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Women and Educational Administration: Certified, But Not Employed

Marilyn L. Grady

The question addressed in this study emerged from contrasting recent research. Some studies indicate that the number of women in graduate programs in educational administration approaches or exceeds the number of male graduate students in such programs (Grimes & Sloan, 1984; Levandowski, 1977; Mertz & Venditti, 1985). However, other data reveal that a corresponding number of women do not hold administrative positions (AASA, 1986). A survey of Los Angeles credentials-holders showed that far more women than men hold the credentials without holding an administrative position (Marshall, 1985).

Historical Perspective

The small representation of women in the ranks of public school administrators has not always been the case. The nationwide decline has been greatest in the elementary schools, where, in 1928, women held over half (55%) of all principal positions. Even in secondary schools, women constituted at least twice the percentage of principals at that level in 1928 as they did in 1973 (Women in Educational Administration, 1928; NEA, 1973). Women held superintendencies in major cities, too, such as Chicago. These statistics suggest that women in the past, held high aspirations for administrative positions.

Following World War II the balance changed, as many men returned from the armed services and sought employment in school settings. Women steadily lost administrative ground in public schools. In the 1940s, throughout the United States approximately 41% of elementary principals were women; in the 1950s, 38%; in the 1960s, 22%. By 1980 the figure dropped to less than 20% (Paddock 1980, p. 20).

Estler (cited in Bilken & Brannigan, 1980) posited models to analyze the persisting underrepresentation of women administrators in schools. These three models were: (1) the women's place model, (2) the discrimination model, and (3) the meritocracy model.

Marilyn L. Grady, University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Estler's Three Explanatory Models

The women's place model acknowledged different socialization patterns for young boys and girls that were institutionally reinforced. These patterns continued in adult life. The women's place model was based on the assumption that the absence of women in leadership positions was due to the different socialization patterns of men and women. As they grew up, women were taught to be the family caretakers and nurturers and that a woman's place was at home. Society did not admire the pursuit of a career requiring planning and many long hours of hard work that took women away from their families.

The discrimination model suggested that preferential hiring and promotional practices explained the sexist imbalance in educational administration. This model was supported by an examination of the number of years it took women to achieve the rank of principal or superintendent (Lyman and Speizer 1980, p. 27). This number was determined by the number of years in constant service in education. Estler's analysis showed that almost the same number of female and male teachers held the credentials to become administrators. However, the median number of years in teaching before appointment to the elementary principalship was 5 years for males and 15 years for females (Estler 1975, pp. 363–85).

The meritocracy model, however, assumed that people were promoted according to their ability. Therefore, it implied that men were more competent than women because men were chosen for administrative positions so often.

Neil Gross and Anne Trask in *The Sex Factor and the Management of Schools* (1976), examined the relationship of gender and competence of elementary school principals. The authors' extensive analysis of data, collected from 91 female and 98 male principals, as well as 1,202 teachers in 41 cities in the United States during the 1960s, indicated that the professional performance of teachers and the amount of student learning was higher, on the average, at schools with female principals. As Estler discovered, there really was very little data to support the belief in the higher general competence of men.

When linked together, Estler's concepts provided an argument that demonstrated the existence of sex roles and occupational stereotypes. Considerable evidence supported the argument that sex role stereotypes and sex role socialization reduced the probabilities that women will actively seek leadership positions and that organizations will be responsive to those who do (Adkinson 1981, p. 31) (Dopp & Sloan 1986, pp. 120–121).

Barriers to Success

Timpano (1976) maintained that sex discrimination was practiced through "filtering methods" that filter out qualified women. "Recruiting filters" included limiting the announcement of a job opening to "Within the district" when the district had few, if any, women certified as administrators. "Application filters" included downgrading an applicant for a top administrative position by suggesting that she apply for a lesser administrative or teaching position. "Selection criteria filters" included applying dual selection criteria by allowing men to skip one or more rungs on the career ladder but requiring women to climb each step. Included in "interview filters" were questions such as, "Aren't you concerned about returning home alone late in the evenings from meetings?" Lastly, "selection decision filters" included rejecting a woman because she was aggressive, but hiring a man because he was. Research and statistics indicate that sexual discrimination, whether overt or covert, does exist in hiring practices in educational administration (Lang 1983, p. 88).

Few internal barriers to women achieving administrative positions are noted in an AASA study (1982, p. 30). The internal barrier mentioned most often in this study was lack of geo-

graphical mobility. Because nearby opportunities were often limited, the lack of geographical mobility strongly affected the women. Personal factors such as marital status, number of children, and ages of children did not significantly affect upward career mobility (AASA 1982, p. 43). In 1986, Dopp reported similar findings.

