (p. 283). Do women principals feel that they speak? Do they feel they are listened to by their staff? By their fellow principals? By those in positions of power over them? How do women leaders negotiate power for themselves as principals of schools,

which are hierarchical institutions?

Power is not static; it is enacted within relationships and can be contested at every moment (Mills, 1997). Some writers have argued that some women are not comfortable with the idea of the pursuit of power because power has been viewed as an overwhelmingly male trait (Thompson Witmer, 1995; Worrall, 1995). Other writers have highlighted that women see power differently than men. These writers claim that women tend to characterize power over others as domination, and therefore illegitimate; and that individual power is often treated with scepticism as it implies the ability to use force (Blackmore, 1989; Hurty, 1995; Regan, 1995; Thompson Witmer, 1995). Lips (2001) states that “the relationship between gender and power is a complex one...women and power mix with difficulty” (p. 848). Lips adds that “gender may be an important predictor of influence styles precisely *because* [italics in original] gender affects the amount and type of power individuals hold...women are less likely than men to be seen as entitled to exert influence” (p. 853). Thompson Witmer (1995) has also argued that women were traditionally seen as gaining power through means of manipulation and of helplessness. Lips (2001) suggests that women access different power because they are seen as less entitled to exert influence and are generally rated as more likable than men. For these reasons, women “exert power in ways that depend on warmth, agreeableness, and democratic leadership” (p. 853).

One of the most vital lessons from the research on power and influence is that if people believe that they can influence the organization (empowerment), the organization will be more effective and productive (Leithwood, Jantzi & Fernandez, 1994; Logan, 1998; Nan Restine, 1993; Rosenblum, et al., 1994). This belief coincides with women’s notions of leadership to empower others. According to Thompson Witmer (1995), male culture views power as power in

itself and for themselves, whereas women view it as limitless and tend to empower others as they themselves acquire more power. Some scholars also believe that women are more likely to share their power and responsibility, and that women use their power to get things done and to improve people's lives (Hurty, 1995; McCall, 1995; Regan, 1995; Thompson Witmer, 1995). It would seem that these are ideal times for women to exercise formal leadership (Logan, 1998; Nan Restine, 1993; Thompson Witmer, 1995). However, a cynical school of thought says that the number of women school administrators is increasing because school administrators have declined in power and influence (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1999).

Authority

Authority is a concept that is problematic for women leaders: the cultural association of masculinity and authority, of maleness and management, is reproduced by those who do not wish to disturb this so called "natural" arrangement (Blackmore, 1989). However, there is research that suggests that women in positions of authority try to change their bureaucratic world (Cooper, 1995).

The concept of authority has a narrower scope than the concept of power. Authority exists when a common set of beliefs (norms) legitimizes the use of power as right and proper, and authority requires a certain degree of voluntary compliance with legitimate commands (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). Different types of authority have been identified according to the kind of legitimacy claimed by each (Hoy & Miskel, 1996). The first is charismatic authority; it rests on devotion to an extraordinary individual. The second is traditional authority; obedience is owed to the position of authority. The third is legal authority, it is based on enacted laws. The fourth is formal authority, a combination of traditional and legal authority in that it rests on position, rules

and regulations. The fifth type is functional authority which has a variety of sources including authority of competence and authority of person.

In the traditional sense of the “right to command”, the person with authority is legitimized by virtue of the person’s position; this legitimate power is conditional on the expectations of the group. In this sense, authority is not power because it does not have force or coercion of power: it relies on the group’s acceptance and acknowledgment of authority (Thompson Witmer, 1995). Authority is made legitimate by tradition, religion, and law, and it can be revoked from above (positional power) or from below (if subordinates refuse to accept authority) (Thompson Witmer, 1995). This traditional view of “authority by position” is changing. Today’s principals must find much of their authority in their personal, interpersonal, and professional competencies, and not in formal positions. Today’s principals must cultivate collegiality, cooperation and shared commitments (Murphy & Beck, 1994). Researchers and lecturers agree on the more current versions of authority. However, it remains to be seen if women in positions of authority are finding these new approaches present and effective in schools.

Gender

For the purposes of this study, Abbott (2000) offers a helpful definition of gender. Three aspects of this definition are noteworthy. First, gender is socially constructed. The term gender “refers to the socially constructed and socially expected differences between men and women as opposed to *sex* [italics in original] which refers to the biological distinctions between females and males” (p. 900). Second, the definition highlights that society tends to sustain gender as binary, male OR female. Third, when an individual acts outside of the binary boundaries, they are seen as “innately deviant or inadequately socialized” (Abbott, 2000, p. 900).

Andermahr et al. (1997) add that “all peoples erect a vast superstructure of *cultural* [italics added] meanings around this *socially* [italics in original] necessary distinction between the sexes”. Furthermore, the two sexes are seen as being not only in a binary relationship, but in a hierarchical one as well where men occupy a position of power and dominance over women (Abbott, 2000).

Typically, gender is labelled as feminine or masculine. As Andermahr et al. (1997) state, “feminine designates the set of cultural attributes assigned to the female sex” (p. 75). Noddings (1995) writes that she uses the label feminine “to point out centuries of female experience” (p. 189). Shibley Hyde and Mezulis (2001) caution researchers because, “for a variety of historical and social reasons, gender differences are often interpreted as suggesting female deficits” (p. 557). They add that “researchers often overlook social role or socialization theories when interpreting gender differences, assuming instead that gender differences are due to innate, functional differences between men and women” (p. 558).

Throughout this report the terms “gender”, “feminine”, and “woman” are used in a manner that assumes that the distinction is socially and culturally constructed. As Phoca (1999) states, “gender is not represented as ‘real’, but as a boundary which is politically regulated” (p. 60). She adds that “the notion of an ‘authentic’ essential masculinity or femininity is replaced by the notion that all gender/sexual configurations are performed, constructed by a recycling of gendered signs of sexuality and desire” (p. 60).

Similar Research

Of the many studies regarding women in educational leadership, the studies by Strachan (1999) and Hurty (1995) most closely resemble this research project. Strachan undertook a study

of the feminist educational leadership of three women secondary school principals in New Zealand. She conducted multiple interviews to explore the women's feminist educational leadership philosophy and practice. She also interviewed staff members, conducted observation sessions, and collected relevant documents. She found that the women creatively constructed a school environment that assisted in the delivery of their leadership agenda. Moreover, the academic and social well-being of their students was central to their leadership. Finally, they were passionate about social justice. Each woman was actively involved in the construction of her own alternative theory of educational leadership characterized by its diversity, flexibility, creativity and emotive quality. According to Strachan, these women showed differences in leadership because there is no single prescription for successful feminist educational leadership. Many of her findings were relevant to my study, though one salient difference is to be noted: her participants labelled themselves as feminist educational leaders, mine did not.

Hurty (1995) undertook a study with seventeen female elementary school principals from a school district on the American West Coast to explore whether women leaders espouse and practice a different theory of power than is typically assumed to be prevalent in male-dominated organizational settings. The researcher observed and interviewed the participants and found that they consistently defined power as the ability to get the job done. The participants identified their ways of working as non-hierarchical; they valued connectedness and risked vulnerability in relating to others. Hurty states that the insights provided by her research will help women and men develop a new agenda of power inside and outside schools and will broaden the understanding of educational leadership. These two studies are similar to this study because they focus on the definitions and descriptions that women educational leaders have of leadership and

power. The studies rely on the experiences and reflections of the participants, as well as on interviews to gather data.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of women principals in high schools from the point of view of women high school principals. I wanted to emphasize how they define leadership, power, and authority. This research is founded on two perspectives: feminist theory and symbolic interactionism. Both perspectives say that roles and definition, or meaning-making, are important. Because gender is significant to each perspective, and to the operational definitions, it will be discussed throughout this report rather than as a separate section. Both views emphasize the experiences, reflections, and perspectives of the participants. Each participant's leadership manifested itself in a variety of ways, depending on situational and contextual influences such as the personalities with whom they were dealing. Therefore, I use the term "leadership approaches".

Feminist Theory

The fundamental basis of this research is feminist theory. The fact and impact of gender differences, inequity, and male domination are assumptions that are central to this research (Blackmore, 1998; Dunlap, 1995; Hawk, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Taylor, 1995; Young, B., 1995). Feminist theory regards gender as central to a person's identity and to her enactment of roles because there are many sources of gender-linked expectations, "parents, the media, and peers all contribute to ideas about who boys and girls, women and men, are and should be" (Kite, 2001, p. 563). Because of our propensity to make distinctions between feminine and masculine, many characteristics have become associated with either feminine or

masculine. These gender-stereotypic characteristics suggest that leadership, power, and authority are to be associated with men. A feminist perspective, at least in part, means being able to see and to analyze gender politics and gender conflict (Reinharz, 1992). The field of education is an excellent example of gender inequity because it is described as a field where women predominate in numbers but where men predominate in power (Dardaine-Ragguet, et al., 1994). In her article on women and working environments, Gutek (2001) confirms that work environments remain largely sex-segregated. According to Gutek, fields such as education are an example of “vertical sex segregation”: “Vertical sex segregation exists when the men who work in the organization tend to hold jobs at the higher levels and women work at the lower levels” (p. 1193). The lack of women principals is especially noticeable at the secondary school level (Blackmore, 1998; Collay & LaMar, 1995; Dardaine-Ragguet, et al., 1994; Gill, 1995; Kennington Edson, 1995; Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993; Poplin Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Young, B., 1994,1995). Education is a critical field in which to effect gender equity because schools influence and shape the attitude of future adults (Dardaine-Ragguet, et al., 1994; Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993). For many years, it has been accepted that the mainstream literature in educational administration is actually a “male stream” literature, and is insufficient for understanding women’s experiences (Bhavnani, 1993; Mills, 1997; Nan Restine, 1993; Poplin Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Strachan, 1999).

Feminist theorists warn against *essentialism* (any invocation of the category of *women*) because it masks the differences in feminist leadership philosophy and hides the rich tapestry of how leadership is practised: it is women’s experiences *in the plural* which provide the new

resources for research (Benham, 1997; Bhavnani, 1993; Mohanty, 1997; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Strachan, 1999; Thompson Witmer, 1995; Young, B., 1994). Noddings (1995) states that:

an essentialist is one who holds that men and women have essential natures that are essentially different [and that] many current feminists abhor the essentialist position because they believe it has long been used to exclude women from the public and professional world. (p. 180)

The challenge is to hear the many voices of women leaders, and to document respectfully the diverse ways of women educational administrators (Dunlap, 1995; Young, B., 1995). This study presents a limited view of women's experiences. It reflects the experiences of a particular group of women who are a privileged and educated minority among the women of the world. This is not surprising since most women in educational leadership are part of the privileged dominant culture (Poplin Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999; Young, B., 1995). By the same token, no group of women is entirely homogeneous, and there will be many differences within a group. For example, the participants in this study differed in terms of their marital status, maternal status, religion, age, experience, career path, and so on. As I engaged the participants in exploring how they understood and experienced leadership, power, and authority, I attempted to remain attentive to how they believed that individual differences influenced their leadership approach and their definitions of leadership, power, and authority.

It is difficult to fix feminist theory or to reduce it to specific aims. However, Benjamin (1986) identified three possible tasks of feminist theory that inform the purposes of this study in particular, "to redeem what has been devalued in women's domain, to conquer the territory that

has been reserved to men, and to resolve and transcend the opposition between these spheres by reformulating the relationship between them” (p. 78). These three tasks summarize what this study tries to explore. The study remains attentive to the implications of the tasks regarding women educational leaders, their power and their authority.

Symbolic Interactionism

This study is also based on symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a perspective in social psychology that aims to understand human beings; it stands apart from other social scientific traditions generally characterized by determinism (Charon, 1998). Further, symbolic interactionism focuses on how people define the world and how that definition shapes their actions. Symbolic interactionism also emphasizes the importance of self-definition, interaction, and power (Charon, 1998). Symbolic interactionism emphasises human beings’ interactions, rather than their personality, society, or the influence of others. This interaction includes not only the social interaction between individuals but also the interaction with oneself, “thinking” (Charon, 1998).

Symbolic interactionism rests on three basic premises:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the *meanings* [italics added] that the things have for them.... The second is that the *meaning* [italics added] of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these *meanings* [italics added] are handled in and modified through, an interpretive process that is used by the person in dealing with

things he [sic] encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

Similarly, I sought to uncover the participants’ meanings of key concepts such as leadership, power, and authority.

The aims of research inspired by symbolic interactionism are to aid in the understanding of how humans feel about themselves and about their situations, and how they take on certain roles, as well as to discover the definitions they have for key concepts (Charon, 1998). These aims are subsumed in this study. In addition to how the participants defined the key concepts, I explored how the participants perceived their role as principal.

Conclusion

The literature review, operational definition, and guiding perspectives presented in this chapter are the foundation of this study. I have introduced them here, but I will return to them throughout subsequent chapters because of their importance to the study’s methodology, data analysis, findings, and conclusions.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study seeks to explore how women high school principals perceive their role as principal, and how they conceptualize leadership, power, and authority. As discussed, qualitative research is best suited to explore these issues because it allows the researcher to understand in considerable detail how people think, and how they develop their perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). More specifically, this study rests on two theoretical perspectives that have a significant impact on its methodology, namely symbolic interactionism and feminist theory. In this chapter, I will outline the study itself, including various aspects of the methodology.

Guiding Perspectives

Feminist theory is one of the guiding perspectives of this study, and as such it has important methodological implications. Feminist theory research widely uses semi-structured open-ended interviews and participant observation. Feminist researchers generally consider personal experiences to be a valuable asset for feminist research (Reinharz, 1992). The connection between the research project and the researcher herself is also important, and usually takes the form of starting with one's own experience (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist research seeks to develop a sense of connection with the people who are studied (Reinharz, 1992). The relationship between the researcher and the participants is based on a rapport; it is non-exploitative, collaborative, and self-reflexive; it is primarily concerned with the empowerment of women (Reinharz, 1992). As feminist researchers, we must *learn from* and not just *learn about* the people being studied (Reinharz, 1992). Regardless of the method used, feminist researchers strive to be open about their subjectivity, by using explicit discussion and reflexivity during every

part of the research (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist researchers are also sensitive to the issues of power and voice. It is crucial for the researcher to make the interests of the participants her priority at every stage of the research process (Bhavnani, 1993). Feminist researchers seek to actively involve their participants primarily by using semi-structured interviews, because interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words (Reinharz, 1992).

Symbolic interactionism, the other guiding perspective, also has significant methodological implications. The objective of symbolic interactionism is to understand what the participants know, to see what the participants see, and to understand what the participants understand. Symbolic interactionism tries to understand the participants' vocabulary and to understand the definitions that the participants give to their thoughts and actions. This is best accomplished by asking the participants to give accounts of their thoughts and actions (Charon, 1998). For example, "to understand someone's career, it is important to ask the actor to reconstruct moments in a stream of action that seem to matter in influencing why he or she took on a certain identity rather than another" (Charon, 1998, p. 215). According to symbolic interactionism, exploring how participants construct roles and definitions of concepts is based on their experiences and reflections. The best way to access these experiences and reflections is to conduct open-ended interviewing, because understanding definitions, including identity construction, is best accomplished by asking the one who is actually doing the defining (Charon, 1998). Symbolic interactionists believe that it is important to gather data by observing people in real situations (Charon, 1998). A combination of participant observation and open-ended interviewing is a highly regarded strategy to help the researcher to grasp the perspectives of

participants (Charon, 1998).

In keeping with the spirit of both of these theoretical perspectives, I chose to do semi-structured open-ended interviews to gather data. I also job-shadowed and observed each participant over a period of two days. This two-pronged approach concords with both symbolic interactionism and with feminist research because both theories suggest observing participants in their real-life situations. The time that I spent observing the women in this study also greatly improved the quality of the interviews because I had valuable contact time with each of the women. By spending time together, we formed a relationship that facilitated our interview sessions. Finally, the time spent job-shadowing each participant provided them with a context to which they could later refer during the interviews.

Sample

I chose to focus on the experiences of women principals at the secondary school level for two reasons: there are fewer women principals of secondary schools, and there has been less research conducted with women at this level (Blackmore, 1998; Collay & LaMar, 1995; Dardaine-Ragguet, et al., 1994; Gill, 1995; Kennington Edson, 1995; Poplin Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Young, B., 1994, 1995). In 1999, Shakeshaft wrote that in the United States, only 26% of high school principals are women, versus 52% of elementary school principals; the situation in Canada is similar (Shakeshaft, 1999; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Young, B., 1994). I selected the five participants for this study from among the female principals of secondary schools in a large Canadian city, including its surrounding suburbs. It is interesting that four of the women coincidentally worked for the same school board, and only one worked for a different school board. These women expressed an interest in

participating in the research. They met the basic criteria for inclusion in the study: of course they were female, they were principals of secondary schools, and they were interested in participating in this study. I limited the number of participants to five, so that I might obtain an in-depth exploration with each one while having a variety of women's voices represented. All the participants were White, middle-aged, well-educated, and middle class. Despite the relative homogeneity of the group, I assumed that each woman was unique, and therefore I attempted to remain attentive to how each one believed that her particular characteristics, or differences, influenced her leadership approach, and her definitions of leadership, power, and authority.

I could not solicit the participants directly, each one had to be solicited by the school board offices, in accordance with their procedures. As a researcher, I had to provide the local school boards with a detailed proposal of the study, which they first had to approve. After satisfying the boards that their employees and students would not be exploited, the boards sent an abstract of the study (see Appendix I) to all of their high school principals. The principals were given my name, email address and telephone number. Interested principals could then contact me personally. Initially, only four out of a few dozen women principals expressed an interest in participating in the study. Once I began to interview and job-shadow some of them, the participants themselves contacted some of their colleagues, and a fifth person volunteered.

These women willingly gave their time and energy to provide valuable information and insights to this study. By participating in this research, the participants reflected on their own practices and, I would like to believe, may have benefited professionally and personally. Many participants expressed their gratitude because their busy schedules rarely allow them time for reflection. Principals who become more self-aware and reflective become better leaders

(Gougeon, 1995). The participants were also grateful that research on women high school principals was being conducted, and they wanted to help increase awareness about the experiences of women high school principals, who are still a minority. However, I am the one who will ultimately benefit from their generosity, because this study was only possible because of their involvement.

Site

I conducted the research primarily at the participants' schools. Occasionally, I conducted them elsewhere if the participants attended meetings at other schools or at school board offices. I conducted three interviews in the participants' offices, where there were continual interruptions. One interview took place in a school board office where there were also continued disruptions. One interview took place at my home, at the participant's request, because she knew that her office would not provide us with enough privacy to conduct the interview.

Procedure and Instrumentation

I used open-ended semi-structured interviews for this exploratory research, thus enabling me to gain an understanding about how people think and develop their perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The interview questions were semi-structured and partially guided by the participants' answers. I prepared an interview guide to facilitate the interview process (see Appendix II). I provided the participants with a copy of the interview guide. All of them had read the questions in advance, and many had prepared answers in writing; all of them had taken the time to reflect on their answers to the questions though they were not required to do so. The questions concerned the participants' career experiences and reflections, and their definitions of leadership, power, and authority. Many questions also included the subject of gender and its

perceived influence on the participants' career and leadership style. The participants knew that I was interested in exploring the issue of gender, because I made it clear in the introductory letter and research proposal abstract. I interviewed each participant at least once. The interviews lasted between 50 and 110 minutes. The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed for analysis. I also job-shadowed each participant for the equivalent of two full working days. The observations were done before the initial interview and allowed me to become familiar with the participants' work situations, and to establish a degree of rapport with them. I took extensive notes during the observation sessions and I made additional notes at the end of every session. The participants provided me with written documents during the job shadowing periods. These included the *Safe Schools Act*, individual portfolios and résumés, and a copy of the evaluation profile for administrators produced by one of the participant's school board.

Method of Analysis

Interpreting research data can be an overwhelming experience, not because the information is difficult to understand, but rather because there is usually so much information with which to work (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Cole and Knowles suggest a step-by-step plan to help manage, organize, and analyze data: keep the research question foremost in the analysis process; organize information to make it manageable; read over all the data to gain a comprehensive sense of it and take notes during this stage; return to the beginning of the data and reread more slowly and methodically; highlight key words, phrases, and passages that stand out for some reason (this is where the researcher must use intuitive judgement); identify and make note of patterns or themes that seem to emerge from the material; assign a new name to characterize each cluster of themes; revisit the material to check accuracy of new

characterization; identify passages in the data that best exemplify the themes or patterns identified (to be used to corroborate an interpretation); finally begin the journey of reporting the findings (Cole & Knowles, 2000). It is important in qualitative research to consult with participants during this process. It is also essential to start the analysis from the very beginning of the research process; analysis should be integral and should shape the inquiry to some extent (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

I followed the steps suggested by Cole and Knowles. I started the process by rereading the observation notes several times, and by underlining passages that intuitively seemed important and related to my research questions in any way. Next, I transcribed the interviews. This was very useful because I became very familiar with the content of the interviews. I then read the interviews several times, and underlined important passages, labeling them as themes and sub-themes relating to the research questions and objectives. Because I conducted the interviews over a period of one month, I transcribed and analyzed some of them before the other interviews even occurred. I reread the interviews and notes, and when I completed the data collection, several themes had emerged. I identified these themes and sub-themes using a colour code. Most of the themes and sub-themes corresponded to those in the literature review. By now, an individual portrait of each participant was complete, which included information from the interview, and from my observation notes. I then mailed each participant a copy of her personal portrait for her review. I provided each with the opportunity to make comments or suggestions and to corroborate or to refute what I had written about them.

These individual portraits became valuable tools in composing this report. I used the portraits to write chapter four, which is a brief introduction to each participant. I used the

portraits, the interview transcriptions, and the observation notes to compile the main findings of the thesis. Two main themes emerged from the findings, which I present in chapters five and six. I then compared the findings to the existing literature in chapter seven. The final chapter includes a discussion of how the findings relate to the original research question, as well as this study's implications for practitioners and for researchers.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Much has been written about the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data, and what actually occurs in the setting under study instead of the literal consistency across different observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The issues of validity that are most relevant to this research include the trustworthiness criteria of credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability), confirmability (paralleling objectivity) (Guba 1981; Lincoln & Guba 1988), as well as the authenticity criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity (enlarges personal constructions), and educative authenticity (leads to improved understanding of constructions of others) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989 in Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I have ensured this study's trustworthiness and authenticity by allowing the participants to speak for themselves during the interview process. I also gave participants the opportunity to verify a written copy of their individual profile during the data interpretation stage. After having read her portrait each participant was asked to make comments, add or retract statements so that they were certain that they were portrayed as authentically as possible.

Ethics

The issue of ethics is of great importance to qualitative researchers because they delve deeply into people's lived experiences, and because of the interpersonal nature of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is imperative that the interests of the participants be a priority to the researcher. In this case, the participants were women in positions of leadership; however, in the micro-political process of conducting research, the researcher is the one who has power and control, by conducting, writing up, and disseminating the research material (Bhavnani, 1993).

This research followed guidelines set by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa, and was subject to its approval. This included providing a consent form to each participant to ensure free and informed participation, as set out by the Tri-Council Policy Statement Article 2.1 (see Appendix III). Many of the school boards contacted also had a review process to approve any research being conducted within their schools. In addition to the aim of the study, the boards were also concerned with the extent of the involvement of their students and of their employees. They asked why the study had to occur in a school, and in what ways the school system would benefit from the involvement of their staff and students. The boards provided interested researchers with an application form, and required an abstract which they used to solicit participants on behalf of any researcher. Because I wanted to job-shadow their employees, I had to submit to their approval process. I was granted final approval only after having received the ethics approval from my University.

Conclusion

Symbolic interactionism and feminist theory, as explained in this chapter, determined the methodological approach of this study. These perspectives were also instrumental in shaping the study's findings because they were the lenses through which all the data was seen and analyzed. The themes that emerged from the data collection and analysis are the result of my interpretation of what the participants said, trying of course to remain as true to their words and experiences as possible.

PART TWO

THE EXPERIENCES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Part two of this report comprises three chapters. In chapter four, I introduce each participant individually. In chapters five and six, I present the two main themes that emerged from my analysis of the data. The first theme pertains to the “relationships” that are a fundamental part of the principalship. The second theme is “responsibilities” which are equally central to the role of the principal. Together these two themes are the pillars of the role of the principal. Necessarily, the participants become less individual in those chapters because their experiences are combined and presented to support the various themes and sub-themes that transcend their individual stories.

Chapter Four

The Participants' Careers

The major findings of this study emerged as two main themes. But before presenting those themes it is important to get to know the participants because their stories and career experiences are the fountainhead of the study's findings. In this chapter I briefly present the five women high school principals who participated in this study. All of the quotations were taken from the interview sessions which were tape recorded and transcribed.

Diane

Of all the participants, Diane was the most open and forthcoming. She spoke more candidly and revealed more of herself and of her thoughts than the other participants. Many of her insights were different from those of the other participants. I am not sure how to account for these differences. Perhaps it is because Diane is more open and candid, or perhaps it is because Diane is the only participant who is from a different school board. Perhaps because the other participants discovered one another's identities, they felt less anonymous than Diane. Perhaps, too, it was because Diane will soon retire and was therefore more willing and able to reflect on her professional life. Diane herself believes that she is now more reflective because she took a leave of absence a few years ago to travel, and she believes that being away from work for a year gave her insights into herself and into her career.

Based on my experiences as a teacher and as a member of the Women in Educational Leadership of Nova Scotia, and based on my initial research, I knew that principals are under a tremendous amount of job-related stress. I was surprised that Diane was the only participant to discuss the job's stress level. Of all the participants, Diane seemed to be experiencing the most

stress as principal. She spoke openly about her stress and about other principals of her acquaintance who are also feeling tremendous job-related stress. According to Diane, she experiences health problems such as high blood pressure because of the stress. She had never experienced such problems before becoming a principal. She wonders if women suffer more stress than men because she believes that “women take things more seriously or more personally, and they probably feel more personally attacked”. Diane knows many other principals who, like her, are at the end of their careers. She herself will retire in less than two years. She says that many of these people are happy to be leaving the field of education. She says that it is devastating to finish one’s career with feelings of disgust toward the system, and to be happy to go. She believes that many of her near-retirement colleagues feel the same way. Diane was visibly emotional and upset about the state of public education in her province. She stated:

I passionately believe in the public education system... I guess because I benefited from it... I think that’s why... I’m going to get quite emotional about this. *A rather long pause as Diane is crying and so the tape is turned off.* I think it’s devastating what the provincial government is doing to it... Dismantling it brick by brick... And leaving the most vulnerable kids behind.....

Diane is also frustrated by what she perceives to be the diminished power and autonomy of the principals. Despite this frustration and stress, Diane remains upbeat and enthusiastic about education. This was particularly evident when she spoke to a group of new teachers about careers in education. She emphasized the demanding nature of the work, but also the intrinsic rewards of teaching and of working with children.

The participants' unique career paths and their experiences of gender discrimination in their ascension to principalship have shaped their attitudes. (I use the term ascension to recognize that administrative positions are higher in the hierarchical structure of schools). Diane describes her own path as being difficult and fraught with discrimination. She explains:

I had finished my principal's qualifications before I ever became a department head. That speaks of the glass ceiling that was in place there, it was a reality, and I lived it. Part of it was demographics, part of it was old boys' network, there's no question; and particularly the area I was in, which was French and third languages. It was primarily male-dominated and even more specifically Francophone males.

She adds that becoming an administrator:

was an endless series of competitions and feeling that you'd been turned down yet once again and I don't know why I stuck with it. I think there's an innate stubbornness somewhere that must drive me to do this.

It was clear that Diane preferred the position of vice-principal. During her first three years as vice-principal, she felt that "I made the most profound and lasting impact". She believes that this was partly because of the relationships that she developed with the staff and the students of that school, "they were such a wonderfully supportive group as a staff, as a community, as students...". She also says, "I love the job of VP and I'm not sure that I did the right thing in going on [to] that last step".

Diane has experienced only one three-year principalship, which is at her current school.

Diane was told that she would be a good match for the school. She was told:

“I think you’d be a really good match for [this school]”. Because of my language background I thought; French, German, Latin, smattering of Spanish; this place had five third languages running. High academic standards, it’s a gifted centre, I’m not a stupid person. I thought, yeah, sounds like my kind of school, you know, heavily involved with Arts and Music and that would be me, it was my profile.

She soon discovered that because of its long history, and because of its demanding and influential parents, the school was actually a very difficult assignment, “I had a number of colleagues come up to me and say ‘Oh, I’m so sorry.... I hope it goes well... That’s a difficult school..’ And I was stunned”. She soon realized that moving to that school was like “walking into a den of lions”. Students are Diane’s top priority. She says that some of the best advice that she has received as a principal was to, “remember when the chips are down and you have to make a decision as an administrator, ask yourself whether it’s good for the kids. And once you’ve answered that question you just take all the other flack and put it into perspective”. She told me that as principal she most regrets the loss of contact with the students. She does not want another promotion because she believes that would only take her even further from the students. Her most “excruciatingly boring year” was when she worked at the school board office because “it didn’t have any kids involved”. She says, “I desperately miss the kids and that’s the part of the job that bothers me the most...I think once there’s a disconnect between the principal and the

kids it's not as good a school as it could be". Last year, a colleague asked Diane if she was considering getting her qualifications to become a school board administrator. She responded: "Why on earth would I want to do that? I'm already so far removed from the kids where I am as a principal, that's never going to happen".

Diane sees her role as principal as being an advocate for the underdog, "so I guess I'm a leader because I do everything I can in that school to make sure that the kid who is the underdog gets a fair shake". And again, "I did what I say I want to do which is to make sure that the underdog gets heard and supported in things". She puts these feelings into context, "I guess what I work towards is as inclusive a school as possible".

Diane made an interesting comment that she sometimes does not tell people that she is a principal because she thinks that it influences their attitude towards her; she wants them to respond to Diane the person, not Diane the principal. This may suggest that Diane sees the principal's status as a barrier to interpersonal contact.

Kathleen

Kathleen has the most experience in high school administration of all of the participants. She has been an administrator for over two decades, and a principal for over eight years. She says that one of her most powerful role models was her own female high school principal. This woman was a nun whom Kathleen describes as being serious and stern. Despite admitting to being serious and stern herself, I observed Kathleen demonstrating a great sense of fairness when she dealt with, or talked about, situations involving less privileged students. She strongly believes in inclusion, and she displayed a great sense of caring for the students in her school. She knew many of her students by name and could often tell me something about their lives and

specific challenges. She was particularly sympathetic to the situations of the many underprivileged students in her current and previous school. Both schools are located in areas where the populations are ethnically diverse and economically deprived. She is proud of her school and teases the administrators of “cushy” suburban or “rich” schools in her own and in other school boards. She has a “tough” school and enjoys the challenges of leading such a school. Kathleen is very proud of her career and of her accomplishments. She was not afraid to speak about her perceived weaknesses and what she is still “working on”. She is approaching the end of her career and still finds the work to be challenging and rewarding.

What is clear from the interview with Kathleen, and from the time spent job-shadowing with her, is the sense of tremendous responsibility that she reports feeling as a high school principal. She expressed a sense of responsibility for the school as a whole, and for the thousands of individuals within the school community: the administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents and neighbours in the community. Her sense of responsibility surpasses the school curriculum, programs, and safety. She reports feeling responsible for the welfare of the people who are associated with her school, and for their education, careers and personal lives.

Kathleen claims that she defies the stereotypical feminine characteristics. She perceives the feminine as docile and agreeable, and says that she is much more assertive in her interactions and tends to “take the bull by the horns and do it in my own inimitable fashion”. Second, she believes that most women are diplomatic and able to compromise, but that she is not like most women in that regard. She stated:

I think you will find some women un/non-confrontational. They tend to mediate problems more than confront them. (R: Would you

say that's your style, to mediate?) No... I 'm a little bit more assertive and upfront with things. Sometimes too much.

Sometimes I can be too frank and I get myself into trouble.

Kathleen says that she can sometimes make hasty decisions, a characteristic that is contrary to what has been traditionally associated with females, the ability to engage in more reflective decision making. "I make very quick decisions. I'm able to do that; sometimes they're too quick and that's clearly a problem".

Because her career path was atypical as compared to other female administrators, Kathleen has difficulty seeing how her gender may have hindered her career aspirations. Kathleen began her administrative career as a young woman in her twenties. She believes that she was a vice-principal for a long period because she has lived in many different cities during her career.

The primary reason that Kathleen sought an administrative position was that she did not feel fulfilled as a teacher. She stated, "I was teaching English, going to university and I realized that it wasn't enough for me". She assumed extra duties such as volunteering to run activities after school, or attending events if a teacher was needed. She found her extra curricular involvement to be rewarding. She explains, "I realized that kids learn a lot in the classroom but they learn an awful lot more outside the classroom". While teaching, Kathleen became the department head of student activities, which led directly to becoming the vice-principal in charge of student activities. She describes herself as "a bit of a hotshot" when she first became a vice-principal at a very large high school. She explains that her notions of leadership, power, and authority have evolved since then. Coincidentally and surprisingly, Kathleen and I share some

common history: Kathleen was the vice-principal at my high school twenty years ago. When I first met her, on the first job shadowing day, I mentioned our common history, and she was very pleased, and told many people about our past connection. She did, however, joke about the fact that I, the researcher, knew about her past reputation as a tough and strict vice-principal. She found this amusing because her approach and her attitude towards school leadership have evolved since then.

Kathleen has moved more often and worked for more school boards than any other participant: eight school boards in all. She believes that this experience was invaluable, and that it has given her a different perspective than most of her colleagues who have only worked for one or two school boards. She sees herself as an outsider to the school board, and believes that this has allowed her to avoid some of the pitfalls that are common to other women in her school board. For example, she believes that many women principals are reputed to be very hard workers because they had to work very hard to prove themselves in their career path to principalship. However, she believes that her reputation preceded her at her current school board and she did not have to prove herself in the same way. She also believes that her many years of administrative experience have been an advantage. In addition to increased confidence, she says that her experience gives her a more complex approach to, and perspective on, leadership. Kathleen became an administrator decades before the current leadership approaches became popular in education. She has learned about and adopted the more current approaches. For example, she knows about the importance of collaborative leadership, and strives to include others in her decision-making. However, she also knows that the decisions are ultimately hers, that the school is a hierarchical organization, and that as principal she is at the top of the

hierarchy. She is sensitive to issues of racism and gender in schools. She often emphasized how important it is to keep learning; she believes that a desire to learn is crucial for all leaders, and especially for educational leaders.

Kathleen's early rise to administration has also affected her perceptions by making her ambivalent about how gender has influenced her career path. Kathleen became a vice-principal when she was a young woman with only a few years of experience as a teacher. This is unusual as compared to other female administrators of the same age. She became a vice-principal while living in another province, and she believes that there, in the seventies, gender was not an issue when it came to educational administration. However, Kathleen now believes that gender is an issue at her current school board. She says "this board has an old boys' club". She acknowledges that during her career, her husband initiated all of their moves, but she does not indicate that this in itself may be a gender issue.

Kathleen spoke eloquently about the rewards of educational leadership; she cited many examples of activities and of programs which have given her a sense of fulfilment during her career as school administrator. All of her examples have one thing in common: extending her role beyond classroom learning and beyond the school. She is fulfilled by helping students learn in a larger context, and by helping them as people, and as citizens of a community. She sees that as her main objective:

The focus on the community that I've had throughout my career has been something that I'm very proud of... I've been noted for the work I've done with tying in the community so that's something

I'm pretty proud of. 'Cause that's something I think schools need to do.

Louise

Louise is the principal of a large high school with a population of approximately 1500 students. She began her administrative career there, and she became the vice-principal of that school nine years ago. Five years later she became the principal. She expects that the school board will soon move her to a new school because of its policy to rotate administrators every five years.

I immediately noticed Louise's gentle nature, and her kindness towards others. She has been described as ruling her school with a feather, and although she may rule gently, she is not perceived as being weak. She is perceived as being a caring individual; many of the staff members commented on her caring approach towards teachers and students. I too witnessed her concern for many of the students and staff. She spoke of dealing with death, illness, divorce and other personal problems of staff members, students, and their families. During two days of job-shadowing, Louise initiated, or organized, hospital visits, meal preparations and collection of money for gifts for staff members in need.

Louise believes that her reputation among teachers, parents, and students is that of someone who will listen. As she says:

I've heard from parents who say to me 'the students feel that they can talk to you. They feel that they know you'. I've often heard parents say, "people in the community always say that you will listen to us".

She admits that often she cannot accommodate the demands of those who talk to her, but she believes that they feel better because they were listened to. Louise genuinely wants to listen to others; she believes that it is important for her to know what people are thinking, how they are feeling, and what it is that they want. She tries to include the voices of as many groups and individuals as possible when making decisions at the school.

Louise's career path is typical of many female administrators. She was a teacher for 13 years before becoming an administrator. When I asked her why she entered into administration, she explained that her decision was because of a "wake-up call", which came one year when two male student-teachers she knew discussed their desire to enter into administration. She asked herself, "why aren't you looking at that too, is there something about yourself"? She believed very strongly that one of these student-teachers was completely incompetent, and wanted to become a principal for all the wrong reasons. He thought that principals were frequently out of the school, and he thought that this was an advantage, "I guess I said to myself if you want to sit here and let people like that become principal that's what you're going to get stuck with". A second factor that pushed Louise into administration was that one of her friends was being encouraged to take the courses necessary to become a principal, and she encouraged Louise to pursue an administrative position. Louise says that her friend's encouragement was important to her decision to pursue administration.

I asked Louise if she believed that her gender influenced why she didn't receive encouragement to pursue an administrative position. Louise was unsure if gender influenced the male administrators at her school not to encourage her to pursue an administrative position. As she explains, "probably, to some extent or perhaps a bit to do with my personality, or make up. I

think I wouldn't fit the role model of what principals or vice-principals were thought to be at that time". She described her personality as being different from the model of an administrator; she described herself as being humanistic, approachable, less organized, not someone who could close the door to people and get work done, and not an intimidating or scary presence, "I think people don't, didn't see that, certainly at the time, as being necessarily a good quality for a vice-principal". Eventually, however, Louise's understanding of leadership changed and she now appreciates those very qualities as being desirable in school administrators.

She appreciates the "awesome responsibility" of the role of principal. Despite feeling prepared for her promotion to principal, she was nevertheless overwhelmed. She compares her role to that of the captain of a ship, who steers the ship, and to that of a "designer", the one who determines where things are going:

When I entered this position as I said before it was, although I had been a VP for five and a half years and felt I was ready for the promotion, it still was overwhelming in that you realize that you do, it's a bit like steering the ship (ha) and you know I hate to think of the captain but the captain of the ship...

She adds that:

It's a little overwhelming sometimes when you become a principal you realize that as a principal you probably have the greatest impact on a school of anybody and you really feel the difference that your presence makes.

When asked to compare the role of principal to that of vice-principal, Louise said that she prefers the role of principal, and spoke of its many rewards. The principal is more involved in the creative planning, and is more detached from managing crises, which is what vice-principals spend most of their time doing. She appreciates that as principal she has more opportunities for professional development and that she has the opportunity to be a leader at the school board level. She believes that the role of principal is more fulfilling than the role of vice-principal, which she sees as a “principal-in-training”. The vice-principal has more individual contact with the students in a counselling type of role, attending mostly to behaviour and attendance problems. Therefore, she describes the job of vice-principal as being very demanding and occasionally negative, because vice-principals deal mostly with students’ problems. She sees the role of the principal as requiring relationship development; she must relate to many groups within and without of the school: “I spend my days relating to parents, to teachers, it’s a constant flow of people coming in”. This part of the job consumes most of her day; the rest of her job is done after school hours. Despite the burden she appreciates the relationships that she has as principal.

When I asked Louise about specific challenges that existed for women principals at the high school level, she mentioned the lack of an informal network with more senior administrators at the school board level. She worries that her lack of an informal connection, and therefore influence, with senior school board administrators may negatively impact on her school. As she explains:

A male principal would have more of an informal network with senior administration. An informal network of male administrators, which include the superintendent and the director;

that group that would golf together, go away on weekends together, things like that. And so I sometimes wonder if my school might be at a bit of a disadvantage in that maybe I don't have that informal network of advocating for my community in that way.

Louise finds her work to be very rewarding and fulfilling. She believes that she has rewarding moments on a daily basis. She finds fulfilment in many aspects in her role as a principal. Most of these rewards are related to events at the school. Louise mentions occasions such as raising money for charity, special assemblies, ceremonies, graduation, and fun events such as dances and talent shows. She believes that being in a high school is always vibrant, fun, and full of rewarding moments. She believes that her staff's expression of their appreciation contributes to her sense of fulfilment. She also finds it rewarding to be a role model for the female students and staff at her school.

Louise believes that she is a leader; she says that she has learned over the years to trust in herself and in her abilities as a leader. Many of the qualities and skills that she now identifies as her strengths were the qualities and skills that she once believed were incompatible with leadership. Recognizing these qualities and skills as strengths demonstrates that her understanding of leadership has progressed since she first considered entering into administration. She says that she is an effective team builder, and a good communicator, and that she is empathetic, that she cares for the people she works with, and that she models the caring approach. She believes that it is important to try to maintain a sense of balance between work and home. She believes that it is a skill to be able to relax and to have a healthy distance from work, and a life outside of work. She also mentions that it is important to have a support

network of family and friends. Louise also values giving positive feedback as a strength because she benefited from receiving positive feedback from her staff when she first became an administrator.

When I asked her what advice she would give women who aspire to the role of principal, she emphasized the importance of being true to yourself, of allowing your personality to come through, and of not assuming any preconceived model of leadership. She advocated that women develop their own unique style of leadership.

Lynn

Lynn has been a principal at a large suburban high school for two years. Her career path is similar to that of other female principals. She was a teacher, a department head, vice-principal and then a principal. Her ascension to the principalship is a story of perseverance in overcoming difficulties. Lynn began her career as an elementary school teacher, where she taught for three years. She stopped teaching full-time to raise four children. While her children were young, she worked as a supply teacher at the high school level, and rediscovered her passion for math. Lynn then returned to university for an undergraduate degree to be able to teach math at the high school level. Meanwhile, Lynn divorced and moved to another city in a different province. She was now raising and supporting her four children by herself, while supply teaching and attending university part-time. During one particularly overwhelming semester, Lynn had to travel for two hours on two nights per week to attend university classes. She finally obtained her degree, and became a permanent full-time teacher in a high school. Because she supported four children, full-time employment was important. Six years later, Lynn completed her honours/specialist

qualifications, and applied to be a math department head. She worked as a department head for four years, and she then became a vice-principal. Four years later, she became a principal.

Unlike the other participants, Lynn was strongly encouraged by her administrators to enter into administration. Because she received so much support and encouragement to enter into administration, Lynn did not see gender as being an impediment to her career path. When she was a teacher, her vice-principal and department head both encouraged her to become a math department head because they believed that she demonstrated leadership qualities. When I asked her to specify what those leadership qualities were, Lynn said that she didn't really know because she felt that she was just being herself. As she explains, "I guess I have leadership qualities that are natural, unassuming; I don't go like 'I'm in charge'". She was hesitant to pursue administration, but they convinced her to obtain her qualifications. Upon receiving her qualifications, she was encouraged to apply for a department head position, and she obtained the position. In her new role as a department head, Lynn faced many challenges:

The first year was very hard 'cause I didn't know anybody. And it was a very traditional school, very old boys school, and I was coming in as a female. And... I'm a by-the-book person, so if these are the rules I'm going to abide by them, 'cause that's how I am.

Though her first year as a department head was difficult, it was also successful. At the end that year, the principal and vice-principal suggested that she consider applying for a vice-principalship. Lynn's response was, "I don't think so... thank you but...no". After her second year, she was more amenable to the idea of applying for an administrative position because she had discovered that she enjoyed the administrative component of her job as a department head.

She therefore decided to obtain her second honours/specialist qualifications, which was necessary to attend the principals' training course. She then immediately attended the principals course thinking, "I don't have to do anything. You know, I'm just going to open doors".

The following year, Lynn's principal encouraged her to apply in a competition for a vice-principalship. She hesitated, saying she was too busy. He handed her the application forms, and told her to "just fill them out". Finally, Lynn entered the competition and was appointed vice-principal. Before starting the job, she felt that she had "really done it now"; that she had once again overstepped her bounds because she believed that teaching was her forte. Her students said that she would not last as a vice-principal because she loved teaching too much. She thought that she could always return to teaching if she didn't enjoy being a vice-principal. Upon meeting the staff at the school where she was to be vice-principal, she reconsidered her misgivings because she felt such warmth from the staff. She had a very good first year as a vice-principal, and she enjoyed the work very much. She realized that her passion for teaching was part of a larger passion of loving children and other people. She realized that, as an administrator, she could better help children who were in need. She implemented meaningful changes which affected a greater number of students.

The final step to principal was not a big one for Lynn. During her second year as a vice-principal, there was a complete turnover of personnel in the school's administration. In addition to being new to the school, the new principal had never worked as a principal before. He relied on Lynn for most of his decisions because she was the only administrator who was familiar with the school. By the end of the year, she realized that she had guided and supported him through his first year as principal. When he suggested to her that she apply to become a principal, she

agreed. However, she admits to having qualms on her first day as principal, “it was scary coming here as the principal, like the one, the principal”. She says that she never had the ambition to become a principal because she had been very content as a teacher. Teaching had been her goal since childhood. Teaching had been her passion. She says that she didn’t feel a need to become a leader because she felt that she was already a leader in the classroom.

Lynn has strong beliefs about leadership, which affect her role as principal. She believes that the principal is the leader of the school. She says that a principal’s authority is based on her knowledge of what is happening in the whole school, “but I’m the one that knows, supposedly knows, everything about the school so when I make a decision I have the big picture in mind”. Lynn believes that all of the other stakeholders in the school have more specific interests at heart: their studies, their classes, their departments. Only the principal views the school as a whole. Lynn also sees herself as the school’s advocate, notably vis-à-vis the school board. She tries to obtain what is best for the school.

Lynn openly discussed with me what she perceives to be her weaknesses as a leader. Her perceived weaknesses are contrary to what has traditionally been associated with women’s leadership style of encouraging others to speak, and of being good listeners. Lynn worries that she can be too much of a leader, “ I have to make the effort to hold back something, to give other people a chance to say things, and make them feel good about what they’ve said”.

Lynn sees her role as a combination of relationships. She has strong relationships with the vice-principals, the department heads, the teachers, the support staff, the students, the parents, other principals, and the school board superintendents. Lynn values the relationship that she has with the vice-principals. When she first became a principal, her initial reaction was one of

apprehension, because she thought that she was going to be alone as the principal. She soon preferred to think of the leadership of a school as an administrative team, “so I thought well yes I do make the decision but you know it’s a team effort”. The administrative team meets weekly to discuss issues, but the members of the team confer with her several times daily. The vice-principals discuss problems with Lynn, and she encourages them to they make their own decisions. They work as a team to organize activities, such as preparing meals for the teachers as an effective way to promote appreciation for the teachers, and as a way to encourage good working relationships in the administrative team. She also plays the role of mentor, or of career advisor, for the administrative and teaching staff. I observed her speaking to many people about their career plans. She encouraged them to pursue leadership roles, and advised them on how to pursue their various goals.

As principal, Lynn says that her priority is the welfare of all of the students. She is concerned for the students, as a group and individually. She has implemented initiatives such as addictions counselling. I observed her interact with many students; she knew many of them by name. Some students asked Lynn for some help but most of the students’ problems were attended to by the vice-principals because that is their role in the school. Lynn, as principal, dealt with staff problems to a much greater extent. Most of the people who dropped in to see Lynn were teachers and other staff members. Lynn tries to make herself available to all of the groups within the school by keeping her office door open. As she said to me, though she is very busy and has a lot of work to do, when someone comes to see her, “I can’t say ‘I’m busy, I can’t see you’. I am there for them”.

Many schools in Canada have school advisory councils. The councils are a formal group with whom principals must have a relationship. Lynn speaks very highly of her school advisory council. She believes that they are wonderful people who are supportive and helpful to her and the school. She fosters a good relationship with this group by involving herself in its activities, “my approach is like when there’s something going on at the school I’m there with them... I’m not all talk... I’ll be in there pitching in and helping”. This effort to involve herself reflects her attitude towards all of the groups within her school.

Anne

Anne is the principal of a large urban high school. Anne is considered by many of her colleagues to be a strong leader in education at the local and provincial level. Many of the projects that she has worked on have been adopted at the school board level and at the provincial level. She has become an expert in some fields relating to educational administration. Those to whom I spoke informally, including secretaries, teachers, and other principals, told me that Anne was an excellent leader and that she was somebody whom they respected for her leadership and expertise in the field of education. Anne finds that her involvement in educational administration outside of her school is very rewarding, but she also knows that this level of involvement is affecting her personally and is affecting her school.

Of all the participants, Anne’s experiences are the least mentioned throughout this report. I spent as much time with Anne as with the other participants, but there are two reasons why her responses differed from those of the other participants. First, I interviewed Anne in an open area at the school board office. This may have affected how she responded to my questions; she may have felt inhibited about giving personal responses. Second, Anne is one of the participants who

spoke of her aspirations to an administrative position at the school board level, and this may have been a factor inhibiting some of her responses. Third, Anne herself says that she is an abstract and theoretical thinker. She responded to many of my questions in an abstract and theoretical manner, and therefore revealed less about herself than most of the other participants. Anne's theoretical approach engendered interesting and thought-provoking conversations. In fact, she asked me many questions that started interesting theoretical discussions, but that did not reveal as much about Anne as it did about her opinions and perspectives on leadership and gender.

Anne began her career as a teacher. She followed a path that is similar to that of most female principals. She taught for a total of sixteen years; she taught for nine years at the elementary level and seven more at the high school level. While she was a high school teacher, Anne became the subject advisor for a large department, a role that included an administrative component. She later became a vice-principal, a position she held for eight years, and has been a principal at the high school level for four years. Her career path was altered because she had a child. She says that she could only consider administration when her daughter was older, "family had been started; that was also part of the component. It naturally evolved with Michelle (her daughter) being old enough to consider that kind of position". Nor did Anne feel rushed to enter into administration; she says that she wanted to take her time to work at it.

When I asked her which factors affected her decision to become a principal, she talked extensively about what she calls the "formative dimension". She explained to me that she began her master's degree in educational administration without any real ambition to assume an administrative position. While doing her master's degree, she learned about the theoretical aspects of administration, and began to understand the dynamics of educational administration.

She says that her interest at the time was academic; she was curious about educational administration, but it appealed to her on a theoretical level only:

Essentially it was very theoretical initially; particularly when I completed my masters in administration. It was there that I began to understand the dynamics, and to know the direction that I wanted to go. So from the abstract theoretical basis.