Adkinson (1985, pp. 327–347) also reported a study of barriers to advancement. Women were equally likely to express ambition at any age until age fifty, but men under the age of thirty were slightly overrepresented. The majority of the women in the study were married but this did not affect their aspirations. Women in the aspiration group were more likely to be single or divorced than the male aspirants. The majority of the men and women were from that state but more than half (of both sexes) were willing to relocate for an administrative position.

Aspirations

Howe (1973) noted that women teachers set their aspirations modestly low. Few women aspired to become administrators. According to Howe's research bright young men entered primary or secondary education with that goal in mind. They spent their beginning years in the classroom, knowing their goal was curriculum design or school administration. Women did not follow similar paths.

Johnson, Yeakey, and Moore (1980) noted that the inferior status of women in school systems also reflected the acceptance by women of the inferior status, and gave legitimacy to that status.

At the very least, the inferior status of women, especially when they are a majority and should have the power of numbers as support, indicates an unwillingness to struggle, an avoidance of conflict, and a reluctance to fight. At worst, it shows us that women teachers believe in their own inferiority and accept the patriarchy as it exists (Johnston, Yeakey, & Moore 1980, p. 120).

Proportionally fewer women than men aspired to administrative posts. Florence Howe (1973) made a connection between the lower percentage of women administrators and the generally low aspirations of women. She identified aspiration as "the crucial issue in women's education." Matina Horner described the dilemma as women's "motive to avoid success" (Recruitment Leadership and Training Institute 1974, p. 14).

Purpose

The purpose for conducting this study was to identify selected reasons why women with administrative certification do not hold administrative positions. Seven specific research questions were addressed:
1. Have women who are certified applied for administrative positions?
2. Have women who are certified been interviewed for administrative positions?
3. What reasons did women provide for not using their administrative certification?
4. Based on family responsibilities, are there significant differences between women who seek administrative positions and women who do not?
5. Based on encouragement received, are there significant differences between women who seek administrative positions and women who do not?
6. Based on age, are there significant differences between women who seek administrative positions and women who do not?
7. Based on academic degree, are there significant differences between women who seek administrative positions and women who do not?

Procedures

To obtain the information needed to answer the research questions, women who held administrative certification but who were not practicing administrators were surveyed. The subjects of this study included 250 individuals who were randomly selected from a population of 1172 females with administrative certification from the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. The study population was identified through a review of records provided by the departments of education in each of these states during 1988.

The survey instrument was developed by the author. Using a representative review of literature (Dopp & Sloan, 1986; Fishel & Pottker, 1974; Frasher, Frasher & Hardwick, 1982; Grady, M. L. & Bohling–Philippi, V., 1987; Lange, 1983; Levandowski, 1977; Lovelady–Dawson, 1980; Marshall, 1986; Mertz, Grossnickle & Tutcher, 1980; Paddock, 1980; and Weber, Feldman & Poling, 1981), a list of 11 reasons that women do not apply for administrative positions was developed and included in the survey. The proposed instrument was reviewed by six professors of educational administration. A revised instrument, incorporating the reviewers' comments and suggestions, was pilot tested with 23 subjects. After some additional adjustments were made, the final survey instrument was prepared.

After two mailings, 196 of the 250 subjects responded, for a return rate of 78%. Telephone calls were made to ten randomly selected nonrespondents to assess nonresponse bias; none was found.

Results

Of the 196 respondents, 127 (65%) had not applied for any administrative position during the last five years. The 69 (35%) women who had applied for administrative positions sent a total of 96 applications. These applications included: 43 for elementary principalships, 19 for assistant principalships, 17 for coordinator positions, 5 for secondary principalships, 3 for superintendencies, 3 for special education directors, and 3 for directors of student services.

Of the 69 respondents who applied for administrative positions within the last five years, 45 (65%) were interviewed. Of these individuals, 22 were interviewed 1 time, 9 were interviewed 2 times, 9 were interviewed 3 times, 3 were interviewed 4 times, 1 was interviewed 5 times, and 1 was interviewed 6 times.