Another factor that pushed Anne into administration was the encouragement that she received from a mentor. This person nurtured her personal growth, and encouraged what she calls the “search for self-truth”. Her mentor helped Anne to gain confidence, and promoted introspection, which led Anne to realize that school administration was a logical move for her.

Anne believes that she had to overcome two obstacles to become a school administrator: she was female, and she was Francophone. She became a vice-principal when few women and few Francophones were doing so. This was an obstacle because administrators hire people like themselves: therefore they hired anglophone males. When Anne first applied to become a school administrator, she was offered a position at the elementary school level because the school board was uncomfortable with women being in administrative positions at the high school level. They worried that women could not deal with discipline problems in a high school. She refused the position, and she believes that her refusal was seen as a sign of strength of character because, shortly thereafter, she was offered a position at the high school level. Anne does not see the principalship as her final career destination; she aspires to positions at higher levels within school board administration.

Anne believes that obstacles remain for women aspiring to administrative positions at higher levels. She is concerned because she has such aspirations. As she explains, “You are sensitive to that whole issue again, just like I was when I first started out as a VP”. This issue came up again later in the interview: Anne described the school board administration as, “a male dominated culture, very male yeah”. She believes that some school boards are more open to women than others, but “the old boys’ club is definitely strong in some of them”.

Anne repeatedly mentioned her need for maintaining balance. Anne discussed this need in reference to many aspects of her life and career. First, she must balance her personal life, her personal needs, motherhood, and her career. Second, she needs to balance the competing demands placed on a high school principal, the demands to be leader within the school, and the demands to be a leader outside of the school. She enjoys being a leader outside of the school, and finds it fulfilling. Nevertheless, she is frustrated at the amount of time that these external demands remove her from her school. She is concerned that the internal affairs of the school are suffering because of her external commitments. Third, she is concerned with maintaining balance within the school; she sees her role as school principal as “balancing the talents of the staff... being supportive and understanding to them... bridge and bring people together”.

As principal, Anne says that she is the person within the school who has the broadest perspective, who sees the big picture and keeps all of the departments and groups equal. A principal has the best interests of the whole school at heart, while other groups have the best interest of a smaller component at heart, for example, the department heads have the interest of their departments at heart. Anne tries to surpass all of the special interests and do what is best for the school as a whole.

Anne was a very reflective participant. She has spent a lot of time considering how gender has affected leadership. She wonders to what extent women have masked themselves and assumed a male form of leadership, or if women perceive themselves to be using a different leadership style. She thinks that we do not yet have the answers because women administrators are a recent phenomenon and are still occupying the administrative positions; she believes that “it’s only once you’re out of the job for a period of time and you can separate yourself that you can really begin to truly analyze what transpired in your career”. When I asked her how she imagined female leadership to be, she said that she did not know. She explained that she does not believe that “female leadership” exists yet because men still dominate the top levels of government, business, and church. She says,

I’ll hold the verdict on that, we haven’t explored our potential yet by any stretch of the imagination because organizations, business, private industry [are still male dominated].

She describes her leadership as one that uses shared decision making; she believes that she has the ability to get people to work as a team. She hopes that she is visionary, and that she is “divergent in my thinking”. She attempts to experiment and envisions her plans over a period of two to three years. She believes that change is a positive goal, and that change is possible when she remains focused.

When Anne talked about how her understanding of leadership has changed, she mentioned that learning from one’s mistakes is a quality. She reassessed her beliefs about leadership because she found that her former conception was unsuccessful. She looks back on those experiences and says, “through reassessment and in debriefing situations, either by

consultation with peers and colleagues or by professional development, you gain greater empathy, a greater understanding”.

When I asked her what advice she would give to a woman aspiring to a position of leadership, she outlined the following: know your strengths and areas of growth before going into the position, have a level of self confidence, be assertive but not aggressive, make plans for long term (five years), seek a mentor, be ready to climb the ladder at a faster pace than women have in the past, advance when you are ready to go ahead. These comments illustrate, to some extent, Anne’s own strengths; they shed light on what she perceives to be important qualities.

Conclusion

All of the women in this study have different approaches to leadership, different ideas about their role as principal, different strengths, different weaknesses and so on. It is important that we recall the differences between these women because they remind us that we cannot speak of the woman high school principal as though she were one typical person. The next two chapters will focus on where the experiences of the participants converge, because their common experiences support the two main themes that emerged from the analysis: that the role of the principal is founded on *relationships*, and that the role of principal is weighted by *responsibilities*.

Chapter Five

The Importance of Relationships

In this chapter, I present the issues that are related to the first major theme that emerged from the findings: relationships. It became clear while analyzing the data that each participant maintains and values many relationships in her role as principal. In fact, the role of the principal, according to the participants, is primarily based on relationships. As Louise stated:

I spend my days relating to parents, to teachers; it's a constant flow of people coming in. Asking for my advice, maybe my permission to do things I guess, or for bouncing ideas off me, that type of thing.

Louise says that this part of the job consumes most of her day; she does everything else after working hours.

I also include sub-themes that are related to relationships, including how leadership affects relationships, the number of relationships, and how principals feel isolated.

Relationships: The Foundation of Leadership

The participants describe their leadership approaches in many ways, but all agree leadership is closely tied to their ability to connect with people. For Louise, leadership is the ability to foster relationships, to mediate, to find solutions that are palatable for everyone, and to make everything work smoothly within the community. She says that a big part of a leadership job is “the relational part”. Kathleen also emphasizes the importance of relationships to leadership. She says that her relationships are based on teaching, mentoring, and coaching. She believes that leadership involves not only implementing a vision, but also “being able to motivate

and help everybody get through it in the end". Similarly, Lynn says that a good leader leads in a way that "makes it easy for people". She said repeatedly that, "leadership isn't 'look at me, look at me, look at me...' leadership is reaching out to everyone, trying to include everyone". All of the participants said that leadership is not conducted from the top, nor from the forefront, but rather from the centre. To Kathleen, this means a "quiet approach" to leadership, which she prefers because she does not like being on the centre stage. Louise says that leadership is "not necessarily expecting them to follow your lead; you know, you're part of it". A few participants used the term "servant-leader". Louise described a "servant-leader" as follows, "we model the fact that we're not afraid to put ourselves at the same level or even in a servant model, where you're doing things for people". For Lynn, her "servant-leader" approach manifests itself when she interacts with teachers, and when she shows her appreciation to her staff such as when she and her vice-principals serve them a meal. Lynn believes that appreciating and rewarding her teachers with such kindnesses is a very important component of her leadership approach.

All of the participants then strive to be supportive of their staff, and to provide them with the encouragement that they need. Most of the participants believe that showing concern for people is especially prevalent among women administrators. As Lynn says, "you work more with people. I think your people skills are on a different level than the males". She believes that women are more likely to concern themselves with the "wellness of people". She believes that teachers, students and parents, prefer dealing with a woman because:

I think they like the woman kind of level of compassion. People like to be taken care of and looked after and so think people respond better".

Kathleen, on the other hand, believes that her emphasis on caring, compassion and kindness originates not from her being a woman, but because her school is part of a parochial school board. Diane and Louise recognize that the title of principal can be intimidating to some, and that a principal may be seen as being unapproachable. They both believe that it is an advantage to be a woman because people are less likely to be intimidated by them. As Diane says, “I would say that I’m probably less threatening to some”. Louise believes that she is not threatening, and although she worries that this might be disadvantageous in some situations, mostly, it contributes to her being “more approachable and less scary”.

Diane recognizes other ways that her gender has afforded her advantages when dealing with people. She states her belief as follows:

I think women can sometimes get away with things, say things to both men and women, that men can’t... I think as a woman you can sometimes cajole boys into doing things that they wouldn’t do for a man because it’s that testosterone thing.

The Principal’s Relationships

The principals have many types of relationships with many different groups within and outside of the school. These include the vice-principals, department heads, teachers, students, parents, other principals, and school board administrators.

Their Relationship With the Vice-Principals

Kathleen said that the principal largely shapes the role of the vice-principal. She believes that the principal sets the “overall atmosphere for the school; the vice-principals are implementors”. Kathleen sees herself as the leader of the administrative team. She has struggled

with “pulling that together as a team... I had to work at that and I’m still working at it”. Lynn values her relationship with her vice-principals. When she first became a principal, she worried that she was going to be alone. However, she soon realized that she preferred a team approach to leading the school, “so I thought well, yes, I do make the decisions but it’s a team effort”. Lynn meets formally with her vice-principals at least once per week, but discusses issues with them individually several times per day. Lynn encourages them to make their own decisions. Anne sees the role of vice-principal as advocates for their students and for their departments, which is important when making decisions, because the vice-principals represent the interests of various groups.

All of the participants value their vice-principals. To Louise, the vice-principal liberates the principal from dealing with mundane tasks, and routine crises, thereby allowing the principal to focus on more fulfilling tasks such as creative planning. She finds the role of principal to be much more fulfilling than the role of vice-principal, which, in her opinion, can become negative because vice-principals continually deal with crises. Louise explained that the vice-principals “help the principal ensure that you have a safe, orderly environment in the school”. Because many of her responsibilities remove her from school grounds, she must be able to trust her vice-principals with the school’s daily affairs. Anne, who is also frequently absent from her school, repeated the same issue. Diane’s relationship with her vice-principals is the most significant relationship that she has within the school:

I’m very fortunate that I’ve got two vice-principals... whom I just adore. I think they are two of the most hard-working, ethical, great human beings I’ve worked with and I can’t tell you what kind of a

support that is for me in this job. And I feel very sorry for those that don't have that. I don't know how they get through the day.

If any of the participants had difficulties or tensions with their vice-principals, they did not vocalize them, nor did I witness any problems during my observation periods.

Their Relationship With the Department Heads

All of the participants value their department heads. Diane explains that the department heads are vital to the smooth operation of the school. She says "I couldn't do my job without the two vice-principals and the department heads". Because she places much importance on their role, she plans to fight hard to "ensure that the department heads are given back that one period per cycle where they can do their department head duties". The department heads are essential to help new teachers, and to support good teaching practices in general. The department heads are the instructional leaders in the school. All of the participants have approximately 100 teachers on staff, and they cannot maintain a close rapport with all of them. They rely on their department heads to act as liaisons between them and the teachers. The department heads also act as advocates for the teachers in their departments. Lynn meets with her department heads on a monthly basis; she tries to listen to what they have to say on behalf of their staff. She stated that, "when we have department head meetings, I want to hear from them, the voice of the teachers".

Unlike with their vice-principals, I observed some tension in the relationship between the participants and their department heads. During a meeting to interview potential department heads, I witnessed Kathleen try to replace an acting department head with whom she was experiencing conflict. Kathleen also spoke to me candidly about the problems that she was

experiencing with the resource department head because of changes that she was trying to bring about in that department. Louise also spoke to me of problems that she was having in negotiating a conflict between one of her vice-principals and a difficult department head.

Their Relationships With the Teachers

All of the participants believe that their role as principal is to support their teachers. All of the participants had an open-door policy whereby their office door was literally kept open at all times; they closed them only when the person to whom they were speaking requested privacy. All of the participants encouraged their teachers to talk to them, not only to discuss problems, but to share news, thoughts, and feelings. The participants expressed pride in their teachers' accomplishments. It is important to all of the participants that their teachers feel empowered. Diane sees empowering teachers as one of her most important roles. She wants to create a school where "teachers see themselves empowered to be able to do the right thing".

All of the participants were concerned about removing administrators from the teachers' association or union. They worry that it has negatively affected their relationship with teachers. Louise worries that the teachers' association has lost an important perspective. She worries about its "union mentality" because of its focus on contract negotiations, and on contract compliance. Diane worries that the gap between teachers and administrators is growing, which "makes it more difficult to run the school in a harmonious way". In Kathleen's school board, students' personal growth outside of the school is encouraged heavily; she worries that the union will pressure teachers to cease extra curricular involvement. Anne states, "there have been a lot of, I guess, issues with the teacher federation, which in a way impede how we would like to run our schools and whatnot". She hopes that the teachers' association, and the principals'

association, will resolve the issues that are beginning to negatively affect the schools. Lynn says that in her opinion, the teachers' association is "breathing down our [administrators] necks".

Many of the participants expressed concern about the recent increase in teachers' workload; they worry that the teachers will burn out. Diane and Kathleen noted that this was another impetus for teachers to stop or to reduce their involvement in extra-curricular activities. Again, this has negatively affected the relationship between the teachers, students, and parents.

On occasion, relationships with teachers can be difficult. Many of the participants have had troubles with teachers when they have tried to bring about change upon first arriving at their schools. Diane encountered this problem with teachers that she refers to as the "old guard" during her first year as principal. The old guard avoided change in its school for more than a decade. They undermined her efforts to make the school less elitist and more inclusive. They also resisted changes to the curriculum and programs that Diane implemented on behalf of the Ministry of Education.

Kathleen faced similar resistance at her school when she first tried to implement changes in the manner in which resource help was delivered. The teachers in the resource department had not taught regular classes for years, and they had been delivering all resource help in a separate "resource" room. In Kathleen's opinion it was important for them to teach at least one class to familiarize themselves with the new programs and curricula. She believes that "inclusion" means that students get as much of their resource help within their regular classroom as possible. The teachers in the resource department resisted Kathleen's efforts. She has tried to persuade them for two years, but they have yet to make any concessions. Kathleen has decided to impose

the changes, which has resulted in strained relationships between Kathleen and many of the resource teachers. Kathleen worries that the teachers may sabotage the effort, a problem which Diane noted as well, “boy can you ever sabotage things well if you don’t agree or if you don’t feel you have input; so it’s much better to get folks on line”.

Lynn discussed her experience with a failed project during her first year because of a lack of teacher support:

Taking on a project as big as that, where you need the people backing. And I knew I didn’t have it yet cause it was too new in the year. And the principal that I replaced had been here for nine years, not as principal but had been in the school, and so they were resentful of her going and me coming in, you know.

The participants have also experienced problems with male teachers because the men were not comfortable with working for a woman. This is not surprising since men are comfortable with men as leaders, they can relate to the masculine approaches to leadership. Because the feminine is viewed as weaker and subservient, having a woman in charge can cause a man to feel defensive about his masculine identity. For example, Anne says that, “at the beginning there’s a certain resistance” by the male teachers. She believes that she was able to overcome this resistance in part by consulting with her staff. In time, her credibility increased and the resistance subsided. Kathleen is ambivalent about how gender has affected her relationships with the male staff; sometimes she said that there were problems, and other times she said that there were none: “Sometimes you’ll have attitudes towards females from the male staff that...we’ll still have some of that old carry over that women just don’t have the abilities

that, you know, the stereotypes. I don't see a lot of it anymore". She also says that male teachers sometimes test female administrators, but that they would not test male administrators. "There [are] roadblocks that are kind of making you go through the hoops to make you prove yourself". She then said, "I don't see a difference in exercising authority; over males versus females". However, after reflection, she stated "and I would say that there's one or two of them that might find that a little hard. They might find that difficult but... I think it's as hard as you make it too".

Most of the participants said that some of the male staff have trouble accepting a female principal, but that these men are the exception. In particular, Lynn experienced a problem with one male staff member, which resolved itself in a Court case that Lynn won. She believes that he was unable to accept being accountable to a female principal. However, all of the participants agreed that their gender enhances their relationships with their female staff members.

Their Relationships With the Students

All of the participants agree they have much less contact with the students than when they were teachers and vice-principals. Kathleen says:

There are aspects of the vice-principal's role that I think are, are incredible and that is the contact they have with young people.

And the impact that they can have on the lives of young people, that principals at high schools cannot have.

Kathleen tries to get to know as many students as possible by supervising the cafeteria because "I like to be in the school, I like to be a principal who is visible...I can tell you what's going on in the school by what I see in the cafeteria". The participants are troubled by the distance between

the principal and her students. Diane regrets that she cannot have close contact with the students. She says:

I desperately miss the kids and that's the part of the job that bothers me the most...I think once there's a disconnect between the principal and the kids it's not as good a school as it could be.

When I asked the participants if their gender was a factor in their relationships with their students, their answers varied. Louise was ambivalent: on the one hand, she believes that students do not make an issue of having a female principal. She attributes this to their experiences in elementary school: "I haven't found that to be a real difficulty; most of the students have had experience with women elementary principals". On the other hand, she believes that some students from certain ethnic backgrounds have difficulty in accepting the authority of a female principal: "Maybe it would make a difference depending on the, I don't know, the racial mix in a school. Whether in some nationalities whether women are as respected as..." Anne is less ambivalent about the influence that her gender has had on her relationship with her students: "If you're at ease with the students and you're not uptight, but can still be demanding, students are going to pick that up, whether you're male or female, they really will". Diane and Kathleen unequivocally believe that in some instances their relationships with their students are influenced by their gender. Older male students will challenge a woman principal, simply because she is a woman. Kathleen says, "but then you have a group who because it's a female thing, and you'll find that typically these are the same young men who grow up in families where women are treated differently". Therefore, in Kathleen's opinion, some young men do not respect women in positions of authority because they are taught at home that women

are not the equals of men. Like Louise, she may be referring to their cultural values. Diane similarly says that older boys “take it on as a particular challenge to challenge you more as a woman than a man”. Diane is the only participant who believes that women occasionally have an advantage when dealing with boys, “as a woman, you can sometimes cajole boys into doing things that they wouldn’t do for a man”.

Their Relationship With the Parents and the Community

All of the participants discussed the school advisory council (SAC), a group that represents the parents and the community. The SACs consist of school administrators, staff, students, parents, and community members. They constitute the main contact between the principal, the parents, and the community. They are chaired by parents or by members of the community. Although the participants said that the SACs can be a wonderful addition to the school, and that the SACs do not reduce the power of the principal, they also stated unanimously that the SACs can be very negative for their school.

Unfortunately, many of the participants have had difficult dealings with their SACs. Despite these problems, each participant believes that the SACs are potentially a positive component to school governance, if the SACs act in their advisory capacity. Three participants spoke candidly of the problems that they experienced with their SACs. These problems stem from SAC members trying to exert control beyond the SAC’s advisory mandate. All of these conflicts were resolved in favour of the principals by school board administrators who reminded the SACs about their advisory mandate.

Anne spoke briefly about one SAC. In her opinion, the problem started because the council chair was very difficult and obstructive, and had an agenda for the school. Eventually,

the situation was resolved when the school board administrator acted to remove the chair from the SAC. Louise also experienced problems with her SAC. Last year, the SAC introduced a controversial initiative. Although everybody accepted the initiative, a small but vocal group of dissenters made Louise's life very difficult. They picketed the school, and involved the media; they even got themselves elected as the new SAC because, as Louise says, "the majority had been caught napping, so to speak, basically didn't come out for the election". In the end, the SAC consisted of "single-issue individuals". They tried to have Louise reverse the decision. This was a very stressful time for Louise, who says: "I was the one being interviewed, being called, reviled by these people who were essentially saying that I was the one trying to ram this through". Eventually, a school board administrator dissolved the SAC, and a new SAC was elected by a majority of parents.

Diane has had the most problems with her SAC. Her school is reputed to be very difficult because of a parent community that is comprised of influential people who are used to exerting control. It is a school with many traditions because it is over 150 years old. Diane was unaware of these issues before becoming the principal; however, she soon encountered problems because, "It was like walking into a den of lions". Moreover, Diane was the first woman to become principal at that high school. She was from a different school board, and from a different community. Because of amalgamation, the new school board was imposing many changes: "How two boards could have such incredibly different cultures and exist side by side in the community was a shock, the likes of which I haven't lived". One of the more significant changes that Diane had to implement was a boundary change, which resulted in some of the school's "gifted" students being transferred to another school, and in new immigrant/ESL students and

students with learning difficulties being added to the school. Diane was committed to making the school as inclusive as possible, but the parents resisted. The Ministry of Education was also imposing profound changes to programming and curriculum. To the parents, Diane was the symbol of all those changes, and they blamed her personally. The SAC met in secret and tried to pass a vote of non-confidence. In the end, a school board administrator met with Diane and the two SAC co-chairs. The school board administrator explained to the SAC co-chairs that Diane was responsible for implementing the changes, and reminded them that they were to act in an advisory capacity only.

Another problem arose when the students' council (SC) at Diane's school held an election to suspend one of the services offered to the students. The SC and the SAC assumed that Diane would support their decision. However, she decided to maintain the service. Diane says that they failed once again to understand that they were advisors only. She eventually withdrew the service, but regrets having capitulated. She removed the service to promote unity and to restore the school's reputation, which had been tarnished in the media. Diane reported feeling as if she had "sold her principles down the river for political expediency". Diane regrets the loss of the service for those staff and students who wanted to keep the service. She is also upset about how the incident affected the individual who provided the service. Moreover, she reported feeling personally attacked and publicly vilified. She also believes that this incident has had a chilling effect on other school principals, who now realize the power of SACs and how easily their own power can be undermined.

Despite these many examples of negative experiences, all of the women stated that the SACs could be a positive force for the schools. All of the participants have had some positive

dealings with SACs. For example, Anne describes her current SAC as being “very collaborative, very mutual”. Lynn says that her SAC is “wonderful, supportive and helpful”. She fosters a good relationship with the SAC as follows, “my approach is like when there’s something going on at the school I’m there with them... I’m not all talk...I’ll be there pitching in and helping”. Louise appreciates her SAC; she welcomes the opportunity to hear from the community, and to include it in the decision-making process because it is important to her to get feedback. She would not want to make a decision without consulting the SAC. The parents feel that Louise will listen to them; that is the foundation of her good relationship with them:

I think that I’m a good listener. I don’t always have a solution for them but I think they [parents] feel at the end that they have been heard and can go away from it satisfied to some extent.

Kathleen considers herself blessed with her SAC because she knows of the problems that it can cause.

Their Relationships With Other Principals

Four participants said that their relationships with other high school principals were very important to them. These four are members of the same school board, which Anne described as one that fosters a collegial relationship between its principals, and between principals and school board administrators.

Kathleen says that her relationship with other principals is very comfortable and open. She says that, “as a group we’re very supportive of one another here. If there’s one cohesive team in this board, it’s the principals... It’s a very tight group, generally; there’s one or two that stand out”. Kathleen says that many of the principals have an area of expertise for which they are

consulted. "People are known for what they're good at". Lynn says that the principals often telephone one another when they have problems or questions. Because Lynn receives more telephone calls than she makes, she believes that she is a leader among her peers. Louise says that the group is not perfectly cohesive; they are not always supportive of one another because they do not want to be perceived as complainers within the school board. Anne says that the high school principals in her school board respect one another and have a very rich sense of camaraderie. Anne's relationship with other principals is important to her because she feels that the role of principal can be isolating because of the hierarchical nature of schools: "There is that pyramid and a lot of issues sometimes you cannot discuss, so it can be isolating; but you bridge that with your peers [fellow principals]".

Diane is from a different school board, and says that she has a good working relationship with the other principals; the group meets formally once per month. Her school board has recently been enlarged because of amalgamation, which may explain why she has a more distant and formal relationship with other principals.

All of the women believe that gender is not an issue in their relationships with other principals, because women administrators are no longer a minority within their school board, and now represent between one third to one half of all high school principals. This is not typical of all school boards, although women administrators are becoming more prevalent. As recently as five years ago, the situation in the participants' school boards was quite different, and there were few women principals at the high school level. All of the participants believe that the increase in the number of women has caused more equitable treatment of women among high school principals. Kathleen, Anne, Lynn and Louise said that although they relate well to all of the

principals in their school board, they feel closest to other female principals. Louise says, “I would have more of an affinity with the female principals, although I do mix well with all of them”. Similarly, Kathleen says, “I would say that the girls [female high school principals] would probably go to each other first. But there’s a couple of fellas that will go directly to the girls”. Lynn says that the women high school principals communicate with one another in ways that differ from how the male principals communicate with one another. She says, “at high school we [female principals] kind of made the decision that you know ‘I can have a nice time with the three of you somewhere else, you know it doesn’t have to be the golf course’”. When I asked Anne about her relationship with other high school principals, she said that the group was generally very supportive. However, she specifically mentioned her relationship with two other female principals in illustrating a point, perhaps indicating that she feels closer to the women than to the men.

Their Relationships With School Board Administrators

The participants say that they have good relationships with their school board administrators. Anne describes the relationship with her assistant superintendents as being very close. She considers her assistant superintendents to be mentors, and she says that she can depend on them for advice. The principals in her school board participate in committees that set the direction for the entire school board. She attributes the close relationship between the principals and the administrators to her school board’s culture: “I also think within our board culture there’s a close rapport between the school board administrators and principals and it may be because we meet collectively”. Louise also says that she has a good relationship with her assistant superintended; he gives her positive feedback and is supportive of her. She says that it is a

comfortable relationship, though not a social one. Kathleen has a good working relationship with her assistant superintendent, but says that “this board has an old boys’ club”. However, she does not believe that her assistant superintendent is part of the old boys’ club:

He exercises power, clearly, and it’s my way or the highway but he does that with everybody, not just females; if anything he’s softer on females, gentler with females and he tends to favour females.

Lynn has worked with three assistant superintendents over the past two years. Two of them were men whom she knew very well and with whom she had a good relationship. The third one was a woman who occupied a position that had been, until then, occupied only by men:

I [was] kind of fearful because I didn’t know her well; sometimes when people are put in a new position of power, that they have to prove it, you know. And because she’s a female and there aren’t many female school board administrators, if she was going to have to prove...

She discovered that this assistant superintendent was very good, and she developed an excellent relationship with her. Diane’s assistant superintendent is also a woman, with whom she has an excellent working relationship. “Our assistant superintendent is wonderful”, she explained. “I think she is one of the best in terms of her ability to listen and in establishing the parameters for people, telling you what the limits are of our decision making”.

Diane is frustrated with the school board because it imposes many demands and restrictions on principals. The school board tells them that they are valued, yet strips them of their autonomy and power. “I guess there’s a frustration in terms of that centralizing, where they

won't let go of certain things", she mused. For example, Diane and her school community wanted to change the report cards. Despite unanimity, the school board refused to accept the change, saying: "All the other schools are doing it; you'll have to follow suit". For ten years, the school board has adopted site-based management, which affords principals more site-based control, however Diane says, "we are no more site-base managed now than we are on a space capsule".

I asked the participants if they believed that gender was an issue in their relationships with school board administrators. The answer was a resounding "yes". Louise bemoaned the lack of an informal network with her senior administrators.

A male principal would have a more informal network with senior administration. An informal network of male administrators, which include the senior school board administrators; that group that would golf together, go away on weekends together, things like that. And so I sometimes wonder if my school might be at a bit of a disadvantage in that maybe I don't have that informal network of advocating for my community in that way.

Lynn talked at length about the special network that exists in her school board among the senior male administrators. They play golf together and invite the male high school principals to join them. Lynn explains that women also play golf but for different reasons:

Like you have to play golf to be kind of with the higher-ups. Now I play golf but I do it for myself. Not to be able to play with top level school board administrators.

The female principals in her board are either excluded from this golf network, or have opted not to communicate in this way. The women socialize among themselves in other activities. Unfortunately, there are no women at the senior levels of the school board administration, and the women high school principals therefore do not communicate with those who wield the most power.

Kathleen was also candid about what she perceived to be gender issues at the school board level. She says that some deny that there is an old boys' club. However, in her opinion, its existence is an important issue:

But the current board that I work in is the one that has the strongest feelings about the old boys club and there's definitely an old boys' network. It's obvious that you're either in the group or not.

Further, Kathleen believes that powerful women have been blocked from ascending to higher levels of school board administration. She believes that one of her colleagues did not get a position as a school board administrator because she is a woman who is very knowledgeable and very powerful. Kathleen believes that they hired a less powerful woman for political reasons. She says, however, that some of the school board administrators are very fair to both males and females, and that gender is not an issue for everyone in powerful positions.

Kathleen believes that the old boys' network at her school board causes many women who are currently principals to work harder than their male counterparts. As a result, women are now frequently asked to participate in high-profile and time-consuming committees. Kathleen believes that she is different than other women principals in her school board because she was an outsider with a reputation. Therefore, she did not have to work as hard to prove herself.

Kathleen also believes that higher expectations are placed on the women in her school board: because it is a parochial school board: “We’re a religiously-based system and sometimes the women are expected to be a little bit more closely aligned with the religion and the religious values”. Women are also seen as “being the workers” and tend to be “non-confrontational”. But Kathleen does not see herself in this way:

I don’t always run into some of the same problems that some women do. I don’t tend to mediate things, I’m a little bit more assertive and upfront with things. Sometimes too much.

Sometimes I can be too frank and I get myself into trouble.

The other participants also said that they worked harder as female principals than their male counterparts.

Relationships: The Rewards of Being a Principal

All of the women said that their position as principal of a high school was very rewarding. Almost all of them said that it was also very demanding and that the rewards come at a high price. Diane says that “this job can cost you your soul”. The participants gave different examples of what they find to be rewarding in their work, but one common thread emerges: relationships. The participants feel rewarded by what they have done to help others, and by what they have done to bring people together. Their sense of reward is rooted in the relationships that they have cultivated.

Most of the participants say that they feel rewarded as mentors and role models. Louise says that being a female principal allows her to be a role model to women teachers and students. Likewise, Kathleen said that mentoring an aspiring principal was a rewarding aspect of her work:

I mentored a principal designate. I was very proud of the work we did together because she was very much a part of the success we had in that school. And it's because we worked together. And she's now principal of a school and very successful so yeah, I was very proud of that.

The participants also find it rewarding to be supportive of their staff. For example, when Louise first became a principal, there was a teachers' strike. At the time, the administrators were in the same union, and therefore, she too was on strike. Louise is proud of how she handled a difficult situation; she is proud that she was able to maintain staff cohesion despite that some individuals did not join the strike. She is particularly proud of the way in which she supported her teachers. She effectively communicated with parents and gained an understanding of why the teachers were on strike.

Two participants said that teamwork was particularly rewarding to them. Anne discussed a situation when teachers on her staff tried to solve the difficult problem of cutting three department head positions. She was proud to lead a group that worked so collaboratively and that demonstrated such great respect for one another. Similarly, Diane discussed an occasion when her staff solved the problem of cutting the preparation time of department heads. Diane says that "it was the most amazing thing to sit there and think we've gone from a school that was totally directed from top down to where they're looking at the organizational structure of how things are going to operate". Diane also discusses bringing together a group of administrators, teachers, students and parents to establish the overall graduation outcomes of the school. She was proud of this initiative because people worked together on a positive project for the school.

She was also proud that relationships grew from this endeavour. Additionally, Diane stated that she felt rewarded by her efforts to establish a mediation program, which as she says “has got to be one of the highlights because what it did was empowered staff and students”.

The participants discussed their relationships with students as being especially fulfilling. Louise feels privileged to be a high school principal, a position that is intrinsically rewarding: “I’m glad I’m involved in the education field in a high school; it’s vibrant and fun and (hah) so there’s lots of rewards in this position”. Louise’s laughter signalled a fond memory of good times. Lynn discussed a relationship where she helped a troubled young female student. After months of conflict, Lynn finally communicated with this girl, who then confided in her. At graduation, the girl expressed her gratitude when she:

came running across the stage and threw her arms around me. In front of all her peers, I mean I was just so choked up. She had come around so that we understood each other. I could see the goodness in her and I thought oh wow. So here she was in front of all her peers; she was showing a sign of affection for the principal. So that, that was pretty neat; I’ll always remember that.

Kathleen discussed many examples where she fostered growth and leadership with her students. She is proud of the leadership programs and of the extra-curricular activities that she has organized for her students and their families. She finds it very rewarding to help students in ways that extend beyond the classroom:

I was able to work with some of the students and connect with community groups. We had some very high needs children. And I

was able to coordinate the efforts of the services that are available in the community...The focus on the community that I've had throughout my career has been something that I'm very proud of... I've been noted for the work I've done with tying in the community so that's something I'm pretty proud of. 'Cause that's something I think schools need to do.

Kathleen says that she went into administration because she felt that the extracurricular work was more rewarding to her than teaching.

Isolation Despite their Relationships

The participants expressed contradictory feelings of relationships and isolation: despite that principals have many relationships, there is an ironic possibility that they may also feel isolated. This might be attributed to the *nature* of many of these relationships: most of them were based on the principals' sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. Many of the relationships that I observed were based on care-giving by the principal. One staff member at Louise's school explained to me that Louise enacts a very "pastoral" role vis-à-vis her staff. While I was job shadowing her, Louise met with the school's pastor, and together they arranged visits for a staff member who was in hospital. Louise also suggested that she and other staff members help a teacher who was experiencing a marriage break-up by preparing meals for her. Kathleen often discussed students' personal difficulties with parental separation, illness or death. Lynn also spoke of her students' troubles and how she and others had helped them and their families in times of need. She discussed the situation of one girl who was living on her own and experiencing financial hardship. She says that "we got some gift certificates for food vouchers

and went over, and brought her food and, and gave her some money and she was in a little bit of debt and kind of helped her through that". These examples demonstrate that these principals care for the people in their schools, and evince their sense of responsibility which extends beyond the school and into people's lives. It seemed to me that the participants' relationships with the people in their schools were more about giving than receiving.

Also, the hierarchical structure of schools creates a sense of isolation for the principal. Lynn says "it was scary coming here as the principal, like the one, the principal... I thought 'ah you're going to be alone'". Louise alludes to feeling isolated when she compares the principal's role to that of the captain of a ship. Anne attributes the principal's sense of isolation to what she calls the "triangle", the hierarchical nature of a school. Kathleen cautions women who aspire to becoming principal about the sense of isolation that arises from making an unpopular decision: "Be prepared for people not supporting you. No one is going to be happy with everything that you do; and sometimes that's hard to take". She also talks about the hierarchy in schools, which she calls the "pecking order", and refers to the principal as the "boss of a school". She adds that one cannot deny the reality of the hierarchy, and although she tries to include many voices in her decision-making, in the end, she knows that it is her responsibility to make decisions. This role isolates her from the rest of the school.

Conclusion

All of the participants said that being a principal means cultivating relationships. They are proud of their ability to develop and maintain many relationships. They value these relationships despite that they can occasionally be difficult. However, their relationships also create isolation because the position of principal is a position of responsibility.

Responsibilities are an intrinsic aspect of the job of principal. In fact the responsibilities of the principal emerged as the second key theme within this study. The next chapter focuses on this important issue.

Chapter Six

The Principal's Multitude of Responsibilities

The last chapter illuminated the importance of relationships to the five women principals involved in this study. This chapter will discuss an equally important aspect of being a principal, namely, responsibilities. The relationships represent the more positive aspect of being a principal, but the responsibilities represent the weightier aspects of the role. It is the responsibilities of being a principal that make it a difficult and complex role. They can be burdensome, conflicting, and constraining for a principal.

In this chapter, I will outline the many responsibilities that the participants identified as being central to their role as principal, and their frustration with being powerless to carry them out. I will also discuss the responsibilities that compete for a principal's limited time. Finally, I will examine the principal's leadership, power, and authority in relation to the research question, and discuss how the participants reacted to those terms.

The Principal's Primary Responsibilities

Louise said:

It's a little overwhelming sometimes when you become a principal and you realize that as a principal you probably have the greatest impact on a school of anybody and you really feel the difference that your presence makes.

Louise's statement illustrates the sense of responsibility that occasionally overwhelms all of the participants. As Lynn says, "it was scary coming here as the principal, like the one, the principal".

Diane allowed me to peruse her formal evaluation. This document lists the criteria that the school board uses to evaluate the performance of its principals, and illustrates what the school board sees as a principal's key responsibilities. The criteria used to evaluate the principal include general school organization, management and administration, supervision and management of the institution, school climate and atmosphere, leadership, advocacy for students, staff supervision and evaluation, communication, planning, and decision-making.

Decision-Making Responsibilities

As principal, the participants say that decision-making is a heavy responsibility. All of them expressed their preference to include others when making decisions. But, in the end, each participant acknowledged that she was ultimately accountable for any decisions.

The participants described their leadership approach as being collaborative. Diane says:

So leadership approaches: collaborative, very collaborative. If I can do it in a collaborative way, if I don't have to put my foot down and say this is the way things are going to be; I prefer to have people understand why we are going down a certain road.

Diane then says that once an organization has adopted collaborative leadership practices, it is difficult to change because "people have become so used to having input they are upset when they don't suddenly get the input". All of the participants strive to include as many voices as possible when making a decision: they consult with as many individuals and groups as possible, and make their decisions based on what they hear. This is different than a democratic decision-making process, which is how some of the participants inaccurately labelled their decision-making approach. As Lynn says, "I think a leader is taking everything out of the room of all the

people that are there and all they have to offer and then making decisions that I have to make on my own". The participants try to include their staff in the decision-making process, but if they cannot come to an agreement, they try to gain the staff's understanding and support.

Anne believes that leadership involves:

Going to the staff and looking at the talents and bringing people together on a particular initiative and then it's a "we" that becomes the stronger voice and, I guess, you're trying to really empower your teachers into their self direction, to make that change.

Anne labels her leadership approach as "shared decision-making". However, her approach is more consultative in nature because she tries to achieve consensus, which does not truly constitute shared decision-making. In the end, what emerged from all of the discussions about decision-making was a sense that each of the participants seeks the approval and support of her staff, but that she is ultimately responsible for making decisions.

Responsibility for Providing Safety

While job-shadowing Louise, I discovered that one of the principal's main responsibilities is to ensure safety at the school. Louise participates in a regional committee that evaluates how school boards are to implement the *Safe Schools Act 2000*. This Act defines the principal as being the provider of safety for the schools, and assigns them the responsibility to maintain, in accordance with the requirements of relevant legislation and board policies, a safe, orderly learning and working environment for students, staff, and others lawfully on school property. The principal also acts *in loco parentis* to the students of the school, implements safe schools and violence prevention policies and procedures, and communicates these policies and

procedures to staff, students, parents and school communities. (This information originates from a document prepared by the regional safe schools committee and outlines the protocol to accompany any safe schools policies. This document accords with the provincial guidelines dated March, 2001).

During the ten days that I job-shadowed the participants, I witnessed many incidents of violence. I also participated in discussions about violence. For example, when I was job-shadowing Diane, somebody found a note with a hit-list in the school. The vice-principals doubted that it was a serious threat, but they were required to proceed as though it were to communicate that this kind of threat was to be handled severely. While I was job shadowing Lynn, a violent incident occurred in which a boy was badly beaten by another boy who had also uttered threats to kill students. The staff treated the threats seriously, especially because the boy was thought to be emotionally disturbed.

Kathleen was worried about other safety issues in her school. She was concerned about the school parking lot because many cars drive through it during the lunch hour, which is dangerous because that is where hundreds of students spend their lunch hour. Kathleen and her vice-principals spend most of their lunch hours monitoring the parking lot to prevent cars from speeding. Kathleen was also concerned about the girls in her school who were being picked up in cars by their young adult boyfriends during the lunch hour. Kathleen ensures that they know that she is watching them.

Some of the participants mentioned that special concerns exist for women principals regarding violence. Louise is concerned that being a woman puts her at a disadvantage when she must confront an intruder in the school. She worries that she is not physically intimidating. She

is careful never to go out alone when there is an intruder in the school. She believes that everyone must be careful when dealing with an intruder, and that they must think before acting. One year, three out of four administrators in Louise's school were women. Some of the male teachers were concerned about the lack of a physical presence in the administration, and they offered their support to the male vice-principal. They believed that the administrators should be physically imposing to provide safety and security in the school.

Kathleen discussed two incidents concerning violence and her gender. The first one occurred when she was a young teacher, and a teenaged boy intimidated her by cornering her in a stairwell and threatened her. Kathleen responded:

I straightened my back and said 'I think you better reconsider what you've just talked about'. Stared him right in the eye. And that was the old, physical presence kind of thing. And he backed off.

The second one occurred when she was a vice-principal in a different high school. A fight had broken out in the schoolyard and Kathleen attended to the problem, as she had many times before. This time, however, she was instructed by her new male principal not to intervene. Kathleen was shocked when he said "'You can't go after that, you'll get hurt, you're a female'. Well that was the first time that I had ever heard that, and I had been vice-principal then for many years".

Diane intervened in an altercation between two male students. She diffused the situation after two male teachers had separated the students:

'Could you just step back ... and just let go of him'. And they [male teachers] were really unwilling to do that because I think

they felt that he was going to go crazy. I grabbed the boy's hands and I just held them, and I said 'if the two teachers let go of you right now do you think you can settle down and just, just talk to me. I'm going to ask everybody else to leave right now and just talk to me'. We were sitting under the stairwell. (Ha ha ha) in a corner of the school. .. And as I held his hand, you could feel that the tension just ebbed out of that body. And I'm not so sure a man could have done that.

Diane's nervous laughter was triggered by the memory of this stressful situation. She believes that this confrontation proves that women occasionally have an advantage when diffusing violent situations. Women do have an advantage in that they are culturally sanctioned to be non-confrontational, emotional, and nurturing. In this case these stereotypical feminine characteristics allowed Diane to deal with the situation in a way that many men could not have because of the cultural expectations for them to be strong, assertive, even aggressive. She believes that this boy would not have allowed a man to calm him in the same manner.

Responsibility for the School as a Whole

The participants are attached to their schools, and often refer to them as "my school". They see themselves as being responsible for the entire school. They also see themselves as being advocates for the school because they are the ones who are responsible for the school as an organization, whereas others within the school are advocates for specific entities. The participants advocate on behalf of their schools with the school board, with the teachers' and administrators' associations, with sports associations, with community groups, and with the

media.

Four of the women use metaphors to communicate that sense of responsibility for the school as a whole. For example, as Lynn says:

You know, I guess the principal's role is one of authority, but it's not authority equal to power, it's authority equal to, you know, about the whole school. While other people know about their class, or a department head might know about their department, a student would know about their studies, a vice-principal might know a part of things. But I'm the one that knows, supposedly knows, everything about the school so when I make a decision I have the big picture in mind.

Lynn expresses here a sentiment that is held by all of the participants, namely, that the most important responsibility of a leader is to set the course for the school. For example, Diane believes that her role is "to have some idea of where the troop should be heading and then try to get the troop lined up in the same direction". This is an interesting metaphor for leadership in that it is militaristic, a characteristic usually associated with the masculine. It is interesting that in order to convey her leadership, Diane used a masculine comparison. Louise echoes this thought when she says that "it's a bit like steering the ship. And the captain of the ship". Louise's metaphor is also a military one, however she then qualifies her leadership in more feminine terms when she adds that she sees herself more "like the designer, I guess - of where things are going...". Here she illustrates that a leader should bring together all of the elements of a school. Anne reflects this trend when she defines leadership as being "more fluid, it is more of

an orchestration". Anne gives a more feminine metaphor for her leadership. This did not surprise me because of all the participants, Anne, was the one who was most interested in discussing the meaning of "feminine" leadership.

Responsibility for the Welfare of Individuals Within the School

In discussing the principals' relationships, I noted that the participants expressed a significant sense of responsibility for the people in their schools. They demonstrate responsibility for the careers of their administrators and teachers by mentoring them and by giving them leadership opportunities. All of the participants mentor and advise their vice-principals; they encourage the vice-principals to grow as leaders. As Louise says:

I think a VP is a principal-in-training, I don't see anybody who would want to be a VP as a final career path, although some do choose that. But to me, you know, you're preparing to be a principal.

Kathleen said that she helps her vice-principals to develop their leadership abilities by allowing them to participate in the decision-making process, and by allowing them to take on some of the responsibilities of the principal. She says that this is how she gained the confidence to become a principal herself. She gained her skills and confidence when a principal who was to retire allowed her to assume his responsibilities. Kathleen now gives her vice-principals the same opportunities.

One of the participants' biggest responsibilities is to counsel and mentor teachers who aspire to be administrators. While I was job shadowing Lynn, I participated in a session where she advised one of her department heads to take a position at another school because it would

give him the experience necessary to become vice-principal. Anne said that she takes her time to discuss career issues with her teachers; she does not like to rush these conversations because they are important to them and to her. While I was job shadowing Diane, a teacher asked how to apply for an administrative position, and Diane offered to help him prepare for the interview. I also observed Louise in conversation with a department head who was debating whether to remain as a department head because of the increasing demands placed on him. Louise also encourages teachers to seek leadership opportunities because, in her opinion, teachers who aspire to be leaders are an asset to her school. While I was present, one teacher informed Louise of his plan to take the "Principal's Course". She thought this to be a wonderful idea, and informed me that teachers who take this course are required to do special tasks which enhance the school. She believes that one advantage to being a female principal is that she is a role model for other women and can encourage them to become leaders. "There have been a number of women on staff that I've encouraged to look into administration as well and had lots of good talks about it".

The participants also encourage teachers to improve their teaching skills and help teachers cope with issues such as classroom management and discipline. While I was at Diane's school, I witnessed her discussing teaching practices. She encourages positive practices and suggested ways of improving weaknesses. The women also counseled and supported teachers who were involved in extra-curricular programs such as intra-mural sports, field trips, and education week displays.

I witnessed instances when the participants demonstrated responsibility and concern for their teachers' personal lives. As discussed, Louise took a pastoral role with her staff, helping them cope with difficult situations. Diane shared stories regarding the personal difficulties of her

staff members, and Lynn was coping with two of her teachers who were experiencing marital difficulties.

The participants say that they feel responsible for the welfare and education of their students. They ensure that the students are exposed to good teaching practices. They also ensure that the students are provided with extra-curricular activities. The participants try to do what is best for the students. Diane recalls some good advice that was given to her: “Remember when the chips are down and you have to make a decision as an administrator, ask yourself whether it’s good for the kids. And once you’ve answered that question you just take all the other flack and put it into perspective”. Lynn entered into administration because she could reach more students as an administrator than as a teacher:

Why am I a teacher? Well I want to teach students and, and instill the knowledge to them and I think I’m good at it and I have this passion for that but the passion is bigger than that; it’s for the love of children, and the love of people and as vice-principal I have more say in what I can do for these students than a teacher in a classroom.

The participants believe that it is their responsibility to foster leadership in students. For example, students may participate in the SAC or the student council, or they may act as peer helpers, or they may take leadership credit courses. Kathleen proudly discussed the various student leadership organizations that she has instituted. She also tries to include the students in school decisions:

I like to empower them [students]. I like to give them authority

and give them the right to do certain things. I set the parameters and tell them ‘Okay, within those parameters, you and your teacher mentor/facilitator can work things out, just let me know what your decision is’.

Their sense of responsibility extends into the students’ personal lives. The women are concerned about students who are experiencing self-destructive behaviours, family problems, or financial difficulties.

Powerlessness and Frustration

The participants were frustrated with having to carry out their responsibilities while being constrained by school board regulations and policies. They have had to implement financial cut-backs which have decreased the number of department heads, and which have decreased the preparation time of department heads and teachers. It was their responsibility to enforce these reductions despite having no input into the decisions. I was present to observe the participants undertake their staffing and teaching assignments for the upcoming years, and I observed their frustration with being constrained, and with projecting staff requirements without vital information.

Many of the participants are also frustrated with implementing their school boards’ “action plans”. Kathleen was particularly displeased with her school board. She believes that the school board has become very centralized and controlling. Kathleen and Lynn believe that centralization makes it easier for school board administrators to maintain control. They believe that the school boards impose regulations to reduce the principals’ autonomy. They say that the “actions plans” do not consider the individual needs of schools, and are inconsistent. However,

Anne disagrees with her colleagues, and says that she is included in many of the school board's decisions. All of the participants complained about the number of school board meetings that they must attend, yet most of them say that the school board is too centralized.

Diane, who works in a different school board, is equally frustrated:

It's a very frustrating situation that we [principals] face because on the one hand we've been told by the Ministry, by our own board, by our own director and by our superintendents what valuable people we are and how our decisions count, how our opinions are valued and what great work we do; and yet the amount of actual authority to work on our own within our school building has decreased over the years.

Diane is frustrated by the lack of power to carry out responsibilities within the school. She believes that the authority of principals is eroding because, "in the past, the principal simply had more power, more authority to do things". For example, Diane discussed a recent problem with air conditioners for the computer laboratories in her school. She had the funds and the opportunity to purchase air conditioners at an excellent price, but she was not permitted to do so because the school board must approve such purchases. This was very frustrating for her because school board administrators are very slow to respond to these requests. "I know for a fact that five years ago I could probably have done this and nobody would have blinked"... The amount of actual authority to work on our own within our school building has decreased over the years". She is frustrated because she is the one who is responsible for the smooth operation of the school, yet she does not believe that she has the autonomy to carry out that responsibility.

Balancing the Competing Responsibilities

The participants find it difficult to manage their large number of responsibilities. These responsibilities compete for their attention. The school's internal responsibilities compete for attention with the external ones, and between themselves. The participants' personal responsibilities compete with their professional ones.

Balancing the Competing Responsibilities Within the Schools

The participants believe that within the school they are the only ones who represent the interests of the school as a whole, whereas others within the school represent more limited perspectives. Lynn explains that, "when I make a decision I have the big picture in mind while other people know about their class, their department, their studies, or a part of things". This unique overall responsibility means that they must balance the interests of all of the groups within the school when they make a decision.

The participants must also balance limited resources. For example, they were all faced with difficult decisions because of financial cutbacks at their schools. It was difficult for them to cut department head positions, teaching positions, courses and programs. They try to make the reductions as equitably as possible, and to affect the school in the least detrimental way. However, they must maintain a balance between competing demands. The aphorism "Robbing Peter to pay Paul" was often repeated when the participants wrestled with cuts. Last year, the participants had to eliminate the only spare period that their department heads used to perform administrative work. This year, the participants had to cut three department heads, despite that the schools' populations remained steady or increased.

This year, the participants coped with the government's decision to cut teachers'

preparation time. In protest, the teachers ceased to participate in extra-curricular activities. The participants felt torn between their desire to support their teachers and their sense of responsibility for the well-being of their students.

Balancing the Internal Responsibilities With the External Responsibilities

The participants are responsible for the smooth operation of their schools. They believe that their presence on-site is important to this end. As Anne says, "I'm dealing with issues that typically I shouldn't, or I have not in the past dealt with. And I know it's out of a lack of that regular dependable presence within the school". All of the participants were frustrated at being away from the school to attend to external demands. Though they appreciate being involved in the decision-making process at the school board level, they resent having to be away from their schools. They must therefore balance both of these important responsibilities. Diane believes that her frequent absences are affecting her school negatively because, "not having enough time for the kids 'cause you're constantly out of the building at meetings... I think we're missing the boat, cause I think once there's a disconnect between the principal and the kids it's not as good a school as it could be". All of the participants shared this sentiment.