The 127 subjects who did not apply were asked to identify reasons for not applying for administrative positions from the list. The list of reasons and the number and percentage of women citing each reason are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Reasons Women With Administrative Certificates Do Not Apply for Administrative Positions N=127

Reason	Number	%
Like Current Position	87	68
Not Interested in Being An Administrator	41	32
Family Responsibilities	39	31
No Vacancies in Area	37	29
No Incentive to Change Positions	32	25
Unable to Move	28	22
Don't Want Added Responsibility	24	19
Not Ready to be an Administrator	18	14
Too Old to be an Administrator	16	13
No Reason	7	6
Too Young to be an Administrator	4	3

The most frequently cited reason for not applying was liking one's current position (68%). Other reasons cited were: not interested in being administrator (32%), family responsibilities (31%), no vacancies in the area (29%), no incentives to change positions (25%), unable to move (22%), don't want added responsibility (19%), not ready to be an administrator (14%), too old to be an administrator (13%), no reason (6%), and too young to be an administrator (3%).

All 196 subjects were asked a separate question regarding their willingness to move to accept an administrative position. Only 25% of the respondents indicated a willingness to move. To some extent, this expression of intent validates the reason given for not applying for administrative positions.

The subjects were asked whether they had been encouraged to become educational administrators. Thirty-seven percent indicated that they had received such encouragement. As a follow-up question, subjects were asked to indicate how they had been encouraged. The primary form of encouragement was verbal. In 21% of the cases, women were told of an administrative vacancy by a practicing administrator. Others were encouraged by invitations to apply for an administrative position (19%), encouragement to take graduate courses in educational administration (18%). and being told of an administrative opening by a university professor (6%).

Chi squares were used to ascertain whether there were significant differences in regard to selected characteristics between the group of women who sought administrative positions and the group that did not. No significant differences were found (p.<.05) based on family responsibilities (e. g. husband's job, children in school) or age (23–30, 31–38, 39–46, 47–54, 55–62, and 63–67+).

A significant difference in the groups was found (x^2=5.75892, df 1, p.<.05) based on encouragement. A significant difference in the groups was also found (x^2=17.21301, df=2, p.<.05) based on academic degree (Masters, Specialist Certificate, or Doctorate).

Implications

Based on the findings of this study, a major impediment to women's successful pursuit of administrative careers appears to be their unwillingness to apply for administrative positions. Additionally, the reasons cited for not applying suggest that, in general, the women in this study prefer their current positions and are not interested in administrative work. Family responsibilities, such as a husband's job or children, may not be the major barriers to women seeking administrative careers as is often suggested. Encouraging women to apply for administrative positions and to continue their graduate studies, as well as persuading women that administrative careers are worthwhile, may be areas that individuals and organizations attempting to increase the number of women in administrative positions should emphasize.

Of the three models outlined by Estler (1975), the women's place model and the discrimination model together provide the best frame work for understanding why women remain in teaching while men move into administration. Although women may be well-qualified, some have psychologically accepted a secondary role in their profession because they are concerned about their family or because they lack confidence (Lange 1983, p. 89). Few women have been socialized to have a clear sense of a career track or to develop their leadership skills. They have also been denied the support, opportunity, and experience given to men (Lyman & Speizer 1980, pp. 29).

Research by Horner (1974) analyzed the tendency of women to lower their expectations of themselves and their esteem. Rather than assume or even apply for non-traditional positions, women elect to avoid success by setting their occu-

pational aspirations modestly low rather than be subjected to social antagonism. The findings of this study confirm the fact that there remains a psychological barrier, a subconscious occupational ceiling, that prevents women from actively pursuing success in the non-traditional roles of school administrators. Thus, proportionately fewer women than men seek administrative positions, tending to disguise their ability and eliminate them from competition in a larger occupational sphere (Johnston, Yeakey, & Moore 1980, p. 127).

Howe (1973) suggested that the reason so few women aspire to become administrators reflected not only the inferior status of women in school systems but also the acceptance by women of both that status and the legitimacy of that status. Moreover, it signifies that women teachers believe in their own inferiority and accept the patriarchal system that exists (Johnston, Yeakey, & Moore 1980, p. 127).

Evidence of interest in administrative posts cannot be based solely on the numbers who apply. A *Maine Times* (1974) discussion of the difficulties of women seeking principals' jobs comments, "One young woman complained that women don't even apply for top jobs because they feel it's a foregone conclusion they won't get them." This response to prior discrimination is a recognized phenomenon (the "chilling effect") among minorities seeking employment. The social conditioning of women may also prevent them from making an aggressive attempt to enter places where they perceive themselves not to be wanted (Recruitment Leadership and Training Institute 1974, p. 16)

The findings of this study are compatible with earlier findings in similar studies. Based on these results, little progress has been made in advancing the aspirations of women and removing barriers to women's advancement in administrative roles. Estler's models continue to be useful in explaining the underrepresentation of women in administrative roles.

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Educational Considerations