Balancing Professional and Personal Responsibilities

All of the women stated that the time demands placed on them were a source of difficulty. They try to maintain a sense of balance between work, family, and personal needs. They believe that family responsibilities are virtually incompatible with being a high school principal. None of the women in this study have young families. Two of the participants do not have any children, two of them have adult children, and one has a teenaged daughter. Many of the participants believe that they have gained wisdom with age; they now realize how important it is

to maintain balance in their lives. Diane and Kathleen both say that they try to work less and to spend more time on themselves. This lesson was learned later in life for both of them. When Diane was a vice-principal, she took a leave of absence to travel for one year. She says that it was the best thing that she could have done, and that it gave her a new perspective on life and on her career:

I still devote the hours to the job but not as willingly as I have in the past. I do it grudgingly because I know there's something else out there, and I don't want to miss it, and I see colleagues and friends who have already died; they're my age or younger. And I don't want to go down that road.

Anne admits that maintaining a sense of balance has been, and continues to be, a challenge:

The biggest challenge for me, and it remains something I work with, is striving for the balance from within. The balance of the principal, the role of the mother and then meeting your individual needs.

Although maintaining this balance is a struggle, Anne says that it is an important goal. She believes that a person who leads a balanced life will be a better leader. A balanced leader will make better decisions, and will have greater patience, understanding, and empathy. Anne speaks fondly of a special mentor, an aunt who was also a principal, and whom she admired greatly for her ability to maintain balance between work, family, and self.

Lynn and Louise also discussed the importance of balance. They try to relax when they

are away from work and to involve themselves in activities that help them forget about work. All of the participants believe that there is more to life than work, and all try to prevent their professional life from dominating them.

The Connection Between Responsibilities and Leadership, Power, and Authority

My research question asked me to explore leadership, power and authority. Specifically, I wanted to examine how the participants defined and enacted leadership, power, and authority. I discovered that a connection exists between leadership and responsibility, between power and responsibility, and between authority and responsibility. The participants comfortably discussed leadership, but they had more difficulty using the terms “power” and “authority”. They did not have clear definitions of “power” and “authority”, and expressed discomfort in discussing how the terms related to them as principals.

The Connection Between Leadership and Responsibilities

All of the women see themselves as leaders, and they all see the position of principal as a position of leadership. As discussed, they see their leadership in terms of responsibilities. The most important responsibility of a leader is to set the course of the school. For example, Diane believes that her role as a leader is “to have some idea of where the troop should be heading and then try to get the troop lined up in the same direction”. Louise echoes this sentiment when she says, “it’s a bit like steering the ship. And the captain of the ship”.

As leader, a principal must be able to “bring it all together, in a weave; weave it together perhaps a little more”. Therefore, the principal must have a vision of, and responsibility for, the entire school. Anne’s definition of leadership also illustrates a sense of responsibility for “the

whole” or for the “big picture”. She says that her definition of leadership has evolved since she first became a principal. She says that she used to see leadership as a structured series of tasks. Now she sees it as “more fluid, it is more of an orchestration”. It is less about managing details than about establishing a framework for the bigger picture.

The Connection Between Power and Responsibilities

Diane says that “power is an illusion”. Similarly, Anne says, “power is illusory”. The participants were ambivalent about defining and discussing power. Power has a negative connotation for all of them. Anne best expressed this discomfort:

When I see power and leader, it really creates an obstacle for me.
I just see them as extremely contradictory...I have a hard time with
the issue of power. It can be very negative. It can be very
destructive. Power means I have control of choices and decisions
over others. So for me it has an extremely negative connotation.

Two different definitions of power emerged: a negative type of power, and a positive type of power. Negative power is founded on one’s position whereas positive power is earned through respect. The participants associate negative power with their mundane responsibilities because that is the power which is accorded to the principal by title, and that power allows the principal to carry out her responsibilities. Negative power is used to make decisions, to maintain order and safety, to promote discipline among teachers and students. All of the participants were uncomfortable with the power that is attached to their position. Anne believes that this type of power interferes with her relationships with people. She says that she would rather that people treat her as one of them, and not as an outsider who wields power over them. Lynn is also

uncomfortable with this “titular power” and prefers the power that is “earned through respect”.

The women associate negative power with insecurity, immaturity, and lack of confidence. Anne says that “the more you have inner confidence... certainly that would diminish the need for power”. Kathleen believes that immaturity leads to power abuses “because you’re young, you lack maturity to be able to focus it [power] properly”. The participants all stated that power is negative when it is abused or when it is used to control others. Louise describes this kind of power as “almost like you’re on the outside, demanding something; exerting a force... I think that it can be really abused and so it’s not something that I tend to use”.

However, power is positive if it originates from positive sources, such as respect or relationships. The women see power in a positive light when it can be shared. They value this type of power, and see it as being essential to effective leadership. Positive power allows them to effectively carry out their more important responsibilities as school leader.

The participants do not value titular power, yet they give examples where its use proves that it is necessary to carry out their responsibilities. Three of the participants used examples of unpleasant situations to illustrate the need for titular power. Kathleen discussed how she used this kind of power when dealing with teachers:

On two occasions in my entire career I’ve fired two teachers...in a sense that’s power but it’s also *responsibility* [italics added] when you think about the fact that you’ve got a person’s career ... to me that’s kind of power in the sense that I had to make those kinds of decisions, they’re not easy to make.

Lynn cites an incident with a male teacher whom she suspected of time theft. He

participated in a golf tournament, but said that he was undergoing medical tests. He had a reputation of leaving from work to play golf, and she knew that his medical days coincided with a tournament being held at his golf club. She confronted him with her suspicions because she needed to exercise her responsibility to ensure his proper conduct.

Louise discusses her use of negative power to “get the attention” of students. She is responsible to ensure that school activities such as assemblies run smoothly, and she uses the power of her position to that end: “I don’t know if it’s the power of my position but for the most part, you know, I can get their attention better than anybody else can”. She says that this is the kind of power that obviously comes with the position because she is “not in any kind of relationship with every single kid in the school. There are fifteen hundred of them; they don’t all know me so obviously it comes a bit with the position”.

Positive power is what allows the women to influence teachers and students to participate in school activities, including leadership and decision-making. They use positive power to empower others, giving them some of the responsibilities of running the school and of making decisions. It is important to the participants that those who will live with the consequences of a decision take part in making that decision. Louise says that “there’s power in bringing a lot of people into what you’re doing. So in that sense power can be a positive thing”. The notion of empowerment creeps in here, and Louise defines it as “divesting yourself of that power or authority and sharing it with others”. Louise adds that empowerment means that “you have to trust, and you have to live with what other people come up with”. Kathleen echoes the idea that sharing power means including others and being prepared to “stand behind what they’ll do”. Kathleen emphasized that power is best used when it is shared with others, and when a leader is

able to empower others and include them in making decisions, because everyone benefits. For the leader and for those who are empowered, power means responsibility. As Kathleen says:

it [power] also comes whenever you accept responsibility for anything... the reverse is also true; if you exercise power you accept the fact that a certain amount of responsibility goes with it.

Participants cited their collaborative approach as examples of using positive power.

Diane discussed a situation where a group of teachers at her school imagined a creative solution to the difficult problem of eliminating the period allotted to department heads while accommodating fundamental changes to the grade 10 curriculum. Diane explained that the teachers' solution was innovative because it allowed the school "to beat the system by using it for what we needed". She adds that "it was the most amazing thing to sit there and think we've gone from a school that was totally directed from top down to where they're looking at the organizational structure". For Diane, that her teachers felt safe to suggest innovative solutions was a credit to her leadership style. She explains that "I didn't make it happen but I guess I laid the groundwork for it to happen". By sharing her power, the teachers took responsibility to find a solution for a school-wide problem.

The Connection Between Authority and Responsibilities

The participants say that authority, like power, can be negative or positive. Negative authority comes from the position, and positive authority comes from respect, knowledge, and relationships. The participants did not express the same ambivalence and discomfort when discussing authority as they did when discussing power.

Authority that originates from the position or the title of principal is formally granted by

statutes and by regulations. It allows principals to carry out their responsibilities, to ensure safety and security in the school, and to make daily and mundane decisions that help the school to operate smoothly. This is a traditional form of authority. As Kathleen says:

You have authority by tradition, there's a tradition that exists in any organization that the boss has authority. It doesn't matter, it's the pecking order and the pecking order exists.

Many of the participants spoke of titular authority as being necessary to carry out their responsibilities. Louise says that this kind of authority helps her to maintain order in the school:

I guess it helps because a school needs a lot of order and teachers need all the support they can get with that. I use that [authority] in a way that would support good teaching, good learning.

Louise worries that titular authority can intimidate and frighten people who have to deal with her as principal, and she tries to make their experience as comfortable as possible. As she explains:

As the authority figure you've got to be careful that the victim doesn't feel that they're the ones being chastised. Just being in the principal's office can be a punishment onto itself.

Louise says that this kind of authority, though necessary, is not something that she wants. She prefers to earn respect. To her, respect for herself is more than respect for her title. Similarly, Diane speaks of titular authority as being necessary. She says that "it enables you to decide things on a day-to-day basis that need to be decided pretty quickly...That's your authority. What's it worth? Not a hell of a lot".

Positive authority also helps the participants to carry out their responsibilities. This type

of authority is founded on respect, on relationships or on knowledge. Two of the participants, Anne and Lynn, said that their authority is knowledge-based. Anne says that “I think I’ve always respected authority as being very knowledge based, having credibility”. She discussed an action research conducted in her school that measured the impact of absenteeism on academic success as an example of how she used knowledge-based authority to carry out her responsibilities as principal.

Now we’re using it [the research findings] with credibility with parents, with students, and with staff. We have some key areas of concern; here’s the data to substantiate that. That to me is authority.

Lynn sees herself as having authority that is based on her knowledge of the whole school. She is the only person who does not have a special interest in the school, and who can see the “big picture”. This allows her to carry out her responsibilities and to make decisions. She says “the principal’s role is one of authority...but it’s not authority like equal to power, it’s authority equal to knowing about the whole school”. She used to believe that authority was a booming voice, but now she says that it is “the voice that knows a lot and knows everything”.

Kathleen enunciated yet another definition of authority. To her, authority, like power, has a connection to responsibility and to sharing that responsibility: “It [authority] is demonstrating confidence in those you work with to allow them to make decisions”. Sharing authority involves an element of risk because it means releasing control. Kathleen’s definition of authority has evolved because she used to believe “the old notion of authority was one of control... I have authority over you and I’m going to tell you what to do... and you didn’t share it with anybody”.

Today Kathleen believes that “authority is an inclusive kind of practice now, much more so than it was before where you include those, the stake-holders and the people who are willing to take risks”. Kathleen was the only participant who said that authority could be shared.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the principalship as a position that has many responsibilities which compete for limited resources, limited time, and limited attention. The participants shoulder many responsibilities, and they feel frustrated and burdened by them. The participants preferred to discuss their relationships as the foundation of their principalship because the relationships are a source of pleasure and satisfaction to them. The responsibilities are as important, but less rewarding to them.

PART THREE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this final part of the report, I present my findings after having considered their significance and implications in relation to the work of other researchers and theorists. In chapters seven and eight, I will situate my findings within the existing body of knowledge in three ways: by supporting some of the existing research, by refuting some of the existing research, and by extending some of the boundaries of the existing knowledge. In chapter nine, I return to the original research question, where I summarize the study's main findings, identify some of the study's significant implications, discuss the study's limitations, and suggest areas for further research.

Chapter Seven

Relationships of the Principal

The literature is replete with discussions about the importance of relationships to women educational leaders. Traditionally, women were expected to be relationship-oriented, as were educators. Leaders have also been expected to concern themselves with the people in their organization. Therefore, I was not surprised to find many references to the female educational leader's focus on relationships. But how do the findings of this study compare to the existing literature on principals and relationships? I will explore three aspects of this question: relationships and leadership, relationships of the principal, and isolation versus connections.

The Principal's Leadership is Founded on Relationships

The participants believe that they have good "people skills" and that their strength as leaders is their ability to communicate with others, to support and encourage them, to connect with others and to foster good relationships. They care about the people in their schools and they are compassionate and kind; there is a nurturing component to their leadership. They attribute this orientation in part to their gender. Gender is socially and culturally constructed, and has a binary distinction between feminine and masculine. The participants have a gender identification, which means that they perform what it means to them be feminine. This gender performance includes being seen as being supportive, encouraging, nurturing, and caring. The women in this study must perform the role of leader in ways that do not seriously conflict with the role of being a good woman. As Gilligan (1982) states, "women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make, and then to maintain, affiliations and relationships" (p. 169). Women are expected to be centred on relationships, but they also expect it of

themselves. Many researchers have found these to be common characteristics of women leaders (Blackmore, 1998; Logan, 1998; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989). Russell (1995) found in her study that what women leaders like about their work is helping bring out people's talents, helping people develop, and making a difference in people's lives. In her longitudinal study of four women principals' experiences with leadership, Fennell (1995) found that the participants' metaphors for leaderships illustrated that power and leadership were relational concepts, and each that participant expressed a sense of nurturance. In her study of twelve female principals, Morris (1999) had similar findings, but gave the following explanation, "the management practices of these women reinforce theories of women's development which emphasise the centrality of relationships, attachment and caring in the work that women do" (p. 354).

According to Myers and Hajnal (1995), "women carry these values they have been socialized to hold - empowering others, listening, responding, caring and nurturing - into their relationships at work" (p. 102). In their study of women principals, Tabin and Coleman (1993) found that the female principal believes that the feminine characteristics that she accentuates in her every day work - understanding, warmth, empathy, nurturing - are a hallmark of women's administrative style. This is similar to what the participants in my study believe about the "feminine" characteristics: they see those qualities as being beneficial to their leadership. Wyn, Acker, and Richards (2000) found that the women in their study "have consciously striven to 'make' themselves senior academics and managers 'differently' from their perceptions of the traditional male academic" (p. 444). It is possible that the women in my study emphasised their focus on relationships as a way of differentiating themselves from what they perceive as the

traditional male principal. Because tension exists for women who must enact a role that has traditionally been seen as a male role, women want to be seen as being capable and competent but also as being different from the male role. That women are now able to enact these “feminine” qualities within the traditional role of principal is a relatively new phenomenon. As Smulyan (2000) writes “the connection of servitude, softness, ethereality, and heart with femininity contributes to a sense of women’s styles as different from men’s, and until now at least, inappropriate when applied to educational leadership” (p. 14).

Schmuck (1995) writes that the call for the empowerment of teachers, site-based management, and decentralization of authority is in line with the positive stereotypes of female leadership, and leads to what some have called the “female advantage” in leadership. Schmuck (1995) adds that it is encouraging to see that women are bringing their feminine heritage to the bureaucracy of schools, that a more democratic way of administering is emerging, and that the administration is being viewed in its original meaning, which is “to minister”. However, she cautions that this may lead to further stereotyping of women because women are expected to meet the call to engage, to increase participation in decisions, to pay attention to the human side of organizations, and to raise the place of individual efficacy over organizational efficiency. Similarly, Strachan (1999) believes that feminism and caring for others in school can be an uneasy alliance. She writes that women’s caring for others (for example, children and dependent adults) can reinforce women’s oppression by patriarchal institutions such as schools. She says that if caring is mainly provided by women and by people of colour, those with power and status (usually men) may come to expect it, and may not themselves develop the capacity to care, which could perpetuate the exploitation of women.

One researcher came to different conclusions. In a study conducted in the Netherlands, it was questioned whether:

women were more involved with others and less task-oriented than men? The answer is no. The stereotype that, in leadership, women are more personally or relation-oriented (consideration) than men was only confirmed for adult education. (Krüger, 1996, p. 453)

To the extent that Krüger's findings are indicative of the situation in the Netherlands, different findings may be attributed to a cultural bias within the thesis.

The notion of community building is related to leadership and to relationships. An important contribution that women principals make to their schools is community building because "building community is an essential part of a woman administrator's style" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 174). Hurty (1995) says that, "leaders who use resources of emotional energy to empower rather than exploit others provide an example of human connectedness and community" (p. 387). The participants of this study saw their schools as communities of people instead of bureaucratic organizations. Their main focus was always on the people in the schools; they see their role as fostering and maintaining a myriad of relationships with individuals and groups.

The women in this study repeatedly described their leadership as being founded on relationships. It is interesting to note that two of the women used military metaphors to describe their leadership. Diane spoke of leading the troops, and Louise spoke of being like the captain of a ship, and of steering the ship. Perhaps these metaphors illustrate that these women continue to associate leadership with masculinity, power, and control. This evinces the tension that women

feel about being seen as being a capable leader (masculine and strong) and being seen as being a good woman (feminine, and relationship-oriented, caring and nurturing).

The Principal's Many Relationships

Other researchers have also found that principals have many relationships within and outside of their schools. They have found that principals' relationships with vice-principals and teachers have been identified as their most important relationships; principals also value their relationships with students, who are their priority. Researchers also have discussed how principals relate to a number of outside groups such as parents, other principals, and school board administrators (Blackmore, 1998; Morris, 1999; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Smulyan, 2000; Strachan; 1999). In her study with three women high school principals, Smulyan (2000) found that "all three principals face the conflicting expectations parents, teachers, and students have of principals" (p. 31). Smulyan (2000) adds that "it [school leadership] emerges in the actions and interactions of the principal as she tries to meet the needs of children, parents, and teachers" (p. 91).

The Principals' Primary Relationships with Vice-Principals and Teachers

The participants in the present study are often required to be away from their schools, and must often trust the running of the schools to their vice-principals. The idea that a vice-principal is there to replace the principal in her absence is very common (Marshall, 1993). Another role for the vice-principals is to serve as a kind of buffer, or filter, for the principal (Marshall, 1993). The participants in my study relayed similar ideas when they discussed how their vice-principals deal with crisis, thus allowing the principal to focus on bigger issues, such as creative planning. Marshall found that the assistant-principals are valued by some principals and merely tolerated

by others. All of the participants in my study expressed appreciation for their vice-principals. They also expressed that they need their vice-principals' support.

The participants in this study view their vice-principals as principals-in-training. Therefore, they try to be mentors and role models to them. They all related attempts to provide the vice-principals with opportunities for personal growth and for greater leadership challenges. In this way, they revealed that they see the role of vice-principal as a stepping stone to the principalship. At the same time, they acknowledged that their own experience as vice-principal was very different from the role of the principal, most notably that as principal they had far less interactions with the students than they did as vice-principal. The view of vice-principal as principal-in-training is a common one (Marshall, 1993; Ortiz, 1982). This view has been challenged by Marshall in her study of the career assistant principal. She found that many vice-principals are content to remain in the position of vice-principal. She concluded that the position of vice-principal was unlike that of principal, and should not be seen as a position of principal-in-training.

The participants in my study demonstrated that one of their priorities was to be supportive of their staff. One researcher found that women enter into administration "to work with teachers in school improvement efforts... the women decided to enter administration more because of collegiality and the intrinsic reward of the job" (Ruhl-Smith, et al., 1999, p. 599). In their study, Nelson Pavan and Andrade Reid (1994) concluded that "all four urban female principals, Black or White, experienced or inexperienced, are actively engaged with both students and teachers over the work structure of the school, teaching and learning" (p. 436).

Researchers have found that female principals see their responsibility towards their teachers as extending beyond instructional support, and include empowerment, moral support, and career mentoring (Acker, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Logan, 1998; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Smulyan, 2000). For example, Acker (1995) found in her study of a woman principal that the principal gave teachers a great deal of moral and practical support, encouraged them to attend relevant courses, prepared them for interviews, made direct efforts to help them secure deputy headships in other schools. She considered the special needs of teachers with small children, and arranged for staff to have a variety of teaching and leadership opportunities. In deploying the staff, she took into account the needs of the teacher, including their family responsibilities. As Acker (1995) states “it might be said that Mrs. Clarke engaged in a process of *teacher development* [italics in original], rather than simply helping teachers with careers in a narrow sense” (p. 64). Similarly, Morris (1999) found that, for the twelve women principals in her study, “a caring relationship with teachers involved dealing with them as total human beings, as men and women with personal lives which were intertwined with their professional responsibilities as teachers” (p. 349).

Some of the participants believe that their efforts to mentor their vice-principals and teachers may be related to their gender; they believe that women are more likely to encourage and to mentor the people with whom they work. Researchers have found that women act as role models and mentors for other women because they appreciate the difficulty that women have in accessing administrative positions, and because they believe that women often need more encouragement to seek such positions (Logan, 1998; Ruhl-Smith, Shen, & Cooley, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989). This was confirmed by Myers and Hajnal (1995) who found that “because

mentors were very significant in the development of each of the participant's careers, each woman was seeking to be a role model for others" (p. 111). *Per contra*, other researcher have found that women administrators are *not* more equitable than men because they conform to the existing organizational norms (Bell, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995).

Nelson Matthews presented some interesting findings about women educational administrators and their views on equity. She categorizes women administrators into four types: two types who encourage other women, and two types who do not. She has labelled the two who do not encourage other women as "isolates" and "individualists". "Isolates" are tokens in their system who enjoy that status. They do not feel that they have personally been discriminated against, and they lack the theory and the language to give them explanatory powers. "Individualists" model themselves after their male colleagues. They worry about offending men and resent women who advocate for gender equity (Nelson-Matthews, 1995).

The other two types of women educational leaders who encourage other women are "activists" and "advocates". "Activists" believe that women are capable administrators, and they are proud of women entering into administration. They appreciate the "radicals" who paved the way, and urge women to help each other and to reexamine the power structure. The final category of women who encourage other women are the "advocates". "Advocates are supportive of other women and clearly believe women bring unique strengths to the schools in which they administer.... These administrators seek to build networks and liaisons with their colleagues" (Nelson Matthews, 1995, p. 264). To the extent that this, or any, categorization is helpful, I believe that the women in my study belong to the "advocates" category because they place a high value on women's strengths as leaders, they encourage and mentor other women

interested in leadership, and they have strong networks with other women principals. I would not consider the women in this study as “activists” because they do not appear to believe that the power structure must be reexamined. I speculate that this is because they believe that women no longer have to deal with discrimination when ascending to the principalship. Another reason why the women in my study did not appear to overtly reexamine the existing power structures may be that they, like the women in Smulyan’s (2000) study, were content with a system that defined them, and which contributed to their success. Another reason may be because, as Kimmel and Crawford (2001) state, “women with any sort of feminist consciousness experience a constant tension between resisting their placement as an outsider and protecting the limited acceptance they may have gained” (p. 758).

The recent removal of principals from the teachers’ association has been a source of concern for the participants. They were concerned that the separation between principals and teachers has negatively affected the teacher-principal relationship, and has made their job more difficult. This separation of teachers from administrators has been written about; for example, Blackmore (1998) suggests that:

This widening gap between administrators’ and teachers’ work and values (and their wages) has been a key aspect of educational restructuring worldwide (Ozga & Walker, 1995; Whitty, 1996), as seen with the demise of the ‘teacher leader’, in places like Sweden (Wernerssom, 1989) and in the assertion of more managerialist and entrepreneurial models of leadership in the UK and elsewhere. (p. 472)

According to Blackmore, one reason for removing administrators from teachers' associations is that principals' roles are becoming akin to management. Blackmore (1998) states that the separation has put a wedge between principals and teachers and has eroded the collegial spirit preferred by women principals. Acker (1995) writes that in Great Britain, "the onslaught of changes produced by the government's 'reforms' have encouraged a model of leadership removed from the symbolism of the 'head teacher' and better described as 'new managerialism'... Women, she (Al-Khalifa) believes, become uneasy about being 'new managers'; it is alien to their concept of self" (p. 66). Jean Helen Young (1993) writes that she has also found other writers who support the belief that the gap between teachers and administrators is detrimental:

The very nature of the top-down hierarchical model is basically incompatible with professionalism (Glazer, 1991). She (Glazer) sees this "deskilling of teachers" as contrary to women's efforts to shape an alternative work culture in schools. Rosenholtz (1989) supports this point of view when she writes that 'A professional culture does not tend toward bureaucratic compliance'. (p. 447)

In the situation described by the participants of this study, it seems likely that the removal of administrators from the teachers' union has increased the hierarchical nature of their relationship, and emphasized the difference between the workers and the managers, thereby decreasing the professionalism of teaching. This goes against women principals' efforts to build communities in schools and to work with teachers.

There are tensions in the relationships between the participants and some of their teachers; these tensions have been caused primarily by changes that the principals have tried to enact. Teachers particularly resisted change by new principals. This is consistent with what Weaver Hart (1995) found in her research, “newcomers must be integrated into existing groups, validated by social processes, and granted legitimacy by subordinates and superiors before they can have significant impacts on the actions of others” (p. 107). In this present study, Lynn exemplified this phenomenon when she discussed a failed project which she introduced too soon in her principalship.

There are also gender-related tensions in the principal-staff relationship. All of the participants had similar experiences; their relationships with most of the male staff are good, and are based on mutual respect. But in every school, there are a few male staff members for whom working for a female principal poses a problem. These experiences confirm what the literature says about female administrators’ relationships with staff, and refutes other findings. It has been well-documented that some men have difficulties in working for women, and that most men prefer to work for male principals (Lee, Smith, & Cioci, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989). More recent research suggests that this attitude is changing, and that men are becoming more accepting of women principals (Gougeon, 1995). The experiences of the participants confirm this new reality.

The relationships of women administrators and female teachers have also changed. There was a time when both women and men teachers preferred working for a male principal; that is no longer true (Gougeon, 1995; Lee, Smith, & Cioci, 1993). Some studies have found that in female-dominated fields, such as teaching, the female administrators were experiencing difficulties (Shakeshaft, 1989). More recent studies support the opposing view, namely, that

women prefer to work for female administrators (Gougeon, 1995; Lee, Smith, & Cioci, 1993; Tabin & Coleman, 1995). The experiences of the participants in this study confirm the more recent findings. In this study, the participants reported that their relationships with female teachers were overwhelmingly positive, and they believe that women prefer working for female principals.

The Principals' Focus is on the Students

For many of the participants, the welfare of their students was an important factor in their decision to enter into administration. They became school administrators to help children. As Shakeshaft (1989) writes, many researchers have found that women administrators, in comparison to their male counterparts, “give more attention to the importance of individual differences among students, they’re more concerned with delinquency prone pupils, and they pay more attention to the social and emotional development of children” (p. 173). Hurty (1995) found in her study of seventeen women principals that students are the priority for most women educational leaders. She states that “these women principals believe strongly that the primary emphasis in their work is the nurturance of children’s growth... ‘the focus, of course, is on children!’” (p. 387). Similarly, Strachan (1999) found “absolutely central to their feminist leadership was the academic and social well-being of their pupils” (p. 321). In her study, Strachan found that her three participants’ personal value systems influenced what they prioritised in their feminist leadership practice. The values are a commitment to being student-focused, providing a safe learning environment, involving care-givers, and consensus decision-making. “Marie, Jill and Kate would rather give up the principalship than compromise these values” (Strachan, 1999, p. 313).

The participants in this study said that they entered administration out of a love for children, and because they felt that they could better serve children as administrators. However, all of them miss the close contact that they had had with students when they were vice-principals or teachers. Researchers have found that women did not desire administrative roles because the roles entailed too much paperwork and took them away from students (Shakeshaft, 1989). As Blackmore (1998) found, “formal leadership meant rejecting what they were passionate about - their teaching and their profession and personal values: ‘I entered teaching to teach because I love children. To become a principal or administrator requires me to change my job!’” (p. 474). These findings contradict what my participants said about why they became administrators. It is interesting to note that my participants entered administration because they love children, whereas other women do not enter administration because they love children. In her study, Morris (1999) also found that “the women all had as the basis of their educational leadership a commitment to making a difference in the lives of the children in their schools” (p. 347). In her study on feminist women high school principals, Strachan (1999) found that “all the women continued to teach, which is congruent with the literature that supports the centrality of children’s learning to feminist educational leaders” (p. 313). None of the participants in my study continued to teach after becoming administrators.

I asked the participants to reflect on how their gender has affected their relationships with their students; their responses varied greatly. I wanted to explore how their responses compared to the literature, and I found that little research has been conducted regarding how male students at high schools relate to their female principals, and vice-versa.

Many areas remain to be explored about administrator-student relationships. For example, Beth Young (1995) reiterates the point that:

We need more specific case examples, observations, and stories that illustrate what our study participants mean by these well-worn phrases such as “student centred”... which student(s)? For example what do these women have to say about gender differences or gender relations among their students. (p. 249)

The Principals' Relationships with School Advisory Councils

As principals, the participants deal with parents on many levels. One of the most important parent-principal relationships is engendered by the school advisory council (SAC). All of the schools in this study use SACs, and all of the women in this study reported that they appreciated SACs for giving them feedback in making decisions. This is consistent with the findings of many researchers that women administrators are consultative in their leadership and strive to include the voices of as many stakeholders as possible (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Blackmore, 1989, 1998; Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Regan, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Young, B., 1994).

At the same time, many of the participants discussed the difficulties that they have encountered with the SACs. All of the problems resulted from the SACs trying to act in a decision-making capacity, rather than in an advisory capacity. All of the participants blame the SAC troubles on overbearing chairs who tried to push through a specific agenda, thus ignoring their role as advisors. Many studies have found that the recent decentralization in education has actually added layers in the hierarchy; and some have argued that the principal's authority to

command has eroded (Blackmore, 1998; Hallinger & Hausman, 1994; Nan Restine, 1993; Smulyan, 2000). One of these additional layers may be the SAC. Diane had a particularly difficult time with her SAC, and she noted how her experience should serve as a warning to other principals: SACs might make their jobs more difficult, and might undermine their power.

Leithwood and Duke (2000) identified three types of site-based management: administrative-controlled, professional-controlled, and community-controlled. According to the participants in this study, their school boards have intended for the site-based management of their schools to be administrative-controlled. Problems arose when the SACs assumed control where they had none. To its credit, every school board intervened to confirm the power of the principal over the SAC, and to remind the SAC of its advisory capacity.

The Rapport with Other Principals

The participants in my study spoke highly of their relationships with other high school principals. They value the relationships, and describe them as supportive, collegial, cohesive, tight, respectful, and so on. This is contrary to what Sachs and Blackmore (1998) found:

Networking was seen by some women as a way of coping with isolation and loneliness of the job. However, for many of them balancing the demands of work and home meant that this had to be done 'on the run'... For most of these women there were no formal professional support networks. Several women described themselves as being 'not much of a networker'. (p. 276)

The participants consider the rapport among high school principals to be a positive experience. However, Ortiz (1982) reports that the rapport among high school principals is a

form of socializing, and that high school principals socialize with one another more, and exert more control over one another, than do elementary school principals. Only one participant in my study, Louise, alluded to this controlling aspect of the principals' relationships with one another. Louise says that other principals are not always supportive during meetings with school board administrators. There is pressure to keep quiet about problems, and to not be perceived as a complainer. She spoke of a situation when she voiced a complaint and other principals merely nodded and "did not jump in". She goes on to say that, "sometimes you worry that you'd be seen as a complainer if you're the one who brings the issue forward all the time. So you have to be really careful about it". It is interesting to note that the three participants who are in the same school board as Louise did not mention this feeling of being unsupported during meetings.

The Difficulties of Networking with School Board Administrators

The participants' main interactions with school board administration are via their contact with their assistant superintendents. All of the participants said that they have excellent relationships with their assistant superintendents. One participant explained that the reason for this good relationship is because they often meet, and because they are encouraged to develop good working relationships. This confirms what Ortiz (1982) found, namely, that high school principals are included in the school board administration and that this inclusion leads to better relationships.

One participant discussed how she was concerned upon learning that her new assistant superintendent was to be a woman. She worried that the woman would be too aggressive in using and in pursuing power. She worried that because there are so few women in school board administration that this person would "compensate for being a woman". This view of women

exerting power is similar to what Lips (2001) writes about as being the negative image of women with power, “the ‘iron maiden’ stereotype for unspecified powerful women... other labels used were ‘man hater’, ‘unfeminine’, ‘asexual’ ‘cold’ and ‘hard’” (p. 849). Regarding the issue of tokenism, there has been research to examine the issues that arise when women achieve positions where they are considered to be tokens. As tokens, these women may feel isolated and anxious, and may behave in ways that are not good for them or good for the organization (Shakeshaft, 1989). More recently, Gutek (2001) writes that women who are tokens “may question their own competence and ability” (p. 1196). She adds that tokens may be “expected to enact mother, pet, sex object, and, for the woman who rejects those roles, militant or iron maiden (or simply bitch)” (p. 1196). In the end, Lynn’s fears regarding her new female superintendent did not materialize.

The most significant gender-related issue in school boards is the lack of an informal network for women principals. The women do not socialize with the senior male administrators at the school board level to the same extent as their male colleagues, and this disturbs them. They worry about the impact of this exclusion on their schools. This concern has been documented by other researchers who have found that it is not uncommon for women to feel excluded from the school board level administration. These women worry about the impact that exclusion from school board administration has on their schools and on their careers (Blackmore, 1998; Hudson, 1994; Russell, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989). As Russell (1995) found in her study with male and female middle-managers, including principals:

While acknowledging the importance of women’s networks for their nurturant qualities, a number of men and women express the view that they do not make up for the fact that women are still

excluded from the more powerful male networks where information critical to the organization is shared. (p. 134)

The participants in this study did not discuss the ways in which they probably have had to negotiate gender differences in their dealings with the school board administration, which is male-dominated. Perhaps they are like the two women in Mertz and McNeely's study (1999), who found that, "Ruth and Linda had accepted the hierarchical structure and organization in which they found themselves and appeared to live comfortably... subordinate to the central office over which they had little control" (p. 213). Contrarily, in her study with three women high school principals, Smulyan (2000) writes that her participants "must develop strategies for meeting the needs of the male-dominated central administration while not losing their voice in the process" (p. 71).

Kathleen discussed at length the effects of sexism in her school board. She noted that female principals have had to work harder to achieve and to maintain their current positions. Her belief has been confirmed by other researchers (Blackmore, 1998; Russell, 1995; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tabin & Coleman, 1993). Russell (1995) writes that "women interviewees tend, as a group, to emphasize their credentials, hard work, workaholism in fact (p. 130). None of the other participants mentioned this issue, and Kathleen herself believes that she is not one of those women who has to work harder to prove herself.

Kathleen, Anne, and Louise expressed that gender is an issue for females aspiring to school board level administrative positions. Research confirms that gender remains an issue for women aspiring to higher levels of school board administration (Gill, 1995; Hudson, 1994; Taylor, 1995). Kathleen believes that women with less power and knowledge have been hired in

her school board instead of more capable and powerful women. This phenomenon has been documented in the literature on women educational administrators. Researchers have found that competent women may be at more of a disadvantage than women of lesser ability when seeking a position, and that men prefer to promote women whom they think they have control over (Russell, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Another problem for women aspiring to higher administrative positions is their exclusion from the senior administrators' network. In a study by Hudson (1994), it was found that formal and informal job contact practices prevent women and minorities from obtaining public school superintendencies... and that "personal contacts are of paramount importance to connecting people to jobs" (p. 386).

Increasing the number of women in senior administrative positions is seen as a way of establishing gender equality in an organization. Therefore, it is important for women to continue to strive to achieve such senior administrative positions. As Bown (1999) writes:

It was desperately important to see more of one's fellow-women in positions of power within the system - not for the sake of "gender tribalism" but in order to facilitate decisions about teaching, curricula, research, and appropriate work conditions which would help women as well as men to gain the maximum chance to realise their potential and contribute their best. (p. 6).

Bown goes on to say that a better gender balance provides a chance for change.

Isolation vs. Connection

Despite their many relationships, it is not unusual for women principals to report feelings of isolation (Pence, 1995; Russel, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Weaver Hart, 1995). Some

writers say that this may be particularly difficult for women because of their need for connectedness in the workplace (Logan, 1998; Russell, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). As principals, women find it difficult to connect to female teachers whom they must now supervise and evaluate (Blackmore, 1998; Ortiz, 1982; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). Researchers have found that women who used to be part of the close female teaching corps can find themselves feeling isolated when they join the mostly male administrative rank (Pence, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Moreover, according to Blackmore (1998), they are, “isolated from their earlier source of emotional support and strength - other women teachers - who now often judged them for their apparent failure to effect change” (p. 474).

The distinction between administration and teaching, and the hierarchical nature of schools is, according to many scholars, the result of men having established the structure, and is not conducive to women’s preferred approaches to leadership (Acker, 1995; Bell, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Women feel constrained by and conform to the existing hierarchy which leads to less connectedness (Acker, 1995; Bell, 1995; Blackmore, 1998; Cooper, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Smulyan (2000) found that her participants seemed “unwilling and unable to change or to challenge the structures that have previously defined them and contributed to their success” (p. 153).

The participants in this study overcame feelings of isolation by working closely with their vice-principals, by forming an administrative team, and by networking with other high school principals, predominantly other female principals. This strategy has been documented:

“Feelings of isolation were less in schools where the administrative team worked closely together” (Sachs & Blackmore, 1998, p. 277).

Researchers recommend that women can overcome these feelings by having contacts and networks with other female administrators (Logan, 1998; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tabin & Coleman, 1993). Tabin and Coleman (1993) found in their study that earlier appointees (pre-1982), upon having become principals, networked extensively, especially with other women principals. These women were grateful for the support that they received from others when they undertook new careers. They also found that the more recent appointees (post-1987) did not specifically make a special effort to develop support as did the earlier appointees. This finding differs from what I conclude about the women in my study. The women in my study shared the characteristics of the earlier appointees from the Tabin and Coleman study, despite being recent appointees.

Some researchers have found that women practitioners in a male-dominated field feel pressure to disaffiliate from other women; the researchers warn that yielding to this pressure will result in women feeling isolated and unable to build solidarity (Bell, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995). This was not the case in my study where four of the participants reported feeling an affiliation with other female principals; they seemed to realize the importance of this connection. Perhaps this results from no longer working in a male-dominated situation. In the area where I conducted this study, the majority of high school principals are still men; but in the past four years, women have made gains and now comprise almost half of all high school principals. It is also possible that because the education system is facing difficult challenges, the issue of gender has been overshadowed by other concerns including, major

curriculum changes, demographic shifts, teacher shortages, low public esteem for teaching, and increasing social problems.

Conclusion

Much evidence supports my findings that women high school principals base their leadership on relationships. However, my findings also contradict what other researchers have said. These contradictory findings are particularly interesting because they signal change: women no longer feel that they are tokens. They network with one another, if not yet with the higher level administrators. They are accepted by their teachers, and by other principals, and they value their ability to connect with people. There are more women principals than ever before, and they encourage other women to enter into administration. This may eventually result in changes that will make the principals feel less isolated, and relationships even more valued. I also hope that some of the tensions that women feel as leaders will eventually dissipate as the gender restrictions placed on women and men lessen. To achieve this result, it is important for the role of leader to become more inclusive of so-called feminine characteristics, and for society to expand its definition of what it means to be a woman and what of what it means to be a man.

Chapter Eight

Balancing Responsibilities

In this chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to what other researchers have found about principals and their many responsibilities. I first examine how responsibilities are central to the principalship, including the responsibilities for making decisions, for providing safety, and for caring for the interests of the school and its individuals. I then discuss the conflicts that responsibilities engender. Finally, I discuss how leadership, power, and authority are connected to the principal's ability to carry out her responsibilities.

The Increasing Responsibilities of the High School Principal

It is clear that the participants feel that they shoulder a heavy responsibility in their role as principal, one that extends beyond learning and the curriculum, to touch issues of safety, social programs, and the lives and careers of the people in their schools. There is much literature to convey the point that today's administrators shoulder increasing amounts of responsibilities (Hajnal & Walker, 1998; Kruger, 1996; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Smulyan, 2000). Hajnal et al. (1998) found that whereas principals used to be responsible for program administration, they are now responsible for "facilitating, enabling, motivating, and coordinating the empowered professionals in their buildings - this in addition to working with parents and community groups" (p. 74). Sachs & Blackmore (1998) found that "for many working within the restructured organization, the certainties of their positions, both in terms of *responsibilities and demands* [italics added] have changed profoundly" (p. 269). Kruger (1996), speaking about the situation in Europe, found that the school head's tasks were "becoming more and more complex. New responsibilities, competences, and skills are required...being the spider

in the web with a helicopter view” (p. 448). This situation is especially difficult for women who are largely responsible for their families; as Young (1992) says “the difference is the assumption by the women and about the women that they will come home from their paid work to a ‘second shift’” (p. 154). It has recently been found that the problem of balancing both the principalship and a family is no longer a problem only for women. As Riehl & Byrd (1997) state, “men increasingly find it problematic, as family roles evolve and men take more responsibility within the home” (p. 62).

However, some researchers have found that women, because of their familial responsibilities, are better prepared to meet the many responsibilities of principalship. For example, Prichard and Deem (1999) found that “the link between taking up the managerial subject position and familial practices was also drawn on by women” (p. 335). Beth Young (1992) found that “there are a number of parallels between doing administrative work in education and coping with the competing urgencies (of women)... Responsibility for family work may be better preparation for educational administration than a graduate degree in the subject” (pp.157-158). In a similar vein, Myers and Hajnal (1995) found that the women in their study “performed multiple roles within their work, family and community. All of the participants were *highly responsible* [italics added] individuals and held a strong work ethic” (p. 112). They also argued that “the feminine values of *responsibility* [italics added], inclusion, and connection have emerged as valuable leadership qualities in the 1990s” (p.102).

The participants in this study value relationships, caring, and responsibilities as principals. The connection between, and among, these values is well-known in the literature on the ethic of care. Gilligan (1982), for example, defines an ethic of care as, “women’s

construction of the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules” (p. 73). She adds that the ethic of care is an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, and of sustaining a web of connection. She adds that “an ethic of responsibility is the center of women’s moral concern, anchoring the self in a world of relationships and giving rise to activities of care” (p. 132). The ethic of care has been closely linked with the feminine. Noddings (1984) states that the ethic of care is a “feminine ethic” (p. 90). Noddings (1995) notes however that although the ethic of care is associated with the feminine, it is not limited to women.

Others posit that the responsibilities of the principal have increased in number but decreased in importance since the number women as administrators has increased. In relation to this issue, Riehl and Byrd (1997) believe that “women leaders cannot exert positive influence on schooling if their growing participation in administration is associated with a general devaluation of administrative work or with the intensification and trivialization of administrative responsibilities” (p. 62). This is similar to what Prichard and Deem (1999) discuss as the “feminisation” of the managerial positions in British further education. Several comments made by my participants indicate that the increasing centralization of school board control has trivialized and intensified their responsibilities.

The Responsibility of Decision-Making

All of the participants described their leadership as being “participative”. Some of the participants labelled their leadership approach as “collaborative”. Others called their approach “shared decision-making”. They all strive to empower their vice-principals, department heads, teachers, and students by including them in the decision-making process. As one participant

stated,

It's going to the staff and looking at the talents and bringing people together on a particular initiative and then it's a "we" that becomes the stronger voice and I guess you're trying to really empower your teachers into their self direction, to make that change.

The participants in this study strive to include as many "voices" as possible in their decision-making. They try to get consensus although they ultimately assume responsibility for their decisions. Much research supports the conclusion that women are collaborative in their leadership, that they believe in shared decision making, that they are good team builders, that they prefer to share their power, and that they are less committed to the formal hierarchy (Acker, 1995; Blackmore, 1998; Reitzug & Patterson, 1998; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999; Wyn et al., 2000). This approach to leadership fits the ethic of care. Gilligan (1982) writes that for women, "relationships, when cast in the image of hierarchy, appear inherently unstable and morally problematic" (p. 62). Wyn, Acker, and Richards (2000) conducted a study with women in management positions in university faculties in Canada and in Australia and found that, "the women frequently referred to leadership in terms of making a difference for others, using the concepts of equity, democracy, anti-sexism, anti-racism, and participation" (p. 442). Smulyan (2000) adds that "the use of democratic and empowering leadership practices might allow principals to be more responsive and flexible" (p. 153).

The Responsibility of Providing Safety

Researchers have found that women strive to establish schools communities where students and teachers feel cared for and safe (Blackmore, 1998; Hurty, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989;

Strachan, 1999). Tabin and Coleman (1993) found that for post-1987 women principals, “ her top priority is that children learn. Developing the school as a warm, comfortable, *safe* [italics added] place for children, building climate, is also important” (p. 394). Similarly, Strachan (1999) found “an explicit commitment to anti-violence by all the women. This stance was uncompromising because each of the women believed that when people feel unsafe and frightened then learning cannot take place” (p. 314).

In the present study, Kathleen and Louise discussed violence as being a gender-related issue. Kathleen related an incident where she was threatened by a male student, and another situation where she was told not to interfere in a fight because she was a woman. Louise worries that she is not physically intimidating to intruders, a disadvantage in her mind. The male teachers in her school were worried one year when three of the four administrators were women. Blackmore (1998) wrote about a similar situation:

This school had built its reputation and student base around strong discipline. A totally female leadership team was seen to be a considerable disadvantage in this rural community where gender equity was perceived to have ‘gone too far’ and ‘against nature’.

(p. 468)

Traditionally, administrators in high schools were expected to be ‘tough guy’ disciplinarians:

There is a view that, particularly at the high school level, the principal must be a tough male, able to maintain control and exert authority. This suggests a certain kind of control and authority, based on “power over” and “fear of”. Whether this conception of

leadership is appropriate for schools in the 1990s must be examined. (Gill, 1995, p. 59)

The participants in my study did not espouse this conception of “power over” others. As Gill (1995) has written, this traditional view has been questioned by researchers and practitioners. It is no longer assumed that toughness is required to combat violence in schools. In their study, Reitzug and Patterson (1998) observed that “schools must take the lead in introducing students to an alternative culture of nonviolent options.... Debbie Pressley [the only participant] opted for caring and empowerment in providing a gentler form of schooling for her students” (p. 179). This is reminiscent of the ethic of care, which speaks to providing safety in schools through caring. “Care”, according to Noddings (1995), “must be taken seriously as a major purpose of schools” (p. 678). An important component of the ethic of care is the acceptance of others, and of promoting a peaceful, non-violent world. As Noddings (1995) claims, through the ethic of care and in “recognizing our mutual otherness, we reject violence” (p. 194). Gilligan (1982) concludes that “the ethic of care rests on the premise of nonviolence - that no one should be hurt” (p. 174).

The Responsibility for the Whole School

Principals in the present study saw themselves as uniquely situated to advocate for the good of the school as a whole. The participants see themselves as the only ones who do not have special interests. Only they can see the “big picture”, and only they are responsible for the whole school. They see their role as setting the direction for the school. This view of the principalship is compatible with what the research says is essential to effective school administration. Additionally, Hajnal et al. (1998) found that leadership was critical to initiating, sustaining, and

institutionalising school change. Similarly, Weaver Hart (1995) states that without strong leadership, the disparate elements of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together.

Researchers have found that the focus on a vision for the whole school is a strength of women principals. For example, Morris (1999) found that the women in her study formulate a vision for the school, and that they are committed to the school, the students, and the pursuit of excellence. Similarly, Jean Helen Young (1993) found that “first, the principal’s vision of what a school could be was a significantly more important factor in schools headed by female principals” (p. 445). Lee, Smith and Cioci (1993) found that, in relation to their male counterparts, women principals were more involved in all aspects of the school as an organization; they were more invested in the details of the daily occurrences at their schools and in lives of their staff, and were more personally involved in the program of the school and were therefore deemed to be better principals. Strachan (1999) found that women who want to carry out their agenda for a school are likely to shape the school. There is little doubt that this intense level of personal involvement takes a personal toll on the participants. The women in my study were aware of the consequences, and all of them discussed how they cared for themselves. This is of particular concern for those who espouse an ethic of care. Noddings (1984) states that the ethic of care is a relationship that includes the person who does the caring, and therefore, “I do not sacrifice myself when I move toward one-caring. Caring is, thus, both self-serving and other-serving” (p. 99).

The Responsibility for the Individuals Within the School

Tabin and Coleman (1993) found that women principals

described their approach as people-oriented, open-door, warm, humanistic, caring, emotional... These women spoke of special skills and characteristics of women as principals: empathy, intuition, emotion, nurturing, cooperation and understanding. (p. 389)

These words are similar to how the principals in this study described their approach: “open-door”, “caring”, “humanistic”, and so on. These words express a significant sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. These are also words that are associated with the gender-stereotypic characteristics of women listed in Kite (2001), which include being aware of others’ feelings, being emotional, helpful, gentle, kind, able to devote self to others, and being capable of understanding. Fennel (1995) found in her study with four women principals that:

one of the themes is the sense of responsibility which each of the four seems to express toward those with whom they work. Carole and Sarah’s expressions indicated a profound sense of their own personal responsibility in working with their colleagues. Nested with the *responsibility* [italics added] theme is that of “servanthood” as a kind of modelling for self-giving. (p. 124)

The notion of principal as servant was raised by some of the women in my study; they named their leadership style “servant-leader”. A servant-leader gives to others, cares for the well-being of their staff members. They discuss the connection between their sense of caring, or

“servanthood”, and their sense of responsibility. This idea of serving others has been listed by Kite (2001) as being one of a gender-stereotypic characteristic. It also reflects the ethic of care, which requires one to be other-serving (Noddings, 1984).

Sachs and Blackmore (1998) found that “schools are complex emotional arenas where they [women principals] are constantly assailed by the emotional demands placed on them by their peers, students and members of the community” (p. 279). Similarly, Blackmore (1998) found that “caring for their colleagues and students had detrimental effects on their health [female principals and teachers]” (p. 473). Perhaps the participants’ relationships are in fact responsibilities, and that is why the relationships are emotionally demanding.

Powerlessness in the Face of Numerous Responsibilities

Three participants bemoaned the principal’s loss of power within the school board, and within their province, during the past five years. They are increasingly responsible for implementing policies and procedures that they have had no part in designing. Despite the implementation of a site-based school management approach, the participants in this study believe that the school boards are actually becoming more centralized and standardized. Therefore, the school boards exert more control over the schools and diminish the principals’ power and authority. This phenomenon has been well documented by other researchers who have found that principals are feeling frustrated by their lack of autonomy in the face of increased control by school boards (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1999). Blackmore (1998) states that principals feel a growing tension “between [their] role as educational leaders in the community and school and as line managers with responsibility to the central administration” (p. 465). She adds that principals “are having to cope with a burgeoning

administrative paperwork due to increased reporting and accountability demands back to the centre” (p. 465). A more cynical point of view proposes that a loss of autonomy, prestige, and pay in an occupation is often the result of a large increase in the number of women entering into that occupation (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1999).

My participants expressed a sense of powerlessness when they said that “power is an illusion”, or that “we have no power”. Hurty (1995) found that her participants expressed a similar sense of powerlessness. She explains that this sense of powerlessness is because of how the participants have defined power:

we fell readily into the trap of thinking we had no power because power, in this unchallenged view, meant control over people, money, and resources... These women saw themselves as having very little “power over” in the traditional bureaucratic organizational structure of the school district. (p. 383)

It is not unusual for women principals to use the existing notions of bureaucracy, given that these notions are assumed to be held by everyone. For a woman to do otherwise means “running the risk of being stereotyped for doing things ‘just like a woman’” (Hurty, 1995, p. 401). At the same time, it would be helpful for administrators to redefine power in ways that do not leave them feeling powerless.

Competing Responsibilities

The principalship is a position with many responsibilities, or demands, that compete for the principal’s time and attention. As Sachs and Blackmore (1998) found, administrators are expected to cope with competing demands created by “external pressures to be more efficient,

effective and economic in how they go about their work. This intensification of work is compounded by increasing demands for external and internal accountability by government and the community” (p. 265). Sachs and Blackmore (1998) add that “the split between personal and professional lives of education workers has become blurred, so that for many teachers and administrators their work is not left at the school gate but taken home and completed after hours” (p. 265). Further, they found that “time and competing demands placed on women was a constant theme that emerged during the interviews; demands on time; not having enough time and so on” (p. 278). However, Myers and Hajnal (1995) speculate that perhaps women are better able to cope with all of these competing responsibilities because, “women have had to learn how to organize and balance conflicting demands” (p. 103). The issue of balancing competing responsibilities arose in my study, some specific examples of which are highlighted below.

Competing Internal and External Responsibilities

The participants in this study believe that it is their duty as principals to ensure the smooth operation of their school. They reported that their influence and impact on their school are essential to its success. As Weaver Hart (1995) found, “the school principal consistently emerges in research and tales of practice as an important factor in the success of schools” (p. 106). Many of the participants in my study worry that their increasingly frequent absences are negatively affecting their schools.

My participants also expressed frustration at having to be away from their schools to fulfill external demands placed on them by the school board, by the provincial government, or by various other organizations. At the same time, some of the women also derive fulfilment from their involvement with external committees, because they see the committee work as having an

impact extending beyond their schools. Ortiz (1982) reports that it is much more common for high school principals to be involved in district-wide committees because there are fewer high school principals than elementary school principals who, because of their greater numbers, receive less attention from the school board administrators. Ortiz also found that, at the time of her study, most of the high school principals (mostly males) were seeking to obtain higher level administrative positions, and therefore welcomed being involved in committees that provided them with information from and contact with school board administrators (Ortiz, 1982). This is consistent with the findings of this study which did not include the experiences of elementary school principals. The women from this study who were most heavily involved in these committees, and who expressed feeling fulfilled by participating in these committees, were the two participants who expressed an interest in obtaining upper level administrative positions. Their feelings about their involvement were mixed; they appreciated the leadership roles that being involved provided them, but they also worried about the impact their absences had on their schools. The participants who were not seeking higher level positions expressed frustration at having to be involved in so many outside committees. It seemed that regardless of whether or not the women aspired to higher positions, they all expressed some tension about being away from their school. The social association of “caring” with “being there” probably adds to that tension.

Competing Professional and Personal Responsibilities

The time demands of the job of principal are well documented (Blackmore, 1998; Marshall, 1993; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989; Strachan, 1999). Sachs and Blackmore (1998) found that “Guilt was a common emotion expressed by all of the women

interviewed. In particular, they expressed feelings of guilt in response to the pressures of balancing home and school life” (p. 277). Beth Young (1992) refers to this situation as “competing urgencies”, a phrase that tries to capture the inner sense of a woman who is a worker, a mother, and a wife. She writes:

Many women regard successful juggling of these “simultaneous” rather than “sequential” demands as a considerable accomplishment...a concurrent dual commitment to paid employment and family work is possible for some women...the key is organization, making efficient use of the available time. Time is a scarce resource, but there is a sense of abundant energy. (p. 151)

The idea that women who juggle an administrative career and a personal life as having superhuman energy is common. Blackmore (1998) found that for many women teachers, “the ‘superwomen’ in the principal positions” (p. 475) were not role models to which many women aspired, because they saw these women principals “putting their family and social lives on hold” (Blackmore, 1998, p. 475). Similarly, Strachan (1999) found that women principals were often described as “having superhuman qualities” (p. 319).

Trying to maintain balance between work, family and personal needs is something that all of the participants in the present study strove to achieve. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, most of the women in this study feel that maintaining a balance between their personal lives and their work requires effort but is necessary. As Anne says “the biggest challenge for me...is striving to [pause] for the balance”. Researchers have found that this issue is important for many female administrators; they realize the significance of having a well-balanced life and strive to

maintain that balance in the face of their very demanding roles. As Chait Barnett (2001) writes, there is an increased need to “understand the intertwined nature of work and nonwork” (p. 1187). For the participants in my study, balance meant taking care of themselves, and reflects the ethic of care, which values serving the self, as well as serving others (Noddings, 1984). Sachs and Blackmore (1998) report that the “quality of life was seen to be important to all of these women. Chris [a participant in their study] indicated that she had to work hard at doing other things than work. She made time to spend with her family” (p. 278).

Researchers conclude that because of the demands placed on women from other sources, the nature of the administrative role will have to change to attract more women. None of the women in this study had small children, and all agreed that the role of principal, is virtually incompatible with that of a parent. As it exists now, the role of the principal has been largely determined by men who had wives at home to take care of most of the other demands (Hajnal, 1995; Marshall, 1993; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1989). This traditional situation is changing as some male administrators are assuming more of their familial responsibilities (Marshall, 1993; Riehl & Byrd, 1997). Chait Barnett (2001) adds that “substantial empirical evidence indicates that men and women who are seriously engaged in work and family roles enjoy better mental, physical, and relationship health” (p. 1186). Chait Barnett (2001) challenges the historical distinction of work-masculine and home-feminine, claiming that “increasingly more sophisticated and textured models of work-family issues are needed” (p. 1189).

The Connection Between Responsibilities, Leadership, Power and Authority

My participants saw a connection between leadership and responsibility, between power and responsibility, and between authority and responsibility. I explored these connections in the

literature, and I discovered that others had also found a link between responsibilities and leadership, power, and authority. Their research is presented below.

The Responsibilities of Leadership

Women perceive their leadership to be primarily based on relationships, with the result that they become responsible for the lives of the people in their schools; that is the primary connection between leadership and responsibility.

Many of the participants see their responsibility as leader as setting the direction, course, or atmosphere for their school. As leader, they strive to be visionary and to have creative plans for their school. Women, although not exclusively, have been found to be particularly visionary in their leadership, and have allowed that vision to guide their work in schools. As Jean Helen Young (1993) says:

The principal's vision of what a school could be was a significantly more important factor in schools headed by female principals.

This may imply one of two things. Either female principals are more likely than male principals to have a vision of what a school could be or they are more likely to allow their vision to guide their work in schools. (p. 445)

Mertz and McNeely (1998) found that one of their two participants had "a compelling vision toward which she is working, and a clear sense of how to realize that vision" (p. 214). They compared her to their other participant who did not have a similar guiding vision. Mertz and McNeely (1998) believe that the difference between their two female participants "are clearly linked to issues of race, culture, and organizational context" (p. 215). Such mixed

findings across studies underline the importance of remaining cautious about attributing behaviour to gender influences without considering a range of other factors.

Researchers have found that female educational leaders feel that it is their responsibility to make schools as inclusive as possible because, as women, they identify with marginalized groups more profoundly than men (Nelson Matthews, 1995; Ruhl-Smith et al., 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989; Strachan, 1999; Young, et al., 1993). Similarly, the participants in my study expressed a desire to make their schools as inclusive as possible. Diane worked to change her school's boundaries to include ESL students, and students who were not gifted, in the student population. Kathleen expressed pride about her racially diverse school community. She also discussed her attempts to allow students with learning difficulties to stay in their regular classrooms. This is similar to feminist educational leaders who try to make their schools inclusive, and who work to promote social justice. Some feminist educational leaders struggle against racism and sexism (Strachan, 1999). Other researchers have found that women operate from an ethic of care and justice, which means that they opt for inclusion and a respect for each individual's rights (McCall, 1995; Young, et al., 1993). This connection between feminism and other types of oppression results from heavy criticism against feminists for their failure to view "others". As hooks (1984) wrote almost two decades ago, "privileged feminists have largely been unable to speak to, with, and for diverse groups of women because they either do not understand fully the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression or refuse to take this inter-relatedness seriously" (p. 14). In this statement, hooks criticizes feminists while affirming the connection between various types of oppression.

Schmuck and Schubert (1995) found that, contrary to the researchers' expectations,

women administrators adopted the prevailing norms of the administrative culture which ignored issues of equity. Kimmel and Crawford (2001) suggest that women leaders feel a tension because as outsiders within they seek both resistance and approval. It is often assumed that because women have been oppressed by men, they will better be able to relate to other oppressed groups. However, white middle-class feminists have been criticized for not including, or even hearing, the voices of other minorities such as lesbians and Blacks. This may be because not all oppression is the same. As Noddings (1995) writes “women have access to privileged knowledge with respect to gender, the poor with poverty, blacks and other ethnic minorities with race” (p. 183).

The Connection Between Responsibilities and Power

This study accepts the premise that power means different things to men and women (Shakeshaft, 1989). This premise has been contested by Kruger (1996), who claims that “women heads hardly differ from their male counterparts in the way in which they experience power” (p. 454). This study does not seek to compare men and women’s definitions of power, but rather seeks to explore the participants’ definitions to further our understanding of women’s experiences with power.

This study found that there was a connection between power and responsibility for the participants, and that the women used their power to help them fulfil their responsibilities. Lips (2001) proposes a more profound connection between power and responsibilities: “Research findings suggest that socialization for responsibility is an important variable in determining how the power motive will be expressed... among adults who score high on a measure of responsibility, high power motivation predicts social leadership behaviours” (p. 851). Lips

(2001) adds that “an orientation toward responsible nurturance is one of the major ways in which social expectations and socialization differ for females and males” (p. 851).

The participants identified two types of power: “negative power” and “positive power”. Hurty (1995) also identified a similar separation of power: “power over” and “power with”. Another researcher, Sergiovanni (1991), identified a similar distinction: “power over” and “power to”. Sergiovanni’s distinction emerged from work that was not specifically done with women. Sergiovanni says that “power over” is power that is controlling; “power to”, however, is power to facilitate.

The participants identified “negative power” as being based on the title of principal. “Negative power” is viewed as controlling others, and can be abused. One participant described “negative power” as being from the outside, and as exerting a force that can be destructive. This “negative power” is similar to what Hurty (1995) has identified as “power over”, or traditional power:

The textbooks seemed to suggest that to wield power as an administrator I had to be more controlling, less trustful, more tempered toward domination and subordination, less open in communication, less tolerant of uncertainty, more coercive, less collaborative. (p. 382)

She then says that this is contrary to women’s preferred approach, which is based on connectedness, warmth, caring, nurturance, collaboration and trust (Hurty, 1995). The participants in my study said that they disliked “negative power” because it interferes with relationships and prevents them from being a part of the group.

The participants described “positive power” as being based on relationships, and as being earned through respect, and to be used to empower others. The participants’ definition of “positive power” is similar to the view of power as the ability to get things done, and can be based on relationships rather than on threats. The conceptualization of power as the ability to “get things done” demonstrates the connection between power and the ability to carry out responsibilities. “Positive power” or “power to” helps leaders to carry out their responsibilities. “Power to” is power to do something, to accomplish something, and to help others accomplish something they think is important” (Young, J.H., 1993, p. 447). Acker (1995) found that women principals believe that empowering more people through generating more autonomy, and by participating more in decisions increases the capacity for effective action rather than increasing domination. Both Acker and Young’s description highlight the connection between power and action.

When the participants gave examples of using “positive power”, it seemed clear that what they meant was that they were using power to carry out their responsibilities. For example, one participant said that she uses “positive power” to implement projects. Many of Hurty’s (1995) findings provide evidence that women use power to empower others. She has identified several elements of “power with”, one of which is “collaborative change”. “Collaborative change” is the art of defining common interests, common *responsibilities*, common problems and common solutions. It requires a language of empowerment that includes “with” instead of “over”, “building bridges” instead of “walls”, and not “knitting the whole sweater in one night” (Hurty, 1995, p. 394). The participants in this study have a concept of positive power which is similar to what Hurty (1995) said about women’s preferred conception of power as related to capacity and

efficacy.

At the same time, this reduction of power to two modes is problematic because the distinction can lead to “the tendency to see power-over as bad and power-to as good, and labelling power-over as masculine and power-to as feminine... [this] distinction is insupportable in real life” (Lips, 2001, p. 849). That the participants in my study admit to using both types of power demonstrates that this social distinction is counterproductive. This social distinction increases the level of tension that women feel when they are placed in a position where they must use the power they now view as masculine and bad.

Similarly, Wyn et al. (2000) dispute another binary view of women’s experiences with power. They believe that seeing women who take pleasure in their power as bad-girl feminists, and that seeing hard-working, and long-suffering women as good-girl feminists, is problematic. They add that “a new understanding must be forged that takes into account the simultaneous experience of pleasure, constraint, passion and control in women’s negotiation of their place” (Wyn et al., p. 437). It should be stressed, however, that this call for a “new understanding” of women’s experiences is itself not so new; since the early 1970's, feminists have pondered the image of the powerful woman. As Greer (1971) writes, “womanpower means the self-determination of women, and that means that all the baggage of paternalist society will have to be thrown overboard” (p. 115).

The Connection Between Responsibilities and Authority

It is important to study authority because without socially validated authority there is no leadership (Weaver Hart, 1995). It is especially important for women to become familiar with authority as social validation of their leadership because, as Weaver Hart (1995) notes, people

who differ from the conventional preconceptions about leaders need to be aware of the validation process:

Leader successors are newcomers who must be integrated into existing groups, validated by social processes, and granted legitimacy by subordinates and superiors before they can have a significant impact on the actions of others...This need for validation by the group places particular pressure on people who differ substantially from conventional preconceptions about leaders. Women are included in this category in almost all situations in which they rise to leadership. (p. 107)

Many feminists maintain that the historical and current conceptualization and practice of authority needs to be reconfigured because traditional authority is conceptualized as sovereignty which privileges the masculine (Hoffman, 1995). Blackmore (1989) similarly states that the cultural association of masculinity and authority, of maleness and management, is reproduced by those who do not wish to disturb this so-called “natural” arrangement. Hoffman (1995) says:

We need to examine and restructure the daily events which reflexively lead to our interpretations of power and authority in such a way that a feminist authority would constitute the feminine, the masculine, and authority in a different, pluralistic way. (p. 49)

The participants in this study conceptualize authority in two distinct ways: one that is negative (position-based), and one that is positive (based on respect, knowledge, and relationships). Researchers also identify two kinds of authority: the traditional and legal

authority which is founded on formal position, and authority which is founded in interpersonal and professional competencies, requiring collegiality, cooperation, and shared commitments (Hoy & Miskel, 1996; Murphy & Beck, 1994). The participants in this study conceptualized “negative authority” in a manner that resembles the former authority, the source of which lies in one’s position. The participants say they do not like this type of authority; they say it is not worth much, yet at least three of them give examples of using it. Kathleen discussed using her authority to fire a teacher; Lynn discussed using her authority to confront a teacher about “time theft”, and Louise says she uses her authority for “crowd control” during school assemblies. These women do not like to see themselves as possessing and using “negative authority”, which they associate with the masculine, because it conflicts with their gender identification. Yet, they find that they have to use it.

Some researchers have found that women report feeling tension when they must occupy a position of formal authority, because formal authority has been the historical domain of men, and has been associated with virility, potency, aggressiveness. It is not that women do not possess these qualities, but rather that they have been socially and culturally required to suppress them. Women who are required to use authority, or women who may desire to display it, are in conflict with the expectations that society has placed on them. This situation is similar to what Shakeshaft (1989) wrote about women and authority over a decade ago:

Contrary to the notion that being like a man will automatically signify authority, many women voice concern over the effectiveness of such strategies. Some women report that they try to look less authoritarian, less in charge, and less threatening in an

effort to be effective. (p. 204)

This tension is also evident within my findings. The women in my study downplay their authority, and seek to be less threatening. They may understand that to do otherwise would compromise their image as a “good woman”, and their effectiveness. However, when the women in my study have to use a form of authority that is socially unacceptable for women, they justify their use of this “negative authority” by saying that it is necessary to accomplish mundane tasks. They emphasize their use of a relationally based authority, and express that it helps them to accomplish more significant goals.

It is also noteworthy that one participant said that authority is represented by, and based on, symbols. The title and the office of principal are examples of symbols of her authority. The belief that symbols are important to establishing authority is common. Shakeshaft (1989) suggests that some women rely on these symbols to establish their authority. One participant in this study admitted that she displays her degrees in her office to gain authority over parents who respect these symbols. The symbols help her to carry out her responsibilities without being questioned or undermined. Similarly, Shakeshaft (1989) found that “a number of women have confided that they complete doctoral work so they could carry with them the aura of legitimate authority, transmitted by the title ‘Dr.’” (p. 204). These symbols of authority can be used to impress others, but as one participant feared, they can also create distance and can intimidate as well. Most of the participants in this study seemed to recognize the importance of these symbols in establishing leadership legitimacy and entitlement, but most preferred not to display their symbols of authority. This is reminiscent of Shakeshaft’s (1989) finding that women believe that appearing to be less authoritarian is more effective.

According to many participants, knowledge, expertise, and experience are also legitimate sources of authority. For example, when people want to earn the title of “Dr.,” and when they display their degrees, they are recognizing this knowledge-based authority. Leithwood and Duke (2000) describe this type of authority as being “the authority or power that a person or group is awarded as a consequence of special or highly valued knowledge” (p. 55).

It is noteworthy that although four of the participants in this study worked in a religiously-based school board, none of them cited religion as a basis for their authority. Yet, it has been presumed that in religiously-based school boards religion is a major source of authority. Leithwood and Duke (2000) have argued that “It is safe to infer that religion remains a strong basis for the authority of leaders in these schools” (p. 57). It would be interesting to investigate further why the women participants did not cite religion as a source of authority. One possible explanation might be the strong connection between religion and patriarchy. That women occupy a position of leadership, power, and authority within such a hierarchical and patriarchal organisation is a source of tension. This tension may be attenuated by their perception of their leadership as one of servanthood. Some Christian religions prohibit women from occupying positions of authority and power: Women are expected to serve the Church. Women as principals may be reconciled when principalship is seen not as a position of leadership but as one of service to the community. As Gnanadason (2000) writes, women in the Christian churches are expected to “reach out to the young, and provide care and nurturing, ... and women are to engage in healing and serving the community” (p. 176). At the risk of overstating the point, it may be too that the school board administration sustain cultural representations of women as more subservient, docile, and obedient -- qualities that become desirable as the school board becomes

more controlling.

Leithwood and Duke (2000) have found that psychology is being increasingly used as a basis for authority. This applies to the participants in this study, because they all identified themselves as being “participative leaders”, and participative leaders base their authority on psychology. Participative leaders use psychology to determine how to best influence teachers’ job satisfaction, commitment, and willingness to participate in school decisions. Perhaps, at least in part, the women preferred the participative leadership approach because it afforded them access to a legitimate form of authority that, as women, they do not possess “naturally”.

Conclusion

The research supports the finding that the principalship is based on responsibilities, and that these professional and personal responsibilities are in competition. There is also evidence that leadership, power, and authority are closely linked to responsibility. The participants preferred to think of their principalship as based on relationships, but those relationships can nevertheless be responsibilities for the principal. What’s more, women have additional responsibilities because of their roles within their families. However, because of those responsibilities, they are believed to be very capable of handling the incredible number of competing responsibilities in schools. Women in positions of leadership are required to use power and authority, which can lead to tension because of the cultural representations of women as being servile, obedient, and passive. However, as more and more women occupy positions of power and authority, these cultural representations are being challenged.

Chapter Nine

How Do Women Define and Enact the Role of High School Principal?

In this final chapter, I return to the original research questions: how do women high school principals define and enact the role of high school principal, and how do they define and enact leadership, power, and authority? I summarize the main findings of this study with five women high school principals, outline what I found to be a “changing landscape”, and discuss the implications and limitations of this study for practitioners and researchers.

The Connection Between Relationships, Responsibilities and Gender

The short answer to my research question is that women high school principals define and enact the role of principal by being the school leader. Leadership that is based on relationships and responsibilities, and power and authority, are seen as elements that are necessary to help principals in this study carry out their responsibilities. When power and authority are based on relationships, the principal believes she is a more effective school leader. As discussed in previous chapters, gender may also be a factor that determines the importance of relationships to the principal, and it may also influence the principal’s definition and approaches to leadership, power, and authority. There has been much research to show that women are socialized to value relationships, and to simultaneously shoulder many responsibilities. As Fassinger (2001) states, “females still are likely to be taught to be nurturing...be selfless and focus on others’ needs...to have socialized habits of caretaking and self-denial” (p. 1179-1180). The findings of the present study highlights three aspects of women’s leadership, namely, tension, privilege, and balance.

Relationships and Responsibilities: An Underlying Tension

In chapter two of this thesis, I stated that despite using a list of gender stereotypic characteristics to describe women's approaches to leadership, women's approaches are more likely to be complex, ambiguous, and tension-filled. This study confirmed that the participants' approaches to leadership are indeed complex, ambiguous, and tension-filled. This study also assumed that women may have difficulty in reconciling what is expected from them as good women versus what is expected of them as good leaders. Again, all the participants in this study discussed this tension in one way or another. Kathleen overtly stated that her vision of herself as a leader defies her image of the typical woman in that she is more assertive, and confrontational; she believes that occasionally this gets her "into trouble". Similarly, Lynn expresses her concern that she does not espouse the "feminine" quality of being a good listener. Anne speaks of having been offered of a vice principalship at an elementary school despite having sought a vice-principalship at a high school. The school board administrators did not think women could manage the discipline problems in a high school. Anne says that her refusal (or resistance to gender expectations) was seen as a sign of strength, and the school board administrators offered the high school position soon thereafter. Louise feels tension between being a good woman and being a good leader, though she does not express this overtly. I detected the tension when she described her role as a leader using a military or "masculine" metaphor. She hesitated to use the metaphor of being the captain of the ship, and said "I hate to think of the captain, but the captain of the ship, God forbid, but, you know, you are the one who determines - a bit like the designer, I guess - of where things are going...". I note that Louise changes her metaphor from being a military "captain" to being a "designer", perhaps alleviating the discomfort that she feels in using

the military metaphor. Lastly, Diane also used a military or “masculine” metaphor, “to have some idea of where the troop should be heading and then try to get the troop lined up in the same direction”, to describe her leadership approach, despite that she emphasises the importance of relationships to her leadership.

Much of the traditional research on leadership distinguishes “consideration” (relationships) from “task” (responsibilities). Leaders were categorized according to the importance that they attached to consideration or task. The assumption was that these orientations were distinct, or opposed to one another. As Hoy and Miskel (1996) write, “studies to determine the basic dimensions of leadership behavior generally identify two distinct categories - concern for the task and concern for individuals and personal relations” (p. 258). They add that the most effective leaders were the ones who scored high in both dimensions. It may be that women, because they are socialized to attend to both relationships as responsibilities, can make very effective leaders. Women score high in both consideration and task dimensions because they see those dimensions as being connected. As Gilligan (1982) wrote, “in the different voice of women lies the truth of the ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection” (p. 173).

Gender and Privilege

One possible limitation of this study is the silence around issues of race and culture. This silence can be explained, in part, by the homogeneous make-up of the group of participants. All of the women were members of the dominant culture and enjoyed further privileges due to their education and class backgrounds. It is therefore possible that the women in this study used discourses of care and service to fortify their relationship with the existing white patriarchy.

Moreover, the women may have unconsciously performed their race and gender in ways that produce and reproduce power within wider social relations. After all, these women work within educational institutions which have been accused of perpetuating race and class privilege. As Poplin Gossetti and Rusch wrote in 1995:

Schooling perpetuates the advantages and conferred dominance of privilege. Schools are an example of a system that legitimizes inequality under the guise of meritocracy, an “equal” opportunity system of social and educational mobility based on merit. (p. 17)

Poplin Gossetti and Rusch then explain that privilege “exists as an invisible and frequently taken-for-granted collection of unearned advantages and assets which are conferred by virtue of our group membership” (p. 16). They add that privilege grants those of us who are members of the dominant culture “dominance and permission to control” (p. 16). That the women in this study perpetuate the status quo of privilege is not surprising because according to Poplin Gossetti and Rusch, “members of the dominant group are taught not to see the embedded privileges” (p. 17).

The notion of a dominant culture stems from imperialism. Therefore, any discussion of privilege leads to a discussion, however brief, about the history of imperialism. It is also significant to review the connection between imperialism and gender. “Imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of gender power. Gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise” (McClintock in Mills, 1997, p. 79). Women were expected to be the purveyors of the dominant culture, morality, and religion. At the time of colonization, women were expected to represent the values of the

culture, but they were also expected to be the caretakers of the indigenous people, to teach them to care for themselves, to educate them, and to help provide medical services to them. The women focused on the well-being and education of the people. Similarly, the women in my study, or more precisely their discourse of care and servitude, accords with the imperialist views. That these women continue to view their role as one of caring and of servitude does nothing to interrupt the status quo, and thus acts to maintain their position of privilege of race and class.

Pratt wrote about the role that women and travel writing played in the establishment of imperialism. She wrote about Anna Maria Falconbridge as being a typical European woman traveling in Africa at the end of the eighteenth century: “Falconbridge’s womanly refusal of knowledge is anchored in assumptions of European privilege and unaccountability... Falconbridge claims an innocence already given by her gender” (Pratt, 1992, p. 105). Pratt later writes about what she labels the “social exploratress”, who are women with feminist sensibilities who fought for social justice in the many European colonies. Even these women lived in a world where “their class and race privilege is presupposed” (Pratt, 1992, p. 159). Certainly the women principals in this study are members of the dominant culture who like the “social exploratresses” take their class and race privileges for granted and inadvertently maintain their position of power and privilege as members of the dominant culture.

Balance

The concept of balance is central to the participants’ ideals: they strive to achieve balance in all aspects of their work and personal lives. They try to engage in a variety of recreational activities that allow them to achieve greater balance, such as jogging, swimming, cross-country skiing, walking, knitting, reading, and spending time with friends and family.

The idea of balance also arises in their job as principal: they balance the internal demands with the external demands of their jobs. A principal who is too internally focussed can miss out on opportunities for her school that are provided by the community, by the school board, or by the Ministry. On the other hand, a principal who is too outwardly focussed can lose touch with what is happening within the school.

The participants are also concerned about balancing the many relationships that a principal is called on to establish and to maintain. It is important for the participants to support their teachers, but not at the expense of their students and vice-versa. Balance becomes an even more difficult goal when the principals must consider the interests of parents and of the school board.

The participants must also try to maintain a balance between being one of the group and being the leader of the group. As leader, they are sometimes called upon to make unpopular decisions, to enforce regulations and policies, and to conduct performance evaluations. Schools are hierarchical and the principal occupies the highest level within the school. The relationship between principals and teachers is therefore one of superior to subordinates.

Balance also comes up when discussing power. The participants have identified two types of power: one that is negative, and another that is positive. They must maintain a balance between both types of power. For women, the overuse of negative power leads to accusations of being pushy or aggressive (Russell, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). On the other the hand, the overuse of positive power can lead to accusations of “doing things just like a woman” (Hurty, 1995).

The Changing Landscape

Many concerns regarding women in educational leaderships persist despite decades of research and attempts to change the situation. Nevertheless, there have been significant changes, and the situation is improving. I have found evidence of these improvements in my study and in the research conducted by others. This evidence was presented in the discussion chapters and will be discussed again in this final chapter.

Tokenism

It should be noted that the women in this study represent women from one Canadian urban centre, where women represent between one-third and one-half of high school principals. This relatively large number of women principals may not represent the situation in the majority of Canadian school boards. Women are no longer tokens among high school principals in the participants' school boards. None of the participants reported feeling as if they were tokens in their current positions. The number of women principals has increased dramatically in the past four years. If this trend continues, women will soon comprise half of all high school principals. It will be interesting to see what the proportion of women administrators will be in the coming decade. One participant expressed concern that, in the future, there will be too few male administrators, and she worries about the impact of this phenomenon on the educational system.

That the participants do not see themselves as tokens accounts for some differences between my findings and findings from studies conducted with female high school principals who were considered to be tokens. The most striking difference is in their relationships with other high school principals: the participants here report having very positive relationships with other female high school principals.

Researchers have expressed hope that when women administrators reach a critical mass, they will be in a position to reshape leadership in ways that better suit them (Collay & LaMar, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Dunlap, 1995; Hurty, 1995; Kruger, 1996; Regan, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993). O'Leary and Flanagan (2001) state that because gender differences in leadership represent a socially constructed phenomenon, they can be altered by changing the gender composition of organizations. It would appear that this is already happening in some areas, and at some levels of educational administration. Unfortunately, it has yet to happen at the highest levels of power in the field of education. Both participants who aspire to higher levels of administration worry about the low number of female administrators at these levels. They consider being a woman to be an obstacle to reaching these positions, and they worry that there is a glass ceiling. That there are currently very few women at senior levels in their own school board suggests that there may in fact be a glass ceiling. If they achieve their goals, they will probably be considered to be tokens. One participant was concerned that until the situation becomes more equitable, women leaders at all levels will not fully develop their own feminine approach to leadership. She fears that until business, government, and religious institutions place women in the highest levels of leadership, women's ways of leadership will not fully develop or be truly appreciated.

Women as High School Principals

Much of the current research about women educational administrators has been conducted with women principals of elementary schools (Blackmore, 1998; Collay & LaMar, 1995; Dardaine-Raguet, et al., 1994; Gill, 1995; Kennington Edson, 1995; Poplin Gosetti & Rusch, 1995; Schmuck, 1995; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Young, B., 1994, 1995). It may be that

many of the findings that have been said to apply to women principals apply mostly to women principals at the elementary level. Elementary school administration is different from high school administration. For example, the studies that concluded that women are instructional leaders were based on research done primarily at the elementary school level, and may not apply to women administrators in high schools (Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993; Nelson Pavan & Andrade Reid, 1994; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989; Young, J.H., 1993). In their study with two female high school principals, Mertz and McNeely (1998) found that the women were giving more attention to managerial tasks than to instructional tasks. Other researchers had found quite different results with women principals, particularly with women elementary principals. The women principals in my study relied on their department heads to be the instructional leaders because of the specialization and departmentalization of teaching subjects.

The high school structure also differs from the elementary school structure because it is larger and departmentalized, and tends to be more hierarchical. Most researchers have found that women prefer a less hierarchical structure (Acker, 1995; Ferguson, 1984; Ruhl-Smith, Shen & Cooley, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989; Young, B., 1994; Young, J.H., 1993). But the women in this study provide some evidence that they have learned to use the existing hierarchical structure in a consultative way. For example, they rely on their vice-principals and department heads to represent the teachers in the decision-making process. They must rely on their administrative staff, because in large high schools it is impossible for them to be in contact with all teachers. They use the hierarchical structure to help them implement what they perceive as being a “democratic process”, or at the very least, striving for a broad based consultation.

The Widening Gap Between Administrators and Teachers

The removal of administrators from the teachers' union became important to this study because it was important to all of the participants. They expressed their concerns without being asked. They say that this division is leading to strains in the principal-teacher relationship. This echoes similar concerns raised by researchers who believe that an increase in the gap between administrators and teachers is detrimental to both groups because it reinforces the bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of schools, which can lead to the de-professionalization of teaching. It is incongruent with women's preferred leadership approaches. Typically, women have been socialized to distrust hierarchies. As Gilligan (1982) writes, "relationships, when cast in the image of hierarchy, appear inherently unstable and morally problematic" (p. 62). It will be interesting to evaluate the long term effects of this separation.

Final Thoughts on Leadership, Power, and Authority

I set out to explore the participants' definitions of leadership, power, and authority, and how they enacted these definitions in their role as principal. I discovered, however, that articulating the meaning of such complex concepts is difficult. This is even more difficult when explored through a gendered lens, which sees these concepts as being tension ridden and socially constrained according to gender norms and expectations. I have only ascertained but a small view of what leadership, power, and authority mean to these particular women.

Leadership. The participants see themselves as leaders. They define and approach leadership in ways that suit them and their gender identification. They report that they can remain true to themselves while being good leaders. Contrary to some research, none of them openly expressed a tension between being a good leader and being a woman (Bell, 1995;

Blackmore, 1998; Dardaine-Ragguet, et al., 1994; Dunlap, 1995; Gill, 1995; Pence, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). At the same time, evidence exists that despite their denials, the women still occasionally experience tension between being a “good woman” and being a “good leader”. The participants identified their feminine qualities as being strengths in their approach to leadership. Louise believes that the increased number of women leaders has resulted in a change in leadership approaches adopted by male leaders, who are now adopting the qualities of nurturance and caring. Anne wonders, however, if women leaders are masking their “true” leadership style to fit the male model of leadership. These opposing views are expressed by women who occupy the same position, for approximately the same length of time, in similar schools in the same school board. What accounts for these different perspectives? The relationship between leadership and gender is ambiguous. Contradictions exist between the participants, and contradictions arise within the participants’ own responses. Educational leadership is currently in a state of flux with many changes happening quickly. Even but a few years ago there were very few female principals at the high school level. Today many school districts have more female principals, and other boards are changing as well. Gender adds new dimensions to the complexity of leadership, and allows it to manifest itself in multiple, creative, and specific ways.

Women administrators must define leadership, because if they know what their leadership ideal is, they can strive to enact it. They should learn about the different models and theories of leadership. However, they should not feel constrained by them. They should allow their own vision of leadership to evolve. Women are free to innovate leadership styles that highlight their strengths and preferences. As Hoffman (1995) says, “there is a need for feminist research to

uncover and redefine the *situatedness* [italics added] of leadership - to displace administration as a set of preconceived practices that establish and maintain control” (p. 49). Evidence exists of the changing nature of leadership. O’Leary and Flanagan (2001) conclude that, “changing the gender composition of organizations, especially at the highest levels, will change the number of women who lead them...and will change the role and stereotypic associations with that role” (p. 656).

Power. Regarding power, the study’s main conclusion is that the participants rely on two types of power. Many other researchers have reached the same conclusion: Hurty (1995) identified “power over” and “power with”; Sergiovanni (1991) identified “power over” and “power to”. But unlike previous studies, which identified women’s preference towards “power with” and “power to”, the participants in this study realize that they use both types of power as required. They use “negative power” to ensure good teaching and good learning, and they use “positive power” to empower teachers and students in their schools. This conclusion accords with Lips (2001), who believes that both types of power are necessary and should not be seen as bad and masculine, or as good and feminine. Similarly, Morris (1999) found that the women in her study “used a combination of personal power and organisational power in their approach to the principalship” (p. 351). Hoffman (1995) proposes that leadership should be explored in its “situatedness”. The same suggestion applies to power. The women in this study expressed feelings of powerlessness and frustration, much like the women in Hurty’s (1995) study, because they still conceive of power in the traditional sense. Although the women in this study were satisfied in their jobs, if they reconceptualize power in ways that better suit them, they would likely feel less powerlessness, and might experience even greater career satisfaction. Of course,

such a reconceptualization is a difficult task because, as individuals, women are embedded in a culture that continues to view power in traditional ways.

Authority. Authority, particularly formal authority, is traditionally associated with masculinity, and women report feeling uncomfortable in positions of authority. It may be that by understanding the importance of authority and how to promote it, women can increase their authority, and use it to reshape leadership itself. As Weaver Hart (1995) says:

Given that all new leaders require this endorsement [authority] for full effectiveness and women deviate from the preconceived ideas about leadership, women stand to benefit greatly from understanding the validation process and skill in promoting it. (p. 108)

Women should try to see authority as a useful instrument, one that allows them to carry out their responsibilities and to make their visions a reality. Because there are many bases for authority, women can select those in which they believe and that do not undermine their sense of self. The participants in this study all described their leadership approach as being participative. The source of authority for this model of leadership has been identified as psychology: the authority of participative leaders comes from their ability to determine how to motivate teachers and how to increase teacher satisfaction and participation in school decision-making processes (Leithwood & Duke, 2000). Therefore it may be that women choose leadership models that allow them to gain knowledge-based authority. Unlike men, women do not have the same access to traditional authority based on position (Blackmore, 1989; Hoffman, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). In other words, in terms of authority, a female principal may not feel as entitled as a male

principal who occupies the same position. Instructional leadership is another model that women prefer, and that also uses psychologically-based authority, i.e., authority that is based on knowing how children learn. It may be that women gravitate towards leadership models that provide them with socially and culturally acceptable forms of authority: psychology, knowledge-based, or otherwise. Women would feel less tension about authority if authority was viewed in a way that privileges neither feminine nor masculine, and if women and men were less constrained by the socially constructed masculine - feminine binary

Implications of this Study

What are the implications of this study? What can women educational leaders learn from this study? What can women who aspire to educational administration learn? How should this study influence future research?

Advice for Women Educational Leaders

In addition to emphasizing the importance of relationships, the burden of responsibilities, the need for balance, and the changing landscape, the women in this study strongly urged other women to network with women principals. They believe that women educational leaders should share their thoughts and experiences because they have much to teach one another. Women principals can seek comfort in their similarities, and learn from their differences. Most of the participants in this study have benefited from close working relationships with other women high school principals. They comfort, nurture, and encourage one another. They also rely on each others' areas of expertise. Their network is an example of how female educational leaders help one another. Because of their network, the participants have avoided many of the common difficulties cited in other studies, such as isolation, frustration, lack of self-confidence, loss of

sense of self, tokenism, powerlessness, and feeling left out of decision-making processes (Alston, 2000; Blackmore, 1998; Cooper, 1995; Dunlap, 1995; Gill, 1995; Hawk, 1995; Myers & Hajnal, 1995; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Russell, 1995; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Schmuck, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999; Tabin & Coleman, 1993; Thompson Witmer, 1995; Young, B., 1994).

Advice for Aspirants

I asked the participants what advice they would give to women who aspire to be educational administrators. They answered the following: be true to yourself; do not adopt a false persona of what a leader should be; know your strengths and areas of growth; be prepared, by doing your homework before entering into administration; know what you're getting into; be prepared to work long hours; create a network of supportive people; love what you're doing: it can't be just a job; be confident, but ask questions; understand that not everyone will be happy with everything that you do; be prepared to keep learning.

Further Studies

This study leads to questions that have not yet been answered by researchers. Since 1995, researchers have called for more studies to examine the leadership of women educational leaders, and much research has since been conducted. However, the context has changed, and there are currently more female school administrators than ever. We continue to need more studies to help further our understanding of women educational leaders. The participants in this study have worked during periods when high school administration employed few women; it would be exciting to study how women who have not experienced "womenless" administration enact leadership. How will truly their leadership affect students and teachers?

What will leadership look like when females are equally represented at the highest levels of administration? A corollary to this is to ask how we can help women ascend to the highest levels of educational administration? One participant believes that women have not yet fully actualized their potential for leadership. In her opinion, it is only when women have finally ascended into the highest positions of power in all fields that leadership will truly reflect women's ways. She also believes that it is only when a significant number of women have retired from administration that they will be able to better reflect on their careers. Until then, women cannot truly reflect upon their roles. It would be exciting to conduct a study with women who have retired, or who have otherwise left educational leadership, and to explore how they view their careers with some distance and hindsight.

We should try to lessen the gap between educational researchers and female educational leaders. Those who conduct research with women educational leaders benefit from these women's experiences. Women educational leaders should likewise seek to gain a better understanding of their own experiences by reviewing what researchers have discovered. Many studies state that the theories and models to which modern female administrators have been exposed are largely based on men's experiences. Women (and men) would benefit by reading studies carried out with women educational leaders because women's experiences have not been included in the standard texts. The women in this study were very interested in the current research on women educational leaders.

Limitations

Qualitative research needs to be attentive to issues of trustworthiness and authenticity. One concern is the subjectivity of the researcher (Glesne, 1999). The practice of reflexivity is

one way to try and account for this subjectivity (Stoeltje, Fox & Olbrys, 1999). Feminist researchers discovered the fallacies of objectivity (Reinharz, 1992; Stoeltje, Fox & Olbrys, 1999). These issues underline the importance of situating oneself within the research to try to expose one's point of departure, perspective, biases and position as person and researcher in terms of gender, race, and class (Stearns, 1998).

My subjectivity certainly influenced my choice of research questions and my findings. That I work in education, and that I have read extensively on educational leadership and on women educational leaders has shaped my subjectivity as a researcher. I was looking for very specific truths, and tried to find them. For example, when some of the interview answers did not correspond to what I was looking for, I might reword the question, or repeat it later when I felt that the participant was ready to say what I wanted to hear. My persistence may have helped me to find what I was looking for, possibly at the expense of other insights. Should I have kept on probing until I was satisfied? This tendency only became apparent to me after having transcribed and reread the interviews. Feminist theorists have found that objectivity is overvalued, and that subjectivity does not necessarily taint a study (Reinharz, 1992; Stoetje, Fox & Olbrys, 1999). It cannot be avoided; the best that one can do is to remain honest, and to try to be aware of one's subjectivities and their influences on the research process.

In addition, my cultural, educational, professional background may have helped to establish a rapport with my participants, which is important to feminist research, but which may have prevented further exploration. However, our similar background may also have allowed us, the researcher and the participants, to maintain some of our prejudices. The participants often told me stories that ended with a confirmatory "you know", to which I responded "yes", orally or

with a nod. Because I believed that I did understand what the participants were discussing, the conversation on that topic would end. Because I “knew” what they meant, I might not have explored the subject any further; we left it at “you know”. On the other hand, the rapport I developed with the participants helped to make them feel comfortable, and because I seemed to know what they meant, they felt secure because they felt understood.

As discussed earlier, my sample of participants undoubtedly limited the applicability of this research. I have not included the voices of minorities such as lesbians, ethnic minorities, and disabled women, to name but a few. The experiences of my participants, at best, provided glimpses of a small minority of women who are part of the white, Christian majority, and who are members of the educated elite occupying positions of leadership. Moreover, my sample included only women who were interested in participating in this study. It is likely that women who chose not to participate would have added a different dimension to my findings. However, this limited number of participants allowed me to explore a few women’s experiences which might illuminate topics that are not well-understood. As Beth Young (1995) states, “women school administrators’ stories of their own career experiences are our most abundant source of knowledge related to women and leadership in Canadian education” (p. 246). Similarly, I sought to access women administrators’ experiences to generate a better understanding of women administrators’ lives.

Some might question the truthfulness of the participants’ responses, and their openness to the researcher. I would like to believe that I overcame these concerns by establishing a good rapport with the participants, which is why I feel that the participants were very open and welcoming. They found the topic to be relevant and important to them. They were very

interested in furthering our understanding of women principals at the secondary level. They appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their careers and on their objectives, strengths and challenges, which could only be done if they were honest and open. The two days of observations before the interview successfully established a rapport between me and the participants. Moreover, the eleven years that I spent as a high school teacher helped to establish a rapport with the participants. Further, my interest in leadership and in women leaders provided yet more commonality to draw us together.

Qualitative research is also concerned about how the research affects the participants. Qualitative researchers state that one can learn from those who react to an outsider's presence, for that reaction tells the researcher what the person believes to be acceptable behaviour. For example, a principal who engages in what she sees as principal-like behaviour is showing the researcher what she believes principal-like behaviour is (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). During the observation sessions, I witnessed what these women believe to be principal-like behaviours, and it showed me how these women enact their preferred approaches to the principalship.

My Final Thoughts

I began this study because I had personal questions about being a candidate for educational administration. I wanted to discover if other women had similar doubts about entering into administration. I discovered that my reservations were echoed in the literature. While keeping my interests in mind, I set out to learn about being a high school principal. I also wanted to determine if school administration was a career for me. I have not yet answered that question. The participants in this study inspired me because they love their jobs, and they find their work to be very rewarding. I enjoyed spending time with them because they liked talking

about their work. However, there are many demands, challenges, and responsibilities that come with being a principal. I realized that the demands of being a principal are still challenging for those who are parents of young children. As Chait Barnett (2001) writes, “the notion of work-family balance is relatively new to the research and corporate policy lexicon” (p. 1181). She adds that, “the new demographic and attitudinal shifts have led to the realization that there is a strong interdependence between work and family - the separate spheres model is no longer applicable” (p. 1186). Unfortunately, she notes that corporate work-family policies have not yet responded to the changing realities. I hope that the workplace will reflect these changes sooner rather than later. Until then, men and women who want to be both committed parents and committed educational leaders will face difficulties in reconciling both roles.

I have greatly benefited from this research. It was a wonderful experience to spend time with the participants, and to learn about the academic, theoretical, and professional aspects of educational leadership. I observed women in action, and learned about how they practice leadership. Finally, I learned on a personal level, what it means to be an educator and a leader. Feminist researchers say that it is important to learn *from* the participants, and not *about* the participants. I agree. Thank you Anne, Diane, Kathleen, Louise and Lynn for all that you have taught me.

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APPENDIX I

**Renée LeBlanc
171 O'Connor St. # 805
Ottawa, Ontario
K2P 1T4
230-1749**

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a graduate student from the University of Ottawa currently working on my M.A. thesis. The reason I am contacting you is that I am hoping you may be interested in participating in my study.

The study is a qualitative research on the topic of women principals of secondary schools. The aim of the study is to learn more about how women in these roles construct for themselves notions of identity, leadership, power, and authority. Your involvement would be greatly appreciated as it is believed that research has much to learn about women in leadership from the women leaders.

If you are interested in becoming one of the five participants you will be asked to allow me to job-shadow with you for the equivalent of two days; you would also be asked to participate in one interview of about 60 minutes at a time and location chosen by you. This would take place sometime in May. Follow up interviews of about 30 minutes, in person or by telephone, will be conducted during the data analysis, in August. At this time you will be given a copy of your individual portrait including transcripts of the initial interview, based on the data collection, and will have the opportunity to discuss the findings with me. You would also be asked to provide me with any documents written by you in your role as principal (e.g., yearbook messages, memos, newsletters, letters home, texts of speeches).

I have been a teacher in a high school for ten years and can personally appreciate the workload and very busy schedule you have. I understand that my request will not be easy for you to fulfill. If you are interested in finding out more about this research and your potential involvement, please do not hesitate to contact me at the following e-mail address reneeleb27@hotmail.com or phone number (613) 230-1749.

Sincerely yours,

Renée LeBlanc

APPENDIX II

Interview Guide:

Introduction: We are here to discuss your experiences as a high school principal and your approach to leadership, power, and authority in the role of principal.

- 1. How long have you been in the role of principal, and can you share with me details of your career path?**
- 2. Can you share with me your understanding of how you wound up becoming a principal? Perhaps there were key moments, experiences, or events, or other factors that have nudged you toward this position.**
- 3. Who or what were some of your role models: individuals, characters from novels or movies etc...?**
- 4. Do you consider yourself a leader? Please explain and give some examples.**
- 5. How would you describe your leadership approaches? How might different situations and contexts shape your approaches? Please give me some examples.**
- 6. Can you elaborate on some of the more difficult or challenging moments you have encountered as a leader? Explore details as comprehensively as possible.**
- 7. Can you elaborate on some of the more fulfilling or rewarding moments you have encountered as a leader. Explore details as comprehensively as possible.**
- 8. What impact, if any, do you think your gender has had on your approach to leadership and your career development? Please elaborate on some specific situations.**
- 9. What are the challenges specific to women principals at the high school level? Can you talk about how these have shaped your own approach to leadership?**
- 10. What are the advantages of being a woman principal of a high school?**

- 11. How would you define leadership? How does this definition relate to your work? Has this definition changed for you over the years; if it has, please explain.**
- 12. Describe for me a time when you were proud of yourself in your leadership role.**
- 13. Describe for me a time when you were disappointed in yourself in your leadership role.**
- 14. How would you define power? How does this definition relate to your work? Has this definition changed over the years; if it has, please explain.**
- 15. Can you tell me about a situation where you demonstrated your power as leader. Explore details as comprehensively as possible.**
- 16. How would you define authority? How does this definition relate to your work? Has this definition changed over the years; if it has, please explain.**
- 17. Can you tell me about a situation where you demonstrated your authority as leader. Explore details as comprehensively as possible.**
- 18. Can you tell me about some examples of how issues of leadership, power, and authority come into play when you are dealing with peers, staff members, students, school board officials both male and female? Explore details as comprehensively as possible.**
- 19. Are there any issues that you would like to talk about relating to any of the questions that I have asked you?**

APPENDIX III

CONSENT FORM

Renée LeBlanc and Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway
Faculty of Education
230-1749
reneeleb27@hotmail.com

I _____ am interested in collaborating in the M.A. research project conducted by Renée LeBlanc, of the Faculty of Education and Women's Studies Program at the University of Ottawa. This project is under the supervision of Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway. The purpose of the research is to further the understanding of how women principals of secondary schools define and practice leadership, power, and authority.

My participation will consist of permitting Renée LeBlanc to observe me while at work for two days and to participate in at least one 60 minute interview. I will be given a copy of the interview guide questions if I wish to prepare myself in advance for the interview. The exact time, date and location will be of my choice. I will be asked to reflect on my career path and leadership and my experiences as a woman in a position of leadership, power, and authority as principal of a secondary school. I will also be asked to participate in a second 30 minute follow-up interview, to be conducted in person or by telephone, where I will be given the opportunity to discuss my individual portrait including the transcripts of the initial interview to provide any concerns or further insights about how I have been portrayed. I understand that the contents of the interviews will be audio taped and transcribed and used only for research purposes. I will also be asked to provide the researcher with some samples of documents that I have written as principal (e.g., yearbook messages, memos, newsletters, official correspondence, texts of speeches). I also understand that my confidentiality will be respected.

I understand that since this activity deals with personal information, it may cause me to reflect on my career and the challenges I have faced as a school administrator and a woman. This may cause me some emotional distress as it is possible that some difficult memories may surface. I have assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these occurrences.

I am free to withdraw from the project at any time before or during the observation periods or interviews. I may refuse to participate and refuse to answer questions without prejudice.

I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. Anonymity will be assured in the following manner: my identity, the school name, and school board will remain anonymous in any written report of the study.

I will have the opportunity to review with the researcher the individual profile developed during the data analysis to ensure that I have an opportunity to provide my personal insights or concerns about how I have been portrayed.

Tape recordings of interviews and other data collected will be kept in a secure manner in the home of the researcher only she and her supervisor will have access to the tapes and transcriptions of the interviews. At the end of the research the tapes will be disposed of and the transcripts and other written documents will use pseudonyms for names and places. Transcripts and other written documents will be disposed of no later than seven years after the publication of findings.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa or by calling the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research (Lise Frigault: 562-5800 ext. 1787)

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I may keep.

If I have any questions about the conduct of the research project, I may contact the researcher, Renée LeBlanc, 171 O'Connor St. #805, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1T4, phone number (613) 230-1749; or her supervisor Dr. Janice Ahola-Sidaway phone number (613) 562-5800 ext. 4079.

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Research Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____